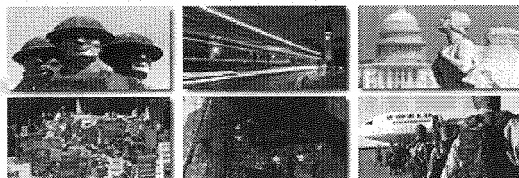


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A scandal of two halves



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This blog is produced by members of the School of Politics and International Relation at the University of Nottingham, and will include occasional guest pieces. The analysis contained in each entry is informed by our internationally-ranked research, and we hope it will help readers better understand the political dynamics that underpin the world in which we all live.

As our last post indicated, the MPs' expenses scandal of 2009 inflicted damage to popular perceptions of politicians. But what impact has the phone hacking scandal had?

Despite the furore it created within the political class and the turmoil it generated within the media, the public reaction to 'hackgate' has been largely left to speculation – until now.

In November 2010, YouGov conducted an online survey on behalf of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which probed public trust in various groups of professionals, covering the media, politicians, and senior police officers. The University of Nottingham repeated this survey over the weekend of the 15th July 2011, by which time the full implications of the phone hacking scandal had become apparent. By comparing the two surveys we think we can identify the impact of 'hackgate' on trust.

The results are as stark as they are important.

Profession	% Trusting in Nov 2010	% Trusting July 2011	Change (%)
Broadsheet Journalists	54	41	-13
Tabloid Journalists	7	5	-2
Senior Police Officers	68	65	-3
MPs in General	17	24	+7
Your Local MP	41	46	+5
Government Ministers	18	22	+4

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Trust in journalists – both broadsheet and tabloid – is down by around a quarter. This can most easily be observed for broadsheet journalists, which was gauged by asking about trust in “journalists in newspapers such as the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Guardian*”. The percentage of the public who expressed trust in them fell by 13 points: this, despite the fact that the scandal primarily focused on tabloid journalists and was actually broken by a broadsheet. The public, however, do not appear to have made this distinction. Trust in tabloid journalists (asked by referring to “journalist in newspapers such as the *Sun*, the *Mirror* or the *Daily Star*”) has similarly fallen by around a quarter, although as this is from a much – much – lower starting point the absolute change is relatively small.

Senior police officers have also not escaped a loss of trust. While the relative size of the change is fairly small, this may be only the beginning of a downward trend.

This is, however, a scandal of two halves. If trust in newspaper journalists and the police has fallen, there has been a remarkable resurgence in trust for politicians and senior civil servants. Trust in MPs in general saw a dramatic 7 point increase, representing a relative increase of well over a third. Such changes are replicated, although to a smaller degree, for respondents’ trust in their local MP, government ministers, and senior civil servants. Whatever the partisan effect of the scandal, the political class as a whole appears to have benefitted from it.

From these data it is obvious that the public has not only taken notice of the scandal, it has also reacted strongly in terms of who they now do – and do not – trust. In particular, it seems likely that the role of individual Parliamentarians in exposing phone hacking and the Parliamentary select committees anticipated scrutiny of Rupert Murdoch, his son James and former executive News International executive Rebekah Brooks (which occurred a few days after the second survey) probably played some part in improving perceptions of politicians.

When MPs do bad – as with expenses – public trust nose dives; but when they are seen to do good voters still give Parliamentarians some credit.

Whether these trends continue or are reversed will depend on the nature of any revelations to come: the phone hacking scandal is clearly not yet over. But it also depends on how the leading players react to these revelations. The big question is: can MPs continue to reverse what many once saw as an inevitable popular decline of trust in politics? The answer appears to be in their hands.

Data note: the sharp-eyed reader may have noted that the figures used for 2010 are not quite the same as those reported by the CSPL yesterday (although they are not that different). They come instead from a companion survey carried out at the same time by YouGov, also for the CSPL, to test the differences between face-to-face and internet surveys. Our 2011 survey was also by YouGov, and to make valid like-for-like comparisons we make here use of the YouGov survey from 2010.

Fieldwork periods: 15th Nov 2010 – 20th Nov 2010, n=2551, 15th July 2011 – 16th July 2011, n=2012. All changes discussed significant to at least $p < 0.02$. Figures are based on unweighted data.

Jonathan Rose and Cees van der Eijk

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September 16, 2011



3 Comments



MPs, phone hacking scandal, trust

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3 Responses to "A scandal of two halves"



Alastair Morgan

September 16, 2011 at 9:39 am #

I'm very surprised that trust in senior police officers hasn't plummeted after the recent debacle with Stephenson and

Yates.

Reply



roger

September 16, 2011 at 12:13 pm #

MPs generally do not take advantage of the opportunities afforded to them when sitting on Select Committees. All too often they are poorly briefed and poorly trained in the art of questioning so they ask patsy questions and fail to get meaningful answers from the people appearing before them. Get the Select Committees working effectively and the standing of politicians will be further improved.

Reply



Richard Ellis

September 16, 2011 at 4:33 pm #

Excellent survey! No worries, I appreciate your thoughts cause of it is obvious that the public has not only taken notice of the scandal. Thanks for such a scandal of two halves giveaway!

Reply

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