

The Effect of Partisanship and Incumbency on Political Trust in Multilevel Systems: The Case of Scotland.

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Introduction

- Political trust is a fundamental attribute of a democratic society
- All citizens will, to some extent, live in a system of multilevel governance. These non-national levels are salient and important to political life.
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- The case here is Scotland within the UK, focusing on the Scottish National Party.

Existing Approaches to Trust in Multilevel Systems

Congruence Levels in a political system are evaluated the same - people either trust or don't, regardless of the level.

Identity People are more likely to trust the level they identify with.

Rationality People assess each level independently and trust them differently depending on their outputs and processes

(Harteveld et al, 2013; Muñoz, 2017)

Partisanship, Incumbency and Political Trust

- Partisanship is a 'perceptual screen' through which citizens interpret the political world (Campbell et al, 1960)
- This can either generate or deteriorate political trust. Partisans have a stake in the system and can express their views, increasing trust; but it can also drive group rivalry and social polarisation, reducing it (Iyengar, 2012; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Iyengar, 2016; Mason, 2015; Hooghe and Olsen, 2017).
- This varies on the type of party and the messages it provides (e.g Anderson and Just, 2013)

Partisanship, Incumbency and Political Trust

- These cues could depend on the incumbent.
- Parties may send different messages about the system depending on who the incumbent is. In other words, the effect of partisanship may change.
- This link between partisanship and incumbency is the proposed explanation for one aspect of how political trust works in multilevel systems.

Context: Scotland and the UK

- A history of devolution since 1999 following a referendum in 1979
- Has its own Parliament (Holyrood)
- Considerable powers over salient public services (education, healthcare, etc)
- National parties have a Scottish branch with a different leader i.e Scottish Labour, Scottish Conservatives; strong Scottish National Party that only competes in Scotland
- Narrowly lost an independence referendum in 2014; independence is the aim of the SNP but doesn't have overwhelming public support

Context: Scotland and the UK



1999

2007

2010

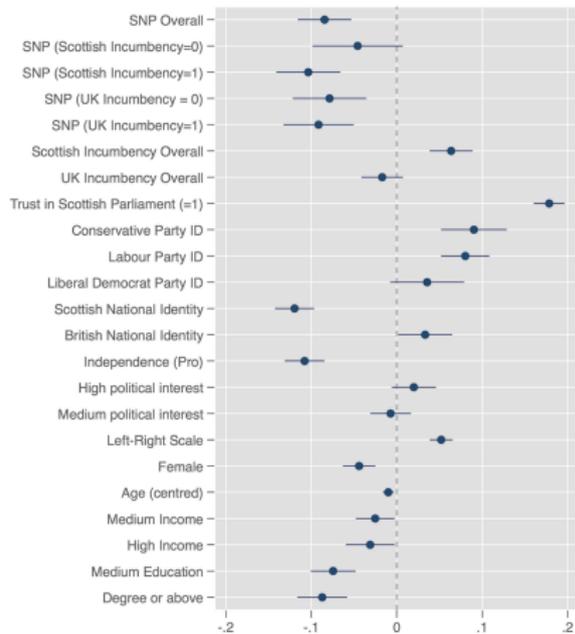
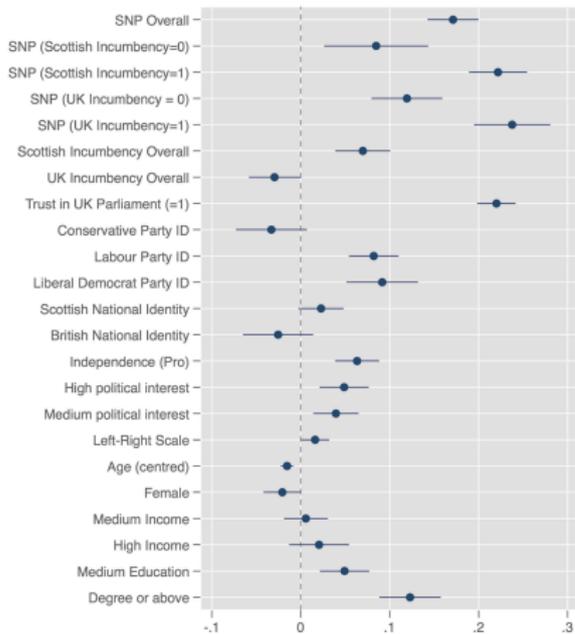
2011

2015

Data and Methods

- Dependent variables: trust in the Scottish and UK Parliament (binary)
- Binary logistic regression
- Key independent variables: binary variable of SNP partisanship; binary incumbency variable at the Scottish level; binary incumbency variable at the UK level; interaction between SNP partisanship and incumbency variables.
- Other independent variables: other party IDs, identity, trust in the Scottish/UK parliament, left/right position, views on independence, standard demographics.

Results



Robustness Tests

- Inclusion of general economic evaluations, perceived benefits of the union, election years, and limiting to pre-2014 (independence referendum)
- Inclusion of non-partisans
- Effect of identity/independence views not statistically or substantively different, either between incumbents or parties.
- Results hold with original ordinal variables.
- Results hold when controlling for years
- Substituting Labour and Conservative identifiers into the interaction shows similar effects - it isn't just an SNP-effect.

Conclusion

- Partisanship matters for political trust in the multilevel system of the UK
- How much it matters can depend on incumbency, but in complex ways.
- Identity matters - but not how we thought it might
- But this is around the edges: most people are 'congruent trusters'.
- Scotland is a unique case - needs testing in other systems to see if it holds

Questions?

Thank You!