Examining Regional-Focus in UK Parliamentary Speech: Electoral Vulnerability and Regional Representation

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Introduction

Motivation

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Does constituency focus improve attitudes to MPs? A test for the UK

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ABSTRACT
A substantial literature demonstrates that in advanced democracies the public generally prefer for MPs to be focused on their constituencies. However, prior research fails to prove that the general public is aware when MPs are doing so, and whether their views of the MP change correspondingly. I test this using a high-quality proxy for constituency focus – talking about the constituency in the House of Commons – linking this to British Election Study survey data on perceived constituency focus and trust. I show that 'real' constituency focus strongly predicts perceived constituency focus and also predicts trust. As expected, these effects exist only for constituents who know (recall) their MP's name. While previous studies argue that the public want 'workhorses' who offer 'value for money' by speaking in Parliament, I instead suggest that the focus, not the volume, of activity can be a more productive route for MPs to develop trust.

Data and Method

- 287,141 speeches recorded in Hansard from 2010 to 2019
- Excluding Northern Ireland, MPs in government or parliamentary posts
- Dictionary for each region
- Dictionary content analysis using R
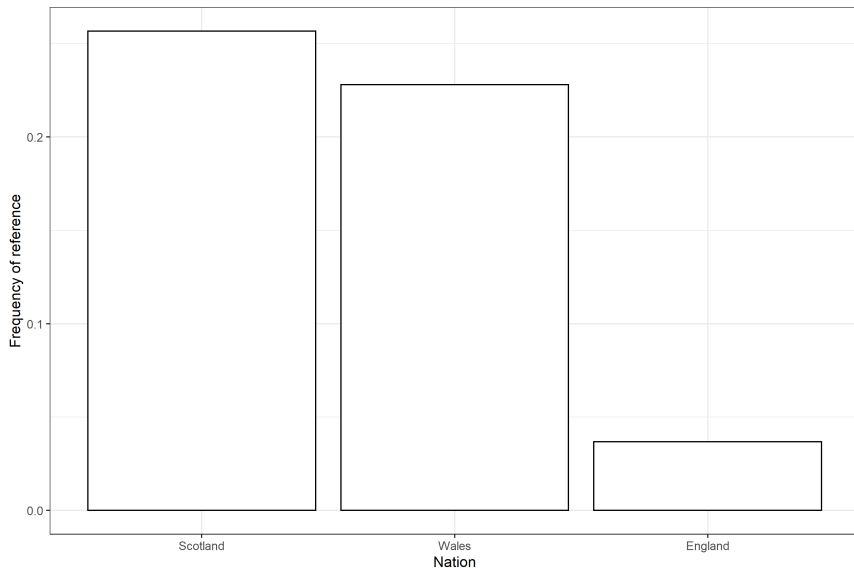
Validation

Method	Regional ref. freq.
Computer	0.07
Manual	0.12

Correlation test:

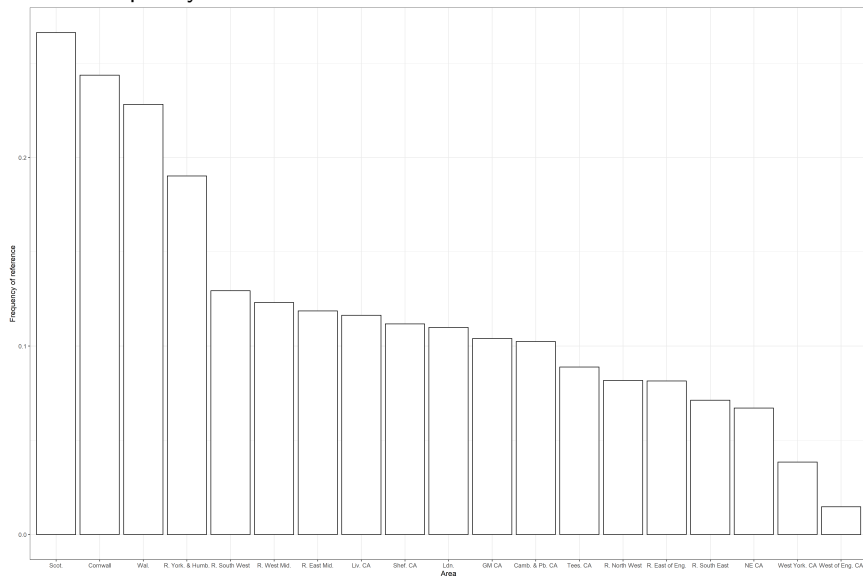|	Validation model
Intercept	0.05^{**}
	(0.023)
Manual	0.95^{***}
	(0.087)
R^2	0.55

$^{***}p < 0.01$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Percentage agreement: 95.91%

