

# **Is Winning Everything? Activism, Campaigns, and Political Efficacy in the UK<sup>1</sup>**

**Timothy Vercellotti**  
**Western New England University**

## **Abstract**

Internal political efficacy -- the perception that one can have an effect on politics -- is assumed to be rooted in self-esteem and ego, and is therefore difficult to alter in adulthood. Previous research, however, has found an association between participating in a political campaign and increased internal efficacy, suggesting that each factor influences the other over time. This research seeks to extend those findings by examining whether it is the outcome of campaigns, or the mere act of participating in them, that has the greatest influence on efficacy among individuals after an election. I test two models: (1) an investment model, in which campaign participants experience an increase in efficacy when their candidate wins, and (2) a civic duty model, in which volunteers report greater efficacy as a result of simply participating in a campaign, regardless of the outcome. I further develop the investment model to consider the nature of victory. Is there a greater psychological payoff for volunteers if their victorious candidate was a challenger as opposed to an incumbent, and also if the win came in a close race? I test the models using British Election Study panel data from 2015. The 2015 general election is well-suited for this research. One in six seats in the House of Commons changed parties as a result of the election, allowing for exploration of the effects of different kinds of victory on participants' political efficacy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prepared for presentation at the 2016 annual meeting of the Elections, Public Opinion and Parties (EPOP) section of the Political Studies Association, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK. Address inquiries to Timothy Vercellotti, Western New England University, 1215 Wilbraham Road, Springfield, MA 01119, [tim.vercellotti@wne.edu](mailto:tim.vercellotti@wne.edu).

## Introduction

The link between political participation and political efficacy is well-documented. Scholars initially speculated that the causal arrow traveled from efficacy to participation, hypothesizing that as individuals felt more capable of influencing politics, they would be more likely to participate in politics (Almond and Verba 1963; Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960; Pollock 1983). But studies also have generated evidence to show that the relationship travels in the other direction, with participation in politics bringing about an increased sense of efficacy (Banducci and Karp 2003; Finkel 1985, 1987; Lambert, Curtis, Brown and King 1986; Welch and Clark 1975). As citizens attended campaign events, attempted to persuade others to support a candidate, gave money to candidates, or volunteered for campaigns, they seemed to develop a greater confidence in their ability to influence the outcome of elections (Finkel 1987). They also developed a greater sense that the government was more responsive to their concerns (Clarke and Acock 1989; Finkel 1985).

A key aspect of the relationship between efficacy and participation still requires further exploration, however. Does participation alone build a greater sense of efficacy, or is it the outcome of participation that makes individuals more confident about their abilities and their role in politics? Scholars have addressed this question in the past, but only with a focus on the most basic form of political behavior, voting. While results have been mixed, the bulk of previous research has found that voting for a winning candidate or identifying with a victorious political party increases one's sense of political efficacy (Clarke and Acock 1989; Iyengar 1980; Lambert, et al. 1986; but see also Welch and Clark 1975, for an opposing view). The effects of other forms of political activity, however, have yet to be explored. In this paper I seek to add to the literature on participation and efficacy by examining the effects of several other types of political behavior, including working on behalf of a political party, donating money to a political party or organization, and attempting to persuade others to vote for a specific party. My primary purpose is to determine whether simply engaging in those activities builds efficacy in what I term a civic duty model, or whether the greatest effect comes from making those efforts on behalf of a winning candidate, which I characterize as an investment model.

This research also explores a larger question about efficacy as an enduring attitude. Is efficacy rooted in a broader sense of identity and ability that is longstanding and therefore more resistant to change, or is efficacy situational? This paper attempts to shed light on the issue by controlling for the traditional predictors of efficacy while also examining the effects of winning and losing elections. Further, in this research I address the causal issues associated with political efficacy and participation by testing my hypotheses using panel data, allowing me to examine changes in political efficacy before and after an election and relating those changes to forms of participation associated with the election.

The paper proceeds as follows. After briefly tracing the theoretical roots of political efficacy, I discuss previous attempts to determine whether backing winning

candidates increases an individual's sense of efficacy. I then present arguments for investment and civic duty models of political efficacy, and develop hypotheses based on those models. I test the hypotheses using panel data from the 2015 British Election Study. I conclude with a discussion of my findings and their implications for the existing body of research on efficacy.

## **Previous Research**

Scholars have divided political efficacy into two sets of attitudes: one set arising from notions of the self, and the other arising from evaluations of the political system in relationship to individuals (Balch 1974; Abramson 1983; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Welch and Clark 1975). The former has become known as internal efficacy, and the latter external efficacy. Scholars seem to agree that internal efficacy has two components: an individual's sense of being able to understand politics, and the realization that one has the competence to influence government and politics (see Balch 1974; Finkel, 1985; Iyengar 1980; Lambert et al. 1986; Niemi, Craig and Mattei 1991). External efficacy, as defined by Miller et al. (1979), as well as others (see Niemi et al. 1991), refers to individuals' perceptions of government responsiveness to their needs and concerns.

