Local Roots in Local Politics*

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Abstract

How does place-based connection influence who holds power in local politics? Given local officials must navigate place-specific institutions and community needs, I theorize that deep local roots serve as a qualification for municipal candidates, with important consequences for who governs and whose interests are represented. Using a novel dataset of campaign statements, linked voter file and candidate records, and original nationwide surveys of elected officials and the public, I demonstrate that local roots pervasively shape municipal elections, which is reflected in who runs for office, how they present themselves to voters, whom voters prefer, and who ultimately wins. While officials tend to be rooted in their communities, I find that constituents are more mobile, making deeply rooted residents descriptively overrepresented, especially in cities with many newcomers. This translates into substantive underrepresentation for newcomers when long- and short-term residents diverge in their local policy preferences. I show that this divergence is likely, especially on land use issues. Together, these findings highlight a central, previously overlooked role for local roots in local politics and policy.

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1 Introduction

Zohran Mamdani, the leading 2025 mayoral candidate for the largest city in the United States, begins his campaign bio with, "Born in Uganda and raised in New York City..." One hundred twenty miles north, in the small town of Olive, New York, a candidate for town board opens his bio with, "Jim and his wife Sharon have been residents of Olive for 40 years and raised their two daughters here." Across the country in Seattle, Washington, mayoral incumbent and front-runner Bruce Harrell describes himself as "a Seattle Public Schools and UW graduate, lifelong Seattle resident, and father..." In all corners of the United States, candidates for local office routinely emphasize their connections to their towns and cities. This makes intuitive sense. Local officials make decisions that primarily affect their immediate communities. They draw on detailed knowledge of local institutions and networks that outsiders typically lack. And yet, place-based connection – what I refer to as local roots – remains largely unexamined in the study of local politics.

This absence in the literature is surprising. Prior research shows that race, gender, income, incumbency status, partisanship, and ideology can influence who holds local office and how officials govern (Schaffner et al. 2001; Trounstine 2011; Hajnal and Trounstine 2014; Ferreira and Gyourko 2014; Carnes 2015; de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016; Holman 2017; Warshaw 2019). But none of these traits directly capture what Oliver et al. (2012) identify as the core motivation for serving: a deep interest in and commitment to one's community. Local roots, on the other hand, indicate a longstanding investment in the town or city.

In state and national politics, where institutions and issues are generally less place-specific, scholars have consistently found that constituents prefer candidates rooted in their districts (e.g., Key 1949; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983; Meredith 2013; Hunt 2021; Hunt and Rouse 2023). Two recent studies extend this insight to the local level, showing that voters prefer embedded candidates in hypothetical local races (Ornstein et al. 2024; Elder and Lueders 2024). While these findings highlight the expansive electoral appeal of rootedness, they do

not focus on the broader importance of place-based connection in local governance.

I argue, however, that rootedness should be understood as a defining feature of municipal politics, shaping candidate emergence, who governs, and representation in local government. This matters because municipal officials are the primary decision-makers in most jurisdictions in the United States. Despite facing meaningful constraints (Hajnal and Trounstine 2010), they set policy on core issues such as housing, infrastructure, and transportation, driving national debates in the process (Glaeser 2024).

To examine the role of local roots in local politics, I draw on several complementary data sources.[1] First, using a novel dataset of 1,955 official candidate statements from 2022 and 2024 California municipal council elections, I document a striking pattern: candidates almost universally highlight their community ties. Nearly two-thirds mention their length of residency, while around 90% emphasize other forms of connections, such as participation in community organizations. This stands in sharp contrast to state elections, where only about a quarter of legislative candidates in a sample of statements reference residency tenure in the district. Roots are also invoked more frequently than commonly studied characteristics like gender, race, and partisanship. These patterns suggest that strong ties operate as a qualification for local candidacy.

Second, I operationalize roots as residency length, and measure this among local candidates and politicians. Matching California Election Data Archive (CEDA) records of council and mayoral candidates to L2 voter file data from 2018, 2020, and 2022, I generate measures of adult years lived and percent of adult life lived in the municipality. Most candidates have spent more than 20 years and over half their adult lives in their communities before running, even when restricting the data to non-incumbents. In the few contests between long-term and short-term residents, rooted candidates are more likely to win. I complement this analysis with an original survey of 1,280 local officials nationwide, showing that the average official has lived in their municipality for 31 years and spent more than half their

[1] See Appendix A for a summary table of the main analyses in this paper.

life there. The people who serve are overwhelmingly long-term residents.

Leveraging the voter file data, I find a substantial gap between candidates' and constituents' residency length. Most candidates are significantly more rooted than the populations they seek to represent. This indicates both that local office is primarily accessible to a narrow, deeply embedded subset of residents, and that candidates differ from most voters in their relationship to the community.

These results carry important implications for representation. Local ties can signal credibility and competence (Campbell et al. 2019), meaning constituents may feel well-represented by officials who are connected to the community. Evidence from my elite survey, paired with an original survey of the public, shows that constituents and officials alike, regardless of their own residency tenure, view local roots as a key qualification for office and associate rootedness with better knowledge of community needs. However, rootedness can also be associated with policy preferences (Brown-Saracino 2007), meaning the dominance of rooted candidates and officials can shape whose voices are heard in local politics. In my surveys of both officials and the public, most respondents perceive long-term residents as holding distinct policy preferences from newcomers, particularly on land use issues. For less-rooted constituents, this introduces a tension, whereby the quality that signals competence also cues policy divergence. Moreover, if this perception stems from reality, and officials hold distinct preferences from a large share of their constituents, the descriptive overrepresentation of rooted residents will translate into the substantive underrepresentation of newcomers.

In this paper, I begin to explore these implications, making several contributions and laying a foundation for future work. First, I extend the literature on local politics by foregrounding an overlooked dimension of descriptive representation: local rootedness. While existing work focuses on partisanship, race, and gender, I show the significance of deep connection to place in shaping who runs and who wins in municipal elections. Second, these results contribute to the broader research on local roots by demonstrating how candidates actively frame their embeddedness and how constituents view those cues. Even more, I high-

light the salience of roots as a political credential. Finally, my research engages the political economy of local governance by suggesting that perceptions of rootedness may carry real weight in decision-making on growth-related policy.

Together, these results underscore a neglected aspect of political geography. As partisan sorting has reshaped communities, research on local politics has increasingly focused on the partisanship and ideology of city leaders. But in both big cities and small towns, the people who govern are alike in that they are deeply tied to the places they serve. No matter their partisanship, ideology, race, or gender, municipal candidates and officials are more locally rooted than the constituents they represent. Even in areas undergoing population growth, power remains concentrated among long-term residents. Place-based connection drives who runs, who wins, and ultimately, who holds local power.

2 The Significance of Roots in Municipal Governance

Scholarship on American local politics has produced a rich body of evidence on the candidate attributes that affect electoral outcomes, such as race, gender, incumbency status, occupation, ideology, and partisanship (e.g., Schaffner et al. 2001; Oliver and Ha 2007; Trounstine 2011; Crowder-Meyer et al. 2015; Kirkland 2022; Hajnal and Trounstine 2014; Sances 2018; Warshaw 2019; Conevska et al. 2024). However, none of these commonly studied characteristics directly capture the primary motivating factor for seeking municipal office: commitment to one's own community (Oliver et al. 2012).[2] On the other hand, a candidate's geographic ties, such as how long they have lived in a place or their involvement in community organizations, indicate their investment in the town or city.

Beyond dedication to the municipality, local officials must navigate highly place-specific institutions, histories, and political dynamics to a degree that higher-level officials do not. A Congressional candidate can relocate to a new district and still engage with similar policy concerns and party cues as they would have dealt with elsewhere. While Congressmembers

[2]Progressive ambition is rarely the driver – most local officials do not seek state or national office after serving in municipal government (Einstein et al. 2020).

carry out district-specific casework, and those with strong roots tend to do more of this type of work (Kaslovsky 2022), they face constraints on how much time they can spend directly on their home district. Local candidates, by contrast, face a distinct issue environment if they move across municipality lines. The municipal government of, for instance, Monterey, California is a government established for Monterey, operates in Monterey, and serves the people of Monterey. Someone relocating from Monterey to nearby Salinas would need to learn about a new government structure, political alliances, and community norms before becoming a credible candidate.

In this section, I outline expectations for how these dynamics influence candidate emergence and who holds local office. I also consider the implications for local representation. The following sections test these expectations empirically.

2.1 Roots, candidates, and elected officials

Given the institutional and political context of municipal governance, rootedness should be understood as part of what makes a "high-quality" local candidate. In state and national politics, quality is often tied to experience in government, professional credentials, or policy expertise. These traits may matter at the local level too, especially in more professionalized local governments, such as those in large cities (Kirkland 2022). But in most municipalities, where local knowledge and networks aid in efficient governance, deep local ties should be an important and salient asset. Prior experience in another town's local government may help, but familiarity with one's own municipality is key to understanding its unique needs.

Following this logic, I expect that candidates see advantages in communicating their connection to constituents. That is, local ties should serve as a valence signal, conveying integrity, commitment, and familiarity with issues in the community (Shugart et al. 2005; Campbell et al. 2019). A lack of such a signal could be detrimental to a candidate's success.

Existing literature has provided several additional explanations for why community ties operate as a positive signal to voters and why candidates may therefore highlight these connections (for an expansive review, see Nyholt 2024). First, roots can function as a de-

scriptive characteristic: voters who are themselves long-term residents could feel represented by candidates who share that background (Pitkin 1967). Second, roots may signal policy preferences. Place-based attachment has been linked to attitudes about land use, economic policy, and cultural preservation (e.g., Barthel 1989; Smutny and Takahashi 1999; Nelson 2001; Fischel 2002; Brown-Saracino 2004; Golding 2014; Trounstine 2020; Dublin-Boc 2023; Brouwer and Trounstine 2024). Given high rates of local participation among homeowners and long-term residents (Einstein et al. 2019; 2020), signaling preservationist preferences might be electorally advantageous. Finally, roots can aid in downplaying other, more divisive characteristics, such as party affiliation (see de Bennedictis-Kessner 2021). Rather than appealing to partisans in an arena where partisanship is often not central to decision-making (Anzia 2021), candidates can frame themselves as devoted community members.

Roots, however, should do more than signal desirable qualities to voters. They can also operate as resources that make running for local office more feasible. Long-term residency or meaningful community involvement through local organizations, volunteer work, or service within local government can serve multiple functions. These ties provide opportunities to build name recognition (Gimpel et al. 2008), learn about local issues, and develop the relationships that often prompt candidacy in the first place (Oliver et al. 2012). Without roots, candidates may face significant barriers to entry, regardless of their other qualifications. Consequently, I predict that the pool of potential candidates for local office will disproportionately include residents with strong roots, and this will have implications for who is elected.

Additionally, when elections do include a set of candidates with variation in their roots, those with deeper ties should be at an advantage. In the first half of the twentieth century, V.O. Key (1949) observed a phenomenon across the South that he labeled "localism," where candidates for state and federal office received outsized support in their home districts. He attributed this to voter apathy and an oversimplified "home-town boy" appeal (p. 37), but subsequent research across state, national, and comparative contexts has found that

candidates with stronger local ties consistently perform better in elections (e.g., Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983; Campbell and Cowley 2014; Johnston et al. 2016; Panagopoulos et al. 2017; Collignon and Sajuria 2018; Jacobs and Munis 2019; Hunt 2021; Hunt and Rouse 2023). Recent work also shows that residency tenure predicts candidate success in hypothetical local matchups (Ornstein et al. 2024; Elder and Lueders 2024). Given existing evidence of a preference for candidates with strong community ties, I expect candidates' roots to be associated with their election outcomes in real-world elections.

