



The impact of election outcome on internal political efficacy: The role of contextual factors

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have investigated the consequences of election outcome for one of the important public attitudes, political efficacy. The effect of election outcome on external efficacy has been confirmed by most previous studies, whereas the effect on internal efficacy is not clear-cut. By reconceptualizing internal efficacy based on the social cognitive theory of self-efficacy, this study argues that there are two conditions for an election outcome's impact on internal efficacy: the expected difficulty of winning and the level of involvement in the election. By analyzing panel survey data collected for three Japanese Lower House elections, this study shows that election outcome exerted an impact on internal efficacy if the following two conditions were simultaneously satisfied: (1) winners/losers perceived that the election was difficult/easy to win, and (2) voters were deeply involved in the election process.

1. Introduction

In most elections there are winners and losers. This is the case not only at the candidate/party level but also at the voter level. It is conceivable that voters for a winning candidate or party become more satisfied with the democratic process than voters for a losing candidate/party in a given election; this conjecture has been supported by multiple empirical studies (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008; Blais and Gélinau, 2007; Craig et al., 2006; Curini et al., 2012; Howell and Justwan, 2013; Singh et al., 2012; Singh, 2014; Wells and Kriekhaus, 2006). Satisfaction with the democratic process can be also replaced with political trust (Anderson and LoTempio, 2002) or the perceived fairness of political institutions/electoral processes (Craig et al., 2006); but what about the impact of an election result on voters in subsequent elections, which may shape the power balance in the long term? To address this link, we need to examine political efficacy as well as more general attitudes toward the electoral process mentioned above. That is, winning voters should feel more influential and more willing to vote in subsequent elections, and vice versa.¹

However, when the impact of election results on voters' political efficacy are examined, the empirical findings are inconsistent. Political efficacy is known to have two dimensions: voters' self-confidence about their influence/ability (internal efficacy) and perceived political elites' responsiveness (external efficacy). While most previous studies have found empirical support in terms of external efficacy (e.g., Clarke and

Acock, 1989; Craig et al., 2006; Davis, 2014; Davis and Hitt, 2017), findings concerning internal efficacy are not clear-cut. Some studies have found that being winners is associated with increased levels of internal efficacy, whereas other studies have reported no systematic effects (e.g., Anderson and Tverdova, 2001; Banducci and Karp, 2003; Clarke and Acock, 1989).

Given these inconsistent empirical findings, this study reconsiders the mechanism underlying the relationship between election outcomes and internal efficacy and, in addition to this analysis, provides an explanation for the inconsistent findings. More specifically, this study first reconsiders internal efficacy as a task-specific variant of the general psychological concept of self-efficacy. This conceptual reconsideration emphasizes the importance of the difficulty of the task itself and individual involvement to solve a task and leads to a hypothesis concerning the conditions under which electoral outcomes affect efficacy level. The hypothesis is tested for three Japanese Lower House elections with different conditions. For each case, the study employs panel survey data to examine individual-level attitudinal changes in efficacy before and after the election.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows: The next section gives a brief review of previous research on the relationship between political efficacy and election outcomes, a reconceptualization of internal efficacy based on the broader social cognitive theory of

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¹ Another possible link has been offered by adaptive learning models of voting. Accordingly, winning voters in an election tend to turn out to vote in subsequent elections, and vice versa (Bendor et al., 2003), a prediction that has also been empirically supported (Kanazawa, 1998; Shikano and Kittel, 2016). While these models are basically driven by voters' costs and benefits, the same outcome can be also moderated by political efficacy.

self-efficacy, and finally the corresponding hypothesis. The subsequent section presents the study's research design and the panel data to be analyzed. After presenting the analysis results, the final section discusses the empirical findings and their implications.

2. Election outcomes and political efficacy

Political efficacy is defined as “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process” (Campbell et al., 1954, 187). It is widely accepted that there are two types of political efficacy: (1) internal efficacy, which refers to feelings of personal competence that permit one “to understand and to participate effectively in politics” (Craig et al., 1990, 290), and (2) external efficacy, which refers to a belief in the responsiveness of political bodies and actors to citizen demands so that citizens may feel influential (Balch, 1974). While internal and external efficacy are correlated with each other, their dispositions are quite different (e.g., Balch, 1974; Lane, 1959).

In considering the effect of electoral outcomes on political efficacy, it is important to distinguish its two dimensions. Given the definition above, political actors' responsiveness is expected to affect external efficacy. In order to believe that the political realm is responsive, citizens need to have a party or candidate to support that represents their interests and connects them to the political realm. Given this argument, external efficacy is expected to respond to election outcomes directly, as winning/losing are crucial elements in deciding whether citizens can have their representatives in the parliament/government. The empirical findings of previous studies are consistent with this expectation (Clarke and Acock, 1989; Craig et al., 2006; Davis, 2014; Davis and Hitt, 2017).

Compared to the findings of studies concerning the effect of electoral outcomes on external efficacy, their effect on internal efficacy has received considerably less attention, and available findings have been inconsistent. Clarke and Acock (1989) suggested that voters for a winning candidate will manifest better internal efficacy because “winners tend to conclude that they can influence the political process” (p.553). At the same time, they also posited that the impact should be smaller than that on external efficacy since internal efficacy is a self-perception about self-ability and thus should not readily fluctuate in reaction to the outside environment. However, empirical findings are not straightforward. In some analyses, winning an election had a positive impact on internal efficacy, while other analyses did not find any significant effects (Anderson and Tverdova, 2001; Banducci and Karp, 2003; Clarke and Acock, 1989).