Early studies of political behavior lumped measures of internal and external efficacy together (see Campbell, Gurin and Miller 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). But by the 1970s scholars began to distinguish between the two constructs, reasoning that they represented different sets of attitudes (see Balch 1974). Abramson (1983) argued that feelings of external political efficacy were highly correlated with trust in government, while the same was not true of internal efficacy, indicating that researchers ought to treat the two sets of attitudes as distinct concepts.

Internal political efficacy has long fascinated scholars of political socialization because of the potential role that this form of efficacy might play in molding children into adults who are active and involved in public affairs (Easton and Dennis 1969; Hess and Torney 1967). Researchers have debated whether parents pass along efficacious attitudes to their children, but have found only modest evidence that this occurs. Jennings and Niemi (1974) identified a weak correlation between parental efficacy and teen efficacy, but the relationship was stronger when both parents exhibited the same levels of efficacy, perhaps sending a consistent signal to their child. Also, teens' levels of internal efficacy tended to be higher than that of their parents on average. Jennings and Niemi (1974) speculated that the difference may have stemmed from both students' more recent exposure to curricula that stressed citizen participation, as well as youthful inexperience that might lead to overconfidence about their ability to influence public affairs.

While the magnitude of parents' role in the development of internal political efficacy is debatable, there is broad consensus that education is an important factor in developing a sense of being able to influence politics and policy. Lambert et al. (1986) contend that "education provides people with some of the conceptual skills that are necessary to understand politics, as well as the accompanying self-image and feelings of personal competence." (711) Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) also found that

feelings of efficacy increased as levels of education increased, and that income had a similar positive relationship to efficacy.

Verba et al. (1995) identified other demographic differences as well, finding that men tended to be slightly more efficacious than women, and that the same was true for whites compared to African-Americans and Hispanics in the United States (see also Abramson 1983 for a discussion of the disparity in levels of efficacy between whites and African-Americans). Elderly citizens generally tend to feel less efficacious than their younger counterparts, possibly due to a loss of social and institutional ties once they retire, as well as a potential drop in income (Abramson 1983).

Internal political efficacy has received considerable attention from scholars because it is widely assumed to predict participation in politics and public life. Verba et al. (1995) found that as efficacy increased, so did volunteering for campaigns, getting involved informally in solving community problems, and serving on the board of an organization. Verba and colleagues also found that efficacy was positively related to voting (see also Miller 1980; Pollock 1983).

The relationship between efficacy and political participation raises questions of causality, however. Which comes first, efficacy or participation? Rosenstone and Hansen summarize the dilemma: "People participate because they feel efficacious, but they feel efficacious because they participate." (1993:15, footnote 14). Dahl (1961) and Finkel (1985, 1987) make similar claims about the feedback loop between efficacy and participation. Finkel writes:

"As one participates in politics, one acquires political skills and perceptions of self-competence, qualities thought necessary for popular self-government and effective control over one's environment. In addition, the development of this attitude makes it more likely that individuals will participate in the future, and thus participation sets in motion a circular causal process." (1985:893)

Finkel (1985) concluded that the circular nature of the relationship between participation and efficacy requires that scholars use panel data to disentangle the effects of each on the other by controlling for prior levels of efficacy and previous instances of participation.

Studies of the link between internal and external efficacy and participation have focused primarily on voting, and have found positive relationships (see Miller, 1980; Pollock, 1983). Finkel (1985), analyzing American National Election Study panel data from 1972, 1974, and 1976, found that external efficacy was both a cause and effect of voting in national elections. He also found that external efficacy predicted whether individuals engaged in other forms of campaign activity, including working for a party or candidate, attending campaign meetings or rallies, and giving money to a candidate.

The link between internal efficacy and political participation traveled in only one direction, however, with internal efficacy influencing voting and participation in campaigns. Those forms of political behavior did not, in turn, influence subsequent levels

of internal efficacy. Finkel speculated that participation in national elections “may not be sufficiently demanding to promote individual self-development, as such activity involves little time or emotional or cognitive activation, and is far removed from the day-to-day concerns of the average citizen.” (1985:907)

In a later study, Finkel (1987) did, however, find that internal efficacy was both a cause and effect of citizens’ participation in campaigns in elections in West Germany in the 1970s. Voting, on the other hand, had only a minimal effect on internal efficacy. Finkel surmised that the level of personal involvement required by campaign activity was greater than that of voting, and therefore the relationship between participation and efficacy might vary based on the level of investment that the various forms of behavior require of citizens. He concluded: “Given that campaigning is more cognitively demanding than voting, and puts individuals in direct contact with conflicting political ideas and goals, this result makes eminent theoretical sense. Those individuals who contribute time, effort and resources to work for the election of a candidate do not, then, derive only instrumental benefit (or loss) from their candidate’s winning or losing; in addition, they become” more familiar with the political system and more confident of their ability to influence politics. (1987:461)

While hinting that outcomes also might matter, Finkel’s studies did not directly address whether winning or losing also influences internal political efficacy. Other scholars, however, have focused on the link between the outcome of political behavior and efficacy, generating evidence to show that supporting a winning candidate will increase one’s sense of efficacy. But support has consisted of either voting for or identifying with the winning candidate or party (see Clarke and Acock 1989; Clarke and Kornberg, 1992; Iyengar, 1980; Lambert, et al., 1986).

