

Replication of “Why Friends and Neighbors? Explaining the Electoral Appeal of Local Roots”

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1 Abstract

This is an extension of “Why Friends and Neighbors? Explaining the Electoral Appeal of Local Roots” by Rosie Campbell, Philip Cowley, Nick Vivyan, Markus Wagner. They seek to understand why politicians with local roots have more success by testing how this effect holds up when voters are treated with the candidate’s behavioral information. They concluded that with more information, the local roots effect does diminish; however, it is still positive. Furthermore, voters had a marginally higher preference for candidates with local roots compared to other varying characteristics including gender, party, and policy interests. I was able to replicate all the results of their paper in R and all my code can be found in on Github.¹ For my extension, I modeled how local roots influence different sub-populations including male vs. female voters as well as different age groups.

2 Introduction

My replication paper will be looking at Rosie Campbell, Philip Cowley, Nick Vivyan, Markus Wagner’s paper, “Why Friends and Neighbors? Explaining the Electoral Appeal of Local Roots”² published in The Journal of Politics. The paper studies the phenomon of why local politicians seem to gain more electoral

¹Github Reposotory

²Replication Paper

support in elections. Whereas the “friends and neighbors” effect has previously been found to arise when there is a lack of information in regard to policy, the only thing voters know is they are local, this article’s purpose is to explain the “direct effect of local roots on voter evaluations of a politician” (Campbell et al. 2019). It is the authors belief that voters “use local roots as a low-cost cue for making inferences about a politician’s “behavioral localism” (extend to which an elected official acts in the interest of their local constituents)(Campbell et al. 2019). Their hypothesis is that the power of local roots in decision making for voters is weakened when voters are more informed about the behavioral localism. The authors use survey experiments of made up candidates running for Parliament in the UK rather than performing an observational study on real elections. Thus, they are able to isolate the effects of local roots, ensure prior knowledge is not a factor. Everyone in the experiment will have the same level of knowledge about each candidate given to them in biographical descriptions through the survey. During real elections, a confounding variable of the local roots effect is disproportionate amount of local media coverage for local candidates leading to easier recognition.

Study 1 used a vignette experiment to more generally test whether the presence of information on behavioral localism impacts the effects of local roots while Study 2 gives people a more wide array of information to test whether having greater knowledge of each candidate eliminates the effects of local roots. Study 1 presented a hypothetical election between two candidates, testing how varying levels of behavioral localism information interacts with being a local candidate. The election was between Phillip (the constant), who moved to the area five years ago, and Nick whose localness was subject to change and assigned randomly. The experiment was set up in such a way that respondents were randomly given either no behavioral information or a short description for each.. When behavioral information was provided, Nick’s behavior also varied between low and high behavioral localism while Phillip always had a constant average behavioral localism (splits time each week between dealing with local issues vs. dealing with national issues). With the information provided, respondents were asked on a scale from 0 to 10 (10 being most satisfied) with having each candidate as their elected official. The dependent variable for the models was Nick’s score minus Phillip’s. The authors modeled this with a least squares regression model and their focus was on the interaction term (being a local candidate and having information). The results were that the presence of behavioral information whether positive or negative for Nick does lessen the friends and neighbors effect, agreeing with their hypothesis that local roots is a cue when no other information is provide. However, they found Nick being a local candidate still positively impacts voters. The authors thus took a deeper look into this with study 2.

In study 2, every respondent was treated with behavioral localism, local roots, and other varying characteristics such as gender, political interests, and party. Thus, in contrast to study 1, this will test if the local roots effect is nullified in the candidate selection process when a wealth of other knowledge is presented to the voters, leaving them without the need to use local roots as a cue for the unknown. Each respondent was given five hypothetical elections with randomly varying attributes, all of which were more specific than in study one. The respondents were asked to pick which candidate they preferred based on information about the localness of the candidates, behavioral localism measured by on how much time is spent on local issues and where the candidates allegiance lies (national party, constituents, or personal views), and other defining characteristics like age, gender, and policy interests. Each respondent was given five varying elections to chose from. Since study 2 possesses much more and much more varied information on the candidates in question, they analyze the average marginal component effect (AMCE). This measures the probability of why a candidate is being chosen based on the candidate’s particular attribute for each category compared to a baseline. This will present the change in probability of a candidate being preferred broken down by each possible individual component of their profile. Even here with so much more information, they found the AMCE for being local was positive and one of the most prominent compared to other categories as well as the baseline of not being local. Thus, the authors empirically found local roots to be an important aspect for voter’s in candidate selection and it is not merely cue.