Such inconsistencies can be explained in an ad hoc way; for example, they can be attributed to different research designs, measurement/operationalization, and data. However, no published study has explained the inconsistent results concerning internal efficacy in the context of a theoretical framework, a gap this paper addresses. More specifically, I assume that the effect of electoral outcomes on internal efficacy is conditioned by a set of factors.

The suggested theoretical framework is based on “self-efficacy”, a concept in social cognitive theory and a more general concept underlying political efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as people's belief in their ability to successfully execute a specific task (Bandura, 1977, 1986). It is considered a significant determinant of people's choices, efforts, and their ability to accomplish a certain task (Bandura, 1997). For example, self-efficacy shapes motivation and commitment in academic life, careers, and sports (Byars-Winston et al., 2017; Feltz and Lirgg, 2001; Wise and Trunnell, 2001).

Before proceeding, it should be noted that both types of political efficacy can be considered task-specific cases of self-efficacy (Caprara and Vecchione, 2013; Littvay et al., 2011). At the same time, the concept of internal efficacy is much closer to self-efficacy than is external efficacy since the former focuses on the individuals' own ability

whereas the latter focuses on the outside environment, in this case, the responsiveness of players in the political realm.

Among several sources of information on the construction of self-efficacy beliefs, it is widely accepted that performance achievements are the most influential source of self-efficacy since they provide individuals with direct evidence of their capabilities (Bandura, 1977, 1997).² That is, a mastery experience increases self-efficacy whereas failure undermines self-efficacy, especially if it occurs before one's efficacy is firmly established (Bandura, 1994). Empirical evidence consistent with this argument has been provided from diverse branches of study; for instance, self-efficacy in sports (Feltz and Lirgg, 2001; Wise and Trunnell, 2001), academic performance (Byars-Winston et al., 2017), and careers (Lent et al., 2017).

However, the impact of performance accomplishment itself, whether in the context of success or failure, depends on how it is cognitively appraised (Bandura, 1997). That is, performance accomplishment will improve an individual's self-efficacy if they appraise the accomplishment as resulting from that individual's enhanced competence. Several contextual issues contribute to such an appraisal, including the social, situational, and temporal circumstances under which events occur. For example, the amount of external aid the individual receives and the difficulty level of the task will affect performance accomplishments' impact on efficacy. Attainments gained as a result of significant amounts of external aid will not be attributed to the individual's own ability and are thus less likely to increase self-efficacy. Similarly, while accomplishing challenging tasks conveys clear evidence of enhanced competence, succeeding at easy tasks may not provide new enough information to change one's efficacy.³ It is worth noting that even the same performance can have different impacts on efficacy based on how task difficulty is acknowledged; acknowledging that a task is difficult results in raising efficacy versus other cases because acknowledging task difficulty affects how previous performance is appraised.⁴

Self-efficacy theory indicates that various contextual factors for the appraisal must be considered to understand the effects of performance accomplishment. How can we translate this to the context of internal efficacy, which is one form of task-specific self-efficacy? Internal efficacy is confidence in one's ability that one can have an impact on the political realm. It is important that one's representative, a politician or party, be in power in order to have a high level of internal efficacy since being in power is one of the strongest ways to exert influence on the political process in a representative system. In this context, winning an election, that is, enabling a politician or party you support to be elected or to increase their influence in parliament, can be considered as a mastery experience, which can lead to enhanced internal efficacy, whereas having one's candidate or party lose an election diminishes internal efficacy.

However, as suggested earlier, efficacy changes result from cognitive processing of the information that one's competence has been enhanced (or weakened) by the performance rather than as a result

² According to Bandura (1977), there are four primary sources: *performance accomplishments* (e.g., past successes, mastery experiences), *vicarious experience* (e.g., watching the competence behaviors of others who attempt a task), *verbal persuasion*, and *physiological states while completing a task*.

³ In addition to these factors, Bandura suggested that the effect of performance achievements can be affected by the amount of effort expended, the circumstances under which they are performed, the temporal pattern of successes and failures, and the way these experiences are cognitively organized and reconstructed in memory (Bandura, 1997).

⁴ In an extreme example, the effect of performance attainment on efficacy can be manipulated by changing one's recognition of task difficulty. Experimental studies of bench press efficacy showed that such efficacy can be manipulated by providing false information feedback. Participants who received false information that they lifted more than their actual lift significantly increased their efficacy than did the group who received accurate information (Fitzsimmons et al., 1991; Wells et al., 1993).

of the performance itself. Diverse contextual factors relating to the election would affect the cognitive processing and thus moderate the effect of an election outcome on efficacy change. It is very likely that the inconsistent findings regarding the effect of election outcomes on internal efficacy are due to such contextual factors. While there could be many such contextual factors, I suggest two that could have a particularly significant effect on the process.

