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SPERI British Political Economy Brief No. 12

The relationship between deprivation and UKIP's electoral support.

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In advance of the 2015 general election, this Brief considers the evolving basis of UKIP's electoral support, with reference in particular to whether more deprived communities are likely to support the party. The argument that the Green Party and Scottish National Party will take votes from Labour and that, by contrast, UKIP will grow at the Conservatives' expense, has become commonplace in political commentary. This evidence examined here challenges this notion in relation to UKIP's support. It demonstrates that prospective UKIP supporters typically reside in areas with high levels of deprivation. Such a pattern is consistent with other anti-establishment parties, including those deemed to be right-wing or far-right, such as the British National Party.

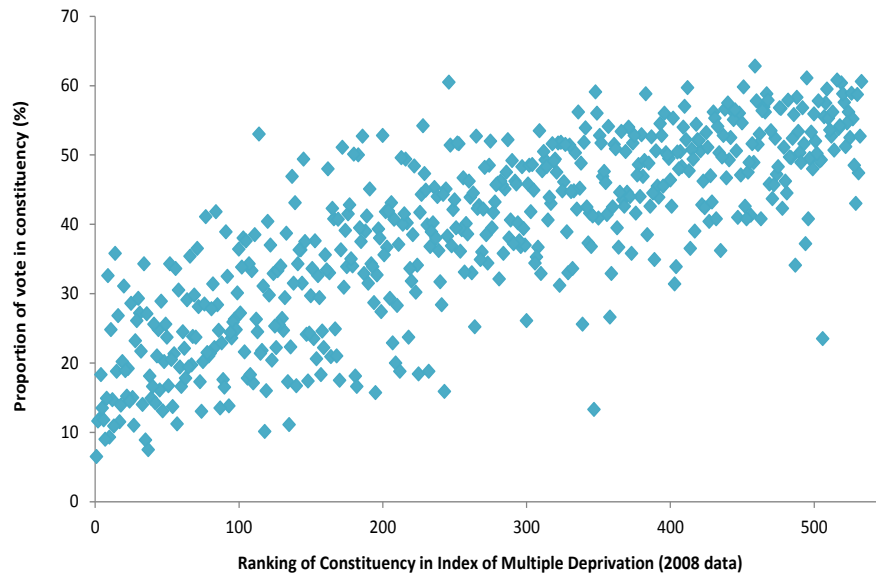
Background

- The UK Independence Party is invariably depicted as a right-wing party. The party's programme generally conforms to this depiction. UKIP's initial parliamentary successes have come in traditionally Conservative areas, via the defection of two Conservative MPs, re-elected in subsequent by-elections.
- UKIP's main challenger to the right of the Conservative Party, the British National Party (BNP), has been in a cycle of decline and, as things stands, appear unlikely to field candidates at the 2015 general election.
- Analysis by Robert Ford and Matthew J. Goodwin (2014) suggested that, in 2005 and 2010, UKIP and BNP were competing for very similar voters. It is likely that many former BNP voters will turn to UKIP at the 2015 election.
- Unlike UKIP, however, the BNP has traditionally been successful in areas dominated by the Labour Party politically. If the UKIP and BNP vote is concentrated on UKIP alone in 2015, UKIP may pose a bigger threat to Labour than the Conservatives.
- Interestingly, further research by Ford and Goodwin (2015) suggests that UKIP voters are more likely to agree with left-wing rather than right-wing policy positions.
- Due to the marginality of many of Labour's seats, a 2 per cent swing from the party to UKIP could result in Labour losing 14 seats (although this does not mean these seats will be won instead by UKIP) (Hough, 2013).

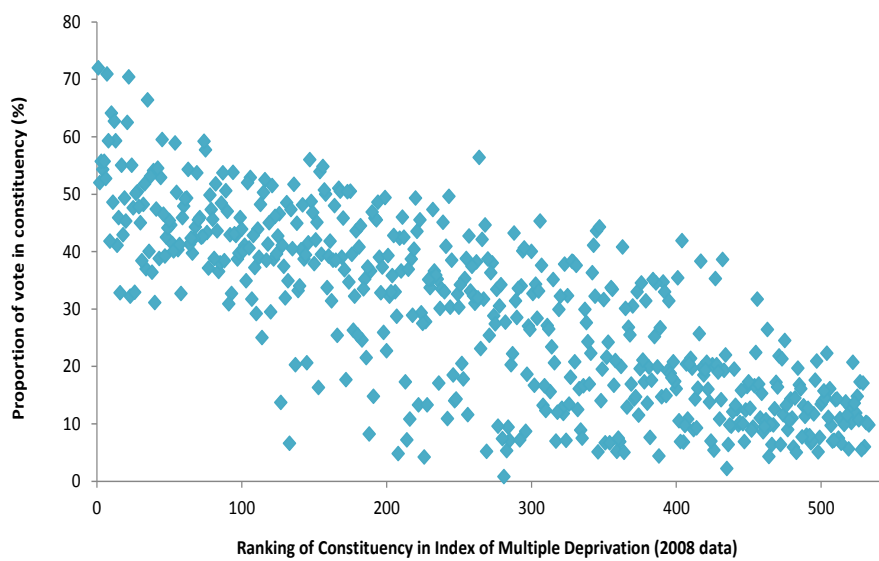
Evidence

- Support for both Labour and the Conservatives in 2010 was linked to relative deprivation. Areas with highest levels of deprivation were likely to return Labour MPs, whilst those with lowest levels of deprivation were most likely to return Conservative MPs.

