

# The personalization of politics in Australia

Ian McAllister

Australian National University, Australia

Party Politics  
2015, Vol. 21(3) 337–345  
© The Author(s) 2013  
Reprints and permission:  
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/1354068813487111  
ppq.sagepub.com



## Abstract

While national election campaigns have become increasingly personalized, it is unclear to what extent this trend has been replicated at the constituency level. Using surveys of Australian election candidates conducted from 1996 to 2010, this article tests the personalization hypothesis at the local constituency level. Three areas that may be affected by personalization are examined: constituency service; geographic proximity between candidates and potential voters; and local election campaigning. Among MPs, constituency service has grown in importance at the expense of local party engagement. However, among the broader group of candidates standing in the election, the results show that party-related activities deliver more votes than personal ones.

## Keywords

Candidates, elections, parties, personalization

## Introduction

There is little doubt that national election campaigns in the established democracies have become more personalized. Leaders are much more prominent now than in the past, and considerable popular attention is directed towards the personalities of the leaders. For example, Barack Obama's family history received more attention during the 2008 presidential election campaign than any US presidential candidate in history, while public interest in Nicholas Sarkozy's marriage to Carla Bruni in 2008 broke a long-standing French taboo about public discussion of the private lives of presidents. Even in parliamentary systems, governments are now routinely named after the leader rather than the party, in a trend that is usually traced to the election of Margaret Thatcher in Britain in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the US in 1980, two strong personalities who dominated their respective administrations.<sup>1</sup>

While the theoretical reasons for the personalization of politics have been much debated, at a practical level the explanations for this important shift seem clear. First, political parties like the trend towards personalization and actively encourage it: for a party seeking to convey its message to voters, it is much easier to use an individual who voters recognize and identify with as the channel of communication. Second, voters themselves like the personalization of politics because it is easier to hold a person accountable for a government's actions rather than an abstract entity such

as a political party. Third, political leaders themselves seek to encourage a personal following because it gives them greater power and influence within the political process. And fourth, and not least, the visual media focuses on personalities because it is visually more appealing for the viewer. In short, the personalization of politics works because it satisfies the interests of all of the main actors in the political process.

Much of the current research on the personalization of politics considers it as a national phenomenon conducted by national leaders and their followers in the context of national, media-centred, election campaigns – what Norris (2000) has termed a 'postmodern campaign'. But there is also considerable scope for personalization to take place at the local level, a potential phenomenon which has received little attention in the literature. Are personal as opposed to party factors becoming more important at the local level, in line with national trends? By using candidate surveys conducted since 1996 in Australia and utilizing similar items, this article seeks to address this question.

Paper submitted 20 August 2012; accepted for publication 24 March 2013

## Corresponding author:

Ian McAllister, School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia.  
Email: ian.mcallister@anu.edu.au

Personalization at the local level is measured across three areas of activity: local constituency service among MPs (including community involvements); the geographic proximity between election candidates and their potential voters; and local election campaigning.

### *Explaining the personalization of politics*

There are several reasons why we might predict that the national trend towards the personalization of politics is being replicated at the local level. First, partisan dealignment has been occurring across a wide range of countries since the 1970s (for a review, see Holmberg, 2007), although it appears to have stabilized in the past two decades (Clarke et al., 2004; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). We might expect that as party attachments weaken, citizens will seek other voting cues to guide their choice, and prominent among these cues is the local candidate. In this context, candidates may expand their personal appeals, and for incumbents increase their emphasis on service to constituents. The effect of this change will be to rely less on their party affiliation to attract votes and more on their ability to meet their constituents' demands and attract resources to improve local services and infrastructure. In Australia there has been an increasing trend towards the parties using traditional pork-barrel politics in order to favour local candidates contesting marginal constituencies (Denemark, 2000).

Australia has one of the highest levels of partisanship in the world, so that historically voters are more likely to vote for parties rather than individuals. Although some degree of weakening has taken place in partisan attachments, dealignment within the major parties has not proceeded as far or as fast as in many other countries (for comparisons, see Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). To the extent that there has been any change in partisanship, it has been in the strength of party attachment not in its direction: in the 1960s and 1970s, about one-third of voters said that they were 'strong partisans'; in the 1990s and 2000s the same figure was around one in five voters (see McAllister, 2011: ch. 3).