The first contextual factor is the level of difficulty associated with winning an election. Self-efficacy theory suggests that succeeding in an easy task is unlikely to enhance self-efficacy since it does not provide the new information regarding self-confidence required to alter efficacy. Analogously, supporting candidates/parties who are expected to win easily is an easy task. In contrast, the opposite situations to these cases can be described as difficult tasks. Given this argument, we can expect to observe efficacy change more clearly in a context in which election difficulty is high for the winners and low for the losers. To be more precise, an election should be difficult for a certain voter group if they perceive their chance of winning to be quite low before election day. If their party/candidate nevertheless wins the election, they should feel more self-confidence. The opposite is also true: if a group of voters expects their party/candidate's winning as likely before an election and their party/candidate nevertheless loses the election, their self-confidence should drop. These examples show that the same act of voting can be perceived as different tasks depending on the context.⁵

A second factor is that the level of involvement in an election would also change the election outcome effect. It is possible that a low level of involvement, such as merely voting with very little cost, would not involve sufficient cognitive activation to alter internal efficacy. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the very act of voting may not be enough to develop self-confidence sufficiently to increase the level of internal efficacy since voting involves "little time or emotional or cognitive activation" (Finkel, 1985, 907). Additionally, there is little room for improving competence if one is only involved in an electoral process to a limited extent. There are many other possible activities through which one can influence election results, such as mobilizing others, donating, or participating in electoral campaigns. It is reasonable to assume that those more deeply involved in an electoral process have a greater chance of developing their election-related skills and competences and thus are more likely to be affected by the election results. This expectation is consistent with the findings of previous studies of internal efficacy. Multiple studies have found changes in internal efficacy resulted from experiencing direct democracy (e.g., Bowler and Donovan, 2002; Kim, 2015) as participating in direct democracy provides the opportunity to improve the skills required to influence the political process by encouraging individuals to become profoundly involved in the process, which in turn enhances internal efficacy (Pateman, 1970).

In summary, if we consider participating in an election as performance and election outcomes as performance achievement, respectively, election outcomes may alter internal efficacy. However, this effect would be conditioned by two major factors: the difficulty of winning the election and the level of involvement in the election. This study focuses on these conditions and investigates how they affect the relationship between election outcome and internal efficacy based on the cases of three Japanese elections.

⁵ One might wonder whether change in efficacy may be due to an unexpected/surprising election result, i.e., the effect of voting may be stronger if the result is unexpected. However, this scenario can also be explained in the theoretical framework presented here because such post-hoc interpretation of the election result corresponds to the perceived task difficulty: perceiving election victories as unexpected/surprising happens because the individuals believed the election was difficult to win beforehand.

Hypothesis. Election outcome exerts an impact on the internal efficacy of voters, enhancing winners' efficacy and diminishing losers' efficacy, if the following two conditions are simultaneously satisfied: (1) winners/losers perceived that the election was difficult/easy to win before the election; and (2) voters were deeply involved in the election process.

3. Case selection

To empirically test the above hypothesis, the current study utilized panel survey data collected for three Japanese Lower House elections in 1996, 2003, and 2009. These elections were chosen for several reasons. First, panel data are available for each election, meaning we can investigate the effect of election outcomes at the individual level.⁶ Second, all three sets of panel data were collected under almost identical designs,⁷ and their questionnaires had a large degree of overlap with each other, meaning the results of individual data analysis can be directly compared. Third, among the three elections, two saw regime change (1996 and 2009), while the 2003 election saw the governing party reelected. These three elections enabled introduction of the issue of variance in the difficulty of winning into the analysis.

This study's hypothesis highlights the difficulty of winning and individual involvement in elections as two key conditions. Below, I discuss both factors in the context of the above three elections.

3.1. The difficulty of winning

It is widely known that the Japanese party system is a predominant party system. As shown in Fig. 1, the Liberal Democratic Party (hereafter, the LDP) has been the major ruling party since 1955 apart from the periods 1993–1994 and 2009–2011 (see Fig. 1). Therefore, there are only a few elections in which power changed significantly, these being the Lower House elections in 1993, 1996, 2009, and 2011.⁸ Among them, two elections, 1996 and 2009, are covered by panel surveys.⁹

The Lower House election in 1996 was the election in which the LDP regained power following their first ever electoral defeat in 1993, although that defeat was largely due to a split in the LDP itself (Tanaka et al., 2009). The LDP obtained 43% of the seats, a plurality but not a majority, and was displaced by a combination of opposition parties. The LDP regained power in 1994 by joining the coalition government and was thus a ruling party at the 1996 election. Nevertheless, the 1996 election was clearly a difficult and important election for LDP supporters because they had lost power for the first time in the previous election and were required to form a coalition government to regain their position. Whether or not they could regain sufficient support to take control of government again depended on the 1996 election.

In the 2009 election, the LDP suffered a crushing defeat, while the Democratic Party Japan (hereafter, the DPJ), the largest opposition party in 2009, experienced a landslide victory (Table 1). The percentage of seats won by the DPJ, 64%, was the highest won by an opposition party since 1955 and represented a historical government turnover in Japan. Because the change of government in 1993 was mainly caused by the split within the LDP (Tanaka et al., 2009), 2009 was the first

⁶ This study utilized surveys from the Japanese Election Study (JES) series, which are a series of nationwide representative panel surveys in Japan (see Appendix A). In these data, there are no other panel combinations that allow examination of changes in internal efficacy in Lower House elections. For this reason, other Lower House elections, for example the elections in 2000 and 2005, could not be analyzed.