3 Literature Review

The local roots effects has been well studied since 1949. Valdimer Orlando Key was the first to study this for Presidential Elections in the southern USA, dubbing his findings as the “friends and neighbors effect” (Key

1949). In analysing Arkansas, he found that in their one party political system that the best explanation for support was just where you are from and who you know. Key himself was concerned by his own findings stating that candidates “can gain support, not primarily for what he stands for or because of his capacities, but because of where he lives” (Key 1949) . However, what Key found was only observational evidence that “candidates for state office tend to poll overwhelming majorities in their home counties” (Key 1949). This friends and neighbors effect was not quantitatively highlighted until 1973 in an analysis of George Wallace’s support across his govenitorial elections. In their analysis, counties of Alabama were classified as friends and neighbor counties were ones he had a disprortionate level of support and they all happened to be located around his home county in southeastern Alabama (E. Black and Black 1973). They found “evidence for the persistence of a strong degree of localism in politics” due to the importance of the the friends-and-neighbors indicator variable in their regression models (E. Black and Black 1973). A year later Raymond Tatalovich confirmed many of the previous findings in his research of Mississippi as well as made extensions across different types of elections. He found that the most prestigious elections in Mississippi (Senate Races) in fact had the most “friends and neighbors” voting (Tatalovich 1975). Furthermore, important to my replication paper, he found that “increased visibility of candidates does serve to blunt thier friends and neighbors support” (Tatalovich 1975).

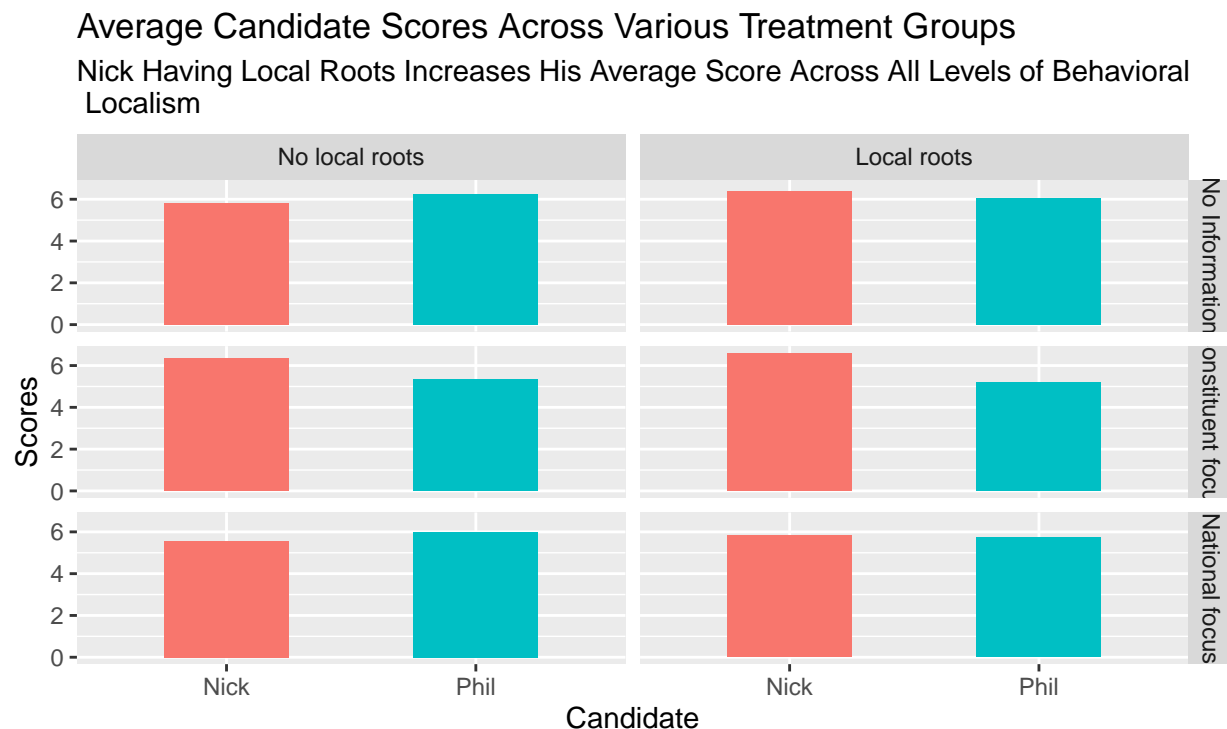
At this point, there was criticism as to the validity of this theory as their had not been anything larger than statewide elections tested and all the testing so far was on Southern states in the USA. The question was were these friends and neighbors results generalizable. Michael Gallagher was the first to document Key’s theories outside the US in the importance of localism in candidate selection in Ireland (Gallagher 1980). Michael Lewis-Beck, Michael and Tom Rice were the first to look at localism on the national level of a presidential election, testing the true presence of a home state advantage. Not only did they find that there is such a thing, but they also most interestingly found that this has not diminished over time even with the nationalization of elections and greater ease with which candidates were able to reach voters across the USA (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983). The local advantage still endures. A myrad of further studies have been conducted on varying levels of elections from local to state wide to nation wide in a fair amount of different countries including Australia, Canada, Britain, Germany Estona, and Norway. The local roots/“friends and neighbors effect” appears has been proven to be far more than just a local phenomenon in one particular part of the world.

