Public Confidence in Government: Public Service Motivation and Political Ideology

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This research is a product of the Public Policy faculty at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.

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Public Confidence in Government: Public Service Motivation and Political Ideology

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I. Background

Confidence in the executive branch of the federal government
- Confidence in government has declined from 28% to 12% over the last 12 years (Fig. 1).
- According to the 2014 General Social Survey (GSS), 44% Americans have “hardly any confidence,” 44% have “only some confidence,” and 12% have “a great deal of confidence” in the Executive Branch of Government (Fig. 2).

Lack of trust
- Leads to excessive micromanagement and excessive dependence on rules.
- Hinders informal relationships.
- Flexibility and discretion become clearly constrained.

II. Research Question and Hypotheses

Research question
- What explains public confidence in the executive branch of the federal government?

Hypotheses
- H1: Government employees have more confidence in the executive branch of the government than their counterparts in the private sector.
- H2: Democrats have more confidence in the executive branch of the government than Republicans or Independents.

III. Data and Research Methods

Data source
- The General Social Survey (GSS), 2014.

Dependent variable
- As far as the people running the Executive Branch of the Federal Government are concerned, would you say you have
  1. Hardly any confidence,
  2. Only some confidence, or
  3. A great deal of confidence in them?

Key independent variables
- Government employees (Fig. 3).
- Democrats (Fig. 4).

Methods
- Cross-tabulation.
- Ordinal logistic regression.

IV. Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government employee</td>
<td>0.322**</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>1.079**</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.112</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-0.217</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious attendance</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 1</td>
<td>0.056**</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threshold 2</td>
<td>1.632***</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1,463</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Log Likelihood: 158.96***
Pseudo - R^2 (McKelvey & Zavoina): 0.117

g^2 test of proportional odds: 17.22***

V. Conclusion and Implication

- Government employees are more likely to express confidence in executive branch leaders. In other words, government employees support the very institutions they work for.
- Democrats are more likely to express confidence in executive branch leaders given that the White House was controlled by the Democratic Party in 2014.
- This study shows that executive leaders are seen as partisan leaders who have strong influence on forming attitudes toward government.

VI. Future Research

- Analyze confidence in other branches of government, i.e. Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court.

VII. References


VIII. Acknowledgements

- We would like to thank Tina Gasnarez, Damini Handa (Office of Sponsored Programs), and John Nicklin (Studio M) for their invaluable support in preparing this poster.

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized parameter estimates. Statistical tests of parameter estimates computed using robust standard errors.

** p ≤ 0.05; *** p ≤ 0.01 (two-tailed tests)