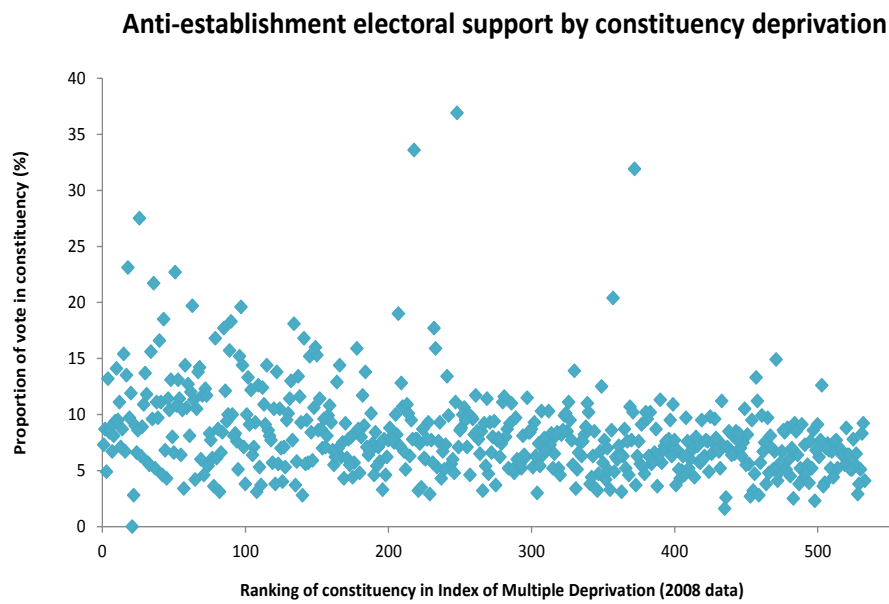
Conservative electoral support by constituency deprivation



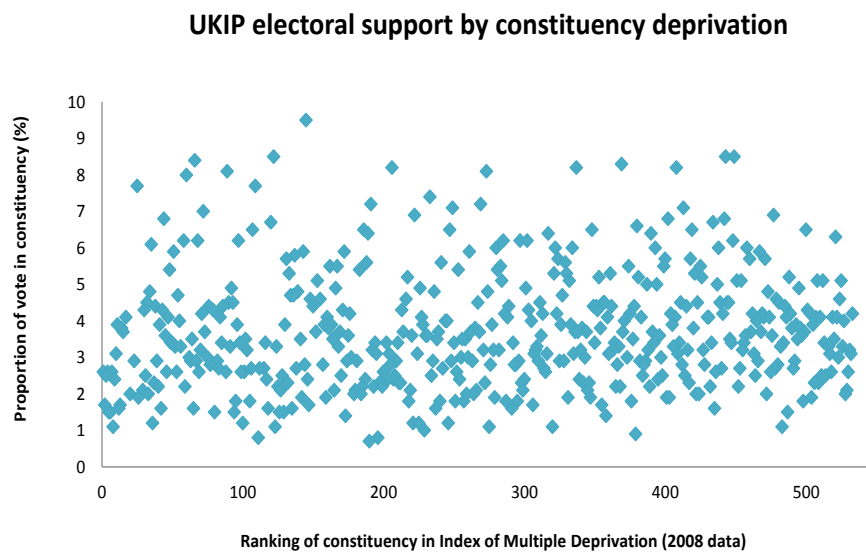
Labour electoral support by constituency deprivation



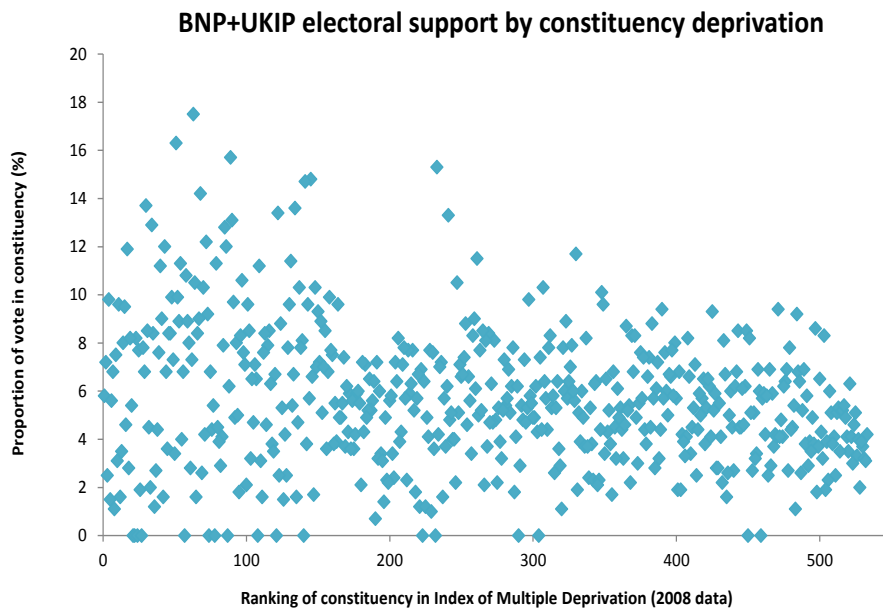
- In 2010, voters in areas with higher levels of deprivation were least likely to vote for one of the three main political parties (Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats).