Clarke and Acock (1989) theorized that outcomes of elections can influence efficacy in one of two ways. There could be an “outcome-contingent” effect, or a “pure outcomes” effect from supporting a winning candidate (553). Under the outcome-contingent effect, individuals will experience increases in both internal and external political efficacy. Internal efficacy will increase because individuals will believe they can influence the political process based on having supported a winning candidate. External efficacy will increase on the assumption “that elected officials are predisposed to attend to the needs and demands of those who assisted their candidacies” (Clarke and Acock, 1989:553). Under the pure outcomes effect, even individuals who did not vote for the winners, but voiced support for them in public opinion surveys, will see an increase in internal and external efficacy. Internal efficacy will increase because the election outcome will show that partisan and socio-demographic groups with which an individual identifies can influence the political process. External efficacy will increase based on the perception that elected officials will need to be responsive to the groups that put them into office (Clarke and Acock, 1989)

Analyzing pre- and post-election survey data from the 1984 American National Election Study, Clarke and Acock found evidence to support both the outcome-contingent and pure outcomes effects. Voting for a winning candidate increased one’s

sense of internal and external efficacy. Also, voicing support for a winning presidential candidate, even if one did not actually vote in the election, was a positive predictor of internal and external efficacy.

The authors also examined the effects of other forms of political participation on internal and external efficacy, including wearing campaign buttons or displaying bumper stickers, attending political meetings or rallies, working for parties and candidates, and donating money. But they found no evidence that such activities increased internal or external efficacy. The measures of campaign activity, however, did not take into account whether individuals engaged in the activity on behalf of winning or losing candidates. Clarke and Acock (1989) speculated that measuring campaign participation in a way that captures the outcome of the participation might yield different results. The extent of the involvement also could influence the effect, they theorized. As the level of intensity of the participation increased, so too might the effect of that participation on efficacy. “Given the psychological involvement that often accompanies campaign activism, it seems reasonable to expect a ‘working for winners/losers’ effect, its’ size being proportional to that involvement.” (Clarke and Acock, 1989: 561)

Elsewhere in their article Clarke and Acock surmise that internal efficacy may be more difficult to alter than external efficacy, and their analysis reveals that internal efficacy is more stable than external efficacy over time (see also Abramson 1983 for a similar finding). They argue that because internal efficacy is a self-perception, it is rooted in “relatively stable personality traits, such as ego strength and self-esteem and, thus, should not fluctuate markedly in reaction to ongoing political events such as elections. External efficacy, in contrast, concerns perceptions of government responsiveness that should be quite sensitive to such events.” (553)

Such thinking raises an intriguing possibility about the potential variation in effects when backing a winner. If the nature of the participation is such that an individual feels a great sense of involvement, then is it possible that the outcome of the involvement could influence the personality-based, and difficult to alter, internal efficacy? If the nature of the involvement requires less of a personal investment, such as in voting, it may be that voting for a winner is more likely to boost only one’s sense of external efficacy.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence presented to date on the resources required by various forms of political participation, as well the link between efficacy and backing winning candidates, suggests that the relationship between internal efficacy and participation may hinge on two important sets of factors: the level of investment that citizens place in a candidate, and whether that investment leads to a winning outcome on Election Day. Previous research suggests that what has been considered a largely fixed set of psychological attitudes – internal political efficacy – might actually be prone to movement depending on how invested a citizen is in a candidate, and whether that candidate wins. The level of investment is not solely financial in nature, but also psychological. To borrow Verba et

---

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Iyengar (1980) finds that voting for the winning candidate increased one’s sense of external efficacy. Finkel (1985), while not taking into account the outcome of the election, also found that voting predicted an increase in external efficacy. Voting had no significant effect on internal efficacy.

al.'s (1995) terminology, "time-based acts," such as volunteering for a campaign, may leave citizens feeling more psychologically invested in a campaign than had they simply contributed money. Other forms of time-based political activities may also generate higher levels of investment, such as watching an election broadcast, or attempting to persuade others to support a candidate.

Previous research, then, suggests the following hypotheses:

H1: High-investment forms of political participation are more likely to boost one's sense of internal political efficacy after an election than lower cost forms of participation, such as voting.

H2: The greatest changes in internal efficacy will come from a combination of political activism and supporting a winning candidate as opposed to losing candidates.

Further, it is possible that it is not just the effect of investing in a winning candidate, but also the nature of the victory that boosts efficacy. Supporting a party candidate who wins a seat held by another party might have a greater impact on efficacy than backing a candidate who retains a seat for the incumbent party. Also, the margin of victory may have an effect on efficacy. Backing a candidate who narrowly wins a seat might make a greater contribution to post-election efficacy than supporting a candidate who wins a seat by a wide margin. The level of suspense and drama inherent in both capturing a seat from an opposing party and winning a close race might amplify the impact of activism on the part of a victorious candidate. These expectations give rise to the following hypotheses:

H3: Individuals who are politically active and support candidates who win a seat held by another party will exhibit a greater increase in efficacy compared to individuals who support a candidate who retains a seat for the incumbent party.