A second possible explanation for the personalization of politics at the local level is the design of the electoral system, which may magnify the effects of dealignment. Electoral systems that are candidate-centred, particularly in having a single member representing the constituency, will enable candidates to emphasize personal service. This is in contrast to party-centred systems, where parties have more control over the selection and nomination of candidates, and where the link between a geographical area and a candidate may be weak or, in party list systems, non-existent. In a comparative context, the most candidate-centred system is that of the US, followed by Australia, Ireland and Switzerland (Dalton et al., 2011: ch. 2). However, as Carey and Shugart (1995: 427) note, a system that allows vote transfers (such as Australia's) also creates an incentive for 'vote pooling across candidates' and shifts the balance from personal reputation

to partisan loyalties. This occurs through the parties' directing voter preferences via 'how to vote' cards.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, preference arrangements for the lower House of Representatives<sup>3</sup> are eagerly sought after, particularly between the major parties and their minor party competitors.

Finally, the growth of the electronic media and the importance of visual images in conveying news have inevitably placed greater emphasis on the personality of the individual in local constituency contests. The popularity of the electronic media has also coincided with the rise of the cartel party (Katz and Mair, 1995), so that parties are able to manipulate the rules in order to access free media time during election campaigns. Of 36 mostly established democracies, 30 currently allow some form of free media access for the major parties during election campaigns (Dalton et al., 2011: Table 2.2). The media have moved from simply reporting election news to becoming active reviewers and evaluators of the major parties and candidates. For example, in the 1959 British general election there was almost no electronic media coverage; by the 2010 British general election there were three debates involving all three major party leaders. Similar transformations have taken place in other countries where media coverage was, at best, deferential to politicians, a notable example of which is Japan (Krauss and Nyblade, 2004).

There are, then, sound theoretical and practical reasons why local election campaigns may have become more personalized, in parallel with the well-known trends that have been taking place at the national level. As voters increasingly use their evaluations of the leaders as a basis for their vote, it is likely that they will use the same criteria to determine their vote at the local level. The net effect of these changes may be that constituency activity has become more personalized. In order to test this proposition, three aspects of local activity are examined: constituency service, geographic proximity and election campaign activity, and their combined effect on the candidates' vote is measured.

Constituency service, or what is often called 'the personal vote', has been shown to reap significant electoral rewards under specific institutional arrangements, particularly in countries that have weak party systems and/or have more candidate-focused electoral systems (Bean, 1990; Cain, 1983; Cain et al., 1987). Australia's candidate-centred electoral system should, in theory, permit multiple opportunities for candidates to engage with their voters in the electorate (with the caveats noted above). These opportunities can take the form of constituency service among elected representatives, such as regular surgeries where voters can seek redress for grievances against government, as well as regular attendance at local community meetings and gatherings – this has been termed 'constituency attentiveness' on the part of the elected representative (McAdams and Johannes, 1985).

In addition to paying attention to constituents, local service can also involve party service, through engagement

with the local party organization. Elected representatives are accountable to their local party and must seek re-selection from the local party membership prior to each election. In the vast majority of cases, re-selection is a formality and is easily secured. However, in a small number of instances a local representative may have ignored the wishes of their party on an issue, and their re-selection may be placed in doubt as a consequence. Moreover, since most local party organizations have small memberships, relatively small changes in local support can affect the outcome of such a re-selection process. Engaging with the local party and satisfying its members' needs is therefore a major priority for most elected representatives (Johns, 1999).

In addition to constituency service and local party work, the geographic proximity of the candidate to their electors is a second area in which the personalization of politics may be more evident. There is a large literature on the extent to which localism plays an important role in making the candidate more appealing to voters. Starting with Key's 'friends and neighbours' effect in 1949 (Key, 1949), a wide range of studies from diverse countries has demonstrated that candidates with local roots and connections will be rewarded with more votes compared to candidates with fewer local links (see, for example, Curtice, 1995; Evans, 2011; Lewis-Beck and Rice, 1983). In particular, Arzheimer and Evans (2012), in a study of England, and Gorecki and Marsh (2012), in a study of Ireland, show that geographic proximity has a significant effect on the vote, with a greater distance between a candidate and his or her voters resulting in a decrease in the vote net of a wide range of other factors.