- Despite the perception of mainly challenging for the Conservatives' support base, there was very little correlation between deprivation and support for UKIP at the 2010 election.

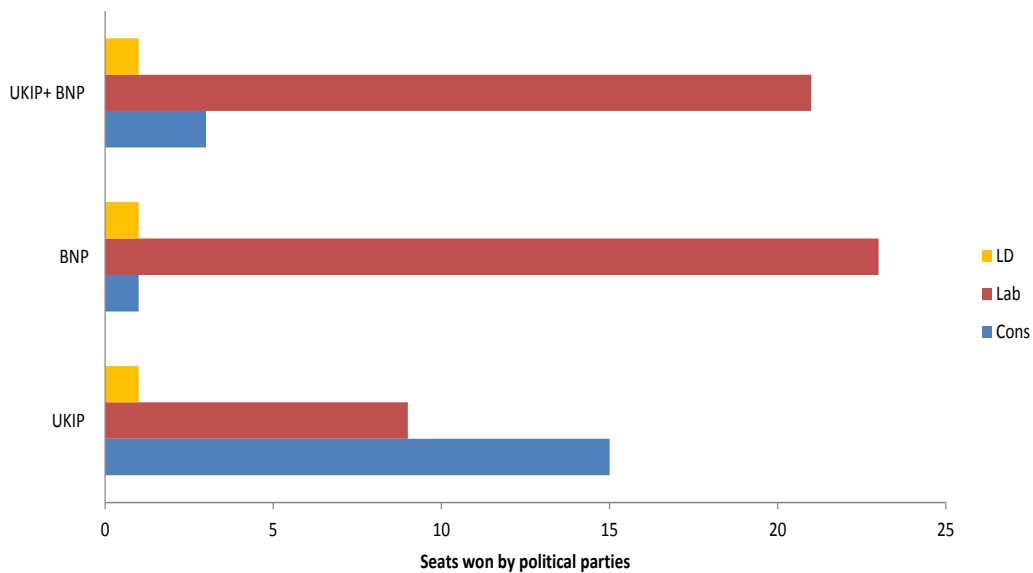


- However, when we combine the UKIP and BNP vote in 2010, we can see that there exists a stronger correlation with deprivation. Supporters of right-wing, anti-establishment parties were more likely to reside in more deprived constituencies.



- Among the 25 constituencies with the highest combined UKIP and BNP vote in 2010, Labour won all but four. While the majority (60 per cent) of the seats where UKIP performed best were won by the Conservatives, a sizeable number were won by Labour. Moreover, Labour won all but two of the seats where the BNP performed best.

Outcomes in the 25 constituencies with strongest UKIP and BNP performance (2010)



Analysis

- Traditional distinctions between left-wing and right-wing parties may be unable to conceptualise recent shifts in voter attitudes, particularly the likelihood of increased support for UKIP in the 2015 general election.
- A rise in popularity for UKIP could hinder the Labour Party as much as, or more than, the Conservatives.
- Whilst support for UKIP in 2010 was correlated to that of the Conservatives to some extent, the threat of UKIP now may be better understood in terms of its ability to attract former BNP votes, and its status as an anti-establishment party.
- This is a somewhat paradoxical situation which typifies the messy landscape of British electoral politics in 2015. Essentially, votes from the former supporters of a far-right party may enable UKIP to challenge the centre-left Labour Party.
- However, former BNP and prospective UKIP voters appear to support a more left-wing agenda on some issues than these parties (certainly in the case of UKIP) tend to advocate. To understand this unusual circumstance, we need to understand the apparent willingness of voters in deprived areas to abandon the parties that are perceived to represent the political establishment.

Conclusion

The argument that the Green Party and Scottish National Party will take votes from Labour, whilst UKIP will grow at the Conservatives' expense, is too simplistic. The evidence examined here challenges this notion in relation to UKIP's support. The Brief demonstrates that prospective UKIP supporters typically reside in areas with high levels of deprivation, and that the party may pose as great a threat to Labour as it does to the Conservatives. A significant swing of votes towards UKIP from Labour may not lead to UKIP winning many actual seats in these areas, but could nevertheless alter the balance of support within constituencies, enabling other parties to challenge Labour more effectively.

Note on sources

The ranking of parliamentary constituencies by deprivation was shared with the authors by the House of Commons Library. Results of the 2010 election are available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/election2010/results/>.

References

Ford, R. and Goodwin, M. (2014) *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge).

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Hough, D. (2013) 'Marginal seats', House of Commons Standard Note SN/SG/06549, available at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN06549/marginal-seats>.



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April 2015

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