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# An Exploratory Analysis of Japanese Voters Who Are Reluctant to Participate in Politics

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## Abstract

Due to the recent trend of declining turnout, an exploratory analysis was conducted using data collected from other study to examine voters who are reluctant to participate in politics. One thousand respondents were divided into three groups based on their willingness to vote: a group with higher willingness to vote as the Willing group, a group with lower willingness to vote as the Unwilling group, and a group without manifestation of their attitudes as the DK group, and those in the latter two groups were defined as voters who are reluctant to participate in politics. There was no difference between the Willing group and the Unwilling group in the degree of expectation that individual efforts would improve society and in sense of internal political efficacy (both low). However, the Unwilling group was significantly lower in the appraisals of living under a democratic government and choosing leaders through free elections. Those who were reluctant to participate in politics tended to be younger in age, non-regular employees, with fewer years of education. They, especially in their 20s and 30s, did not show their attitudes even toward the policies which may have negative consequences to their own lives. This suggests that the reluctance of these voters to participate in politics may be caused by their lack of awareness of the possibility that their uneasy situation of life can be improved through their political participation.

**Keywords:** political participation, political efficacy, attitudes toward democracy

## Introduction

The voter turnout for the 49th House of Representatives election held on October 31, 2021, was 55.93%<sup>1</sup>. According to the statistics of the Ministry of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20211101/k10013330811000.html> (date of access, Nov. 30, 2021).

Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC)<sup>2</sup>, this rate was slightly higher than that of the 47th election in 2014 (52.66%) and the 48th election in 2017 (53.68%), but remained at a low level. It is particularly low among the younger age groups, with turnout in 2014 and 2017 being around 33% for those in their 20s and around 43% in their 30s. Voting in elections is the most basic way of political participation, and it goes without saying that the history of activities to demand this right is long and still continues today.

This situation can be described as political alienation, lack of trust in politics, political inefficacy, or apathy. Chen (1992) defined and confirmed four dimensions of political alienation as follows: first, political normlessness or distrust, which refers to unfavorable evaluations stemming from a perceived discrepancy between norm and reality; second, political powerlessness or inefficacy, which refers to the extent that the electorate believe that they have no ability to influence the political process; third, political meaninglessness, which refers to the extent that one perceives the outcomes of political choices as being unpredictable, therefore the choice itself is meaningless; and fourth, political apathy or indifference (Chen 1992: 214). Cappella & Jamieson (1997), praising Chen's attempt as most comprehensive, proposed an original concept of political cynicism apart from political alienation consisted of these four dimensions. Political cynicism is, by their definition, the absence of trust, although it is somewhat related to political alienation (Cappella & Jamieson 1977: 141). They state cynicism implied that the self-interest of political actors is their primary goal and that the common interest is secondary at best or played out only for its political advantage (Cappella & Jamieson 1997: 142).

Which one of these slightly different concepts best explains the phenomenon of low voter turnout in Japan today? To consider this, it is necessary to attempt to understand the actual situation. This study focused on voters who are reluctant to participate in politics and explored what characteristics they have.

## Methods

To examine this research agenda, an exploratory analysis was conducted using data obtained from a survey on criticism of political reporting (Otsubo, 2022). The survey was conducted in mid-January 2021 among the monitors of Freeasy, a web-based survey system of iBRIDGE corporation. A hundred men and women each living in the Kanto region were assigned to each age group from 20s to 60s. The mean age of the total of 1,000 survey respondents was 44.63 years old (SD=13.95). The survey questionnaire were on demographic attributes such as age and gender, media use to access news, critical attitudes and behaviors toward news coverage on

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo\\_s/news/sonota/nendaibetu/](https://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/senkyo_s/news/sonota/nendaibetu/) (date of access, Nov. 30, 2021).

television, normative attitudes toward mass media coverage, perceptions of hostile media, attitudes toward the policies of the current administration, sense of political efficacy, and attitudes toward democracy.

As a method of identifying voters who are reluctant to participate in politics, which is the focus of this study, a question item was used, that is, “I always try to vote in national and local elections,” which asks about the intention to participate in politics in the form of voting. This was one of the ten question items that asked about attitudes toward democracy. These question items were set with reference to the World Values Survey (Yasuno, 2018) and Takada (2008), and the respondents were required to answer how it is applicable to them. The choices were “very much,” “fairly,” “somewhat,” “somewhat not so much,” “not much,” “not at all,” and “don’t know”. The results of all these 10 items are shown in Table 4.