2.2 Roots and representation

If deeply rooted residents both dominate the candidate pool and have an advantage in elections, governing bodies will overrepresent the most well-established residents, at least descriptively. This could be more concerning in larger municipalities because smaller, less dense places tend to have more informal politics, stronger social ties, and lower residential turnover than large cities (Oliver 2000; Oliver et al. 2012; Lappie and Marschall 2018; Marble and Lim 2023). In these latter settings, rooted officials may be more reflective of their electorates. But in larger, more mobile communities, the dominance of embedded candidates could lead to descriptive underrepresentation of a larger share of the constituency.

The descriptive overrepresentation of rooted residents, however, does not necessarily imply a shortcoming in democratic representation. While it could foster trust and enhance perceptions of legitimacy for rooted residents (Mansbridge 1999), the knowledge and competence attached to roots could lead to increased trust for newcomers as well. Regardless of their place-based connection, residents could still feel well-represented by rooted officials.

Nonetheless, it is also plausible that descriptive representation has implications for substantive representation. If so, the gaps between local officials and constituents could be of greater concern. Both American and comparative politics scholars have found that embedded leaders tend to be more responsive to embedded constituencies (Fenno 1977; Tsai 2007; Bhavnani and Lee 2018; Ban and Kaslovsky 2024; Crosson and Kaslovsky 2024; Smolders and Descamps 2024). This may be normatively desirable when strong-rooted residents share

the preferences of the broader electorate, but when not all constituents are rooted and preferences differ based on rootedness, the disproportionate power of embedded residents could result in the substantive underrepresentation of those with weaker ties.

Democracy depends on both effective governance and inclusive representation. The presence of strong-rooted officials should support the former, whereby embedded officials bring institutional knowledge, legitimacy, and durable relationships. But if rootedness functions as an informal qualification for office, it narrows who is viable to serve, resulting in overrepresentation for the most established residents. This is not inherently problematic, but when such dynamics result in substantive underrepresentation for more transient residents, a tension arises between the benefits of rooted officials and preferable policy outcomes for all. As Americans become increasingly sorted by geography, so too may the quality of local representation. In some places, officials may closely mirror a stable, rooted electorate, and in others, rooted leaders may govern over mobile populations with distinct preferences. Evaluating how local roots structure who runs, who governs, and who is heard is central to understanding how local democracy functions.

3 Measuring and Evaluating the Salience of Roots

As a first test of my theoretical expectations, I evaluate whether candidates systematically highlight their local ties. If they do not, it would call into question the importance of roots as an electoral qualification. Deeply rooted residents might be more likely than newcomers to consider running for local office regardless of voter preferences, but the absence of messaging about roots would suggest that candidates do not view roots as electorally valuable. I therefore begin with campaign materials to assess whether candidates frame roots as a relevant quality.

To evaluate how candidates present themselves in campaign materials, I assembled a dataset of official candidate statements from the 2022 and 2024 California municipal council general elections. In California, booklets of statements are sent to all voters, making them a

consistent and accessible way to observe how candidates present themselves.[3] The California Election Data Archive (CEDA) provides information on California municipal candidates, including vote share, incumbency status, and the number of candidates in the race. Using names from the candidate lists, I collected candidate statements through municipal websites or by directly communicating with counties to obtain voter guides. For more details on data collection, see Appendix B.

With a team of research assistants, I hand-coded information about candidates' embeddedness. In total, there were 2,134 council candidates in the 2022 general election, and 1,975 candidates in 2024. For 2022, we coded statements from 249 municipalities in 39 counties for a total of 1,151 candidates (over half of all total candidates). For 2024, we collected and coded 804 additional statements from 186 municipalities in 25 counties. See Appendix B for a map of municipalities included, as well as details on missingness and the coding process.

Coding these statements was relatively straightforward, yet time-consuming. My research assistants and I coded all statements using a standardized codebook. To assess reliability, we double-coded a subset with two independent coders per statement and resolved all discrepancies in person by consensus.[4] We first coded whether candidates mentioned their length of residency (1 for mention, 0 otherwise). Mentions could include the exact number of years, "lifelong" residency, growing up in a place, or that they are a long-time or new resident, all signaling something about their roots, but not necessarily strong roots. Second, we coded whether they mentioned other connections to the municipality (1 if so, 0 otherwise). This included participation in volunteer activities and organizations *within* the community, raising kids in local public schools, owning a local business, experience in another position in the municipality's government or experience as an incumbent.[5] If a candidate discussed experience in any of these capacities outside the municipality, that was not counted. This allows

[3]Not all states provide official candidate statements, and other forms of campaign communication are unevenly accessed.

[4]Appendix B includes an explanation for why this coding was conducted manually rather than using natural language processing or a supervised machine learning approach.

[5]Only 5.01% of statements that included mentions of embeddedness referred only to incumbency.

me to capture more than just time spent in a place, such as whether candidates substitute a lack of long-term residency with other forms of embeddedness in their communities. When possible, we noted the year they moved to the municipality and whether they grew up there.

To illustrate the coding, I present an excerpt from a statement below, with text that informed our coding in bold. This was coded 1 for mention of length and 1 for mention of other connections. Additionally, the candidate would be coded as having not grown up in their municipality. See Appendix B for additional example statements.

> *My family has called Eastvale home for the last* ***19 years****. I've been married for 29 years and we have two boys. I come from a family of three boys, all in law enforcement, and one sister. I hold a B.A. / M.A. degree along with a teaching, counseling, and school administration credential. I've been in education for 27 years, with the last 11 as a* ***school counselor at Ramirez Intermediate School.*** *As an active community member, I was involved in our* ***Citizen Advisory Board for JCSD for 5 years and a Kiwanis Board member. Currently, I am a Community Emergency Response Team member...***

Figure 1 presents the frequency at which candidates discuss their roots in campaign statements. Among the 1,955 candidates with accessible statements, almost two-thirds mentioned their length of residency and just under 90% mention other connections to *their current* community. When I split this into 2022 and 2024 statements, the rates are nearly identical for each year. Only 120 (6%) of statements mention neither length nor connection, either focusing on what the candidate will do once in office or containing mostly irrelevant information.

Figure 1: Mentions of Residency Length and Community Connections

Note: This shows the number and share of California city council candidates who mention either their length of residency or another community connection in their official campaign statements among statements available for 2022 and 2024.

Interestingly, candidates with a wide range of residency tenures reference their length of time in the community. In fact, among those who mention length, only around one-third say they grew up in the municipality. Nonetheless, the longer a candidate has lived in their municipality, the more likely they are to mention their length of residency.[6] There were no statements where a candidate states that they, for instance, moved within the last year and wanted to jump right into local politics.

Strikingly, while nearly all candidates highlight their roots or local connections, very few reference traits that dominate the representation literature, such as gender, race, or partisanship. To demonstrate this, I coded each statement for mentions of other characteristics, including gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, immigrant or first-generation status, and party or ideological affiliation.[7] Party/Ideology includes mentions of party or partisanship, a specific political party or ideological identity, or endorsements from a party, politicians from one party, or an organization affiliated with a party. California holds non-partisan local elections with no party labels on the ballot; the same is true for most U.S. municipalities. I coded mentions for each characteristic only when candidates referenced them as part of their identity – e.g., stating they were the first woman or first person of color to run in their city.

Table 1: Mentions of Candidate Characteristics in Campaign Statements

Characteristic	Total Mentions	Percent of Candidates
Community Connections	1,737	88.85%
Length of Residency	1,209	61.84%
Party/Ideology	70	3.58%
Immigrant/First-Gen	49	2.51%
Racial/Ethnic Identity	44	2.25%
Gender Identity	17	0.87%

Note: This compares the number and share of California city council candidates who mention length of residency and community ties to the number and share who mention other characteristics in their official campaign statements among those available from 2022 and 2024.

[6]Length of residency is measured by how long a candidate has been registered to vote in their municipality, using L2 voter file data. See Appendix M for further details.

[7]Immigrant or first-generation identity was included because it appeared as a self-described trait in several statements. More details are in Appendix C.

In Table 1, I show that fewer than 100 candidates referenced each of these other characteristics across both election years. For some traits, such as gender or race, one might expect that only candidates from historically marginalized groups would highlight these identities, limiting the overall frequency. However, far more than 0.87% of candidates are women and greater than 2.25% are people of color. In some counties, though, these statements are accompanied by photos, meaning candidates may not feel the need to highlight their ascriptive identities. Therefore, these should be understood only as explicit mentions, not implicit signals. All candidates do have a partisan identity, but fewer than 4% explicitly reference their partisanship or ideology.[8] These patterns suggest that explicit identity signaling is uncommon, at least in contrast to the widespread emphasis on local ties.

Rather than focusing on these other qualities, almost all candidates frame their qualifications through their relationship to the municipality. They make claims such as, "My *roots* are deeply planted in the town as a *4th generation* resident," or, "As someone who *grew up here*, I have dedicated my life to Fresno..." Even candidates who moved during adulthood make the same appeals, such as, "I am running for Antioch City Council because I believe this city deserves leadership *deeply rooted* in the community. I have lived and served in our community for *more than 13 years*." Others define the meaning of roots directly: "I have deep roots in our community, thoroughly understand the issues that face our families, and have a vested interest in improving the city that molded me." The focus is not on politics per se, but rather on embeddedness in the community they hope to serve.

The statements reveal that residents who select into running for local office do not all have lifelong ties, but nearly all present some form of connection beyond mere residency or homeownership.[9] This might seem trivial, but this emphasis is significant compared to

[8] Applying the same coding scheme, 78.6% of statements among those I collected for state-level canddiates contain explicit partisan cues. State ballots list party affiliation, but these cues are in addition to the party label printed on the ballot.

[9] Length of residency and community engagement may also trade off to some extent. It is difficult to have engagement without having spent some time in the place, but living a long time somewhere without participating in the community may not signal the same level of quality as someone relatively new to the community and engaged. These data do not allow for cleanly evaluating that trade-off, but it should be considered in future work.

candidates for state and national office, who may have little connection to their district and use their experience as, for example, a lawyer or member of the military, to qualify themselves as a viable candidate. To illustrate this, I collected 140 California State Assembly and Senate statements from 2022 and 2024 (for details, see Appendix E). Mentions of length of residency are only present in about 24% of statements. Mentions of other connection to the district are present in about three-fourths of statements. However, the majority of these mentions (71%) reference only incumbency or experience as a city elected official. I include such mentions because they are a sign of embeddedness, but they differ from most council-level mentions in that they primarily signal political experience.

This unique emphasis on roots and connection in local statements underscores two points that support my expectations: first, local candidates are generally not newcomers – embeddedness in the community prior to holding office appears to be a standard for selecting into running; and second, they seem to think that roots are an important electoral signal.

4 The Breadth and Depth of Local Roots

The statements show that candidates view local roots as a part of their qualifications, but they do not offer consistent or comparable measures of roots. In this next section, I turn to administrative and survey data to investigate candidates' and officials' rootedness.

Assessing the strength of roots, however, is difficult, in part because data on municipal candidates remains limited. Scholars of state and national politics have greater access to indicators such as birthplace, length of residency, or local schooling, but no centralized database tracks such measures at the local level. Even complete lists of municipal candidates are unavailable in most states.[10] In California, CEDA provides a candidate list, but it must be supplemented with additional information about each candidate.

To address these challenges, I draw on multiple data sources, generating several measures

[10] de Benedictis-Kessner et al. (2023) provide a large candidate database, but it excludes most small municipalities and does not include variables related to roots. This list can be used to scrape Wikipedia, but pages typically exist only for winners or prominent candidates. In Appendix N, I present descriptives from a Wikipedia scrape, but I exclude this from the main text for reasons outlined in the Appendix.

of rootedness. While no single measure fully captures local rootedness, together they offer a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between local ties, candidate emergence, and who governs.