Election campaign activity is the third area in which personalization may have become more prominent. The election campaign inevitably focuses candidates' attentions on what they regard as the most important means of winning votes and there is extensive comparative research to show that mobilization at the local level can increase votes (Karp and Banducci, 2007; Karp et al., 2008). While Australia's system of compulsory voting means that encouraging voters to turnout is not a factor, it does mean that there is more scope for devoting resources to conversion. In recent years, election campaigns in Australia have become more personalized, emphasizing local level concerns but remaining centrally directed; Ward (2003: 583) describes this approach as 'localizing the national'. At its core, this involves 'meet and greet' events harnessed to an extensive database about individual voters (van Onselen and Errington, 2004).

These three areas of local politics – constituency service, geographic proximity and election campaigning – provide the focus for the analyses that follow. If politics is becoming more personalized at the local level and if – more importantly – voters are being influenced by the personalities of the candidates, then it should be evident across these three broad areas of activity. These are also areas that have been extensively covered in the ACS surveys since

1996, with a reasonable degree of inter-election comparability in the items that have been used.

## Data and method

### Data

The Australian Candidate Study has been conducted at each federal election since 1987 (with the exception of the 1998 election) in parallel with a national post-election survey of voters. The ACS surveys all election candidates from parties that are anticipated to attract 10 per cent or more of the vote. In practice, this means that the ACS surveys all Labour, Liberal, National and Green party candidates. This article utilizes the 1996, 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010 surveys; the response rates for the surveys were 63.5 percent, 56.8 percent, 53.6 percent, 49.9 percent and 45.5 percent, respectively. Full details of all of the surveys conducted since 1987 can be found in McAllister and Pietsch (2011: Appendix).

While the survey covers all Labour, Liberal, National and Green party candidates for both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the analyses presented are based solely on the Labour, Liberal, National candidates who stood for the lower House of Representatives. Senate candidates are excluded because of the different electoral system, which means that they campaign within their state or territory rather than within a single member constituency. In addition, the elections covered here were all half-Senate elections, meaning just half of the Senate seats are up for re-election.<sup>4</sup> Green candidates are excluded because, until 2010, they had failed to secure a lower house seat and questions which relate to constituency service among incumbents are therefore not applicable.

### Method

In Table 5 the dependent variable is the first preference vote that the candidate won in the election to the lower House of Representatives. The analyses also control for incumbency (scored as a dummy variable) and the number of candidates standing in the constituency. Entering a party control into the model, in addition to incumbency and the number of candidates, does not change the substantive results; in the interests of parsimony it is excluded. A more stringent test of the hypothesis would have been to control for the candidate's vote in the previous election. However, this produced multicollinearity between prior and current vote and it was therefore excluded. For campaign activities, multiple item scales were constructed from the items in Table 3 (for 1996–2007) and Table 4 (for 2010) and scored from a low of zero to a high of 10.

Ordinary least squares regression methods are used to make the estimates in Table 5 and checks were made to ensure that the estimated votes are bounded between 0 and 100 percent. Since several candidates are typically included

**Table 1.** MPs' local constituency and party work, 1996–2010.

	(Mean hours per month)				
	1996	2001	2004	2007	2010
<b>Local constituency service</b>					
Dealing with constituents' problems	48	45	51	48	54
Attending local community functions	31	33	33	38	42
Speaking at public meetings	11	12	13	12	12
(Subtotal)	(90)	(90)	(97)	(98)	(108)
<b>Local party work</b>					
Attending party meetings	12	14	9	9	7
Party fundraising	5	8	6	6	5
(Subtotal)	(17)	(22)	(15)	(15)	(12)
Travelling	19	18	18	16	21
(N)	(83)	(83)	(45)	(44)	(45)

The question was: 'We are interested in the amount of time you spent in your electorate and what you did there. Thinking back over the past year, about how many hours per month did you usually devote to the following activities within your electorate?' Estimates are for House of Representatives incumbents only.

Sources: 1996–2010 Australian candidate studies.

from each constituency, robust standard errors were calculated, clustered for constituencies.