The result of this simple question is shown in Table 1. The 621 respondents who selected “very much,” “fairly,” or “somewhat,” were considered to express their willingness to vote to some extent at least, and were classified as “the Willing group”. The 287 respondents who selected “somewhat not so much,” “not so much,” or “not at all” were considered to show little willingness to vote to varying degrees, and classified as “the Unwilling group”. The respondents who chose “don’t know” (n=92) were those who did not express their attitudes or thoughts or those who were not so cooperative with the survey, and were considered to be those who might have other characteristics than those who are unwilling to vote. Therefore, those who chose “don’t know” to all 10 question items about democracy, including this one, were classified as “the DK group” (n=82).

Table 1. Responses to “I always try to vote in national and local elections.”

	Very much applicable	Fairly applicable	Somewhat applicable	Somewhat not so much applicable	Not so much applicable	Not at all applicable	Don't Know	
n	246	184	191	128	77	82	92	1000
%	24.6	18.4	19.1	12.8	7.7	8.2	9.2	100

In this study, among the three groups, the Willing group (n=621), the Unwilling group (n=297), and the DK group (n=82), the members of the latter two groups were defined as “voters who are reluctant to participate in politics”. By comparing these three groups, the characteristics of voters who are reluctant to participate in politics were examined. In addition to the overall analysis, an analysis limited to the respondents in their 20s and 30s, with especially lower voting rates, was conducted. The main items examined were demographic attributes, attitudes toward democracy, sense of political efficacy, attitudes toward the policies of the current administration, and media use to access news. In order not to overlook the characteristics of these

groups, relatively simple methods such as  $\chi^2$  test and residual analysis or one-way analysis of variance and multiple comparisons of each item were adopted.

## Results

### *Demographic Attributes*

To explore the characteristics of voters who are reluctant to participate in politics in terms of demographic attributes, gender and age composition of the three groups were examined. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Gender and Age of the Three Groups

		Willing group	Unwilling group	DK group	
Gender	Male	317	140	43	500
	Female	304	157	39	500
	total	621	297	82	1000
$\chi^2=1.44, df=2, p=.487,$ Cramer's V=0.038					
Age	20s	94	86	20	200
	30s	109	71	20	200
	40s	126	54	20	200
	50s	137	51	12	200
	60s	155	35	10	200
	total	621	297	82	1000
$\chi^2=50.11, df=8, p<.001,$ Cramer's V=0.158					

There was no difference by gender among the three groups, but there was a significant difference by age group ( $\chi^2=50.11, df=8, p<.001$ , Cramer's V=.158, 95%CL [.119, .202]). The results of residual analysis showed that the Willing group had significantly lower percentages in their 20s ( $p<.001$ ) and 30s ( $p<.05$ ), and significantly higher percentages in their 50s ( $p<.05$ ) and 60s ( $p<.001$ ). On the other hand, in the Unwilling group, the proportion of those in their 20s ( $p<.001$ ) and 30s ( $p<.05$ ) was significantly higher, and that of those in their 60s ( $p<.001$ ) was significantly lower. Of the 379 respondents in the Unwilling or the DK group, 52.0% were in their 20s ( $n=106$ ) and 30s ( $n=91$ ). Of the respondents in their 20s, 53% were categorized into the Unwilling or the DK group, and of those in their 30s, 45.5%, while 37.9% of all age groups. These results indicate that the percentage of those who are reluctant to vote is higher in younger age groups. It can be said that these results confirmed the reality that appeared in the voting rate.

For occupation and years of education, which are likely to differ by age group, the analysis was limited to those in their 20s and 30s ( $n=400$ ). Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Occupation and Years of Education of the Three Groups in Their 20s and 30s

		Willing group	Unwilling group	DK group	total	
occupation	Company employee (regular)	105	60	9	174	$\chi^2=50.27, df=22, p<.001, \text{Cramer's } V=0.251$
	Company employee (contract, temporary staff)	8	14	2	24	
	Manager / Executive	0	1	0	1	
	Public employee (excluding faculty and staff)	10	3	0	13	
	Self-employed	7	4	0	11	
	Free enterprise	3	1	0	4	
	Doctors and medical personnel	2	3	1	6	
	Housewife	17	19	3	39	
	Student	21	16	4	41	
	Part-time worker	17	20	9	46	
	Unemployed	12	12	8	32	
	Other	1	4	4	9	
		total	203	157	40	
years of education	9 years	11	21	10	42	$\chi^2=39.29, df=8, p<.001, \text{Cramer's } V=0.222$
	10~12 years	33	47	6	86	
	13~14 years	37	37	5	79	
	15~16 years	90	35	14	139	
	more than 17 years	32	17	5	54	
		total	203	157	40	