⁷ All were based on a national face-to-face survey, and a two-stage stratified random sampling method was used.

⁸ The study focuses on the Lower House elections since it has the right to form a government, hence it alters the power situation substantially.

⁹ For more detail, see Appendix A.

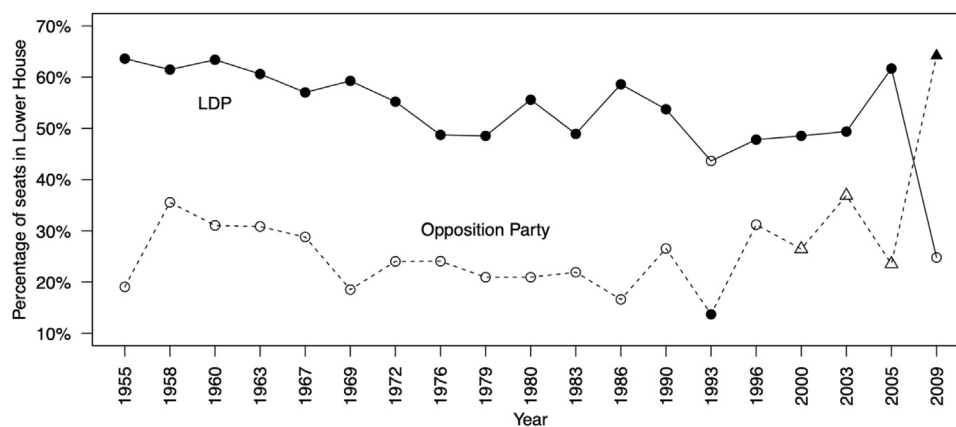


Fig. 1. Percentage of seats in the National Diet (Lower House) from 1955 to 2009. The solid line indicates the Liberal Democratic Party's number of seats (percentage), and the dotted line indicates the number of seats of the largest opposition party at that time (percentage). Black-filled data points indicate that the corresponding party took power after the election. Triangles indicate that the Democratic Party Japan was the largest opposition party at the corresponding time.

Table 1
Election results for three elections.

Party	Seats (%)	Change of seats	In gov't.
2009 Lower House Election (August 30 2009)			
Total number of seats: 480			
Democratic Party Japan	308 (64.2%)	+195	Yes
Social Democratic Party	7 (1.5%)	±0	Yes
People's New Party	3 (0.6%)	-2	Yes
Liberal Democratic Party	119 (24.8%)	-184	No
Komeito	21 (4%)	-10	No
Others	22 (5%)	+1	No
2003 Lower House Election (November 9 2003)			
Total number of seats: 480			
Liberal Democratic Party	237 (49.4%)	-10	Yes
Komeito	34 (7.1%)	+3	Yes
New Conservative Party	4 (0.8%)	-5	Yes
Democratic Party Japan	177 (36.9%)	+40	No
Japanese Communist Party	9 (2%)	-11	No
Others	19 (4%)	-17	No
1996 Lower House Election (October 20 1996)			
Total number of seats: 500			
Liberal Democratic Party	239 (47.8%)	28	Yes
Social Democratic Party	15 (3%)	-15	Yes*
New Party Sakigake	2 (0.4%)	-7	Yes*
New Frontier Party	156 (31.2%)	-4	No
Democratic Party Japan	52 (10.4%)	±0	No
Japanese Communist Party	15 (3%)	+11	No
Others	21 (4%)	-7	No

The table is based on the election reports published by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (see http://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo_s/data/index.html). * indicates that a party joined the government without sending a ministry member.

time the change in government was a direct result of citizens' voting behavior. Defeating the LDP was a difficult task for opposition party supporters since the LDP had (except for one brief period) remained continuously in power since 1955 and had a stable political support base.

In contrast to the 1996 and 2009 elections, the 2003 election was held during a period of LDP domination, and the LDP and its coalition partner Komeito won the election. The LDP's support remained stable, and there were no strong opposition parties to threaten their power. In this election, the winner achieved a relatively easy task, while the losers failed in a difficult task.

To summarize, in the 1996 and 2009 elections, the winners achieved their victories under difficult circumstances, whereas the losers failed where they would have been expecting to win. The opposite was true for the 2003 election. Therefore, the context in which the 1996 and 2009 elections took place would have engendered a considerable

number of winners/losers who satisfied the conditions to alter efficacy, whereas the context of the 2003 election would not have engendered such persons.