Other as well as the more recent studies have focused on the causes of the friends and neighbors effect instead of just proving its existence. Shaun Bowler Todd Donovan and Joseph Snipp believed the friends and neighbors effect is indirect, coming just out of having more information about candidates due to greater local media coverage for local candidates. Thus, there conclusion were opposed to previous understanding that people use local roots to evaluate candidates. However, they find localism merely comes out of “a voter’s proximity to local media sources” and how “knowledge about candidates is distributed” (Bowler, Donovan, and Snipp 1993). Similar results were also found in the UK that “the effects result more from the distribution of information than”from the hometown boy infuence” Key origonally proposed (Johnston et al. 2016). However, nothing has been definitive with studies still showing from surveys responses that voters exhibit “small differences in the ratings of candidates in response to sex, religion, age and education cues but more sizeable effects are apparent for the candidate’s occupation and place of residence” (Campbell and Cowley 2013).

Thus, with conflicting evidence, at the time of the paper I am analyzing, there was still much unkown about the nature of the friends and neighbors effect that the authors sought to finally answer. Their explanation for the “direct effect of local roots on voter evaluations of a politician” is that “voters rationally use local roots as a low-cost cue for making inferences about a politician’s “behavioral localism” (Campbell et al. 2019). This idea of behavioral localism was defined as a politician’s willingness to act in the local communities interest (Shugart, Valdini, and Suominen 2005). This is because voters believe that candidates with local roots”are more emo- tionally connected to the constituency and better informed about constituents’ needs (Shugart, Valdini, and Suominen 2005). Voters tend to believe local candidates share ideologies, experiences, and will have greater concern for them, thus, they receive the local support out of mere inference. This theory is finally tested in the article I analyze, directly testing whether or not local roots effect is just a filler for lack of other information. They do so by treating voters with behavioral localism information. The quantity measured is the presence as well as the change of magntitude in the friends and neighbors effect when voters

are given more information.

4 Beautiful Graphic



Footnote: Very similar to Figure 1 from ‘Why Friends and Neighbors? Explaining the Electoral Appeal of Local Roots’. I use the raw scores instead of Nick minus Phil for my graphic; however the same results can be seen. facets of local root vs. not local roots and the behavioral information are all referring to changes to Nick, not Phil, and these are the differences in treatment groups

5 Paper Extensions

The authors were very thorough in their analysis including a lengthy appendix with a lot of other things that were tested that were not highlighted prominently in the main article. However, I do believe there are a of interesting paths to follow in regard to extensions. The authors in their discussion and conclusion provide a lengthy list of questions and extension that arise from their own analysis. However, most of this does involve trying to explain the local roots effect that was out of the scope of their analysis :“What might account for the local roots effects that we have observed but that are left un-explained by the particular mechanisms considered in this article?” (Campbell et al. 2019). They go on to speak about theories as well as experiments that should be carried out, including questions and frameworks for experiments with real elections to view how their results play out in an actual race. However, they do not mention much at all about the shortcomings of their analysis (not that there is necessarily any, the analysis was very thorough) and all of these proposed extensions are outside the scope of Gov 1006. My extensions will be focused on the data and experiments they used and will consist of subsetting the data to view how their results apply to various subgroups of the population.