For occupation, there was a significant difference among the three groups ( $\chi^2=50.27, df=22, p<.001, \text{Cramer's } V=.251, 95\%CL [.196, .316]$ ). As a result of the residual analysis, in the Willing group, the percentage of “company employee (regular)” was significantly higher ( $p<.01$ ) and that of “part-time worker” was significantly lower ( $p<.05$ ). On the other hand, in the Unwilling group, the percentage of “company employee (contract, temporary staff)” was significantly higher ( $p<.05$ ), and in the DK group, the proportion of “company employee (regular)” was significantly lower ( $p<.01$ ) and that of “part-time worker” was significantly higher ( $p<.05$ ). The ratio of regular employment in the Unwilling group and the DK group was lower than that in the Willing group.

There was also a significant difference in years of education ( $\chi^2=39.29, df=8, p<.001, \text{Cramer's } V=.222, 95\%CL [.161, .291]$ ). The results of the residual analysis showed that the Willing group had a significantly higher percentage of “15-16 years” ( $p<.001$ ) and significantly lower percentages of “9 years” ( $p<.01$ ) and “10-12 years” ( $p<.05$ ) among the five categories, while the Unwilling group had a significantly higher percentage of “10-12 years” ( $p<.01$ ), and significantly lower percentage of

“15-16 years” ( $p<.001$ ). The DK group had a significantly higher percentage of “9 years” ( $p<.01$ ). In terms of the median of each group, the Willing group was “15-16 years,” while both the Unwilling and the DK groups were “13-14 years,” confirming that those who are reluctant to vote had fewer years of education than those who are willing to vote. There were no significant differences in household income or marital status. No significant differences were found in gender.

### *Attitudes toward Democracy*

What attitudes toward democracy do the voters who are reluctant to participate in politics have? Ten question items including the one to have been used for the categorization of the respondents into the three groups were set for the measurement of the attitudes toward democracy, and the means of the three groups were compared, setting “don’t know” as 0, “not at all applicable” as 1, and “very much applicable” as 6. The results are shown in Table 4. As was mentioned above, the DK group was defined as the respondent who chose “don’t know” to all ten items in this set of questions, so the means of it were zero for all items as the matter of course. Multiple comparisons were conducted using the Holm method, and the means of the groups that showed significant differences at the 5% level are indicated with a different letter for each on the right shoulder of the value.

The two groups that were reluctant to vote were significantly different from the Willing group in nine out of ten items and they were lower. The only exception was the result of item 4, “I do not believe that society can be improved with a little effort on our part.” There was no difference between the Unwilling group and the Willing group ( $p=.781$ ). The means for both groups were above the midpoint (3.0) and skewed in the direction of being agreeable to the statement. This means that both the Willing group and the Unwilling group have a kind of resignation toward the betterment of society, and there is no difference in this respect.

Focusing on the effect size, that of item 7, “I prefer to have a democratic government in my country” ( $d=0.78$ , 95%CL [0.64, 0.92]) and that of item 8, “I believe that it is essential for democracy that the people elect their leaders through free elections” ( $d=0.82$ , 95%CL [0.68, 0.96]), were particularly large. It means that there are large differences between the Willing group and the Unwilling group in these points.

Although both groups feel difficulties in the improvement of society, the Willing group recognizes the importance of free elections to choose their own leaders and democratic government and has not lost their wills to participate in politics through voting behavior, while the Unwilling group is skeptical of democratic institutions and democratic government and is losing their wills to participate in politics.