## Results

### Local constituency service

To evaluate the importance of constituency service, the ACS surveys have consistently asked incumbent candidates how many hours per month they had typically spent on a range of activities within their electorate prior to the start of the election campaign.<sup>5</sup> These cover community-related activities, such as speaking at public meetings, as well as party-related activities, such as attending party meetings. As the estimates in Table 1 show, the most time-consuming activity for elected representatives is, not surprisingly, dealing with constituents' problems. In 1996 this activity took up a substantial 48 hours per month, rising to 54 hours by 2010. The second most time-consuming activity is attending local community functions, which accounted for 31 hours per month in 1996, again rising to 42 hours by 2010. Travelling to and from the national parliament in Canberra – potentially a major consideration for MPs from the remoter states – is the third most time-consuming activity. This can also be a major limitation on the time MPs have available for constituency service and local party work.

In general, party-related activities – attending party meetings and party fundraising – are much less of a burden on MPs when compared to constituency service. For example, party meetings took up just 7 hours per month in 2010, while party fundraising accounted for 5 hours. The results show that the pressures on MPs' time are generally not party related; the total time devoted to the two party

activities in 2010 was 12 hours per month. By contrast, the three constituency activities totalled an average of 108 hours per month, a substantial commitment. For the most part, these constituency activities cannot be conducted during parliamentary sitting periods, so they must be carried out at weekends or at other times so as not to interfere with parliamentary commitments.

The most interesting trend in Table 1 is the consistent increase in the time devoted to constituency service over the 1996 to 2010 period, and the corresponding decline in the amount of time devoted to local party work. By 2010 the average MP was undertaking 18 hours per month more constituency service than an MP in 1996; over the same period, party work declined from a peak of 22 hours in 2001 to 12 hours in 2010. These results provide suggestive evidence that local politics is becoming more personalized, with MPs seeing their electoral fortunes resting more in the promotion of their constituents' interests than in satisfying the needs of the local party. A contributing factor in the reduction in party work may be the decline in the local party organizations of both major parties over the past two decades (see Ward, 1991); with fewer party members, there may simply be fewer party meetings and party events to attend.

### Geographic proximity

There are various ways of measuring geographic proximity between the candidate and the voter, covering birthplace, education and a range of other indicators. One of the most commonly used measures is residence within the constituency. While candidates often move into the constituency, if not already resident there, it nevertheless represents a public indicator of the extent to which the candidate, if elected, will identify with and promote local interests. Not surprisingly, between 8 and 9 out of every 10 candidates report living in the electorate they are standing for (Studlar and McAllister, 1996). These figures are confirmed in the results in Table 2, which show that just over 8 in every 10 candidates reported living in the electorate between 1996 and 2010, with a slight rise to just over 1 in 10 in 2001.

Within the local community, candidates are usually active in a range of community organizations and groups in order to broaden their visibility and capacity to garner votes. The degree of local community activity therefore represents a second indicator of geographic proximity and localism (Rice and Macht, 1987). Table 2 shows that the average candidate in the period 1996 to 2010 was 'very active' in an average of about two community groups, from a total list of 11.<sup>6</sup> There has been no obvious trend over the period of the surveys, with the highest local community involvements occurring in 2001 and 2010, and the lowest in 2007.

The level of local party activity is measured by two variables. First, there is the proportion of candidates who report

**Table 2.** Candidates' local community and party activity, 1996–2010.

	1996	2001	2004	2007	2010
Local community activity					
Lives in electorate (percent)	82	93	83	81	83
Community involvements (mean number 'very active' in)	2.1	2.5	1.7	2.0	2.5
Local party activity					
Employed in MP's office (percent)	20	22	26	26	29
Length of party membership (years)	14.2	15.1	14.7	15.1	17.7
(N)	(192)	(144)	(141)	(136)	(115)

Estimates are for House of Representatives major party candidates.

Sources: 1996–2010 Australian candidate studies.

**Table 3.** Party support for the local election campaign, 1996–2007.

	(Percent say 'a lot')			
	1996	2001	2004	2007
Party support for . . .				
Leaflets, handouts	43	33	38	37
General organization	16	12	15	16
Funds	12	10	10	16
Workers from central party office	6	8	8	5
Visits by leader	6	7	8	9
Visits by other politicians	14	16	18	15
Campaign workers (mean number per day)	14	16	18	15
(N)	(192)	(144)	(141)	(136)

The question was: 'How much support for your campaign did you receive from your Federal/state party organization in the following areas?'