For study 1, the authors in one of the appendices performed balance and randomization checks to insure that there is a “distributional balance of four respondent characteristics – gender, age, education and social grade, all measured pretreatment – across the six treatment groups created in the experiment” (Campbell et al. 2019). Since “None of the differences in proportions across treatment groups are bigger than 10% and only a

small number are greater than 5%” (Campbell et al. 2019), I believe this presents an excellent opportunity to dive deeper into if the “friends and neighbors” effect is stronger for one subset of the population than others (ex. males vs. females, older vs. younger). I hypothesis that there may in fact be some interesting differences especially in regard to age. For example, do the younger people in the study, who may not be as engaged in politics or care how they are represented in Parliament, more often vote for the candidate with local roots. Or even on the opposite side of the spectrum, do the elder people in the study who have been engrained in their community and care about their representation vote for the person who will be concerned more with the wants and needs of the people than his/her personal political views. I could do a lot more analysis such as this with gender as well and the other personal information included about the people surveyed.

6 Replication Appendix

I was able to replicate all tables and graphics:

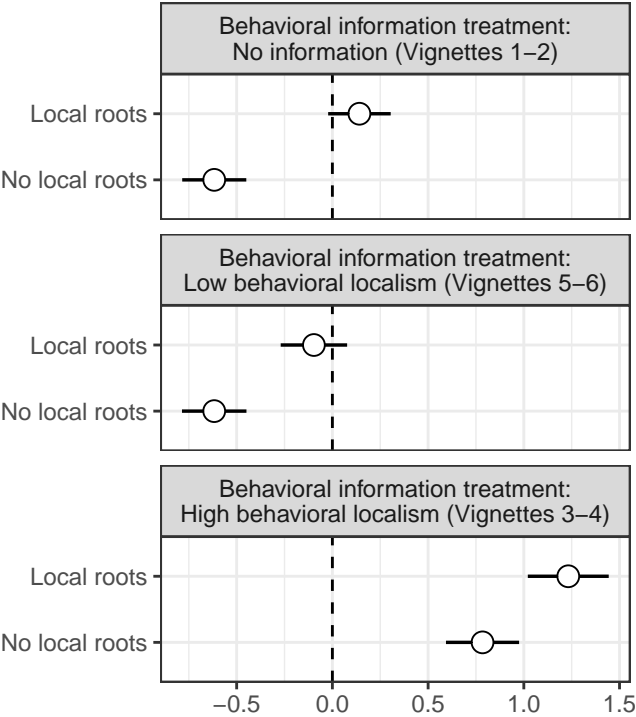
Table 1: Relative Ratings of MP Nick by Local Roots and Behavioral Information Treatments in Study

	Conditioning Effect of Any Behavioral Localism Information		Separate Conditioning Effects for High and Low Behavioral Localism	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Intercept	−0.412*** (0.057)	−0.661*** (0.128)	−0.412*** (0.057)	−0.664*** (0.125)
Local roots	0.755*** (0.080)	0.759*** (0.080)	0.755*** (0.080)	0.758*** (0.080)
Behavioral localism information	0.683*** (0.078)	0.691*** (0.079)		
Behavioral localism: High (vs. no info)			1.395*** (0.098)	1.402*** (0.098)
Behavioral localism: Low (vs. no info)			−0.007 (0.085)	−0.0002 (0.086)
Local roots X Behavioral info.	−0.253** (0.110)	−0.257** (0.110)		
Local roots X High behavioral localism			−0.311** (0.140)	−0.311** (0.139)
Local roots X Low behavioral localism			−0.233* (0.119)	−0.238** (0.119)
Controls for voter characteristics?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	5,203	5,203	5,203	5,203
R ²	0.036	0.046	0.107	0.116
Adjusted R ²	0.036	0.044	0.106	0.114

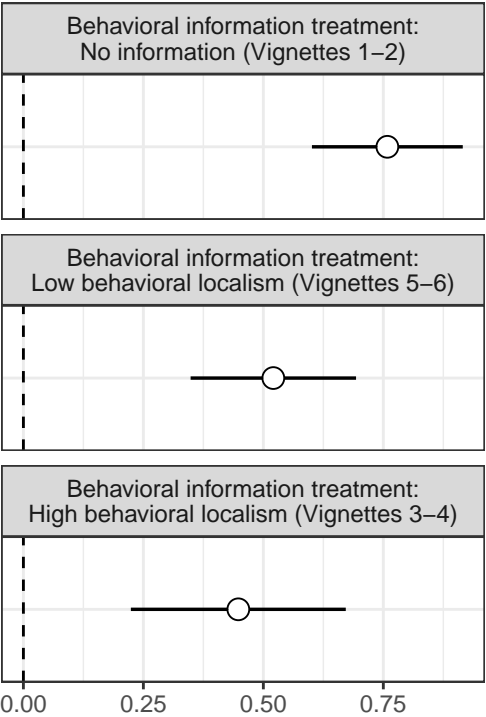
Note. All models estimated via ordinary least squares. Dependent variable is respondent relative rating of MP Nick (the 0–10 rating of Nick minus that of Philip). Robust standard errors in parentheses. N p 5,203.