Results: patterns between nations

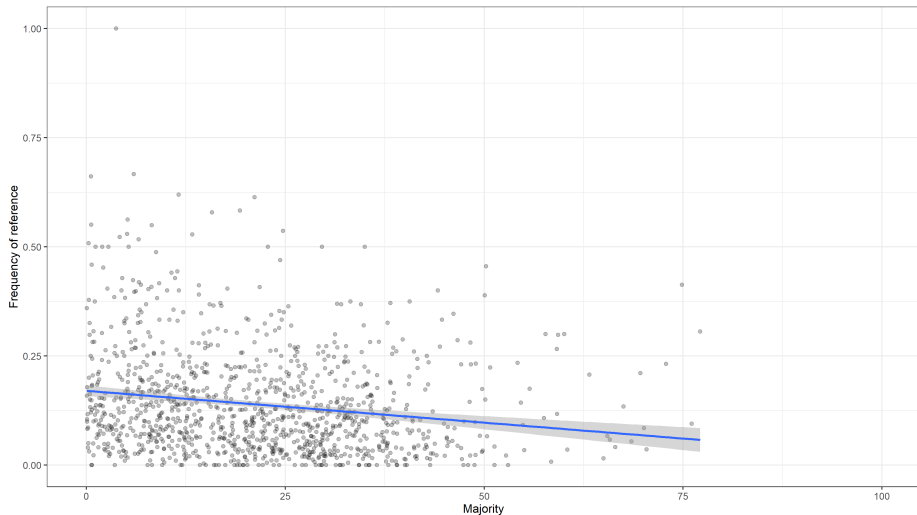# Results: patterns between regions

Overall frequency: 0.12

Over time
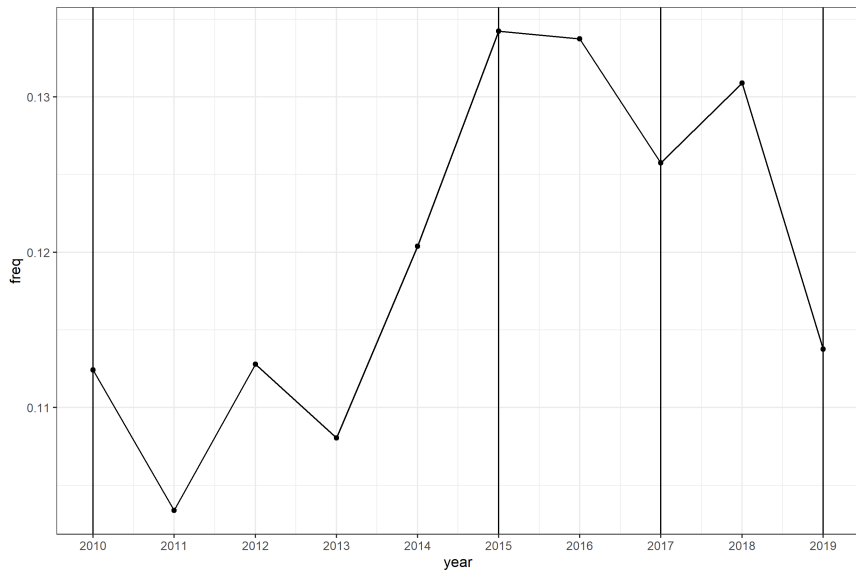
Devolution
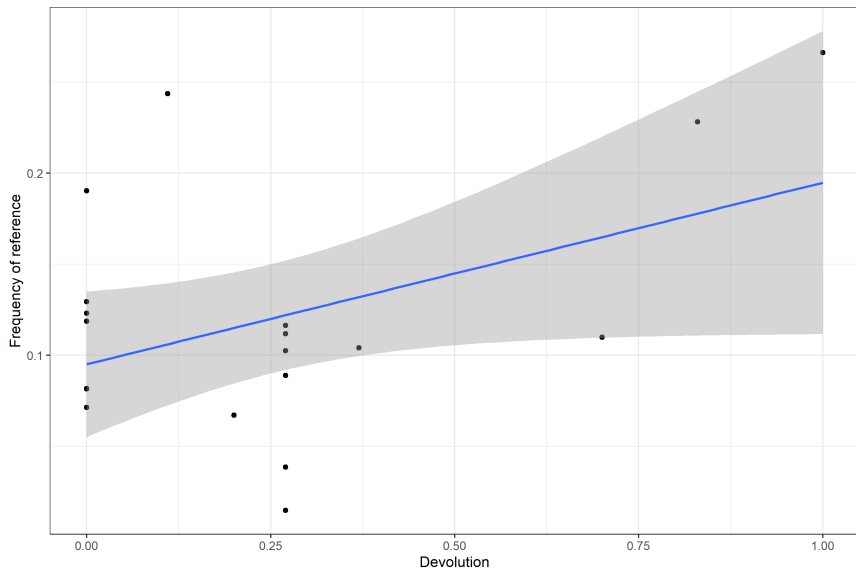
Marginality

Regression results

	Model 1
Intercept	0.117816***
	(0.001155)
Majority	−0.001193***
	(0.00004566)
Devolution	0.140885***
	(0.001950)
R^2	0.02
N.	269184

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$

Table: Model 1

Where next?

- Extend analysis to include Northern Ireland
- Specify a more robust devolution model and if explanatory power is still weak, test an alternative independent variable (e.g. survey-derived measures of nationalism/regionalism)
- Modify dictionaries so as to reduce incidences of false positives and negatives

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