3.2. The level of involvement

It is not easy to gauge each voter's overall involvement in an election, either emotionally or behaviorally, or their individual evaluation regarding this matter. Further, the JES only contains a few survey items that assess voters' involvement in the election, and these items do not appear consistently in all three election surveys. In particular, given that there are diverse modes of involvement, these items are insufficient to comprehensively capture voters' level of involvement in the election. To overcome this problem, this study considered voters' past performances or, more specifically, respondents' voting behavior in the target election and in the previous two elections. That is, voters who consistently voted for the same party in all three elections were considered deeply involved in the election (hereafter termed *loyal voters*). Consistently voting for the same party already indicates a high level of involvement in the long term; we can reasonably assume that such voters are more emotionally attached to the party and put more effort into making the party win an election compared to other voters, such as swing voters or nonvoters. Additionally, an item response theory model including *loyal voters* and available survey items related to involvement supported using *loyal voters* as a measurement of the level of involvement (see Appendix D).¹⁰ The model showed that *loyal voters* measured the same latent concept as the other items, and the former is more beneficial than using the other items since it enables a wider range of voters to be distinguished. Therefore, the measure used here was a reasonable proxy for emotional and behavioral involvement.¹¹

Based on the above consideration, respondents were categorized as one of five statuses: loyal winners, loyal losers, single winners, single losers, and nonvoters. As explained above, loyal winners and loyal losers are those who voted for the target election's winning/losing

¹⁰ Survey items asking about respondents' experience of multiple participatory modes in the election and the level of party attachment were used.

¹¹ Note that this measure is a binary proxy and does not directly measure voters' actual level of involvement. There will be variance in the actual level of involvement among voters whose values for this measure are the same; however, we expect that those with a positive value will tend to be involved more deeply than others in general. In addition, it is also possible to define loyal voters as those who voted for the same party in two consecutive elections. This does not affect the overall results below, but the effect sizes are smaller if such an analysis is implemented (Appendix E).

Table 2

Winning, losing status in the model and the expectation of the election outcome effect. *Party W* indicates winning parties in the target election, and *Party L* indicates losing parties, i.e., parties except *Party W*.

Vote direction in three elections			Category	Prediction of efficacy level		
Previous Election 2	Previous Election 1	Target election		1996	2003	2009
Party W	Party W	Party W	<i>Loyal winner</i>	increased	–	increased
Party W	Party L	Party W	<i>Single winner</i>	–	–	–
Party L	Party W	Party W				
Party L	Party L	Party W				
Party W/Party L	Abstention	Party W				
Abstention	Party W/Party L	Party W	<i>Loyal loser</i>	decreased	–	decreased
Abstention	Abstention	Party W				
Party L	Party L	Party L				
Party L	Party W	Party L				
Party W	Party L	Party L	<i>Single loser</i>	–	–	–
Party W	Party W	Party L				
Party W/Party L	Abstention	Party L				
Abstention	Party W/Party L	Party L				
Abstention	Abstention	Party L	<i>Nonvoter</i>	–	–	–
Party W/Party L/Abstention	Party W/Party L/Abstention	Abstention				

Table 3

Years of estimating election outcome and corresponding survey panels. JES: Japanese Election Study.

Year	Survey	
1996	JESII	Post-election survey of 1995 Upper House Post-election survey of 1996 Lower House
2003	JESIII	Pre-election survey of 2003 Lower House Pre-election survey of 2004 Upper House
2009	JESIV	Post-election survey of 2007 Upper House Post-election survey of 2009 Lower House

parties in all three recent elections, namely, the target election and the two previous elections. Single winners and single losers are those who voted for a winning/losing party in the target election but whose votes did not follow this pattern in the previous two elections. Nonvoters are those who abstained from voting in the target election regardless of their past voting behavior. All possible vote patterns and their classifications are shown in Table 2.

To summarize, I predicted a change in internal efficacy only in those who satisfied both conditions discussed earlier. Specifically, the internal efficacy level of loyal voters in two election, 1996 and 2009, would be affected by the election outcome, with the internal efficacy of loyal winners being improved and that of loyal losers undermined. In contrast, the 2003 election outcome should not have affected the internal efficacy of any voters (Table 2).

4. Panel data analysis

To test the above predictions, I utilized three panel datasets collected for three Lower House elections in 1996, 2003, and 2009. Each panel data comprised seven (JESII, JESIV) to ten (JESIII) waves that were conducted from 1993 to 1996 (JESII), 2001 to 2005 (JESIII), and 2007 to 2011 (JESIV). Among these, six survey panels listed in Table 3 enabled examination of attitudinal change in the three target elections as these panels cover the periods before and after the three target elections.¹²

4.1. Operationalization

The dependent variables were the change in respondents' efficacy at the internal level between the two waves, conducted before and

after the election. The study constructed an internal efficacy variable by adding two classical efficacy items: (1) "People like me don't have any say in what the government does" and (2) "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what is going on". The items were measured using a five-point Likert scale; hence, the dependent variables ranged from –8 to 8. Before subtracting efficacy items in the two waves, the efficacy items were reversed so that a high value indicated a higher efficacy level.¹³

The main independent variables were whether the respondents experienced winning or losing in the election, which is the election outcome that depended on the respondents' vote choice. This study considered voting direction in nine elections, namely, Lower House elections from 1993 to 2009.¹⁴ In the 1993 Lower House election, each voter cast one vote for a local district candidate in a multi-member constituency. After electoral reform in 1994, voters received two ballots: in the Lower House, one for a local district candidate in a single-member constituency system and one for a party list in the proportional representation (PR) system in 11 regional districts; in the Upper House, one for a prefectural district candidate in a single or multimember constituency system and one for a party list in the PR system in nationwide districts.¹⁵ Due to a lack of resources, small parties frequently do not run in all local districts. Consequently, some voters cannot cast their votes for the party they actually support. However, this is less frequent in the PR system since small parties tend to run in most PR districts.¹⁶ Accordingly, the analysis below used the PR votes in the election conducted after 1994 to assess the effect of winning/losing and to capture voters' true voting intentions.