4.1 Measure 1: voter registration as a proxy for residency tenure

I begin by defining rootedness as residency length. I do this for both practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, data on how long candidates and voters have lived in their municipalities are more widely available than data on birthplace, educational history, or social ties. Theoretically, long-term residents are more likely than newcomers to possesses knowledge of the area and its residents, a sense of duty to the community, and established social networks.

Given the difficulty of collecting consistent information about local candidates through web searches, news articles, or direct outreach, I rely on a proxy for residency length: the length of time a candidate has been registered to vote in their municipality.[11] This approach assumes that candidates are politically engaged and likely to register to vote shortly after moving. Address change data could, in theory, provide precise move-in dates, but it is costly to obtain and cannot distinguish between moves within a municipality and moves into it.

Using candidate data from CEDA and registration dates from the L2 voter file, I assess patterns in candidates' residency tenure. I matched mayoral and council candidates from the 2018, 2020, and 2022 elections to individual-level voter records using the `Fuzzylink` package in `R` (Ornstein 2025). The package implemented a probabilistic record linkage procedure based on candidate full name. I also required an exact match on municipality. After matching, I dropped any rows that did not exactly match on last name. In cases where multiple potential matches had equal match probabilities, I used additional information, such as middle name, age, or birthdate, gathered through web searches, to select the most likely match and discard the rest. Appendix F provides details on missingness.

This process yielded a dataset of 4,873 matched council candidates and 586 matched mayoral candidates from the three election years. The L2 voter file provides each candidate's

[11] See Einstein et al. (2020) for evidence of others using the same proxy in a different context.

registration date at their current address and year of birth. I use this information to generate two measures. First, I calculate the length of residency by subtracting the year of registration from the year of the election. Second, I compute the percentage of adult life spent in a place as: $\frac{\text{Length of Residency}}{\text{Age During Election}-18} \times 100$.[12]

Neither measure captures whether an individual grew up in their municipality, but they can differentiate between long-term residents and recent movers.[13] A younger resident may have spent a greater share of their adult life in a place than an older resident with the same length of residency, but this does not necessarily indicate a deeper connection, which is why years of residency remains a useful measure.

Figure 2: Residency Tenure Among Candidates

Note: The black bars display data on mayoral candidates, and the blue bars present data on council candidates. Length refers to the number of years since voter registration. Percent of adult life is calculated as years since registration divided by the number of years since the candidate turned 18, multiplied by 100. In Appendix Q, I present similar distributions when subset to only non-incumbents.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of residency tenure among the matched candidates, with council candidates represented by blue bars and mayoral candidates by black bars. The left panel categorizes candidates by the number of adult years spent in the municipality,

[12] I use residency address as the primary address. L2 also provides mailing addresses. Fewer than 1% of matched candidates have mismatches between mailing and residency cities. This indicates that candidates are not just claiming residency in the municipality where they are running – they actually live there.

[13] The L2 voter file includes estimated state of birth for many candidates. Around two-thirds of matched candidates were born in California. However, state of birth is distinct from growing up in the municipality. Statements reveal that many were young movers or immigrants, limiting the usefulness of this variable.

while the right panel shows the percentage of their adult life spent there. Mean and median residency tenure for council candidates is 21 years. They have lived an average (mean and median) of 64% of their adult lives in their municipalities. Their average age is 53 (median: 54). Given that 64% of 53 is about 22.4 years, these results suggest that most councilors have lived in their towns and cities since around age 30 or earlier. Mayoral candidates show similar patterns: a mean residency length of 22 years (median: 23) and 63% of adult life spent in their municipalities (median: 62%), with an average age of 55 (median: 56).[14]

Notably, 85% of council candidates candidates and 87% of mayoral candidates have lived in their municipalities for more than 10 years, and over half of both groups have 20 or more years of residency. Almost three-quarters of candidates have resided in their municipalities for at least half of their adult lives. If, as Ornstein et al. (2024) propose in their hypothetical candidate profiles, ten years is sufficient to establish roots, then the vast majority of individuals running for local office are strongly rooted in their communities. Even with a stricter threshold, such as 20 years, the majority of candidates would still meet the bar. This suggests that very few candidates run without a substantial connection to the place they seek to represent, supporting expectations laid out in the theory section.

4.2 Measure 2: reported tenure from survey responses

Registration records provide a useful proxy for residency length, but survey data can offer direct reports on the embeddedness of those who hold office. Therefore, to complement the voter file data and better understand why candidates emphasize their roots, I conducted a survey in December 2023 with 1,280 local elected officials nationwide. Respondents included elected officials in governing board roles (e.g., councilors, trustees, aldermen) and top posi-

[14]These results likely understate true residency length. I cannot observe whether a candidate moved within the municipality and re-registered, left and later returned, lived in the municipality without registering to vote, or registered at age 18 after growing up there. Using survey data described in the next section, I show that among 52 California officials for whom I also have matched candidate data, 26 (50%) report residency within 5 years of their length since registration. Of the remaining 26, 13 (25%) have shorter registration than reported tenure (consistent with delayed registration after moving), and 13 (25%) have more years since registration than reported tenure (consistent with moving out of and back into the municipality without changing registration or administrative error).

tions (e.g., mayors, supervisors, chairpersons). The survey was administered via Qualtrics, with participants recruited through email invitations.[15] Although those currently in office may differ in meaningful ways from candidates who were not elected, this approach yields the most direct measures of rootedness available.

The survey included questions on demographics, connection to the municipality, perceptions of constituents' preferences, and attitudes about local roots. The distribution of respondents across Census regions closely matches that of the full sample, and respondents are from every state except Hawaii and Nevada. The ratio of men to women is approximately 2:1. Nearly 90% of respondents identify as white. A majority (57.8%) are over the age of 60. National estimates for all local officials are unavailable, but the distribution of demographic groups closely mirrors data from Oliver et al. (2012). Consistent with the full set of U.S. municipalities, two-thirds of respondents serve in places with 10,000 or fewer residents. Political affiliation is fairly balanced: 42.81% identify as Democrats, 40.54% as Republicans, fewer than 10% as pure Independents (not leaners), and under 7% with another party.

Figure 3: Residency Tenure Among Elected Officials

Note: The black bars display data on top officials who responded to the survey and the blue bars are for governing board members. Length refers to the number of years they indicate living in their municipality. Percent of life is calculated as years lived divided by their age, multiplied by 100. In Appendix Q, I present similar distributions when subset to only first-term officials.

[15]See Appendix G for information on response rates, sample composition, and survey procedures.

Figure 3 displays variation in both length of residency and the percentage of life lived in the municipality, calculated as: $\frac{\text{Length of Residency}}{\text{Age}} \times 100$. Unlike the voter file proxy, this measure presents respondents' self-reported residency. Among all survey respondents, the mean length of residency is 31 years (median: 30), and the mean share of life lived in the municipality is 51% (median: 47.01%). The mean age of respondents is 61 (median: 63), several years older than the average among the California candidates. In Appendix H, I show that 32% of respondents spent most of their adolescence in the municipality they currently represent, and another 20.23% grew up in a nearby town or city. Altogether, about half of respondents were raised in the region in which they now serve.

Not every sitting official has deep roots, but the average individual serving in municipal government has spent a significant portion of their life in the place they represent. Many also grew up there, have a spouse who did, or have parents with local ties (see Appendix H). Lifelong residency is not a necessary qualification for holding office, but it is uncommon for officials in this sample to have lived in their municipality for fewer than ten years. Most report decades-long residency, further supporting my expectations about the relationship between rootedness and who governs.

5 Why Roots Matter in Local Politics

I have shown that candidates for municipal office are deeply rooted in their communities, and they generally communicate this information to voters during campaigns. If most of the people who emerge have strong roots, how does this influence election results? And what are the implications of those outcomes for representation? In this section, I show that, despite little variation in rootedness, roots are predictive of election outcomes. I then find that the prevalence of rooted officials leads to descriptive overrepresentation of rooted residents.

5.1 Elections favor strong-rooted candidates

Most candidates for municipal office are long-term residents, meaning voters typically choose between deeply rooted competitors. In other words, roots influence elections via candidate

supply. There is, however, some variation in the California dataset: 13% of mayoral candidates and 15% of council candidates have lived in their municipalities for fewer than 10 years. I demonstrate that in the small share of contests where long-term residents face off against relative newcomers, the more established candidates tend to prevail.

To evaluate the relationship between winning an election and residency tenure, there must be elections where long-term residents and newcomers run against one another.[16] Table 2 reports the share of mayoral races that include candidates on either side of several rootedness thresholds, using the matched candidate data. Ten years is a benchmark in prior research, but I also consider other thresholds: 20 years of residency, as well as 25% and 50% of a candidate's adult life spent in the municipality. With all cutoffs, a minority of races feature a mix of long- and short-term candidates. Races with candidates who have lived in their municipality for more than 20 years are almost always composed of candidates with at least 10 years of residency. This pattern reinforces the idea that deep local roots are an important qualification: weakly rooted candidates rarely run, and when they do, it is not frequently against deeply embedded opponents.

Table 2: Share of Races with Short-Term and Long-Term Candidates

Cut-off for long-term	**Share of Races with mix**
10 Years	21.2%
20 Years	42.4%
25% of Adult Life	13.9%
50% of Adult Life	31.8%

Although only a small subset of races includes meaningful variation in candidates' rootedness, these cases still allow for a test of whether strong roots are associated with winning. If so, this would suggest that candidates' emphasis on local ties in campaign statements is most persuasive when those ties are especially strong. While survey experiments show that constituents care about candidates' residency length (Ornstein et al. 2024; Elder and Lueders 2024), observational data can shed light on whether that preference manifests during

[16] I exclude council elections from this analysis given the number of unmatched candidates within elections.

elections, where candidates often campaign in a crowded information environment.

For mayoral candidates from the L2 match sample, I estimate the following equation:

$$\text{Win}_{ijt} = \alpha_{jt} + \beta_1 \log(\text{Residency Tenure}_i) + \boldsymbol{\omega} Z_i + \varepsilon_{ijt} \tag{1}$$

where i is an individual candidate, j indexes municipalities, and t is years. α_{jt} are municipality-by-year fixed effects, which ensure that candidates are only compared within a given election. This accounts for unobserved characteristics of each election, such as place-specific electoral dynamics, and prevents comparisons across municipalities where only newcomers or only long-term residents are running. $\log(\text{Residency Tenure}_i)$ is the number of years a candidate has been registered in the municipality, logged to reduce skew.[17] Z_i is vector of candidate-level covariates, including incumbency status (1 for incumbent, 0 otherwise), gender (1 for woman, 0 for man), and age (standardized), with corresponding coefficient vector $\boldsymbol{\omega}$. I present models with the incumbency control excluded as well because incumbency could be post-treatment. If rootedness increases the likelihood of winning an initial election, where incumbency is a consequence of that win, controlling for incumbency could attenuate the observed effect of rootedness. All models cluster robust standard errors at the municipality level and exclude candidates in uncontested races.

This approach is inherently limited in its ability to estimate a causal effect of rootedness on winning.[18] Even with included controls, unobserved confounders may exist. For instance, a candidate may share political or cultural values with longtime residents, which could both lead them to stay and make them more appealing to voters. Some studies of rootedness focus on birthplace to limit selection bias, but birthplace data are very difficult or impossible to obtain for most local candidates. Therefore, this model presents the association between rootedness and electoral success when there is variation in candidates' roots.

Table 3 presents the relationship between residency tenure and electoral success in mayoral

[17] All logarithmic transformations in the paper use the natural log.

[18] For further discussion on the limitations to causal inference, see Appendix K. If anything, the estimates should reflect attenuation bias. Newcomers who choose to run against rooted candidates likely bring compensating strengths. This comparison should be among strong-rooted candidates versus highly qualified newcomers on some other dimension, not the average newcomer.