However, judging from the results of item 5, “I believe that politics works better when it is left to competent leaders than when it is discussed by everyone” and

Table 4. Attitudes toward Democracy of the Three Groups

	Willing group	Unwilling group	DK group	F	df	p
1 I always try to vote in national and local elections.	5.09 <sup>a</sup>	2.09 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	1138.81	2, 187.74	<.001
2 I try to participate in social activities (volunteer activities, citizen movements, etc.) that I agree with.	2.90 <sup>a</sup>	2.15 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	32.25	2, 193.57	<.001
3 I believe that it is much more important that individual freedom be protected than that we all work together to improve society.	3.11 <sup>a</sup>	2.73 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	5.87	2, 190.44	.003
4 I do not believe that society can be improved with a little effort on our part.	3.31 <sup>a</sup>	3.34 <sup>a</sup>	0.00 <sup>b</sup>	0.03	2, 187.92	.967
5 I believe that politics works better when it is left to competent leaders than when it is discussed by everyone.	2.96 <sup>a</sup>	2.55 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	7.26	2, 190.44	.001
6 I prefer that my country is governed by a strong leader who does not need to worry about parliament or elections.	2.92 <sup>a</sup>	2.39 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	12.21	2, 191.22	<.001
7 I prefer to have a democratic government in my country.	4.06 <sup>a</sup>	2.85 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	54.67	2, 189.05	<.001
8 I believe that it is essential for democracy that the people elect their leaders through free elections.	4.25 <sup>a</sup>	2.95 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	57.16	2, 187.27	<.001
9 I believe that it is essential for democracy that the people obey their rulers.	2.78 <sup>a</sup>	2.18 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	15.69	2, 191.00	<.001
10 I believe that information from the mass media is essential for democracy in order to evaluate politics and make decisions in elections.	3.78 <sup>a</sup>	2.80 <sup>b</sup>	0.00 <sup>c</sup>	34.95	2, 187.08	<.001

Note: There is a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the different alphabets at the top right of the value.

item 9, “I believe that it is essential for democracy that the people obey their rulers,” both of which were significantly higher than the Unwilling group, the Willing group seems to prefer to leave political decisions to their leader after selecting the person through democratic procedures. The results suggest that the Willing group does not necessarily totally support the democratic system of government.

There were significant differences between the Unwilling group and the DK group at the level of less than 0.1% for all items, and the effect size was  $d=1.48$  (95%CL [1.33, 1.63]) even for the smallest item 9. The effect size is much higher than 0.80, which is usually evaluated as “large” (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2008). Although both of these two groups are reluctant to vote, the DK group does not have or is not willing to express its own views on democracy, while the Unwilling group clearly has an attitude of skepticism toward democratic institutions and democratic political management.

The results of the analysis limited to respondents in their 20s and 30s were

basically the same, although there were slight differences in the significance probabilities and effect sizes.

### ***Sense of Political Efficacy***

In the survey, five question items were set about the sense of political efficacy, referring to some previous studies (e.g. Yasuno, 2003; Lee, 2020) and “Japanese Value Orientations” (Nihonjin no ishiki) survey by NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute. The respondents were asked to respond on a 5-point scale: “agree,” “somewhat agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” and “disagree”. Table 5 shows the results of means of the three groups, which were transformed so that the higher the sense of political efficacy, the higher the value.

Although there were significant differences among the three groups for all items ( $p < .001$  for all), two patterns emerged: one was that the Willing group was the highest and there were significant differences between it and the other two groups, and the other was the DK group was the highest and there were significant differences between it and the other two groups. The first pattern included the results of item 1 and 2, which asked about the possibilities of influence of voting and public behavior on politics (both  $p < .001$ ), and that of item 5, which asked about the belief that the public opinions are reflected in politics (the Unwilling group:  $p < .001$ ; the DK group:  $p = .001$ ). There was no significant difference between the Unwilling group and the DK group. These results were to be expected and confirmed that the Willing group has a higher sense of political efficacy in these aspects than the other two groups.

Table 5. Political Efficacy of the Three Groups

	Willing group	Unwilling group	DK group	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
1 Voters can influence the country’s politics to some extent by voting in national elections.	3.57 <sup>a</sup>	2.93 <sup>b</sup>	2.72 <sup>b</sup>	65.50	2, 230.02	<.001
2 Ordinary people can also influence the country’s politics to some extent by demonstrating, signing petitions, and posting messages on social networking sites.	3.43 <sup>a</sup>	2.89 <sup>b</sup>	2.68 <sup>b</sup>	52.35	2, 231.47	<.001
3 People like me don’t have any say about what the government does. <R>	2.53 <sup>a</sup>	2.52 <sup>a</sup>	3.12 <sup>b</sup>	35.77	2, 236.97	<.001
4 Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what is going on. <R>	2.74 <sup>a</sup>	2.73 <sup>a</sup>	3.28 <sup>b</sup>	15.94	2, 232.30	<.001
5 The opinions of the people are more or less reflected in politics. <R>	3.03 <sup>a</sup>	2.69 <sup>b</sup>	2.60 <sup>b</sup>	15.44	2, 997	<.001

Note: There is a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the different alphabets at the top right of the value.  
<R> means a reversed item.