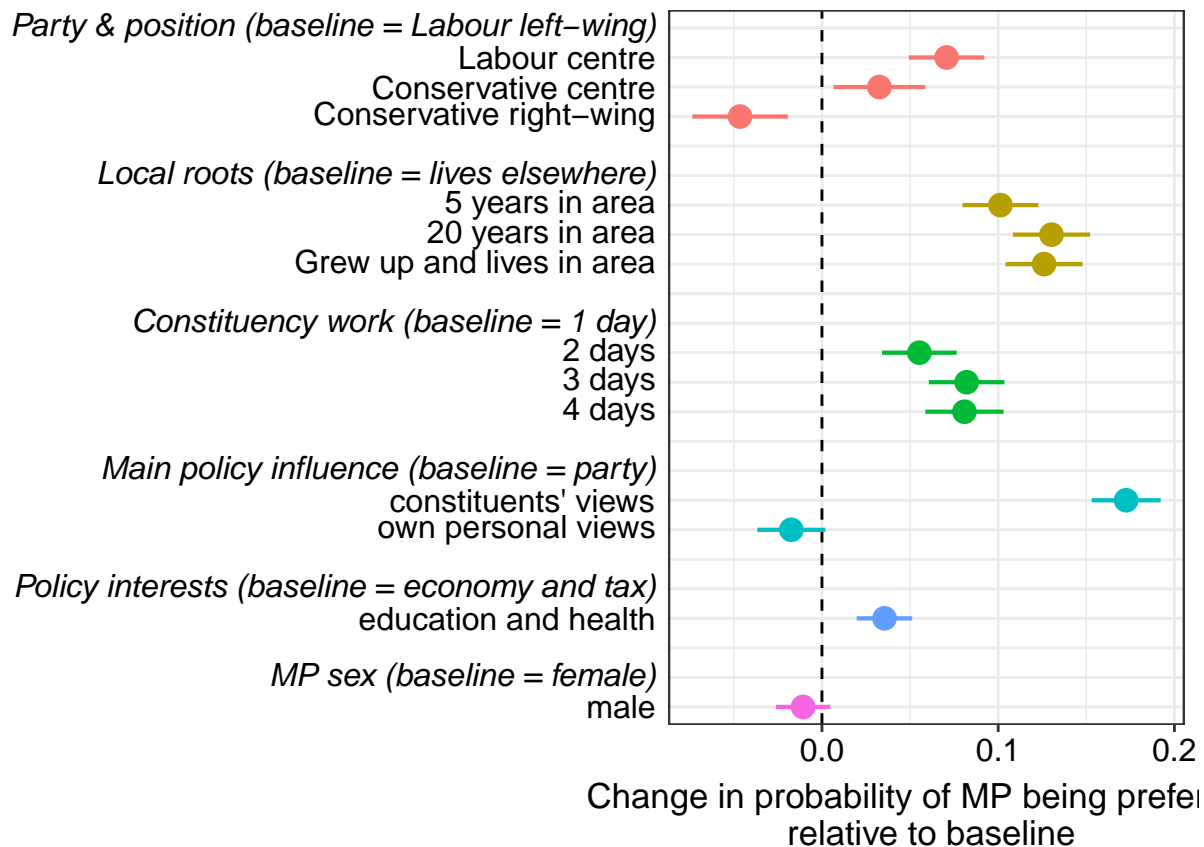
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

(a) Predicted relative rating



(b) Effect of MP local roots treatment





6.1 Replication: What I Achieved and What I Did Not

I was able to replicate all the code of the paper. There were some errors based on updating of packages; however, these were easily fixed. I had the most difficulty with trying to replicate the stargazer table. The code by itself did not have the note at the bottom nor the column headers. I was not able to replicate the table exactly, however, I was able to figure out how to make it as similar as possible. I did so manipulating the Latex of the stargazer output.

7 Citations

The data and code for this replication is from Dataverse (Campbell et al. 2018). I used the stargazer package to replicate tables (Hlavac 2018) and I follow recommendations made by Gary King for replication (Gary King 2000). I use many techniques from the Gov 1006 textbook “Regression and Other Stories” (Andrew Gelman 2019) as well.

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