Estimates are for major party House of Representatives candidates.

Sources: 1996–2007 Australian candidate studies.

employment in an MP's office prior to standing as a candidate. This is a direct measure of the rise of the career politician (Riddell, 1995), and the results in Table 2 show a consistent increase, from 20 percent in 1996 to 29 percent in 2010. Second, the length of party membership reflects the candidate's local party involvement (since candidates must be first and foremost a member of the local party branch), and it too has been increasing, with the average candidate reporting 17.7 years of party membership in 2010, an increase of more than three years on the same figure in 1996.

These estimates suggest that local party activity among candidates is increasing, while local involvement has remained stable. Placing these results alongside those in the previous table we find several important patterns in terms of local and party engagement among candidates and elected members. Local activity is consistently high, with

**Table 4.** Local election campaign activities, 2010.

	(Mean hours)
Time spent on . . .	
Door-knocking, canvassing	15
Organizing direct mailing	4
Speaking on the telephone	11
Radio and TV interviews	3
Newspaper interviews	3
Attending fundraising events	4
Campaign workers (mean number per day)	16
(N)	(115)

The questions was: 'Please indicate how many hours per week you spent on each of the following activities in your campaign?'; 'Approximately how many workers could you count on to work for your campaign on an average day?' Estimates are for major party House of Representatives candidates.

Source: 2010 Australian candidate study.

the estimates of constituency service suggesting an increasing local focus since 1996. While local party work has been declining among elected members, indicators of party engagement are increasing. This tends to suggest that nomination and eventual election is becoming ever more a matter of party commitment; once elected, members reduce their commitments to the local party and focus their resources on the constituency.

### Local election campaigning

The activities that are conducted during the course of an election campaign can range from canvassing and door-knocking to the use of an email newsletter to garner support. And of course, resources – such as funds and campaign workers – are required to carry out these activities. The ACS surveys from 1996 to 2007<sup>7</sup> have consistently asked the candidates a range of questions about how much support they reported receiving from their central party in order to undertake a range of campaign activities. Table 3 shows that parties were most likely to supply leaflets and handouts for the campaign and to assist with general organization, and least likely to supply workers or to assist with visits by the party leader.

The trends between 1996 and 2007 suggest that party support for leaflets and handouts has declined slightly, presumably as the Internet and other centrally organized media outlets have increased in importance. Party support in terms of funding increased slightly in 2007 compared to previous elections, as did support for visits by the party leader. However, with the exception of leaflets and handouts, the impression is that most candidates had relatively little support from the central party organizations during the election campaigns. The last line in Table 3 gives the mean number of party workers the candidate could count on. This increased slightly between 1996 and 2007, but otherwise has remained reasonably consistent over the period.

**Table 5.** The electoral effects of local community and party activity, 1996–2010.

	1996		2001		2004		2007		2010	
	b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)	b	(SE)
<i>Local community activity</i>										
Community involvement	0.00	(0.48)	−0.79	(0.52)	0.50	(0.62)	−0.11	(0.43)	−0.36	(0.41)
Lives in electorate	0.48	(1.96)	−1.88	(3.36)	−4.09*	(2.45)	2.81	(2.20)	0.93	(1.62)
<i>Local party activity</i>										
Employed in MP's office	6.11*	(1.97)	2.69	(1.98)	0.57	(1.76)	2.93*	(1.56)	−1.27	(1.74)
Length of party membership	0.17*	(0.09)	0.35*	(0.09)	−0.02	(0.07)	0.23*	(0.07)	0.08	(0.07)
<i>Local election campaigning</i>										
Campaign activities	0.50	(0.35)	−0.54	(0.35)	−1.42*	(0.70)	0.15	(0.22)	0.04	(0.04)
No. of party workers	0.23*	(0.09)	0.98*	(0.38)	0.41	(0.29)	0.38	(0.29)	0.15	(0.11)
<i>Controls</i>										
Incumbent	14.56*	(1.98)	9.48*	(2.07)	19.3*	(1.75)	12.54*	(1.92)	14.05*	(1.87)
No. of candidates	−0.32	(0.48)	−0.60	(0.51)	−0.51	(0.45)	−0.10	(0.48)	−1.14*	(0.50)
Constant	26.17		33.02		48.32		27.84		36.65	
Adjusted R-squared	0.42		0.43		0.53		0.53		0.54	
(N)	(192)		(139)		(141)		(136)		(115)	

\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.10$  or better.