As explained above, all respondents were classified into one of five statuses: Loyal winners, loyal losers, single winners, single losers, and nonvoters (Table 2). In this study, winning was defined as having voted for a party that joined the government after the election.¹⁷

¹³ For reference, the internal efficacy correlations between waves were as follows: 0.40 between 1995 and 1996, 0.46 between 2003 and 2004, and 0.51 between 2007 and 2009.

¹⁴ Three target elections and two recent previous elections for each target election. For more detail, see Appendix B.

¹⁵ For more detail on the Japanese Lower and Upper House electoral systems, see Gallagher (1998) and Jain (2020, 25).

¹⁶ For example, in the 2009 Lower House election, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) ran in 31 of 300 single-member districts and in all 11 regional PR districts (see the election reports published by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, https://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo_s/data/shugiin45/index.html).

¹⁷ There are many other possible definitions of winning an election. For example, winning could be defined as gaining more votes or seats than in

¹² For more detail about the JES series, see Appendix A.

For example, voters who voted for any of the three parties in the government after the election in 2009, the Democratic Party Japan (DPJ), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), or the People's New Party (PNP), were considered winners (see Table 1).¹⁸

To classify respondents, this study utilized survey items asking respondents which party they voted for in the PR system in the three elections: the target election and two recent previous elections at the national level. For the 2009 election model, the vote decisions in 2009 (Lower House), 2007 (Upper House), and 2005 (Lower House) were utilized; for the 2003 election model, 2003 (Lower House), 2001 (Upper House), and 2000 (Lower House); and for the 1996 election model, 1996 (Lower House), 1995 (Upper House), and 1993 (Lower House).¹⁹

To estimate the effects of interest, I regressed the change in internal efficacy on the above five voter groups. Since all respondents were classified into one of the five voter groups and each group was defined by a dummy variable, the dummy variable for *loyal loser* was dropped from the analysis. That is, the corresponding group was the reference category used to interpret the results. I also included *age cohort*, *gender*, *education level* as control variables. *Age cohort* and *education* ranged from 1 to 7 and 1 to 4, respectively.²⁰ A higher value indicates a higher cohort and education level. *Female* is a dummy variable with a value of 1 indicating female.

4.2. Results

The regression results are presented in Table 4. In the 2009 and 1996 election models, *Loyal winners* exhibited a significant positive effect on internal efficacy change, while the three other categories of election outcome did not show such an effect. The estimated values suggested that changes in loyal winners' efficacy were 0.74 and 0.54 greater, respectively, than those of loyal losers. This is consistent with my expectation that a significant effect would only be shown in the two elections that involved regime change. The estimated effects for the other categories, *Single losers*, *Single winners*, and *Nonvoters*, were also positive but were not significantly greater than those for loyal losers.²¹

the previous election. However, participation in the government is the direct translation of the ultimate goal of an election, namely, to determine who will form the government. This is why the corresponding definition has been frequently used in previous studies to identify winners (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Singh et al., 2012). Moreover, as discussed above in the theory section, the win/lose variable derived from this definition can best predict the change of internal efficacy since being in power is one of the most effective ways for one's representative to exert influence on the political process.

¹⁸ In the post-election surveys of 1996 and 2009, some respondents were interviewed before the government formation. However, in both cases, what coalition government would be formed was almost certain on the day after the election. In the 2009 election, three parties, the DPJ, SPD and PNP, formed a pre-electoral coalition. In the 1996 election, the SPD and PNP were LDP's coalition partners in a previous government, and they cooperated during the election campaign. Further, at the press conference held on the night of the election, Hashimoto, the prime minister-designate, announced that he requested that the two parties join the government. Given this context, it is reasonable to assume that almost all voters acknowledged the formation of the upcoming government, even before the formal government formation.

¹⁹ Appendix B shows the three target elections' winning/losing parties and their statuses in past elections. There are some cases where winning/losing parties did not exist in previous elections. Respondents who voted for the predecessor party were considered consistent voters. For example, the New Frontier Party, one of the losing parties in 1996, was created by merging three parties in 1993. Respondents who voted for any of those three parties were considered New Frontier Party supporters.

²⁰ *Age cohort*: 1. 20s; 2. 30s; 3. 40s; 4. 50s; 5. 60s; 6. 70s; 7. 80s+, *Education*: 1. Junior high school completed; 2. High school completed; 3. Junior college completed; 4. University undergraduate degree completed.

²¹ While here, we are more interested in the effect of winning/losing elections than the overall model fits, small R-squared values (even in the 2009

Table 4

Election outcome effects on the change of internal efficacy in three Lower House elections. The reference category among winning/losing statuses is *Loyal losers*. Bold values indicate significance at the 5% level.