Table 3: Relationship Between Residency Tenure and Mayoral Election Victory

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
log(Years Lived)	0.124**	0.139*	0.098*	0.144**				
	(0.042)	(0.057)	(0.044)	(0.054)				
log(% Life Lived)					0.115*	0.135*	0.082	0.129*
					(0.057)	(0.061)	(0.050)	(0.062)
Woman		0.091	0.054	-0.004		0.098	0.058	0.002
		(0.070)	(0.057)	(0.065)		(0.070)	(0.057)	(0.066)
Age (std.)		-0.014	-0.031	-0.044		0.055	0.017	0.031
		(0.043)	(0.033)	(0.033)		(0.034)	(0.027)	(0.027)
Incumbent			0.598**				0.598**	
			(0.066)				(0.066)	
City × Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	558	556	556	432	558	556	556	432
Election-Year Groups	217	217	217	214	217	217	217	214
Only Non-Incumbents				✓				✓

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This presents the relationship between residency tenure (years lived and % adult life lived) and electoral victory, with controls for incumbency, age (standardized) and gender (1 = woman, 0 = man). Models 4 and 8 include only non-incumbents. Robust standard errors, clustered at the municipality level, are in parentheses. Each observation is a candidate, but with fixed effects, comparisons are made only within municipality-year (election).

races. Models 1-4 use logged years of residency as the independent variable, and Models 5-8 use the logged percentage of adult life lived in the municipality. In the first four models, the coefficient on residency length is positive and statistically significant, even after subsetting to only non-incumbents. For percent of adult life lived, the coefficient is statistically significant in all models, aside from the full specification with the incumbency control (Model 7).

Logging residency length means the estimate captures diminishing returns to tenure: the increase in predicted probability of winning is larger when moving from 10 to 20 years than from 20 to 40 years. In both cases, using the estimate from Model 4, doubling the number of years lived is associated with a 9.98 percentage point increase in the likelihood of winning ($ln(2) \times .144$). These results are consistent with expectations, but they should be interpreted with caution. First, the observed relationship is an association, not to be interpreted as an effect. Second, rootedness matters for who becomes a candidate in the first place. That is, potential candidates with weaker local ties are filtered out before they reach the ballot.

Additionally, the coefficients on incumbency are substantively and statistically significant

in Models 3 and 7. In each model, incumbents are more than 50 percentage points more likely to win than non-incumbents. This aligns with prior research showing an incumbency advantage in local elections (Schaffner et al. 2001; Trounstine 2011). Of course, incumbency is closely related to rootedness and may also be a post-treatment variable, which limits the interpretability of models that include it.

There are two main takeaways from this analysis. First, the limited number of races featuring both long-term residents and newcomers highlights the role of rootedness in who selects into candidacy. Second, even within the small set of elections where variation exists, residency length remains a positive and statistically significant predictor of electoral success. Voters may respond to signals of embeddedness, but the results could also point to material advantages, such as social networks, greater access to resources, or deeper commitment to the campaign, all of which may be associated with long-term residence.[19] Regardless of the underlying mechanism, these findings reinforce the idea that local roots are not only associated with who appears on the ballot, but also with who ultimately wins.

5.2 Descriptive overrepresentation of embedded residents

The representational significance of rootedness depends on whether leaders differ from their constituents and whether those differences matter for accountability or policy. If most residents are strongly rooted, support for embedded candidates could be driven by a preference for descriptive representation: voters may favor officials who are like them because their presence in government enhances trust or legitimacy. But if constituents lack such ties, then positive evaluations of rooted candidates would stem from something other than shared traits. Here, I show that rooted residents are descriptively overrepresented, suggesting that support for embedded candidates cannot be explained by trait congruence alone.

5.2.1 Comparing candidates' to constituents' residency tenure

To measure registered voters' residency length in a comparable way to candidates', I calculate tenure for all constituents in California municipalities for which I also have candidate data

[19] See Appendix N for details on how winning and losing candidates present themselves in statements.

(2018, 2020, and 2022). I use L2 registration date and birth date to calculate years lived and percent of adult life lived. The average residency length among constituents (mean of the averages across municipalities) is 9.2 years, and the average percent of adult life lived in the municipality is 23.8%. The average length does not exceed 20 years in any municipality.

Figure 4: Residency Length Averages and Distributions

Note: Panel A shows the mean residency length of constituents and candidates for local office. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Panel B presents the distribution of residency length among candidates and constituents. For constituents, the distribution presented is that of average tenure for each municipality to avoid over-weighting length from large cities. Appendix L shows the constituent-level distribution.

In Figure 4, Panel A, I show that the average residency length of constituents does not mirror the tenure of the people serving them. The distribution of length among candidates also differs substantially from the distribution among constituents (Figure 4, Panel B). I present the distribution of average constituent tenure at the municipality level, rather than the distribution of all individuals, to ensure that larger cities do not disproportionately influence the pattern. The distribution is also not driven merely by the fact that elected officials are older, on average, than constituents. When I use percent of adult life lived, the same pattern emerges (see Appendix L).[20]

[20] Following a similar matching procedure as for local candidates, I evaluate state-level candidates' tenure in their districts. I allow for a match in any municipality that overlaps with the district. This resulted in several false positives, which I cleaned manually using biographical information. See Appendix E for more details. I find that 86% of California State Assembly and Senate candidates in my sample have lived in a municipality within their district for at least 10 years, comparable to the 85% of council candidates and 87% of mayoral candidates. What distinguishes local elections, therefore, is not the extent of candidate rootedness, but how it is communicated. Roots may help state candidates build name recognition or

To more formally estimate differences in residency tenure between candidates and constituents, I use the following equation:

$$\log(\text{Residency Tenure})_{ijt} = \alpha_{jt} + \beta_1 \text{Candidate}_{ijt} + \varepsilon_{ijt} \tag{2}$$

where specifications mimic Equation 1, but controls are excluded from the main model and the variables of interest differ. *Candidate* is a binary indicator for whether the individual ran for office (1) or not (0), and the outcome is years lived or percent of adult life lived (logged). β_1 represents the average difference in tenure between registered voters who ran for office and those who did not, within the same city and election year. The analyses include all registered voters from municipalities in which the sample of candidates are registered. In Appendix Q, I present the same models with controls, as well as unlogged and rescaled versions of the dependent variable, which yield substantively similar estimates for β_1.[21]

Table 4: Residency Tenure Regressed on Candidacy

	Log(Years Lived)		Log(% Life Lived)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Candidate	1.553**	1.397**	1.246**	1.219**
	(0.0325)	(0.0122)	(0.0276)	(0.0111)
% Difference	372.8%	304.4%	247.5%	237.9%
95% CI	[339.6, 410.4]	[286.9, 322.7]	[222.1, 275.8]	[221.1, 255.4]
N Candidates	586	4,873	586	4,873
Observations	39,097,818	39,097,818	39,097,818	39,097,818
City × Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Election	Mayoral	Council	Mayoral	Council

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This presents the relationship between residency tenure and whether an individual is a candidate in a given election year. Each observation is a registered voter in California. Candidate is an indicator for whether the voter is a candidate in the election year. Columns 1 and 3 use an indicator for mayoral candidates and 2 and 4 an indicator for council candidates. Models with controls are in Appendix Q. Robust standard errors, clustered at the municipality level, are in parentheses. The *% Difference* row presents percent difference in residency tenure between candidates and non-candidates.

Table 4 shows that candidates for city council and mayor have substantially longer average

fundraising networks, but in local races, they appear to function more directly as a signal of quality.

[21] In Appendix Q, I also regress candidacy on residency tenure. This yields tiny estimates given a very small share of residents ever run for office. Although candidacy is a rare event, I do show that standard logistic regression performs well for testing whether tenure predicts candidacy. A manual prior-corrected intercept per King and Zeng (2001) does not change the slope estimates.

residency tenure than their constituents. In all models, the coefficients are positive and statistically significant. Given the logged outcomes, I exponentiate the coefficients to show an interpretable difference between candidates and constituents. For instance, in Model 1, mayoral candidates have, on average, 3.73 times the residency length of non-candidates. The estimate is similar in magnitude for council candidates.

These patterns cannot be explained solely by the overrepresentation of older residents. The results hold when using percent of adult life lived and remain robust in models that control for age (see Appendix Q). As shown in Models 3 and 4, candidates have spent more than twice the share of their lives in their municipalities compared to constituents.

5.2.2 Strong-rooted candidates across municipalities of all sizes

I have shown that there is a substantial gap between constituents' and candidates' rootedness, on average. Prior research suggests that as population size increases, residents' rootedness should decline (Marble and Lim 2023; Lewis 2011). However, almost all candidates have strong ties and not all municipalities in the sample are small towns, meaning candidates do not follow this expected pattern. Constituents have weak roots on average, but there is variation in the distribution of averages for each place. If constituents' rootedness changes with population size, the gap between constituents and candidates will vary by population as well, resulting in different rates of descriptive overrepresentation across municipalities.

In this section, I show that candidates with long local tenure are not limited to small-town America. Constituents' tenure, however, declines with population size. To illustrate these patterns, I estimate the following equation for both constituents and candidates:

$$\log(\text{Residency Tenure})_{ijt} = \alpha_t + \beta_1 \log(\text{Population}_{ijt}) + \beta_2 \text{Rurality}_{ijt} + \beta_3 \text{Age}_{ijt} + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (3)$$

where the outcome is logged residency tenure and key independent variable is logged population size. I control for rurality because many small communities within urban commuting zones differ meaningfully from more isolated rural places. Rurality is measured as a rescaled continuous version of the Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes from the U.S. De-

partment of Agriculture, where 0 is most urban and 1 is most rural.[22] Age is also correlated with residency tenure. Given population size is associated with age distributions – larger cities often have younger populations – failing to control for age could conflate differences in tenure with differences in age. I include only election year fixed effects because I am interested in variation across municipalities.

Table 5: Relationship Between Population Size and Residency Tenure

	log(Years Lived)			log(% Life Lived)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
log(Population)	-0.0387**	0.0421	-0.0015	-0.0499**	0.0410	0.0022
	(0.0065)	(0.0274)	(0.0093)	(0.0070)	(0.0261)	(0.0087)
Rurality (0-1)	-0.0565	-0.1055	-0.0887	-0.0364	-0.0385	-0.0689
	(0.0372)	(0.1944)	(0.0619)	(0.0434)	(0.1887)	(0.0592)
Age (std.)	0.0457**	0.4260**	0.3521**	-0.1543**	-0.0604**	-0.1479**
	(0.0124)	(0.0278)	(0.0089)	(0.0086)	(0.0214)	(0.0075)
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,338	586	4,873	1,338	586	4,873
	Constituents	Mayoral	Council	Constituents	Mayoral	Council

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This presents the relationship between municipality population size and residency tenure. Tenure is measured at the individual level for mayoral and council candidates and at the municipality level for constituents (average tenure among registered voters in the municipality). Columns 2, 3, 5, and 6 use individual candidates as the unit of analysis. Columns 1 and 4 use municipality-level observations. The rurality indicator ranges from 0 (least rural) to 1 (most rural). Age is standardized. Robust standard errors, clustered at the municipality level, are in parentheses. Tables without controls, as well as bucketed population averages, are included in Appendix L.

In Table 5, for constituents, the coefficient on logged population is negative and statistically significant in Models 1 and 4. Holding rurality and age constant, as population increases, average residency tenure in a municipality decreases. Doubling the population size ($ln(2)$) is associated with a 2.68% decrease in average years lived ($ln(2) \times -.0387$) and 3.5% decrease in average percent of life lived in the municipality. Constituents' average tenure is 9.2 years in cities with around 10,000 people. A tenfold increase in population size ($ln(10)$) corresponds to a 8.9% decrease in average years, implying that in a city of 100,000 residents, the average tenure would be approximately 8.4 years. While overall tenure is low for constituents, it is highest in the smallest places.

