The relationship between political and ethnic identity among UK ethnic minority and majority populations

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Motivation

- Ethnic identity is only one aspect of individuals' identities; it can provide insight into identity formation to explore its relationship to other identity domains
- Political identity may not be best understood as shaped by ethnic identity, but both being mutually constituted
- Aim: investigate observed and common unobserved drivers of political and ethnic identity across minorities and majority in the UK

Research questions

1. Are political and ethnic identities driven by common unobserved factors? Do associations differ for minorities and majority?
2. What are the key observed characteristics shaping political and ethnic identity? Do they differ across the two identities, and across minorities and majority?
3. What is the role of discrimination, generation, and Muslim identity in shaping minorities' political and ethnic identity?

Context

- Ethnic identity is subject to increasing analysis and political debate in Western European countries
- Ethnic roots of national identities find increasing expression within populist conceptions of the nation (Kenny 2014)
- Ethnic identification among the majority is typically weaker than among minorities but also more sensitive to context (Nandi and Platt 2015, 2016)
- Might expect investment in political identity to track salience of ethnic identity

Variables

Figure 1. Net political and ethnic identity by ethnic group

Notes: How important is your [political beliefs] [ethnic and racial background] to your sense of who you are?
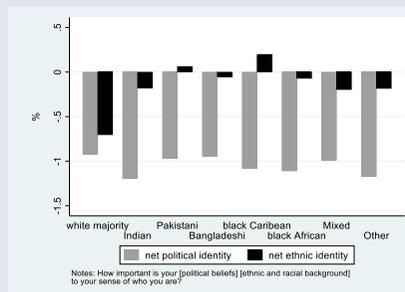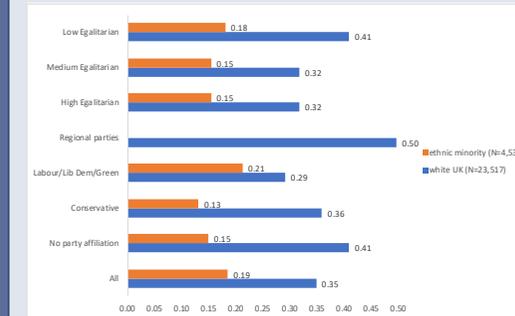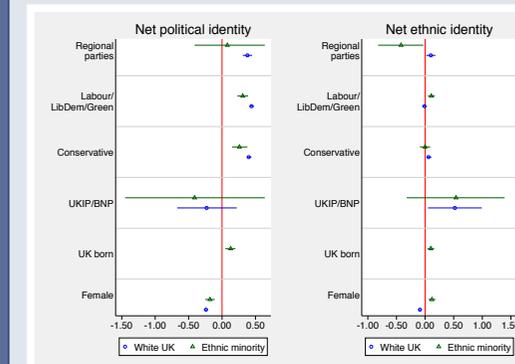
Figure 2. Estimated correlation coefficient of the (unobservables) error terms in the political and ethnic identity models
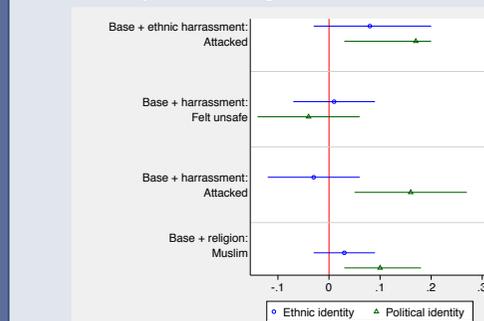

Notes: Weighted estimates.

Figure 3. Estimated coefficients of models of strength of (net) political and ethnic identity estimated using SUR

Notes: Weighted estimates. Reference categories: men, born outside UK, can't vote/no party affiliation/don't know. Model adjusts additionally for: age, activity status, educational qualifications, household NS-SeC, household income, marital status.

Figure 4. Estimated coefficients of models of strength of (net) political and ethnic identity estimated using SUR

Notes: Weighted estimates. Models adjust additionally for sex, age, activity status, educational qualifications, household NS-SeC, household income, marital status, country of birth (ethnic minorities only), voting in neighbourhood of residence, party affiliation.

Data and methods

- Data source: Understanding Society
  - Nationally representative panel survey started in 2009
  - N = 26,000 households + ethnic minority boost 4,000 households
- Sample: wave 2 adult respondents, N = 28,049
- Dependent variables: net political identity & net ethnic identity
  - Net of identity score averaged over five other domains
- Ethnic groups: a) white UK, b) ethnic minorities
- Method: seemingly unrelated regressions (SUR)
  - Estimate political and ethnic identity as joint processes
  - Allow errors to be correlated
  - Correlation coefficient between unobservables interpreted as common unobserved factors driving both identities

Results

- Common latent drivers of ethnic and political identities
  - Stronger for majority and those with more conservative views
- Observed characteristics associated with political and ethnic identities largely similar for the majority and minorities
- Local share of right-wing voters → ethnic but not political identity among both majority and minorities
- Discrimination → minorities' political but not ethnic identity
- Both political and ethnic identity are stronger among 2nd generation compared to immigrant minorities

Contributions

- First analysis of common drivers of individuals' political and ethnic identities, for both majority and minorities
- Evidence that
  - Identities have common determinants
  - Ethnic identity is not the most significant aspect of identity
  - Muslim religious affiliation associated with political but not ethnic identity
- Tentative support for theories of 'reactive ethnicity' in 2nd generation (Rumbaut 1997)

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