	1996		2003		2009	
	Estimate	Std. Error	Estimate	Std. Error	Estimate	Std. Error
(Intercept)	0.02	0.49	0.26	0.45	0.39	0.42
Win/lose categories						
Single losers	0.31	0.34	-0.13	0.24	0.21	0.23
Loyal winners	0.74	0.36	-0.11	0.25	0.54	0.25
Single winners	0.21	0.36	0.00	0.28	0.24	0.21
Nonvoters	0.41	0.40	-0.17	0.36	0.07	0.39
Controls						
Cohort	-0.03	0.06	0.01	0.05	-0.11	0.05
Female	-0.01	0.15	-0.01	0.14	0.38	0.15
Education	-0.07	0.08	-0.08	0.08	0.00	0.09
N	1269		1257		949	
R ²	0.01		0.002		0.02	

The regression results only show the differences between *Loyal losers* and other categories but not the differences for other combinations. To assess all combinations, I utilized posterior simulations based on the regression results.²² Fig. 2 presents estimated differences between categories obtained from the simulations.

As the regression results have already shown (Table 4), the differences between loyal voters (*Loyal winners*–*Loyal losers*) were positively significant for two election models, 2009 and 1996 (Fig. 2), and the size of the estimated values were larger than for any of the other combinations. These results are consistent with my expectations. The election outcome effects were only evident in two elections, which were difficult for winners and easy for losers, suggesting that the election context conditioned the effects. Additionally, the results demonstrate that loyal voters were more affected by winning/losing compared to other groups. This suggests that the level of involvement was a key element in being affected by the election results.

Fig. 2 also suggests an asymmetry between *Loyal winners* and *Loyal losers* regarding their effect size. In the 1996 election model, the differences between *Loyal winners* and two further voting groups, *Single winners* and *Single losers*, were also positively significant. That is, the efficacy of *Loyal winners* was significantly enhanced compared to all other voters, except nonvoters in 1996. In contrast, the differences between *Loyal losers* and other groups were not significant, except for *loyal winners*. These contrasts suggest that winning an election had a larger effect than losing an election.

One possible explanation for this result is the disposition of internal efficacy. According to the theory of self-efficacy, failure diminishes self-efficacy, especially when efficacy is not firmly established (Bandura, 1994). Additionally, people who already have a high sense of efficacy tend to attribute their failure to factors other than their capabilities, for example unfavorable circumstances, which leads to the effect of failure being attenuated (Bandura, 1997). That is, unless losers' efficacy is in the process of developing or the efficacy level was very low from the beginning, a one-time failure will not have a significant negative impact.

It is worth noting that this result is based on a proxy measure; the measure based on loyal voters is binary, while the level of involvement

and 1996 models) suggest that there are further unexplained factors regarding the change of internal efficacy. For example, previous studies showed that experiencing a direct democracy would explain a further part of the variances of internal efficacy change (e.g., Bowler and Donovan, 2002; Kim, 2015). Explaining the rest of the variances will surely be an important future research topic.

²² The results are based on 3,000 independent simulation draws. For more details of this method, see Gelman and Hill (2007).