Ordinary least squares regression showing partial (b) coefficients and cluster-robust standard errors (SE) predicting the first preference percentage vote for each candidate. The estimated votes are bounded between 0 and 100 percent. Estimates are for House of Representatives candidates for the Labour and Liberal-National parties. See Table 2 for scoring of variables.

Sources: 1996–2010 Australian candidate studies.

The 2010 ACS asked the question about campaigning differently from the previous surveys. Each candidate was asked on average how many hours per week they spent on a range of activities. The patterns mirror the broad findings in the previous table, with most time being spent on canvassing and phone calls (the latter presumably mainly to potential voters). The mean number of campaign workers was also directly comparable with the previous surveys, at 16 per day. While the measures used between the 2010 survey and the previous 1996–2007 surveys differ, they do tell a consistent story. They suggest a modest decline in the importance of traditional campaign methods, such as canvassing, and a modest increase in funding and in the availability of campaign workers. The next section examines the extent to which these methods had an impact on the vote that the candidates attracted.

### Impact on the vote

To what extent does the geographic proximity of the candidate to potential voters and patterns of local campaigning reap electoral returns?<sup>8</sup> This question is addressed in Table 5 by predicting the first preference vote in the House of Representatives won by major party candidates between 1996 and 2010. The independent variables are the measures of local and party activity identified earlier in Tables 2, 3 and 4 with the addition of controls for incumbency and the number of candidates standing for election in the constituency.<sup>9</sup> The estimates are partial coefficients, which show the percentage change in the vote due to a particular effect, and standard errors.

The results in Table 5 show consistent, if modest, effects for geographic proximity and local election campaigning. Geographic proximity has some impact on the vote, but via local party activity rather than local community activity. The sole significant effect for local community activity is via living in the electorate and is in the opposite hypothesized direction. By contrast, there are moderately consistent effects for local party activity. In two of the five models, prior employment in an MP's office produces a statistically significant increase in the vote; in 1996 the effect is substantial, increasing the candidate's vote by just over 6 percent, net of other things. In three of the five models, there is a statistical effect for length of party membership, with the longer the candidate reported being a party member the greater the vote that the candidate received, again net of other things.

In contrast to local party activity, election campaigning has more modest effects on the vote. Campaign activities, combined in a single scale, show a significant impact only in 2004, and then not in the expected direction. There are larger and more consistent effects for the number of party workers that the candidate could count on; in both 1996 and 2001 these workers significantly increased the vote, and indeed in 2001 each worker could be expected to increase the vote by almost 1 percent, net of other things. Overall, these results confirm the importance of local party engagement in securing a safe seat, which is assumed to be an aspect of geographic proximity. To that extent, a candidate's electoral prospects remain a matter of party involvement and party service rather than enhancing her vote through local activity and connections. Party employment and a lengthy party

membership underpin the increasing importance of the career politician, and the necessity of working for the party for an extended period in order to gain selection for a winnable seat.

Party support for the local campaign does, therefore, matter to the vote that a candidate receives and is mediated mainly through party workers, rather than through the activities that the candidate herself engages in. This supports a long tradition of voter research which has demonstrated that while local effects on the vote have only a moderate impact (see, for example, Denver et al., 2004; Whiteley and Seyd, 2003), they do exist and can be important in tightly fought contests. Whatever the general trend towards a highly centralized campaign staffed by professionals and utilizing sophisticated electronic communications, a role for the local campaign remains.

## Conclusion

While there is little doubt that national election campaigns have become more personalized in recent years, the extent to which this change has been translated to the local constituency level has not been well researched. Australia represents an important case study to examine the personalization of local campaigning for two reasons. First, the preferential voting system used for the lower House of Representatives is primarily a candidate-centred system, although with the caveats noted by Carey and Shugart (1995) that effective party strategies are also important to accumulate transfers. Second, the system of compulsory voting means that parties and candidates can concentrate their efforts on the conversion of voters, rather than on mobilizing them to turnout to vote.