However, the results of the item 3 and 4 (both reversed items), describing the respondent's own sense of powerlessness and the respondent's own sense of incomprehension about what the government was doing, showed a very different pattern. Although there were significant differences among the three groups (all  $p < .001$ ), the means of the DK group were significantly higher than the other two groups (all  $p < .001$ ). The means of the Willing group and the Unwilling group were below the midpoint (3.0), which means they feel powerless to some extent. There was no significant difference between them (item 3:  $p = .932$ ; item 4:  $p = .904$ ).

Table 6 is a cross-tabulation table of the results of item 3 and 4. In all three groups, the frequencies of "neither agree nor disagree" was the highest, but in the Willing group the ratio of it was around 37% of the group, and in the Unwilling group it was about 43%, while it was about 80% in the DK group. On the other hand, the percentage of respondents who denied the lack of their own influence and understanding was about 3% to a little over 5% in both the Willing and the Unwilling groups, while it accounted for about 16% in the DK group.

These results suggest that the Willing group has a high sense of political efficacy in society in general, but feels helpless and incomprehensible about themselves, while the DK group has a low sense of political efficacy in society in general but tends not to evaluate or deny their own abilities and understanding, and as the result of that, they have a relatively high self-evaluation. The Unwilling group had a low sense of political efficacy both for society in general and for themselves.

An analysis limited to the respondents in their 20s and 30s was also conducted, but the results were similar, although there were some differences in significance probabilities.

### ***Attitudes toward the Current Administration's Policies***

In the survey, the respondents were asked about their attitude toward the five policies that the current Suga cabinet at the time this survey conducted had basically inherited from the former Abe cabinet: same-sex marriage approval (reversed item), corporate taxation increase (reversed item), the prime minister and cabinet ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine, relocation of the American military base to Henoko, and nuclear power promotion. These questions were set with reference to Lee (2021). Respondents were asked to respond on a 5-point scale: "agree," "somewhat agree," "neither agree nor disagree" "somewhat disagree," and "disagree. Table 7 shows the results of the means ( $-2 \leq M \leq 2$ ) of the three groups after transforming them so that the direction of the administration support is positive, and the direction of the administration disapproval is negative.

Overall, there was no tendency to show the same attitude toward all policies, even those of the current administration at the time. There was no significant difference between the means of the three groups for the policy on nuclear power promotion. As for the other four policies, although there were significant differences

Table 6. Frequencies of Responses of Each Three Group

		Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	disagree	total	
item 3: No-influ- ential	Willing group	n	121	168	234	79	621	
		%	19.5	27.01	37.7	12.7	3.1	100
	Unwilling group	n	71	59	124	27	16	297
		%	23.9	19.9	41.8	9.1	5.4	100
	DK group	n	1	0	66	2	13	82
		%	1.2	0	80.5	2.4	15.9	100
total		n	193	227	424	108	1000	
		%	19.3	22.7	42.4	10.8	4.8	100
item 4: No-under- standing	Willing group	n	71	188	229	100	33	621
		%	11.4	30.3	36.9	16.1	5.3	100
	Unwilling group	n	43	67	130	42	15	297
		%	14.5	22.6	43.8	14.1	5.1	100
	DK group	n	2	0	66	1	13	82
		%	2.4	0	80.5	1.2	15.9	100
total		n	116	255	425	143	1000	
		%	11.6	25.5	42.5	14.3	6.1	100

among them, the results for the policies on same-sex marriage and corporate taxation increase were quite different from those for the prime minister and cabinet ministers' visitation to Yasukuni Shrine and relocation of U.S. military to Henoko. For the first two policies, the DK group was the most supportive of the administration and significantly different from the Willing group, which was the least supportive ( $p=.001$  for same-sex marriage and  $p<.001$  for corporate taxation), while for the latter two policies, the Willing group was the most supportive of the administration and significantly different from the DK group which was the least supportive ( $p<.001$  for the Yasukuni Shrine visit and  $p=.040$  for the relocation to Henoko).