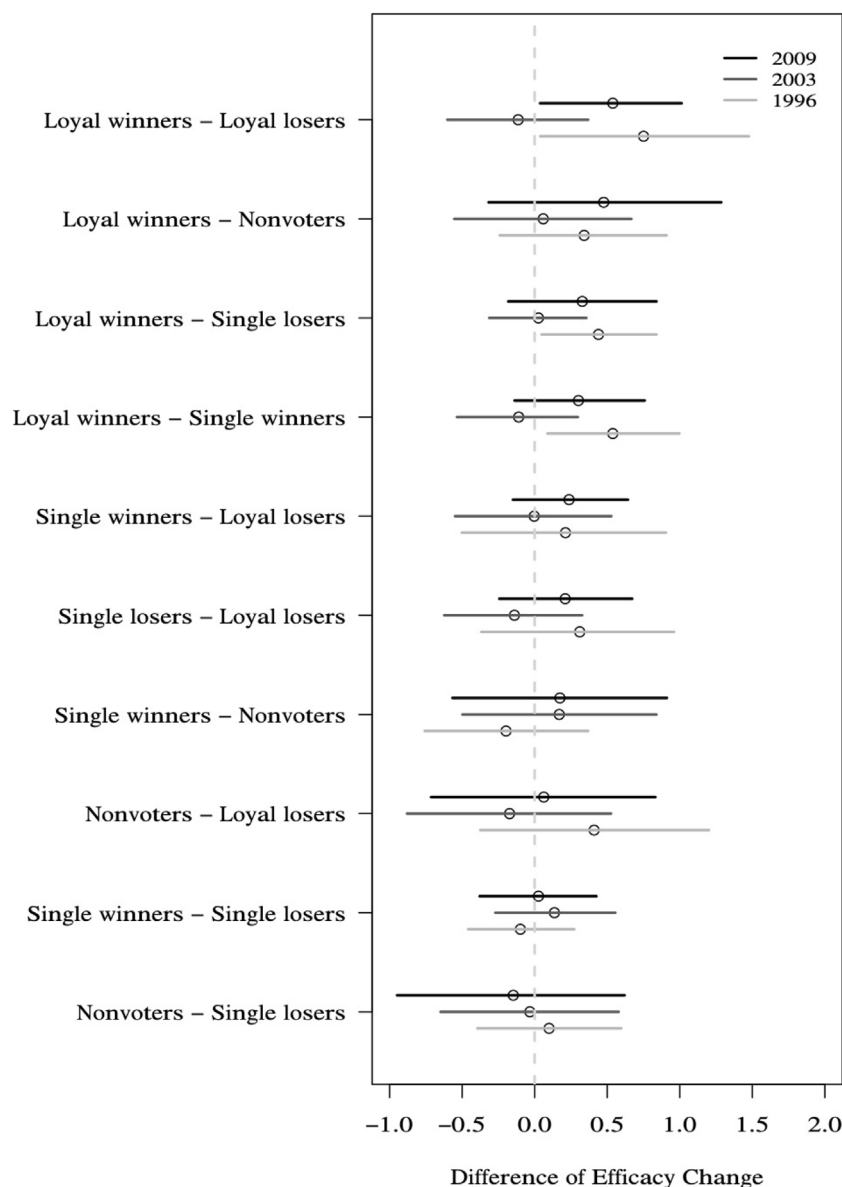


Fig. 2. Estimated effects of the differences in internal efficacy between respondent groups in three Lower House elections. Estimates are the results of posterior simulations (3000 times for each model) from the regression results (Table 4). Dots and vertical lines indicate estimates and 95% confidence intervals, respectively.

in the election can be continuous (see also the item response analysis in Appendix D). It is possible that some respondents were not correctly classified. In particular, loyal voters may have included some less involved voters. However, this means that the general findings are based on rather conservative estimates, and a more clear-cut measure would likely reveal larger effects of electoral involvement.

5. Discussion

In previous studies, the effect of election outcomes on internal efficacy was not clear-cut. By focusing on “self-efficacy”, the current study hypothesized the existence of two conditions for election outcomes to affect internal efficacy: the expected difficulty of winning/losing and the degree of involvement in the election.

To examine the hypothesis, the study analyzed three Japanese Lower House elections that manifested different contexts whereby the expected difficulty of winning/losing was changed. Additionally, respondents were classified into five categories based on their past voting

behavior, which could be assumed to correspond to the degree of involvement in the election. The panel dataset enabled me to investigate attitudinal change at the individual level.

The hypothesis was supported by the results, which showed that (1) the effects of election outcome were present only in elections that were difficult/easy for winners/losers and that (2) the effects were present in the groups that were supposed to be deeply involved in the election. That is, these two conditions were required for election outcome to affect internal efficacy. If these two conditions were not included in the model, election outcome did not significantly affect internal efficacy (see Appendix C). It is likely that these conditions explain some of the inconsistent findings of previous empirical studies.²³

²³ One might wonder whether these two conditions also influence external efficacy. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, I speculate that these two factors do not condition the effect of election outcome on external efficacy. In contrast to internal efficacy, which is more affected by individual confidence, external efficacy refers to a belief in the responsiveness of actors in the political realm. Thus, winning/losing should directly affect external

The current findings are limited in generalizability since the study considered only three elections in one country; thus, further study is needed to determine whether the suggested mechanism may be generalized. At the same time, the suggested mechanism underlying the conditioned effect of electoral outcome on internal efficacy is firmly based on established social psychological theory. Additionally, the breadth of analysis involved – panel datasets in three different election contexts – suggests a certain level of external validity.

Some further limitations should be noted. First, the result of the analysis suggested that an election outcome might have a stronger impact on the winning than the losing side. However, the generalizability of this finding requires additional debate and scrutiny. This could form the basis for future research efforts and, if supported, could imply that frequent regime changes would enhance the internal efficacy of the electorate as a whole.

Second, this study was unable to answer another important question regarding the duration of the effect of election outcome on internal efficacy: for how long is the effect sustained? To my knowledge, the only study that addresses this problem in a structured way is Davis and Hitt (2017), which scrutinized the duration of the effect on external efficacy. They demonstrated that the effect of election outcomes on external efficacy attenuates as the next election approaches. The underlying psychological mechanism has not yet been identified, but they speculated that the “rising anxiety or cynicism” of the winner and “rising optimism” of the loser as time passes could be the mechanism whereby the two external efficacy levels converge (Davis and Hitt, 2017, 684). Although the subject is beyond this paper's scope, given the mechanism of internal efficacy, it seems reasonable to think that the effect of election outcomes on internal efficacy will be sustained longer than in the case of external efficacy. In contrast to external efficacy, which is directly related to the responsiveness of the political realm, internal efficacy is more affected by individual confidence and hence will not fluctuate as easily unless as a result of a concrete experience that affects such confidence.

Even with these limitations, the study contributes to debates on the effect of election outcomes on political efficacy, especially on its internal dimension, and helps develop theoretical perspectives on internal efficacy by considering accumulated studies of self-efficacy. Further, while previous studies focused on participation in an election itself as a prime factor in improved internal efficacy levels (e.g., Finkel, 1985, 1987; Quintelier and Hooghe, 2012), this study demonstrated that the election outcome, winning or losing, is also an important factor that affects citizens' confidence.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102406>.

efficacy since it leads to having representatives in the political realm, which is crucial to feeling that the political realm is responsive. That most empirical studies using a variety of cases found a consistent effect of election outcome on external efficacy supports this hypothesis. However, these two factors might affect the size of the effect. One might expect representatives to be more responsive after winning a difficult election because they realize the power of their supporters. Similarly, those who were deeply involved in the election might expect greater responsiveness from representatives as recognition of their efforts. Regardless, theoretical scrutiny and empirical analysis are needed in future studies.

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