The results presented here, covering an extended period of time, have enabled us to examine the extent of the personalization of politics at the local level in detail. The findings are mixed. There are elements of localism reflected in how local elected representatives and candidates behave, and in the electoral rewards that such activity brings. In general, personal activity is less important than party activity at the local level. Local community activity reaps few electoral rewards, while local party activity is consistently much more significant. For example, having been a full-time party employee before standing for election or being a long-standing party member both bring extra votes, a reflection of the importance of party networking. To the extent that there is a discernible trend, however, these party aspects appear to be less important now than they were in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Local election campaigning also matters in attracting votes, but perhaps to a lesser extent than is the case in other countries. Certainly, greater numbers of party workers increases the vote, but the commitment of a candidate to engaging in diverse forms of local campaigning is relatively unimportant. Moreover, as with the previous findings, it would appear that local election campaigning was more important in earlier elections than in more recent

ones. Once again, party rather than personal factors would appear to dominate the electoral equation.

The robustness of the results suggest that these findings have held for at least the period of the surveys; if there has been a move towards personalization at the local level, it has largely taken place before the 1990s. This accords with the research on national trends in personalization which identifies the growth of the electronic media as a major factor (Mughan, 2000). It remains an open question whether the increasing use of the Internet for election campaigns and its ability to appeal directly to small, segmented groups of voters will stimulate the sorts of changes that the advent of television brought in the 1970s. As Ward (2003: 595) has argued 'technological change has . . . provided an impetus for a new emphasis on local campaigning'. But however voters respond to these future changes, it remains the case that the Australian electoral system – and the choices that voters must make at the ballot – remain predominantly party choices, and whatever their failings parties retain the broad confidence of the electorate.

## Funding

The 1996, 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010 Australian Candidate Studies were funded by the Australian Research Council. The data are publicly available from the Australian Data Archive (<http://ada.anu.edu.au>). An earlier version of the article was delivered at the American Political Science Association meetings, September 2010, Washington D.C. My thanks to panel members for their comments and to three *Party Politics* referees for their constructive suggestions.

## Notes

1. For reviews and assessments of these trends, and discussions of their origins, see McAllister (1996, 2007), Mughan (2000), Poguntke and Webb (2005). For a thorough and objective evaluation of the personalization thesis, see Karvonen (2010).
2. Around half of all voters consistently report that they follow such party directions (McAllister, 2011: Figure 1.2)
3. Since 1949, elections to the upper house, the Senate, have been conducted using the single transferable vote method of proportional representation, with each state and territory forming a multi-member constituency (Farrell and McAllister, 2003, 2005). Since Senate candidates are not examined here, the upper house electoral system is not described.
4. During the period of the ACS surveys, only the 1987 election was a full Senate election. Half Senate elections are held because the term of a senator is six years, and the terms are staggered to fit in with House of Representatives elections (which are every three years).
5. The question was asked only of incumbents prior to the election.
6. The list is: community service, business associations, professional associations, trade union or staff associations, religious organizations, women's organizations, environmental groups,

sports clubs, hospital boards, school boards or PTAs, and ethnic group organizations.

7. The question was not asked in the same format in the 2010 ACS.
8. It is obviously not possible to include constituency service in the equations since this question was asked of MPs only.