H4: Individuals who are politically active and support candidates who win a close election will exhibit a greater increase in efficacy than will supporters of candidates who win by a comfortable margin.

Support for these hypotheses could provide evidence in favor of an investment model of political efficacy, in which acts of political participation boost subsequent levels of efficacy if the participation is associated with a winning candidate. Helping a candidate to victory could have an empowering effect for individuals, boosting their sense that they have the ability to influence the political process.

If, on the other hand, internal political efficacy increases as a result of participation regardless of the outcome of the election, those results would indicate support for a civic duty model of political involvement. Citizens may find their reward simply in the social and psychological benefits of participating as they carry out their civic duty, even if their chosen candidate does not win. Political scientists have drawn on the concept of civic duty to address the paradox of voting, in which an individual expends effort to vote despite the great likelihood her or his vote will not decide the outcome of the election (Aldrich 1993, see also Bowler and Donovan 2013 for an application of the

concept of civic duty to voter turnout in the 2011 British electoral system referendum). This research extends the argument to consider other forms of political participation as they relate to civic duty as an alternative to the investment model.

### **Data and measures**

I test these hypotheses using panel data gathered in the 2015 British Election Study. The general election results in the United Kingdom in 2015 provide a useful opportunity to test these hypotheses for several reasons. First, the election result was somewhat of a surprise, in that many pre-election polls suggested that the election would lead to a hung Parliament and either another coalition government or a minority government. Instead, the Conservative Party won the election outright with an 11-seat majority. Also, about one in six seats – 111 out of 650 – changed from one party to another as a result of the election (Hawkins, Keen, and Nakatudde 2015). Those major changes included the Liberal Democrats losing 49 of the 57 seats they had won in the 2010 general election. The Labour Party also had a net loss of 26 seats in 2015, while the Conservative Party had a net increase of 24 seats. The Scottish National Party made significant gains, winning 50 seats held by other parties in 2010. In addition, about one in six seats were decided by a margin of 10 percent or less. Although this proportion is smaller than in the 2010 general election, these marginal seats provide a critical mass for testing the effects of political participation on efficacy. Each of these developments provides opportunities for shifts in citizens' post-election levels of internal political efficacy given the unexpected and sometimes dramatic outcomes of races for seats in a large number of constituencies.

The polling firm YouGov, working with a consortium of British universities, measured public opinion about the 2015 general election in the BES panel study. The study was conducted online in six waves from February 20, 2014 to May 26, 2015. Data collection for the sixth wave began May 8, 2015, the day after the 2015 general election. This paper uses data from wave four (conducted March 4 – 30, 2015), wave five (conducted March 31 – May 6, 2015), and wave six.

Waves four and six contain five measures of internal political efficacy. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

1. I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.
2. It takes too much time and effort to be active in politics and public affairs.
3. It is often difficult for me to understand what is going on in government and politics.
4. Going to vote is a lot of effort.
5. Voting is an enjoyable experience.

Respondents used a five-point scale to report whether each statement reflected their views (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). For some questions I recoded the responses so that the most efficacious view received the

highest score, and then I combined the five measures in each wave to create separate scales of internal efficacy for before and after the election. The reliability of each scale was acceptable, with a coefficient alpha of 0.70 for the efficacy scale from wave four, before the election, and a coefficient alpha of 0.69 for the efficacy scale from wave six, after the election. Each scale ranged in value from five to 25, with a mean of 17.6 and a standard deviation of 3.3 in the pre-election scale and a mean of 18.1 and a standard deviation of 3.2 in the post-election scale. Although the mean change was 0.5, the distribution of the changes among survey respondents ranged from a decline of eight points to an increase of nine points. Of the 22,927 respondents in the analysis, 30 percent showed a drop on the internal efficacy scale from pre- to post-election, 29 percent had no change, and 41 percent had an increase in the efficacy scale. The post-election efficacy scale served as the dependent variable for the models, while the pre-election efficacy scale served as an independent variable in the models, making it possible to isolate the effects of political participation and election outcomes on efficacy after the election while controlling for pre-existing levels of efficacy.

Political participation serves as the key independent variable in the models. The BES had six measures of political participation in wave five of the study. Respondents were asked:

During the last seven days, have you done any of the following? (Choose all that apply):

1. Done any work on behalf of a political party or action group
2. Given any money to a political party, organization or cause
3. Displayed an election poster
4. Listened to or watched a party election broadcast
5. Read a campaign leaflet/letter, text message or email from a political party
6. Tried to persuade somebody which party they should vote for

The BES also had a measure of political discussion in wave four of the survey:

7. During the last week, roughly on how many days did you talk about politics / parties with other people?

I combined the political discussion measure from wave four with the participation measures in wave five to create a scale of political participation. Because the wave five measures were all dichotomous (no = 0, yes = 1), I re-scaled the political discussion measure into a dichotomous variable that reflected whether respondents had discussed politics more or less often than the median number of days that the sample reported talking about politics (2.9 days) (no = 0, yes = 1). As a result, the political participation scale ranged from zero (engaging in none of the behaviors in the previous week) to seven (engaging in all of the behaviors). The variable had a mean of 1.7 behaviors and a standard deviation of 1.8. The scale had a coefficient alpha of 0.67.