[22]Using RUCA scores follows best practices in the literature (Nemerever and Rogers 2021).

For both mayoral and council candidates, population size is not significantly associated with residency tenure in these models. Regardless of context, those who run for office tend to be deeply rooted. Therefore, strongly rooted individuals are overrepresented everywhere, but especially in larger cities. These findings demonstrate that strong local roots are a defining trait among candidates, distinguishing those who run from the broader public.[23,24]

5.2.3 Comparing rootedness to other characteristics

How does this compare to other characteristics that are more commonly considered in research on local representation, such as race, gender, and age? Evaluating the role of local roots alongside more widely studied identities tests whether rootedness is not only conceptually distinct but empirically more powerful in explaining who selects into candidacy.

Using the same specifications as in Equation 2, I substitute the dependent variable for other characteristics. Each outcome variable is binary: 20 or more years of residency, 10 or more years of residency, male (estimated by L2), age 50+ (using L2 date of birth), and predicted white (using the `predictrace` R package for candidates and non-candidates).[25] The coefficients represent the average percentage point difference in the outcome between candidates and non-candidates within a city and year. This comparison can be interpreted as the selection margin, where candidacy is the revealed expression of political ambition.

In Figure 5, the coefficients from all ten models are positive and statistically significant.[26] Women, younger individuals, and people of color are underrepresented among candidates, consistent with existing literature. However, the coefficients on both binary measures of residency tenure are significantly larger than those from any other model, highlighting the extent to which long-term residents dominate the candidate pool relative to other groups.[27]

[23] See Appendix D for evidence of the same pattern among sitting officials from the survey.

[24] In Appendix L, I show that candidates in larger cities are marginally less likely to highlight their length of residency, but the difference is not substantively meaningful.

[25] `predictrace` (Kaplan 2023) estimates race/ethnicity using last names from the U.S. Census. The package assigns each individual the most likely race associated with their surname. This approach is applied uniformly to candidates and constituents, meaning bias is likely to be consistent across groups.

[26] Not all candidates were successfully matched to the voter file. If the unmatched candidates are disproportionately from certain groups, this could bias the representational ratios.

[27] I do not present raw shares of each group among candidates and constituents because the constituent values would be disproportionately influenced by large cities.

Figure 5: Relationship Between Characteristics and Candidacy

Note: Coefficients indicate how candidates and noncandidates differ on the select characteristics. Models include municipality level cluster-robust standard errors and municipality-year fixed effects. In Appendix Q, I present the full set of coefficients for these models.

The descriptive underrepresentation of historically marginalized groups is widely understood to matter for both symbolic and substantive reasons. Symbolically, seeing members of one's group in office can provide legitimacy to the political system and foster trust in government. Substantively, group identity can be associated with policy preferences, meaning shared identity between constituents and officials can improve representational alignment. Descriptive overrepresentation would matter if it led less-rooted constituents to view local government as less legitimate or reduced trust in elected officials. Substantively, it would be of concern if officials' deep roots translated into policy advantages for long-term residents over more transient populations. In the final section, I explore both of these possibilities.

6 Descriptive Overrepresentation: How Voters See It and Why It Matters

I have shown that deeply rooted individuals disproportionately run for and hold local office. But what does this mean for symbolic and substantive representation? In this section,

I explore whether overrepresentation is politically meaningful. Specifically, I ask whether constituents and officials value local roots, why they do or do not, and whether rootedness is perceived as being associated with differences in policy preferences.

6.1 Residents care about representatives' rootedness

Why are roots predictive of emergence and eventual victory? Connection to community may provide what candidates need to win, such as networks and resources. Or, a resident may only want to run for office if they know enough about a place and how it has evolved over time. Potential candidates may also expect that constituents only want to elect people with strong ties. These reasons are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

However, the emphasis on embeddedness in candidate statements suggests candidates view this as an important part of their qualifications, independent of whether roots are connected to resources. It also seems to suggest that candidates expect rootedness to be universally valued. If so, descriptive overrepresentation may be preferred by voters.

To explore constituents' attitudes about roots, I introduce an additional data source. In March 2025, I conducted a survey of Americans using Cloud Research.[28] The sample was stratified by municipality size, ensuring balanced representation in small and large places. After data cleaning, the sample included 991 respondents.[29]

I assess whether elected representatives and constituents view roots as an important quality by asking in both the survey of officials and the public survey: "How important do you think it is for people serving in local government in your municipality to have lived in the municipality for a long time?" Responses range from "Not at all important" to "Very important" on a five-point scale.

Figure 6 shows that most officials and constituents consider roots to be at least slightly important. About 57% percent of officials rated the importance of long-term residency in

[28] See Litman et al. (2021) for details on the quality of Cloud Research data.

[29] Nine respondents who either did not pass the attention check or skipped most questions were removed. Results in this section are unweighted. Weighted descriptives yield substantively similar results (within 1 percentage point for all categories). More details on the sample are included in Appendix O.

Figure 6: Importance of Long Residency Tenure for Serving in Local Government

Note: "How important do you think it is for people serving in local government in your municipality to have lived in the municipality for a long time?"

local government as either "Very important" or "Slightly important", which closely aligns with the 62% of candidates who highlight their length of residency in their statements. Among constituents, over 85% of participants say that officials' roots are important.[30]

Figure 7: Relationship Between an Individual's Residency Tenure and Perceived Importance of Officials' Long-Term Residency

Note: The panels show the relationship between responses to the question in Figure 6 and respondents' residency tenure. Logging the x-variables or plotting loess lines produces nearly identical results.

Who are the people who find residency tenure less important? In Figure 7, I show that the type of people who are less likely to find length of residency important are those who

[30]The middle value, "Neither important nor unimportant" is difficult to interpret. It could be viewed as similar to "Not very important" or it could be viewed as a "Don't know" category. Therefore, more focus should be on the extreme values of the scale. Importantly, the distribution is concentrated at the top of the scale even under a conservative coding of the midpoint as "Not very important."

have weaker roots, both among officials and constituents. I plot officials' and constituents' attitudes on the importance of residency length (rescaled 0-1, from "Not at all important" to "Very important") against length/percent life lived. Respondents who have spent a larger portion of their lives in their municipality tend to find long-term residency more important for holding office. When I regress importance on both measures of residency tenure using an OLS model, the coefficients are statistically significant but substantively small, likely due to response clustering at the upper end of the scale. This holds when I control for municipality-level and respondent-level characteristics (see Appendix I).

Given average importance is greater than 0.5, positive feelings about officials' rootedness carry beyond just respondents with strong roots. Roots are not a descriptive characteristic on which only aligned constituents prefer to match their representatives. This is a quality that even many officials with weaker roots perceive as valuable, despite not possessing it. However, the variation that does exist indicates that those with the deepest ties value this quality most, nearly unanimously. Descriptive representation adds an additional boost, whereby respondents appear more supportive of rootedness when it mirrors their own experience.

6.1.1 Evidence for why roots are important as a candidate quality

These results suggest that embedded residents emerge as candidates, at least in part, because both constituents and officials think it is important for representatives to be connected to their communities, but why do people think this is important? Perhaps the shared trait adds legitimacy to local government for long-term residents. Or, officials' rootedness may be valuable to the broader electorate because it signals competence, as past work suggests (Campbell et al. 2019). To explore this, I ask participants in the public survey to explain their answers to the question about the significance of officials' local ties.

A manual text-item search shows that 78.7% of participants who rated long-term residency as at least slightly important explained their view in terms of understanding the municipality and the community within.[31] For example, one 30-year resident wrote, "Because they can

[31] See Appendix P for items in the text search. I also applied a BERT-based sentence embedding model (`all-MiniLM-L6-v2`), which turns full sentences into numeric vectors that capture their semantic meaning.

understand the city and local area." Similarly, a five-year resident answered, "It takes time to fully *understand* all the needs of an area. Each town is unique." Among people from small towns and large cities, responses were similar. Constituents who find officials' residency tenure to be important tend to view roots as a signal of place-based understanding.

In contrast, 6.0% of respondents wrote about caring for the community, 5.4% about feelings of connectedness, 1.9% about investment in the community resulting from deep ties, and 1.9% about trust. Fewer than 1% of respondents focused explicitly on issue positions, with statements such as: "...I would prefer that they have lived here a long time because they will likely more align with my political preferences" (21-year resident).

Among the 117 respondents who did not find officials' long-term residency to be important, 15% were focused on bringing in new perspectives. This sentiment was succinctly expressed by an 18-year resident: "New people can bring new solutions." Other responses related to the idea that someone should be able to do their job independent of where they came from.

These results, coupled with results from recent survey experiments (Ornstein et al. 2024; Elder and Lueders 2024), suggest that the average constituent would prefer a long-term resident over a short-term resident in office, were they given such an option in the real world. Their reasoning for this preference is also informative: roots signal knowledge and understanding of the municipality and its constituents. Strong-rooted officials are viewed as more legitimate and more able to make the right decisions given their ties to the community, meaning there are perceived symbolic and substantive benefits to being represented by long-term residents, independent of one's own residency tenure.

6.2 Roots and substantive representation

While few participants explicitly discussed the relationship between roots and policy preferences in their open-ended responses, those who wrote about understanding the issues in

Similar responses are placed close together in a high-dimensional vector space, and I then used KMeans clustering to group these into topic clusters. This differs from probabilistic topic models, which assign words to topics probabilistically. However, for a range of cluster solutions, the resulting topics consistently centered on respondents' knowledge and understanding of their municipalities, producing conceptually redundant clusters with limited interpretive value. I used these results to guide the text-item search.

the community were often indirectly referencing preferences about specific issues. To know about the community and its interests is to have a perception of what the people want. Policymaking should follow from understanding the place and the people in it.

The relationship between roots and local issue preferences is important for two main reasons. First, it could explain why constituents vote for or against a candidate. Alignment between preferences and roots could be an advantage for candidates in places where constituents have deeper roots, on average. In municipalities with higher rates of population turnover, however, this connection may not be advantageous. Second, this could influence decision-making post-election. Elites' perceptions of constituents' preferences may translate into the positions they take on important local issues. If strong-rooted constituents are among the most engaged residents (Einstein et al. 2020) and they are perceived as having distinct preferences from newcomers, this could shape how officials make decisions.

6.2.1 Perceived issue differences between newcomers and long-term residents

To explore whether local officials and constituents perceive a relationship between roots and preferences, I ask in both my elite survey and public survey about perceived divides between long-term residents and newcomers on local issues. The survey question reads: "In some cities and towns, people who have lived there a long time have different views on local issues than people who have moved there recently. In other places, there is no clear difference in preferences between those who have lived there a long time and those who haven't. On how many issues do you think there are differences in the views of newcomers and long-time residents in your municipality?"

Figure 8 shows that 53.7% of officials and 60.2% of constituents reported that at least half the issues in the municipality are divided between newcomers and long-term residents. Approximately two percent of respondents in both surveys report that there is no division. Although only 16.7% of constituents and 14.8% of officials claimed that most or all issues are divided along these lines, the results suggest that the majority of respondents perceive at least some division in local policy preferences between people with deep connections to

Figure 8: Perceived Difference in Newcomer vs. Long-Term Resident Issue Preferences

Note: "...On how many issues do you think there are differences in the views of newcomers and long-time residents in your municipality?"

their municipalities and newcomers. There is no clear relationship between perceiving these differences and officials' or constituents' own residency tenure (see Appendix I).

Respondents who said that there were at least a few issues with divides between these groups were then asked: "On what issues do you see the clearest divides between newcomers and long-time residents?" If the issues dividing newcomers and long-term residents were of little relevance to local government, these results would be less substantively significant, but this is not the case.