To analyze the clarity of the attitudes, the means ( $0 \leq M \leq 5$ ) of the frequencies of the both ends of the scales, "agree" or "disagree" were compared, and found significant differences among the three groups (Welch=19.49,  $df=2$ , 228.58,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.034$ , 95%CL [.014, .057]). The Willing group ( $M=1.32$ ,  $SD=1.49$ ) showed the clearest attitudes, followed by the Unwilling group ( $M=0.90$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ) and the lowest DK group ( $M=0.51$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ) ( $p<.001$  for both). On the other hand, the frequencies of "neither agree nor disagree", were the lowest in the Willing group ( $M=3.68$ ,  $SD=1.49$ ) and significantly lower than the Unwilling group ( $M=4.10$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ) and the DK group ( $M=4.49$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ) ( $p<.001$  for both). There were also significant differences between the Unwilling group and the DK group in those (both  $p<.05$ ). The DK group showed significantly less clear attitudes than the Unwilling group.

Table 7. Attitudes toward the Current Administration's Policies of the Three Groups

		Willing group	Unwilling group	DK group	F	df	p
1	Same-sex marriage should be allowed <R>	-0.42 <sup>a</sup>	-0.32 <sup>a</sup>	0.02 <sup>b</sup>	10.21	2, 239.78	<.001
2	The corporate tax burden should be increased to fund social welfare. <R>	-0.51 <sup>a</sup>	-0.33 <sup>b</sup>	-0.01 <sup>c</sup>	17.26	2, 244.14	<.001
3	There is nothing wrong with the prime minister and cabinet ministers visiting Yasukuni Shrine.	0.57 <sup>a</sup>	0.38 <sup>b</sup>	-0.07 <sup>c</sup>	28.81	2, 271.68	<.001
4	The relocation of the Futenma base in Okinawa to Henoko should proceed as soon as possible to eliminate the danger of the base.	0.16 <sup>a</sup>	0.09	-0.12 <sup>b</sup>	7.31	2, 281.46	.001
5	Nuclear power should be promoted to reduce CO <sub>2</sub> emissions.	-0.07	-0.01	-0.10	0.51	2, 278.00	.600

Note: There is a significant difference ( $p<.05$ ) between the different alphabets at the top right of the value. <R> means a reversed item.

These results indicate that voters who are reluctant to participate in politics are less clear attitudes toward the current administration's policies, which are the main criteria for making decisions in national elections, than those who are willing to participate in politics. This may result in a more pro-government attitude, as indicated by the results on same-sex marriage and corporate taxation.

In the analysis of respondents limited to the age groups of 20s and 30s, a difference was found in the policy on nuclear power generation, and there was a significant difference among the means of the three groups at the 5% level (Welch=3.77,  $df=2$ , 164.18,  $p=.025$ ,  $\eta^2=.009$ , 95%CL [.000, .033]), although the effect size was small and there was no significant difference in the multiple comparisons. In the comparison of the clarity of attitudes, there was a significant difference among the means of the frequencies of "neither agree nor disagree" (Welch=10.33,  $df=2$ , 120.27,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.043$ , 95%CL [.011, .086]). The Willing group (M=3.81, SD=1.41) was the lowest, and there was no significant difference between the DK group (M=4.60, SD=0.98) and the Unwilling group (M=4.22, SD=1.10). This means that the Unwilling group did not show their attitudes toward the current administration's policies as the same degree as the DK group. The other results were basically the same as those of the overall analysis, although there were a little differences in the significance levels and effect sizes.

### Media Use for News Contact

In the survey the respondents were asked what kind of media they usually use to learn about political and social trends. Ten categories of media were set, including traditional mass media such as TV news and newspapers, as well as Internet-based media such as social networking sites (SNS). Respondents were asked to respond on

a 5-point scale, from “frequently (=4)” to “never used (=0)”.