[Table 1 here]

One-third of the sample reported having engaged in none of the behaviors, while 61 percent of the sample indicated they had engaged in one, two, three or four of the seven behaviors in the previous week. Only one percent reported having done all seven forms of political participation in the seven days prior to responding to the survey.

Various political acts can have varying price tags. Depending on one's resources, donating money can be costly. Time-intensive activities, such as volunteering for a campaign or attending meetings or events, also make demands on citizens (Verba et al.1995). Attempting to persuade others requires an investment not just of time but of social capital, with the amount of social capital varying by the receptivity of the audience to the message. Even displaying a poster can come at a cost in that doing so is a public act that may not be well received by others. The frequency with which respondents to the BES reported engaging in political acts reflects these varying costs.

[Table 2 here]

The more expensive forms of participation – working for a party or giving money – occurred least frequently, with four percent of respondents indicated they had engaged in either activity. Displaying a poster was the next least frequent act (5 percent), followed by attempting to persuade someone to support a specific party (12 percent). The most frequently occurring acts were discussing politics with others (53 percent); reading a leaflet, letter or other communication from a party (42 percent); and listening to or watching a party election broadcast (34 percent).

### **Multivariate models**

I tested the hypotheses in a series of Ordinary Least Squares regressions with the 21-point scale of post-election internal efficacy as the dependent variable. I began with a basic model, then in three subsequent models I incorporated independent variables that measured various characteristics of the outcome of the election in each constituency. The independent variables in the basic model consisted of the scale of political behaviors, pre-election levels of internal efficacy, whether the respondent voted in the May 7, 2015 general election (which some previous research has shown to be a predictor of political efficacy), and age, education level (university degree or higher) and gender as control variables.

[Table 3 here]

Controlling for pre-election levels of internal political efficacy, political participation had a statistically significant and positive effect on post-election efficacy. Voting also had a significant and positive effect, as did education. Age had a negative effect, while the effect of gender was insignificant. Comparing the standardized coefficients, pre-election internal efficacy had the largest effect, as one might expect. The higher cost forms of political participation had a slightly larger effect than voting (0.09 standardized units for each standardized unit increase in participation and 0.08 standardized units for voting), but the difference was quite small. The evidence to support H1, that higher investment

activities will boost post-election efficacy to a greater extent than voting, is underwhelming in the basic model.

The second model takes into account the outcome of the election, allowing a test of H2, that the greatest changes in internal efficacy will come from making significant investments in a winning candidate as opposed to losing candidates. Wave six of the BES included this question: “In the recent General Election, did the candidate that you voted for get elected?” I included this measure in the second model, and I also interacted this question with the political participation variable. The model also included all of the other variables from the basic model.

[Table 4 here]

Controlling for pre-election internal efficacy, the political participation scale and voting continue to exert a significant and positive influence on post-election efficacy, with participation doing so at a slightly higher magnitude than voting. Voting for a winning candidate also has a significant and positive effect on post-election efficacy, although the standardized effect is smaller than that of the political participation scale and voting (0.02 standardized units for backing a winning candidate, versus 0.09 units for the participation scale and 0.08 units for voting). The interaction between the political participation scale and voting for a winning candidate was not statistically significant.

Incorporating the interaction into the model changes the interpretation of the effects of the political participation scale. The scale now reflects the effects of participation for respondents who did not support a winning candidate. At the same time, the measure reflecting a vote for a winning candidate represents the effect for those voters who scored zero on the scale of political participation. The result is that political participation has a positive effect on post-election efficacy, and supporting a winning candidate has a positive effect on post-election efficacy, but these effects exist independently of each another. The insignificance of the interaction term undermines support for the investment theory, in that the theory holds that participation on behalf of a winning candidate would be most likely to increase post-election efficacy.

The second model incorporated the outcome of the election in each respondent’s constituency by including a measure of whether the respondent voted for the winning candidate. Victory combined with political participation, however, did not have a significant effect on post-election efficacy. But there may be specific characteristics of a constituency-level election outcome, interacted with political participation, that could influence post-election efficacy. The final two models include measures of two of these characteristics – whether a seat changed hands from one political party to another, and whether the outcome of the election was close or not. In each case these elements could provide for suspenseful and dramatic results, which might provide a more significant return on the investments represented by the scale of political participation.

Wave six of the BES includes a series of constituency-level measures of whether the seat in each constituency changed from one party to another. Using these measures,

and the variable capturing whether each respondent voted for a winning candidate, I categorized each respondent as having voted for a winning candidate in a district where the seat remained with the same party or flipped to another party. I included those measures in the third model along with two interaction terms – one reflecting the interaction between the political participation scale and voting for a winning candidate where the party held the seat, and the other measuring the interaction between participation and voting for a winning candidate who captured the seat from another party.