To identify the types of issues perceived as divisive, I first used a structural topic model (STM) to extract latent topics from the open-ended responses (Roberts et al. 2014). However, most words in most topics were related to development, growth, and housing. This pattern persisted even when varying the number of topics. The prevalence of these words made it difficult to identify other issues perceived as dividing newcomers and long-term residents.[32]

Therefore, I shifted my approach to a more transparent text-item search. I built a corpus of words under topic umbrellas, using the most common words from the topic modeling. I then searched for these words in the text of each response, generating binary indicators for

[32] I also applied a BERT-based sentence embedding model. For a range of cluster solutions (varying the number of topics), the resulting topics consistently centered on housing, development, and growth, producing redundant clusters. Other large language model approaches may have been appropriate, but I follow Soria (2025), who recommends such approaches be used as, "supplements to, rather than replacements for, human judgment."

when a specific topic was addressed. These binary indicators were then aggregated to provide summary measures for the prevalence of each topic. See Appendix P for more details.

Figure 9: Open-ended Responses on Division between Newcomers and Long-time Residents

Note: This presents the percent of responses on each topic among respondents who indicated there was at least some division between newcomers and long-time residents.

Figure 9 illustrates where respondents perceive the most conflict between newcomers and long-term residents. Among officials who reported such divides, 44.9% mentioned topics relating to zoning, growth, development, land use, housing, building, and density. Several of these responses referenced resistance to change, as in comments such as, "newcomers move here because they like the town, then think they can change the way things are," and, "newcomers want quick change and long time residents understand that it takes time to process change..." In contrast, only 10.3% of officials' open-ended responses focused on taxes, 5.21% on business, 4.64% on schools, 3.26% on the budget, 2.36% on utilities, 2.28% on infrastructure, and 1.79% on safety. Just 1.14% of responses mention race or explicitly race-related issues, and 0.33% mention immigration. These results suggest that officials view residency tenure as a cleavage in local politics, particularly on issues involving changes to the municipality's physical space and economy.

Constituents perceive similar divisions. Among those who reported differences on at least a few issues, 34.4% cited housing- and development-related issues as the primary divide.

Some responses also referenced resistance to change, such as, "Long term residents do not want change or added population," and, "Long time residents don't want the scenery to change or new building to get constructed." Only 12.4% mentioned business, 7.76% taxes, 7.45% schools, 4.24% infrastructure, 3.31% public safety, 3.21% the budget, 1.96% utilities, 1.86% immigration, and 0.62% race.

Among both officials and constituents, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between perceiving these divides and believing it is important that officials have community ties (see Appendix J). Either people prefer the issue positions of long-term residents, or there is a quality about these residents that overcomes an aversion to their preferences. It could also be that respondents do not have defined preferences and therefore trust the preferences of those with deep roots. I leave further investigation of this to future work.

Together, these findings illustrate two important implications that stem from the descriptive overrepresentation of rooted residents. First, the pool from which constituents can choose their representatives is composed of people who are perceived to have positions on important local issues that differ from the many constituents who are not running for office. Second, decision-making could be influenced post-election not only by officials' own positions, but also if local officials base their positions, in part, on what they believe their constituents want (Broockman and Skovron 2018). When local power-holders are long-term residents who perceive other engaged, rooted residents as wanting to preserve the status quo, policy on issues around land use may not reflect the views of newcomers or would-be newcomers. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, subsequent research should focus on exploring the relationship between officials' rootedness and land use policy.

7 Discussion and Conclusion

Most Americans are not regularly thinking about their local governments, but if they were to pay attention to the leaders making the most immediate decisions in their lives, they would come to realize that these are people deeply embedded in their communities. This is not

purely because they chose to elect rooted candidates, but rather, it is largely a result of the candidate pool. Drawing on multiple sources of data, I illustrate an important pattern of candidate emergence in local politics: candidates running for local office have strong roots, even when their constituents do not.

The literature on local politics has focused on multiple aspects of local elections, but scholars have overlooked one key informal qualification for candidacy: ties to one's community. This may be because such a quality seems obvious. Serving in municipal office requires familiarity with the place and its people. At the national level, scholars have considered connection to community a desirable quality, in part because rooted representatives may serve their districts better, but it is not a requirement for candidacy. In local politics, however, knowing and being a part of the municipality is integral to serving, potentially substituting for the political experience necessary at higher levels of government.

Using data from the California Election Data Archive, the L2 voter file, a novel dataset of California candidate statements, and an original survey of 1,280 local councilors and top officials throughout the United States, I show that rootedness is prevalent among candidates and sitting officials. Most candidates for city council and mayor in California have spent a significant share of their adult lives in the municipalities in which they ran. Nationwide, sitting officials have spent decades in their communities. Importantly, the role of roots in candidate emergence is consistent across different types of municipalities. The people serving in office are deeply rooted, not just because those with strong roots are more likely to win elections, but because those who run for office are embedded in their towns and cities.

The composition of the candidate pool is important for several reasons. First, it reveals who has access to candidacy. Women, people of color, and younger voters are all underrepresented among candidates, but short-term residents are even more so. Second, it highlights how rootedness is distinct from these other characteristics – not only is it a descriptive trait, but also a valence trait. I find that most constituents, regardless of their tenure, believe it is important to be locally rooted to serve in local office. Third, it raises a potential concern

about the underrepresentation of newcomers' interests. My survey data reveals that representatives and members of the public perceive differences between long-term residents and newcomers, particularly on important issues such as land use and growth. If issue preferences differ between these groups, and the candidate pool is comprised of deeply rooted residents, constituents with similar community connection could be at a representational advantage.

These findings raise several questions about what the descriptive overrepresentation of rooted individuals means for decision-making and inequality in representation. However, tracing the link from roots to preferences and ultimately to policy is difficult. Preferences can both influence and be influenced by local attachment, and the salience of issues potentially related to place-based attachment varies by community. These dynamics, combined with limited accessibility to data and the challenge of isolating rootedness from other traits or place-level factors, make generalizable analyses hard. Understanding how community ties translate into substantive representation remains a key area for future work.

Additionally, the research in this paper is not without its limitations. First, the candidate statement data is exclusive to California, primarily due to a lack of available data in most other states. This highlights the need for scholars to collect more data, particularly in smaller towns. Second, I am not showing the effect of roots on candidate emergence. Instead, I demonstrate that most candidates possess this quality, suggesting it is either a desired quality or perceived as such by candidates. The survey data support this idea, but future research should aim to more clearly identify whether some aspect of roots drives people to run for office. Third, the operationalization of roots may not fully capture the nuance of candidates' community ties, again highlighting a need for more data collection. Fourth, I do not evaluate the interaction between roots and other candidate characteristics, such as race or gender, which could be tied to roots and affect local candidate emergence. Future work should consider other factors alongside roots, as well as the ways in which various groups engage with their communities or are tied to specific segments of the community.

Despite these caveats and the need for more research, this study reveals important pat-

terns about local elections and representation. Candidates for local office typically have long residency tenure, which they highlight during campaigns. As a result, long-term residents are descriptively overrepresented among candidates, and in turn, elected officials. This does not inherently constitute an "overrepresentation" problem, as voters appear to genuinely value candidates with strong community ties, and the dominance of rooted officials may even be perceived as a strength of local democracy. Yet, the widespread perception that preferences differ between long-term and short-term residents raises concerns that this imbalance could contribute to the substantive underrepresentation of more mobile populations. This tension between rootedness and mobility underscores broader questions of equity and inclusion in local politics. In places with more transient populations, where issues like land use and growth are salient, we should consider how power in the hands of long-term residents influences whose voices are amplified in local democracy.

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Appendix

A. Summary of Analyses

Table A1: Summary of Analyses

Question	Answer	Test	Data
Who runs for local office?			
1. Are local roots salient in local elections?	Yes	A. Mentions of roots and community connection in official candidate statements B. Comparing roots mentions to mentions of other commonly studied identities	CEDA; Original dataset of CA candidate statements (2022 and 2024)
2. Do local candidates have strong roots?	Yes	A. Distribution of length of residency and percent of adult life lived in municipality	CEDA candidate data matched to L2 data (2018, 2020, 2022)
Who governs?			
3. Do sitting officials have strong roots?	Yes	A. Distribution of length of residency and percent of life lived in municipality	Nationwide survey of top officials and governing board members
4. Are roots associated with winning (when candidate rootedness varies)?	Yes	A. Share of elections with both long- and short-term residents running for office B. Relationship between residency tenure and election outcomes in contested races	CEDA–L2 matched candidate data
How do roots matter for representation?			
5. Are constituents as rooted as the people who run for office?	No	A. Averages and distributions of residency tenure for constituents and candidates B. Relationship between residency tenure and candidacy	CEDA–L2 matched candidate data; L2 data for all registered voters in CA (2018, 2020, 2022)
6. Does the rootedness of residents vary by municipality population?	Yes for constituents; No for officials	A. Relationship between population size and residency tenure, comparing candidates and constituents	CEDA–L2 matched candidate data; L2 CA voters; RUCA; U.S. Census
7. How do officials and constituents view roots as a qualification for office? And why?	Positively; Roots signal knowledge of the community	A. Survey questions on perceived qualifications B. Text-analysis of open-ended responses	Officials survey; Constituent survey
8. Do officials and constituents perceive policy differences between long-term residents and newcomers? On what issues?	Yes; Mainly land use and growth	A. Survey questions on perceived policy positions B. Text-analysis of open-ended responses	Officials survey; Constituent survey

CEDA = California Election Data Archive candidate lists
L2 = L2 voter file data
RUCA = Rural Urban Commuter Area scores
Officials survey: Original nationwide survey of governing board members and top officials; N = 1,280
Constituent survey: Original nationwide survey of members of the public; N = 991

B. Candidate Statement Data Collection

For 2022 statements, I began with a list of 2022 California municipal council candidates in the November election from the California Election Data Archive (CEDA). With help from a team of research assistants, I conducted web searches and reached out to counties in California. Counties are responsible for distributing voter guides to each municipality. These voter guides include official candidate statements for candidate who provide them. This is material that all constituents have an equal opportunity to read (registered voters receive them in the mail). There are 58 counties and 482 municipalities in California. In 2022, 430 cities in 51 counties had council elections, and in 2024, 440 cities in 53 counties. We received responses with full guides or a list of statements from 39 counties (249 municipalities) in 2022, and in 2024, 286 cities across 25 counties.

For 2024 statements, I began by collecting 2024 candidate guides, given the CEDA 2024 dataset was not available at the time of data collection. After collecting statements with research asssistants, I collected and cleaned data on candidates whose statements I had. Once 2024 CEDA data was available, I merged it onto the candidate statements data to calculate rates of missingness.

Figure B1: Counties and cities with candidate statements

Note: This shows counties that responded to requests, with cities for which I have statements in black.

Figure A1 shows the coverage of counties from which we were able to obtain statements for 2022 and 2024. Ideally, we would have statements from all candidates. Unfortunately, this was not possible because 1) not all candidates submit statements, 2) some counties would not provide statements, 3) some counties never responded to our requests.

Process: Research assistants conducted their coding for each statement using a survey I developed in Qualtrics to more easily keep track of coding. This survey included the research assistant's name, the name of the candidate, the municipality name, whether they mention

length (with a series of steps to determine this), whether they mention other connection to their current community (again, with specific instructions), the type of connection (if they mention it), the length of residency (if it is possible to obtain that from the information provided), and any additional notes. Below are the general guidelines for mentions of length and other connections.

Length of residency: this could look like the candidate providing a specific number of years they have lived there, stating that they grew up in a place, explaining that they have spent many years there, or some other variation of making a statement about their length of residency. These statements might look something like, 1) "As someone who grew up here, I have dedicated my life to Fresno and the Central Valley." 2) "I was born, raised, and have lived in Hayward for over 20 years." 3) "My wife and I raised our daughter here for 18 years." This should not include how long they have worked in the municipality or participated in local organizations unless it is obvious that they are also indicating their length of residency (i.e., moving to the municipality to work x number of years ago).