Since the results of other surveys (e.g., Communications Usage Trends Survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications; Japanese Time Use Survey by NHK Broadcasting and Culture Research Institute) have shown that there are large differences in media use among age groups, the comparison among the three groups was limited to those in their 20s and 30s. The means of the three groups ( $0 \leq M \leq 4$ ) are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Media Use of the Three Groups

	Willing group	Unwilling group	DK group	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
1 NHK TV (terrestrial) news programs	2.31 <sup>a</sup>	1.59 <sup>b</sup>	1.00 <sup>c</sup>	23.87	2, 110.17	<.001
2 Commercial TV (terrestrial) news programs	2.73 <sup>a</sup>	2.38 <sup>b</sup>	1.40 <sup>c</sup>	14.33	2, 104.18	<.001
3 Information programs (so-called “wide shows”) on commercial (terrestrial) TV	2.28 <sup>a</sup>	2.01 <sup>b</sup>	0.95 <sup>c</sup>	17.73	2, 397	<.001
4 Satellite broadcasting (BS and CS) news-related programs	1.21 <sup>a</sup>	0.85 <sup>b</sup>	0.35 <sup>c</sup>	17.79	2, 138.17	<.001
5 Radio (including Internet radio) news-related programs	1.32 <sup>a</sup>	0.85 <sup>b</sup>	0.58 <sup>b</sup>	11.24	2, 115.60	<.001
6 Newspapers (including online services)	1.81 <sup>a</sup>	0.98 <sup>b</sup>	0.65 <sup>b</sup>	24.43	2, 116.27	<.001
7 Current affairs weekly magazines (including online services)	1.28 <sup>a</sup>	0.75 <sup>b</sup>	0.30 <sup>c</sup>	28.86	2, 157.30	<.001
8 Internet news sites (e.g., Yahoo! News)	2.94 <sup>a</sup>	2.47 <sup>b</sup>	1.93 <sup>c</sup>	10.09	2, 100.12	<.001
9 News-related programs distributed only on the Internet and news-related contents on video sites (e.g., YouTube)	2.00 <sup>a</sup>	1.50 <sup>b</sup>	1.18 <sup>b</sup>	9.58	2, 397	<.001
10 News-related posts on social networking sites (e.g., Twitter)	2.10 <sup>a</sup>	1.64 <sup>b</sup>	1.30 <sup>b</sup>	7.36	2, 104.38	.001

Note: There is a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between the different alphabets at the top right of the value.

In all three groups, Internet news sites (e.g., Yahoo! News) were the most used of the ten categories of media, followed by commercial TV news programs. Although these were commonly used among all groups, there were significant differences among the three groups in all 10 media uses including the mentioned two (all  $p < .001$ ). The Willing group was the highest, and significantly higher than the other two groups. Between the two groups, the Unwilling group had significantly higher exposure than the DK group to NHK news programs ( $p = .011$ ), commercial TV news programs ( $p < .001$ ), commercial TV information programs ( $p < .001$ ), satellite broadcasting ( $p = .015$ ), weekly magazines ( $p = .026$ ), and Internet news sites ( $p = .020$ ), but there was no significant difference in the uses of radio, newspapers, news-related programs and contents distributed only on the Internet, and posts on SNS.

The DK group had a high selection rate of “never used”, and a low usage rate

for all media. The DK group had very limited contact with media to obtain news-related information, which indicates once again they have the least interest in society among the three groups.

## Discussion

In this study, the respondents were divided into three groups according to their responses to a single question asking their willingness to vote: the Willing group, the Unwilling group, and the DK group who did not show their attitudes at all to a series of questions about democracy including this one. They compared among the three groups in their demographic attributes, attitudes toward democracy, sense of political efficacy, attitudes toward the policies of the current government, and the media use to access news. In this study, both those in the Unwilling group and those in the DK group were defined as voters who are reluctant to participate in politics, and the characteristics of them that emerged from the results of the exploratory analysis conducted so far are as follows.

The demographic characteristics of voters who are reluctant to participate in politics are younger age, higher percentage of non-regular employment, and fewer years of education. As for the attitudes toward democracy, voters who are reluctant to participate in politics showed more negative attitudes toward democratic institutions and democratic government and were more skeptical. This was also evident in the sense of political efficacy. Internal sense of political efficacy, which is the perception that people can understand politics and competently participate in political activities (Acock & Clarke 1990: 87), was equally low both in the Willing group or relatively proactive voters and the Unwilling group or voters with little intention to vote. However, as for the degree to believe that citizens can have some influence on national politics through their voting behavior and various activities, that of voters who are reluctant to participate in politics was significantly lower than that of relatively proactive voters. When it comes to the attitudes toward specific policies of the current administration, which can be considered to be one of the sources of judgment in elections, voters who are reluctant to participate in politics, especially among the younger generation, did not show clear attitudes even toward policies that might be directly related to their own lives such as increase of corporate taxation for social welfare. In addition, voters who are reluctant to participate in politics use less frequently various types of media, which provide information that helps form attitudes toward the policies of the current administration and make decisions about voting behavior.