[Table 5 here]

Political participation and voting in general remain significant and positive predictors of post-election political efficacy. Voting for a winning candidate in a seat that did not change from one party to another also was a significant and positive predictor. Contrary to expectations, however, voting for a winning candidate in a constituency where the seat changed hands had a negative effect on post-election political efficacy. The interaction between political participation and voting for a candidate where the seat changed from one party to another was significant and positive. The interaction between political participation and voting for a winning candidate in a constituency where a party remained in power was not significant.

The results of Model #3 offer some support for hypothesis H3, in that the combination of political activity and voting for a candidate in a constituency where the seat changed from one party to another exerted a positive effect on post-election political efficacy. Given that only one in six seats changed parties in the 2015 election, this result, combined with political participation, may have given those individuals a greater sense that they could influence politics. But conflicting evidence comes from the positive effects of political participation alone, which would reflect the experience of individuals who were involved in politics but did not support a winning candidate in their constituency. At the same time, the effects of supporting a candidate for a seat that did not change party hands also was positive, denoting the experience of individuals who were not politically active beyond voting for the winning candidate. At the same time, the negative effect of supporting a winning candidate for a seat that flipped from one party to another is puzzling. This effect, taking into account interactions, would reflect the experience of individuals who did not engage in political activism beyond voting for the winning candidate. The negative effect is counter-intuitive and difficult to explain.

Taking into account the margin of victory in the constituencies is the final test of the investment theory. Hypothesis H4 holds that individuals who are politically active and support winning candidates in close races are more likely to see an increase in post-election efficacy than will individuals who support candidates who win less competitive races. If the race is competitive, there will be more uncertainty about the probable outcome, and perhaps the contest will require a greater investment on the part of political activists. About one in six seats in the 2015 general election had a margin of victory of 10 percent or less, so I used that cutoff to categorize constituencies as competitive or not competitive. I then coded respondents based on whether they had voted for a winning

candidate in a competitive constituency or a non-competitive constituency. I also interacted those measures with the political participation variable. I report the results in Table 6, Model #4.

[Table 6 here]

As in the previous models, political participation and voting in general have a significant and positive effect on post-election efficacy. Voting for a candidate who wins by 10 percent or less has no significant effect on efficacy. Voting for a candidate who wins by more than 10 percent, however, has a significant and positive impact on post-election efficacy. The interactions between political participation and voting for winning candidates in close races or non-competitive races are not statistically significant. The results suggest that political participation positively affects post-election efficacy for individuals who did not support a winning candidate, either in close race or a blow-out. Backing a candidate who wins by a large margin also boosts post-election efficacy. But backing a winner in a close race has no effect on efficacy, and the combination of political activism and supporting a winner in either a close race or a non—competitive race also does not influence efficacy. The notion that investing a lot of effort in supporting a winning candidate in a competitive constituency pays off with greater post-election efficacy is not supported by the results of Model #4.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The analyses generate limited evidence in support of the investment model, suggesting the civic duty model may be a more accurate characterization of the influence of political participation and election outcomes on post-election efficacy. The analysis using the basic model, without taking into account election outcomes, generated evidence suggesting that both political participation and voting predicted an increase in post-election efficacy. Standardized estimates showed that the higher cost forms of political participation had a slightly greater impact than voting, which supports hypothesis H1. But the difference in the effects was very small.

Taking into account the outcome of the election (Model #2) indicated that political participation and voting for a winning candidate each contributed to increased post-election efficacy, but the effects were distinct. The combined effect of political participation and supporting a winning candidate, as reflected in the interaction term, was not statistically significant. Instead, the political participation scale was significant only for those who did not vote for a winning candidate. Backing a winning candidate was significant only for those who did not engage in other acts of political participation. The model did not generate evidence to support hypothesis H2, that the greatest changes in internal efficacy would come from a combination of political activism and supporting a winning candidate.

The nature of the outcome of the election in each respondent's constituency was related to political investments in only a limited set of circumstances (Model #3). Hypothesis H3 asserted that politically active individuals who support a candidate who

wins a seat held by another party would exhibit a greater increase in post-election efficacy than would politically active individuals who back a candidate who retains a seat for the incumbent party. The analysis generated evidence to support this hypothesis, in that the interaction between being politically active and voting for a candidate who flips a seat was a significant and positive predictor of post-election efficacy. That was not the case for the interaction between political participation and supporting a candidate who retains a seat for the party, which was statistically insignificant. However, political participation among respondents who did not back a winning candidate also continued to exert a positive, and larger, effect on post-election efficacy than the combination of political activism and backing a candidate who captured a seat from another party. Also, voting for a winning candidate who held a seat for a party was a significant and positive predictor among individuals who were not otherwise politically active. The most puzzling result was that voting for a winning candidate who flipped a seat had a significant and negative effect on post-election efficacy among voters who were did not engage in other forms of participation.