Connection to community: this could look like kids in the local *public* school district, committees and commissions they sit on, volunteer and organizational work within the current town/city. If it seems like a connection to community, you should put yes. If you select "yes" for connections, you will next be asked what these connections are, and you should write an explanation of this. For example, if they list several committees on which they volunteered, you can write "committee volunteer". If they were a sports coach for multiple local sports teams, you can write "local sports coach". If they served on the PTA, city environmental commission, and volunteer at church, you should feel free to write each of those three things or you can write "community volunteer". If you think the way they describe these involvements is different enough that they should be listed as separate connections to the community, list what you think is appropriate. If you select "no" for connections, you will be taken to the end of the survey and will then move onto the next candidate.

If you selected "yes" for length of residency, you will be taken to a question asking how long they have lived in the municipality. If they provide a number of years, enter that. If they say something like they grew up in the place or went to high school there, enter "grew up." If they don not provide anything specific enough but just say they've lived there a long time, you should make a note of that.

As a reliability check, we selected 100 statements for double-coding. Inter-coder agreement was substantial (Cohen's Kappa = 0.647, $p < 0.001$), and we resolved all discrepancies in person.

Why not a Large Language Model? I explored two automated approaches for this coding task: using ChatGPT-4 and training a supervised model on over 1,000 statements. However, both methods performed poorly relative to human coders. ChatGPT frequently misinterpreted text, mistaking years in a job or marriage as indicators of residency length, while overlooking direct statements about living in a place. It also struggled with identifying community connection, frequently missing relevant content or misclassifying it. The trained model similarly failed to achieve reliable accuracy. Given these limitations, I relied on research assistants who could apply structured decision rules and accurately interpret nuanced statements.

Missingness

Table A1 shows how many statements were missing and collected by population size for the 2022 and 2024 data. Rates of missingness, particularly in 2024, are greater in smaller municipalities. The largest municipalities also have high rates of missingness. With 2022 data, using an OLS model, I regress missingness on logged population. The estimate is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.0365$, $p < 0.001$). The smallest population is 245 people and the largest is 3,849,297. A shift from the smallest to the largest municipality is associated with a 35.3 percentage point increase in the likelihood of collecting a statement. However, given there are more small than large places, I still have a reasonable sample of the small places.

Table B1: Missing candidate statements by population bucket

	0-10,000	10,001-25,000	25,001-75,000	75,001-150,000	150,001-300,000	300,000+
Collected 2022	170	200	380	281	89	31
Missing 2022	192	228	289	175	54	40
% Missing 2022	53.04	53.27	43.20	38.38	37.76	56.34
Collected 2024	72	163	49	256	71	193
Missing 2024	252	229	81	362	22	200
% Missing 2024	77.78	58.42	62.31	58.58	23.66	50.89

I also compare places with statement coverage to those without using 2023 ACS 5-year place estimates. Overall, there are not major differences. Cities with statements are marginally denser and have higher household incomes, home values, and rents than cities without statements; mean population is smaller among covered cities but highly variable in both groups. Median age is modestly higher in covered cities, while racial composition is broadly similar. These differences indicate that coverage is slightly more common in more urban, higher-cost places. These are also the types of places with municipal websites and online access to voter guides, making statements more easily accessible.

Table B2: Balance Across Cities With and Without Statement Coverage

	No statements (N=91)		Statements (N=352)	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Population (1,000s)	84.7	414.6	63.7	103.0
Pop. density (per km^2)	1,313.2	786.6	1,667.9	1,270.9
Median HH income ($)	98,897.7	57,299.5	105,740.9	43,745.9
Median age (years)	38.2	8.4	39.9	7.1
Median home value ($)	731,074.8	586,163.4	795,001.5	469,968.7
Median rent ($)	1,832.1	822.6	2,016.0	653.5
White (%)	50.9	21.0	50.6	20.5
Hispanic (%)	42.3	30.4	37.3	24.5

Example Statements

Example with only length of residency mention (candidate won):

"*I decided to get involved with Angels Camp City Council when a vacancy became available in December 2020.* ***As someone who was raised in Angels Camp*** *and knew how wonderful a community we are fortunate to live in, it was essential to be involved and be a voice for the constituents.* ***I attended Mark Twain Elementary and am an alumnus of Bret Harte High School.*** *Having lived in other parts of the state I can confidently say there is truly no other place like Angels Camp. I attended Saint Mary's College of California in Moraga, graduating with a Communication BA and work as a Conference and Events Planner for NASPO. I have worked in both the private and public sectors, giving me a unique opportunity to understand our city's inner workings better. I take the job of being on the City Council seriously, and although I am an individual, I feel that the most critical part of my role in being a City Council member is being a voice for the citizens. I humbly ask for your vote to continue representing you in the City of Angels Camp.*"

Example with only other community connection mention (candidate won):

"*I'm running for Chico City Council to improve Chico's quality of civic life. Much progress has been made cleaning up our downtown and parks, and there is still much to do. As your councilmember, I will focus on these priorities. Public spaces are for the public. Living in tents in public areas cannot be allowed and has proven to be a disaster for the community as well as the homeless. Now that the pallet shelter is open, the homeless have a safe, clean place to go. Public safety must be enhanced. Chico has 40% fewer police officers than the average for California cities of our size. Chico needs more police officers so they can better patrol our city, including Bidwell Park and our downtown area. Housing should be more affordable and we need more of it. Planning and approval requirements must be simplified and streamlined to increase housing supply.* ***I'm a local business owner*** *and grew up on a small farm. My career experience includes the management of companies and solving problems, experience I will put to work to help make Chico a better place to live. I would be honored to have your vote.*"

Example with neither length nor other connection mention (candidate lost):

"*I'm not a career politician. My day job is all about customer advocacy, and that translates directly to constituent advocacy. Every day, I talk with customers to understand their problems and concerns, and to learn what negative things my company has to change, and what good things need to stay the same. And every day, I push company leadership to prioritize and invest in making improvements that will benefit our customers the most. That's what I'll do for you: push other community leaders to do what benefits the people of Concord the most. The situation with the Naval Weapons Station is an ongoing disaster; our district and city are suffering from the complete lack of progress. And for years, residents have been asking city council for a humane and ethical solution to our homelessness crisis. But all we see is more sweeps. I'm listening to your agenda and am ready to fight for it. Concord won't get better if we keep doing the same old things. The incumbent has been in office for 25 years, and it's time for change. Elect me, Quinne Anderson, as your new Councilmember for District 1. Let's break the cycle.*"

C. Coding Mentions of Other Traits

In Table 1 in the paper, I present the number and percent of all councilor candidate statements in my dataset that include an explicit mention of gender, race, party, ideology, or immigrant status. Unlike mentions of length of residency or connection to community, these are very infrequent.

First, I conducted a keyword search across all statements using a dictionary of relevant terms associated with each trait. For each trait, I generated a binary variable coded 1 if the statement included a term from the corresponding category and 0 otherwise. The initial dictionary was developed with assistance from ChatGPT-4.

- Gender: gender, woman, women, female, male, man, men
- Race: black, african American, afro-American, Asian, asian American, chinese|, ilipino, indian, japanese, korean, pacific islander, native hawaiian, hispanic, latino, latina, latinx, mexican, mexican american, puerto rican, cuban, salvadoran, middle eastern, arab, armenian, iranian, persian, native american, american indian, indigenous, tribal member, chicano, chicana, biracial, multiracial, mixed race, person of color, people of color, poc
- Immigrant: immigrant, first-generation, first gen, second-generation, second gen, came to (the)(US, U.S., America, this country), born abroad, foreign-born, naturalized citizen, naturalized, moved (here, to the US) from, arrived in (the)(US, U.S., America), refugee, asylum-seeker
- Partisanship: partisan, party, nonpartisan, endorsed by .* party
- Party: democrat, republican, gop, independent, libertarian, socialist, green party, working families
- Ideaology: liberal, conservative, progressive, leftist, maga, right-wing, Left-wing, centrist, moderate, far-(left|right)

Second, I downloaded the dataset containing the statements and the binary term indicators, and I hand-coded whether each term was used as an identity marker or merely as a descriptive quality, using the same criteria applied in my local roots coding. For example, the word "independent" appeared frequently, but it rarely indicated partisan identification as an Independent. Hand-coding allowed me to capture those rare identity references while disregarding irrelevant uses. Similarly, terms like man, woman, and gender often appeared in the context of serving specific groups, rather than expressing the candidate's own identity. While the keyword list was non-exhaustive and some terms may have been initially missed, my review of nearly all statements during the hand-coding process allowed me to identify and include additional relevant cases. I completed the 2022 statements' partisan and ideological coding with a team of research assistants to ensure replicability. For that coding, our Cohen's Kappa was 0.836 ($p < 0.001$), indicating high inter-coder reliability.

D. Population Models – Survey Data

Table D1: Relationship between residency tenure (Survey) & municipality population size

	Length (Years)	% Life	Length (Years)	% Life
log(Population)	−0.272	0.004	−0.035	0.008
	(0.390)	(0.006)	(0.426)	(0.007)
Rurality			2.196	0.035
			(1.941)	(0.030)
Constant	33.379***	0.456***	30.775***	0.415***
	(3.515)	(0.056)	(3.997)	(0.065)
Observations	1,220	1,220	1,220	1,220
Adjusted R^2	−0.0005	−0.0005	0.0001	0.0001

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: These data are from the survey of local officials (governing board members and top officials combined). The population ranges from around 300 to just under one million.

E. State-level candidate statements and residency tenure

Table E1: Mentions of connection and length among a sample of state-level candidate statements (2022 & 2024)

Mention	Total	Pct.	type
No	107	76.43	Length
Yes	33	23.57	Length
No	31	22.14	Connection
Yes	109	77.86	Connection

Note: This includes 140 state candidates for which I was able to collect statements. Statements were coded following the same procedure as for city council statements. There is overlap in which state-level candidates mentioned length and mentioned connection, but the percentage who mention Length happens to nearly mirror the percentage that do not mention connection. These, however, are not the same group of candidates.

I also matched state-level legislative candidates (Assembly and Senate) from CA in 2018, 2020, and 2022 to the L2 voter file. Using the `fuzzylink` R package, I linked candidates by full name, exact matching on municipality for all municipalities that overlapped with the district in which the candidate was running. This resulted in several false positives for each candidate, and I eliminated matches by hand using Wikipedia birthdate information and other online resources. In total, I have 199 matched state-level candidates.

Figure E1: Distribution of State Candidate Tenure in District

Note: This presents the distribution of the length of registration and percent of adult life registered in a municipality in the district for state-level candidates.

F. Missingness in the L2 Match

Tables F1 and F2 report the number and percent of matched candidates by population bucket, combining data from 2018, 2020, and 2022 for both mayors and councilors. Match rates are consistently higher for councilors, with approximately three-quarters matched across all population categories. For mayors, match rates increase with municipality size, reaching nearly 80% in the largest cities.

Table F1: Number of matched and unmatched candidates by population bucket

	0-10,000	10,001-25,000	25,001-75,000	75,001-150,000	150,001-300,000	300,000+
Councilors Matched	796	928	1592	1031	362	164
Total Councilors	1017	1226	2042	1384	479	223
Mayors Matched	58	72	167	144	90	55
Total Mayors	97	115	260	222	119	69

Table F2: Percent of matched candidates by population bucket

Role	0-10,000	10,001-25,000	25,001-75,000	75,001-150,000	150,001-300,000	300,000+
Councilors	78.27	75.69	77.96	74.49	75.57	73.54
Mayors	59.79	62.61	64.23	64.86	75.63	79.71

G. Elite Survey Procedure, Response Rates, and Descriptives

In December of 2023, I surveyed 1,280 top elected officials and governing board members from municipalities across the United States. These officials come from 1,183 unique places. In 83 places, two officials responded, six places three officials, and one place four officials. The sample was 50,000 local officials. I used data from PowerAlmanac from June 2023. Between June and December, several people left office, died, or changed their contact information. Thousands of emails bounced or were inactive addresses. Non-response could have been a result of non-contact or actual non-response. The distribution method closely follows the American Municipal Officials Survey (AMOS) – challenges associated with response rates are similar.