So far, the characteristics of voters who are reluctant to participate in politics have been described, but in what ways do they differ from voters who are relatively proactive in political participation? Relatively proactive voters, as well as voters who are reluctant to participate in politics, showed pessimistic attitudes toward the

improvement of society through their own efforts and felt themselves powerless and lacking in understanding of politics. In other words, they both felt an internal sense of political powerlessness, and this was not a factor that separated them. What separated them was their beliefs in the political effectiveness of society in general and trust in the institutions of democracy such as administration by democratic governments and the election of leaders through free elections. Voters who are willing to participate in politics did not lose faith in the democratic system itself and expressed their willingness to vote with hope, whereas voters who are reluctant to participate in politics were less favorable to democratic government and less aware of the importance of electing leaders through free elections. This suggests that voters who are reluctant to participate in politics are skeptical about the current democratic society and have a kind of resignation.

However, their attitudes toward specific policies of the current administration were not clear, especially in younger age groups. Among the specific policies set in the survey, there were some that could not be said to be directly relevant to the lives of many of the respondents living in Kanto region, such as visit to Yasukuni Shrine by cabinet members and the relocation of the U.S. military base to Henoko, Okinawa, but the increase of corporate taxation for social welfare is an issue that would be directly related to their own lives. A higher percentage of voters who are reluctant to participate in politics are not in regular employment compared to voters who are relatively proactive in politics, therefore it is thought that agreeing with increasing the corporate tax burden for social welfare, that is, disagreeing with the policies of the current administration, may have a positive effect on their own lives. However, the percentage of them who clearly expressed their attitudes was lower than that of voters who are relatively proactive in political participation. This suggests that they do not have such an understanding of policies that may work against them. Those who are reluctant to participate in politics also have lower media usage overall and fewer opportunities to encounter information that promotes their understanding of such policies. If they do not come to such an understanding, they are unlikely to think of making use of voting as a means of expressing their will for their better lives.

Among the voters who are reluctant to participate in politics, those who do not express their attitudes at all have very little use for the media to access news-related information, so it is safe to say that their interest in society is quite low. However, by not expressing their attitudes, they showed the most supportive for some of the current administration's policies like corporate taxation among the three groups in the result, even though it would be less beneficial to them. This is thought to be parallel to the reality. If voters do not express their attitudes by voting, that is, they abstain from voting, the result could be that they are more supportive of the policies of the current government that are not necessarily beneficial to those who are reluctant to participate in politics.

About 40% of the voters who are reluctant to participate in politics have 12 years of education or less. In other words, after graduating from high school, they have almost no opportunity to receive education about politics. If they understand that voting is a way of expressing their wills and that it can change their uneasy living conditions, it is possible to say that their attitudes toward political participation may change.

Tanabe (2020), who examined changes in the voting behavior of young people by analyzing data from 2007 to 2018, argues that many young people with no hope in Japanese society have become bystanders to politics. Katase (2015) states that as a result of the lack of political culture in the information consumption society since the 1980s, “young people in Japan have lacked the imagination to connect the ‘small’ situation they are in with the ‘big’ social movements” (Katase 2015: 282), and he introduces the argument of Kumazawa (2006) that vocational education in high schools is necessary to rebuild the lost political culture.

Voters who are reluctant to participate in politics tend to be younger in age, have fewer years of education, and are engaged in occupations with unstable employment, suggesting that they may be economically insecure. The reluctance of these people to participate in politics seems to be largely due to their lack of awareness of the possibility that their uneasy situation can be improved through political participation. To examine voters who do not participate in politics, it will be necessary to accumulate research based on surveys of a variety of people, including those who are in such situations. This study has the limitation that it is an exploratory analysis based on data obtained from surveys conducted for other research purposes. However, even when the analysis was limited to younger people, the present study included people with less years of education and those in non-regular employment in the analysis, and it provides some findings that cannot be obtained from a survey of university students only.

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