The fourth model, which took into account the margin of victory in each respondent's constituency, did not generate support for hypothesis H4. That hypothesis asserted that the combination of being politically active and supporting candidates who win a close election would lead to a greater increase in efficacy than would supporting a candidate who wins by a comfortable margin. Interactions between political participation and support for winning candidates in close races or non-competitive races were not statistically significant. Among voters who were not otherwise politically active, supporting a winning candidate who won by 10 percent or less also was not significant. Voting for a winning candidate who won by more than 10 percent had a significant and positive effect on post-election efficacy among those who did not engage in other forms of participation. Being politically active remained a positive predictor of post-election efficacy among those who did not back a winning candidate.

The bulk of the evidence from the data analyses points away from thinking of political activism as a form of investment in victorious outcomes. Instead, political participation more consistently exerts a positive effect on post-election efficacy even when voters do not support winning candidates. The act of engaging in politics may be its own reward, regardless of the outcome of a specific election. These results suggest that engaging in forms of political activism is more likely to be motivated by a sense of civic duty than seeking a return on an investment of time, financial capital and / or social capital. It is also worth considering that individuals who engage in various forms of political participation, particularly high-cost acts such as donating money or working for a campaign, may have a greater understanding of the challenges and occasional unpredictability of electoral politics based on prior elections. For this category of citizens the outcome of a single election may not influence their sense of internal political efficacy in a significant way because they may have historical and first-hand experience with winning and losing. They may continue to participate regardless of the outcome.

In reporting these results, it is important to note that this is a test of hypotheses in one election cycle. Also, the effects of political participation and backing winning

candidates on post-election efficacy were small compared to the effects of pre-election efficacy. But given previous characterizations of internal political efficacy as a largely fixed set of psychological attitudes, detecting shifts in these attitudes after an election, and relating those shifts to political participation and election outcomes, expands our knowledge of political efficacy and its potential malleability. That political efficacy can increase as a result of political participation rooted more in civic duty than in self-interest is a useful finding to consider.

## References

- Abramson, Paul R. 1983. *Political Attitudes in America*. San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman & Co.
- Aldrich, John H., 1993. "Rational choice and turnout." *American Journal of Political Science*, 37:246–278.
- Almond, Gabriel A. and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Balch, George I. 1974. "Multiple Indicators in Survey Research: The Concept 'Sense of Political Efficacy.'" *Political Methodology*, 1:1-43.
- Banducci, Susan A., and Jeffrey A. Karp. 2003. "How Elections Change the Way Citizens View the Political System: Campaigns, Media Effects, and Electoral Outcomes in Comparative Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science*, 33:443-467.
- Bowler, Shaun, and Todd Donovan. 2013. "Civic duty and turnout in the UK referendum on AV: What shapes the duty to vote?" *Electoral Studies*, 32:265–273
- Campbell, Angus, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller. 1954. *The Voter Decides*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson.
- Campbell, Angus, Phillip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley.
- Clarke, Harold D. and Alan C. Acock. 1989. "National Elections and Political Attitudes: The Case of Political Efficacy." *British Journal of Political Science* 19(4): 551-562.
- Clarke, Harold D. and Allan Kornberg. 1992. "Do National Elections Affect Perceptions of MP Responsiveness? A Note on the Canadian Case." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 17(2):183-204.
- Dahl, Robert A. 1961. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press.
- Easton, David and Jack Dennis. 1969. *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Finkel, Steven E. 1985. "Reciprocal Effects of Political Efficacy: A Panel Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science*, 29(4):891-913.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. "The Effects of Participation on Political Efficacy and Political Support: Evidence from a West German Panel." *The Journal of Politics* 49(2):441-464.
- Oliver Hawkins, Oliver, Richard Keen and Nambassa Nakatudde. 2015. "General Election 2015." House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number CBP7186, 28 July 2015. Retrieved online at <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7186#fullreport>
- Hess, Robert D. and Judith V. Torney. 1967. *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Iyengar, Shanto. 1980. "Subjective Political Efficacy as a Measure of Diffuse Support." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 44(2):249-256.
- Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. 1974. *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lambert, Ronald D., James E. Curtis, Steven D. Brown, and Barry J. King. 1986. "Effects of Identification with Governing Parties on Feelings of Political Efficacy and Trust." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 19(4)705-728.
- Miller, Warren E. 1980. "Disinterest, Disaffection, and Participation in Presidential Politics." *Political Behavior*, 2(1):7-32.
- Niemi, Richard G., Stephen C. Craig, and Franco Mattei. 1991. "Measuring Internal Efficacy in the 1988 National Election Study." *American Political Science Review*, 85(4):1407-1413.
- Pollock, Philip H. III. 1983. "The Participatory Consequences of Internal and External Political Efficacy: A Research Note." *The Western Political Quarterly*, 36(3):400-409.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Welch, Susan, and Cal Clark. 1975. "Determinants of Change in Political Efficacy: A Test of Two Hypotheses." *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 3:207-217.