## References

- Arzheimer K and Evans J (2012) Geolocation and voting: Candidate–voter distance effects in party choice in the 2010 UK general election in England. *Political Geography* 31: 301–310.
- Bean C (1990) The personal vote in Australian federal elections. *Political Studies* 38: 253–268.
- Cain B (1983) Blessed be the tie that unbinds: Constituency work and the vote swing in Great Britain. *Political Studies* 31: 103–111.
- Cain B, Ferejohn J and Fiorina MP (1987) *The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carey JM and Shugart MS (1995) Incentives to cultivate a personal vote: A rank ordering of electoral formulas. *Electoral Studies* 14: 417–439.
- Clarke HD, Sanders D, Stewart MC and Whiteley P (2004) *Political Choice in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Curtice J (1995) Is talking across the garden fence of political import? In: Eagles DM (ed.) *Spatial and Contextual Models in Political Research*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Dalton RJ, Farrell D and McAllister I (2011) *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton RJ and Wattenberg MP (eds) (2000) *Parties Without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Denemark D (2000) Partisan pork barrel in parliamentary systems: Australian constituency-level grants. *Journal of Politics* 62: 896–915.
- Denver D, Hands G and MacAllister I (2004) The electoral impact of constituency campaigning in Britain, 1992–2001. *Political Studies* 53: 289–306.
- Evans E (2011) Selecting the right sort: Patterns of political recruitment in British by-elections. *Parliamentary Affairs* 65: 195–213.
- Farrell D and McAllister I (2003) The electoral system. In: McAllister I, Dowrick S and Hassan R (eds) *The Cambridge Handbook of the Social Sciences in Australia*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Farrell D and McAllister I (2005) *The Australian Electoral System: Origins, Variations and Consequences*. Sydney: University of NSW Press.
- Gorecki M and Marsh M (2012) Not just ‘friend and neighbours’: Canvassing, geographic proximity and voter choice. *European Journal of Political Research* 51: 563–582.
- Holmberg S (2007) Partisanship reconsidered. In: Dalton RJ and Klingemann H-D (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Johns G (1999) Political parties: From private to public. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 37: 89–113.
- Karp JA and Banducci SA (2007) Party mobilization and political participation in new and old democracies. *Party Politics* 13: 217–234.
- Karp JA, Banducci SA and Bowler S (2008) Getting out the vote: Party mobilization in a comparative perspective. *British Journal of Political Science* 38: 91–112.
- Karvonen L (2010) *The Personalisation of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies*. Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Katz R and Mair P (1995) Changing models of party organization and party democracy: The emergence of the cartel model. *Party Politics* 1: 5–28.
- Key VO (1949) *Southern Politics*. New York: Knopf.
- Krauss E and Nyblade B (2004) ‘Presidentialization’ in Japan? The Prime Minister, media and elections in Japan. *British Journal of Political Science* 34: 357–368.
- Lewis-Beck M and Rice T (1983) Localism in presidential elections: The home state advantage. *American Journal of Political Science* 27: 548–556.
- Lewis-Beck M, Jacoby WG, Norpoth H and Weisberg HF (2008) *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- McAllister I (1996) Leaders. In: LeDuc L, Niemi R and Norris P (eds) *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McAllister I (2007) The personalization of politics. In: Dalton RJ and Klingemann H-D (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McAllister I (2011) *The Australian Voter: Fifty Years of Change*. Sydney: University of NSW Press.
- McAllister I and Pietsch J (2011) *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study, 1987–2010*. Canberra: Australian National Institute for Public Policy.
- McAdams JC and Johannes JR (1985) Constituency attentiveness in the House: 1977–1982. *Journal of Politics* 47: 1108–1139.
- Mughan A (2000) *Media and the Presidentialization of Parliamentary Elections*. London: Palgrave.
- Norris P (2000) *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Poguntke T and Webb P (eds) (2005) *The Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rice TW and Macht AA (1987) Friends and neighbors voting in statewide general elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 31: 448–452.
- Riddell P (1995) The impact of the ruse of the career politician. *Journal of Legislative Studies* 1: 186–191.
- Studlar DT and McAllister I (1996) Constituency activity and representational roles among Australian legislators. *Journal of Politics* 58: 69–90.
- van Onselen P and Errington W (2004) Electoral databases: Big brother or democracy unbound? *Australian Journal of Political Science* 39: 349–366.



- Ward I (1991) The changing organisational nature of Australia's political parties. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 29: 153–174.
- Ward I (2003) 'Localizing the national': The rediscovery and reshaping of local campaigns in Australia. *Party Politics* 9: 583–600.
- Whiteley P and Seyd P (2003) How to win a landslide by really trying: The effects of local campaigning in the 1997 British general election. *Electoral Studies* 22: 301–324.

### **Author biography**

Ian McAllister is professor of political science at The Australian National University, Canberra. His research covers comparative political behaviour and his most recent books are *The Australian Voter: Fifty Years of Change* (University of New South Wales Press, 2011) and (with Russell Dalton and David Farrell), *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage* (Oxford University Press, 2011).