## Tables

<b>Table 1 – Frequency of Acts of Political Participation in the Past Seven Days</b>	
Number of Acts	% of Survey Respondents
Zero	33%
One	28%
Two	2%
Three	11%
Four	20%
Five	3%
Six	2%
Seven	1%
N = 22,927	

Source: British Election Study 2015, waves four and five

<b>Table 2 – Campaign Activity in the 2015 British General Election</b>	
In the past seven days, have you...	% of Survey Respondents
Discussed politics with others (on three or more days)	53%
Read a campaign leaflet / letter, text message or email from a political party	42%
Listened to or watched a party election broadcast	34%
Tried to persuade somebody which party they should vote for	12%
Displayed an election poster	5%
Done any work on behalf of a political party or action group	4%
Given money to a political party, organization or cause	4%
N = 22,927	

Source: British Election Study 2015, waves four (political discussion) and five (other six activities)

<b>Table 3 – Predictors of Post-Election Internal Efficacy Model #1 – Basic Model</b>		
	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient
Pre-election political participation scale	<b>0.16**</b> (0.01)	<b>0.09</b>
Voted in the election	<b>1.19**</b> (0.06)	<b>0.08</b>
University degree or higher	<b>0.29**</b> (0.03)	<b>0.05</b>
Age group	<b>-0.11**</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.06</b>
Female	-0.002 (0.03)	0.00
Pre-election internal efficacy scale	<b>0.69**</b> (0.01)	<b>0.70</b>
Constant	<b>5.00**</b> (0.10)	
N	22,927	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.60	

Notes: Dependent variable – 21-point scale of post-election internal political efficacy. Standard errors are in parentheses. Statistically significant results are in bold.  
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (Two-tailed tests)

Source: British Election Study 2015

<b>Table 4 – Predictors of Post-Election Internal Efficacy Model #2 – Model Taking into Account Support for Winning Candidate</b>		
	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient
Pre-election political participation scale	<b>0.16**</b> (0.01)	<b>0.09</b>
Voted for winning candidate in the constituency	<b>0.16**</b> (0.04)	<b>0.02</b>
Political participation * Voted for winning candidate in the constituency	0.00 (0.02)	0.00
Voted in the election	<b>1.13**</b> (0.06)	<b>0.08</b>
University degree or higher	<b>0.29**</b> (0.03)	<b>0.05</b>
Age group	<b>-0.11**</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.06</b>
Female	-0.004 (0.03)	-0.001
Pre-election internal efficacy scale	<b>0.68**</b> (0.01)	<b>0.70</b>
Constant	<b>5.00**</b> (0.10)	
N	22,927	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.60	

Notes: Dependent variable – 21-point scale of post-election internal political efficacy. Standard errors are in parentheses. Statistically significant results are in bold.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (Two-tailed tests)

Source: British Election Study 2015

<b>Table 5 – Predictors of Post-Election Internal Efficacy Model #3 – Model Taking into Account Support for Winner and Whether Seat Changed Parties</b>		
	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient
Pre-election political participation scale	<b>0.16**</b> (0.01)	<b>0.09</b>
Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where party held seat	<b>0.17**</b> (0.04)	<b>0.04</b>
Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where seat changed from one party to another	<b>-0.19*</b> (0.09)	<b>-0.02</b>
Political participation * Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where party held seat	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02
Political participation * Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where seat changed from one party to another	<b>0.08*</b> (0.04)	<b>0.02</b>
Voted in the election	<b>1.13**</b> (0.06)	<b>0.08</b>
University degree or higher	<b>0.29**</b> (0.03)	<b>0.05</b>
Age group	<b>-0.11**</b> (0.01)	<b>-0.06</b>
Female	-0.003 (0.03)	0.00
Pre-election internal efficacy scale	<b>0.68**</b> (0.01)	<b>0.70</b>
Constant	<b>5.00**</b> (0.10)	
N	22,927	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.60	

Notes: Dependent variable – 21-point scale of post-election internal political efficacy. Standard errors are in parentheses. Statistically significant results are in bold.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (Two-tailed tests)

Source: British Election Study 2015

<b>Table 6 – Predictors of Post-Election Internal Efficacy Model #4 – Model Taking into Account Support for Winner and Whether Margin of Victory was 10% or Less</b>		
	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient
Pre-election political participation scale	<b>0.15** (0.01)</b>	<b>0.09</b>
Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where margin of victory > 10%	<b>0.17** (0.04)</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where margin of victory was 10% or less	0.13 (0.07)	0.01
Political participation * Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where margin of victory > 10%	0.001 (0.02)	0.00
Political participation * Voted for winning candidate in a constituency where margin of victory was 10% or less	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.002
Voted in the election	<b>1.13** (0.06)</b>	<b>0.08</b>
University degree or higher	<b>0.29** (0.03)</b>	<b>0.05</b>
Age group	<b>-0.11** (0.01)</b>	<b>-0.06</b>
Female	-0.004 (0.03)	-0.001
Pre-election internal efficacy scale	<b>0.68** (0.01)</b>	<b>0.70</b>
Constant	<b>5.00** (0.10)</b>	
N	22,927	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.60	

Notes: Dependent variable – 21-point scale of post-election internal political efficacy. Standard errors are in parentheses. Statistically significant results are in bold.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  (Two-tailed tests)

Source: British Election Study 2015