The survey was distributed by email through Qualtrics and recruited respondents through a link that would take them to the survey. The email also included a link to a website describing the survey with a university domain to increase the likelihood that respondents would not consider this spam and asked that only the official addressed in the email respond, not staffers or other officials. Respondents could complete the survey at their own pace. There was no option to go back once completing a question, but the link sent to their email would allow them to return if they closed out at any point. After three days, I sent a reminder email. Four days later, I sent a final reminder. One month from the initial distribution, I downloaded responses for analysis. I responded to all emails with questions and questions in the open-response box at the end of the survey.

Figure G1: Municipality locations for elite survey respondents

Note: This shows elite survey respondents' locaitions. The map excludes two municipalities in Alaska to ensure those respondents remain anonymous.

Table G1: Overall Response Rate (completed surveys)

Type	Response Rate (%)	N
Governing Board Member	2.19	876
Top Elected Official	4.04	404
Total	2.56	1280

Note: This is based on the initial sample of 50,000 (40,000 governing board members and 10,000 top officials). Discussions with other scholars using the same data source and approach revealed that these response rates are what is expected of online surveys of local elites.

Table G2: All US Municipalities vs. Officials' Municipalities

	All		Officials'	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Population	10666	1207	17006	4844
Rurality (0-10, rural to urban)	3.87	2	3.27	2
Pct. White	75.5		82.77	
Pct. Black	13.6		6.43	
Pct. Asian	6.3		3.93	
Pct. Hispanic	19.1		8.57	
Pct. Voting Age Population	75.34		76.1	
Pct. Over Age 65	19.6		19.57	

Note: This shows means and medians for demographics of all US municipalities (from the Census) versus the demographics of municipalities represented by officials who responded to the survey.

Table G3: Population of municipalities represented by respondents by role

	Governing Board Member	Top Elected Official
0-5,000	399	250
5,001-10,000	165	61
10,001-25,000	155	57
25,001-75,000	111	27
75,001-150,000	29	8
150,001-300,000	9	1
300,000+	8	0

Note: This is the number of respondents representing populations within these buckets.

Table G4: Gender Distribution

Gender	Count	Pct. of Total
Man	860	67.19
Woman	395	30.86
Other	10	0.78
NA	15	1.17

Table G5: Race/Ethnicity Distribution

Race	Count	Pct. of Total
Asian	9	0.70
Black	31	2.42
Hispanic	36	2.81
Middle Eastern	5	0.39
Native American	8	0.62
White	1145	89.45
Mixed	3	0.23
Other	6	0.47
NA	37	2.89

Note: Other includes all respondents who wrote in an additional category that did not fit within the other racial/ethnic groups. NA includes all respondents who provided no response to this question.

Table G6: Regional Distribution among Respondents

Region	Respondents	Pct. of Respondents	Sample N	Pct. of Sample
East North Central	355	27.73	13485	26.97
East South Central	42	3.28	2885	5.77
Middle Atlantic	271	21.17	10020	20.04
Mountain West	99	7.73	2300	4.60
New England	101	7.89	3315	6.63
Pacific West	121	9.45	2924	5.85
South Atlantic	104	8.12	5189	10.38
West North Central	125	9.77	5220	10.44
West South Central	62	4.84	4662	9.32

Note: There are Census regions. States within these groups are categorized by the US Census Bureau.

Table G7: Party Distribution

Party	Respondents	Pct.
Democrat	548	42.81
Republican	519	40.55
Independent	125	9.77
Other	88	6.88

Note: Democrat and Republican includes Independent leaners. Independent includes pure Independents who do not lean towards either party. Other includes any write-in that did not fit into one of these other three groups.

Table G8: Population by Officials' Party

Party	Total Constituents	Pct.
Democrat	11361428	52.19
Republican	7723402	35.48
Independent	1633015	7.50
Other	1050165	4.82

Note: I add the total population for each municipality represented by respondents from each party to show the number of constituents represented by officials of each party. The number of respondents from each party is near equal, but Democratic respondents have larger constituencies.

Figure G2: Age Distribution

H. Measures of roots from the survey

Figure H1: Where the official spent the majority of their adolescence

Note: Around one-third of respondents grew up in their municipality. Another 20% grew up in a municipality nearby. Only around 30% grew up in another state or outside the country.

Figure H2: Has or had children in the local public schools

Note: The majority of respondents have children, and the majority of those with children had or have them attending local public schools.

Figure H3: At least one parent or partner/spouse spent majority of adolescence in the current municipality

Note: Most officials have neither at least one parent nor a spouse/partner who spent the majority of their adolescence in their municipality. Around one-fifth do, suggesting a very strong connection among those officials.

Figure H4: Own a home or business in their current municipality

Note: Almost all respondents own a home. Only around one-fifth of officials in the survey own a business.

Figure H5: Served in another elected role or in appointed/volunteer position

Note: Most officials were not in elected roles prior to their current position. However, the majority were involved in other community roles, either appointed positions within the local government or volunteer positions in the community.

I. Models corresponding to Figure 7

Table I1: Relationship between importance of officials having lived a long time in a place and residency tenure

	DV: Importance of long residency tenure					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Prop. Life	0.253***	0.252***	0.219***			
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.029)			
Years Lived				0.004***	0.004***	0.004***
				(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0005)
Rurality		−0.009	0.006		−0.009	−0.001
		(0.024)	(0.026)		(0.023)	(0.025)
log(Population)		0.007	0.014*		0.010	0.017*
		(0.006)	(0.007)		(0.006)	(0.007)
Seniority			0.045			−0.055
			(0.079)			(0.081)
Woman			−0.008			−0.010
			(0.018)			(0.017)
Party (D=1)			−0.086***			−0.085***
			(0.016)			(0.016)
Non-White			0.067			0.066
			(0.036)			(0.034)
Constant	0.512***	0.457***	0.447***	0.513***	0.429***	0.420***
	(0.015)	(0.057)	(0.064)	(0.014)	(0.057)	(0.062)
Observations	1,231	1,231	999	1,280	1,280	1,026
Adjusted R^2	0.071	0.071	0.096	0.080	0.082	0.113

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: This corresponds to Figure 7 for officials. Using an OLS model, I regress responses to the question about whether officials find it important for representatives to have lived in a place a long time (scaled 0-1) on the proportion of an officials' life that they have lived in their municipality (0-1) or the length in years. Models 2 and 5 include place-level controls, and models 3 and 6 include respondent-level controls as well. Coefficients remain statistically significant and in the positive direction for all models. Robust standard errors are clustered at the place level.

Table I2: Relationship between perceived issue division and residency tenure

	DV: Perceived Division on Issues Between Newcomers and Long-term Residents					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Prop. Life	−0.023	−0.023	−0.008			
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.024)			
Years Lived				−0.001*	−0.001*	−0.001
				(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0004)
Rurality		−0.006	−0.002		−0.006	−0.0001
		(0.018)	(0.020)		(0.017)	(0.019)
log(Population)		−0.003	−0.005		−0.004	−0.006
		(0.005)	(0.005)		(0.004)	(0.005)
Seniority			−0.065			−0.037
			(0.053)			(0.053)
Woman			0.042**			0.042**
			(0.014)			(0.013)
Party (D=1)			0.012			0.012
			(0.013)			(0.013)
Non-White			0.001			0.011
			(0.025)			(0.025)
Constant	0.433***	0.462***	0.457***	0.442***	0.477***	0.473***
	(0.012)	(0.042)	(0.048)	(0.011)	(0.042)	(0.049)
N	1,231	1,231	999	1,279	1,279	1,025
Adjusted R^2	0.0003	−0.001	0.010	0.004	0.003	0.013

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: Using an OLS model, I regress responses to the question about whether officials perceived issue preference differences between newcomers and long-term residents on residency tenure for survey respondents. Models 2 and 5 include place-level controls, and models 3 and 6 include respondent-level controls as well. Robust standard errors are clustered at the place level.

J. Importance of residency tenure and division on local issues

Table J1: Relationship between perceived importance of officials' rootedness and perceived division between long-term residents and newcomers

	DV: Importance of long residency tenure			
	Constituents		**Officials**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Issue Division	0.108*	0.115*	−0.071	−0.030
	(0.043)	(0.046)	(0.043)	(0.044)
Years Lived		0.002***		0.291***
		(0.001)		(0.039)
Logged Pop.		0.014**		0.018**
		(0.004)		(0.006)
Age		0.0005		0.002**
		(0.001)		(0.001)
Woman		0.017		−0.004
		(0.017)		(0.017)
Party (D=1)		−0.048**		−0.084***
		(0.018)		(0.016)
Constant	0.737***	0.546***	0.671***	0.318***
	(0.021)	(0.062)	(0.019)	(0.069)
N	991	858	1,279	1,021
Adjusted R^2	0.006	0.040	0.002	0.116

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: I regress responses to the question about whether officials find it important for representatives to have lived in a place a long time (scaled 0-1) on perceived division between newcomers and long-term residents (scaled 0-1, with 1 being all issues). Models 2 and 4 include controls. Coefficients for constituents are positive and statistically significant. A shift from perceiving no issue division to seeing division on all issues is associated with a 10 percentage point increase in perceived importance of officials' rootedness. Robust standard errors are clustered at the place level.

K. The challenge of causal identification

Even with the limited variation in candidate roots, ideally, I would be able to estimate the causal effect of strong roots (or the strongest roots) on winning local elections. That would demonstrate whether candidates who are deeply tied to their communities have an advantage in local elections over those with relatively less weak ties, the same way in which scholars have found that candidates for state and national government fare better when they were born in or grew up in their municipalities. There are several data challenges to this. First, I am unable to access large-scale data on candidates' place of birth, where they attended high school, how long they have lived in their municipalities (beyond the L2 data), or how far they live from the municipality in which they grew up. Second, so many local candidates have lived in their municipalities for enough years to establish connections to the community that

it is difficult to identify what counts as variation in the strength of roots between candidates within a municipality.

Beyond these data constraints, however, there are other methodological challenges to estimating an effect of roots on electoral outcomes. The main problem with a basic OLS model, preventing us from interpreting these estimates as causal, is the issue of selection, which creates endogeneity bias as both roots and electoral outcomes are influenced by unobserved candidate characteristics. Adding candidate-level controls to the models will not entirely overcome this bias. Additionally, there is self-selection into the candidate pool. As described in the paper, candidates with stronger roots are likely more willing to run because they expect it will help them to win (or they have additional resources and connections from their rootedness). Finally, incumbents with strong roots might strategically deter challengers with strong roots. Controlling for incumbency does not account for this problem.

Instrumental variables could be one approach. However, potential instruments like job relocation likely violate the exclusion restriction. For example, relocation might affect winning through paths other than length of residency. Second, most plausible instruments, like economic shocks affecting mobility, are at the municipality level, not candidate level. Additionally, given limited variation in candidate roots, this would be a weak first stage. Even if I had a valid instrument, it would only identify effects for a specific complier population - candidates whose roots were affected by the instrument - which may not be relevant given the prevalence of strong roots among candidates.

What about a close-election regression-discontinuity design? Even if I dichotomized treatment, for council elections, there are multiple councilors per municipality and institutions vary by district or at-large (and this varies across time as well). For both mayoral and council elections, there are not enough close elections between long-term and short-term residents, and the places with close elections between these types of candidates are not representative of all municipalities. Moreover, vote margin likely correlates with candidate roots in ways that violate key RDD assumptions about the continuity of potential outcomes at the threshold. The LATE would not provide much information and I would be underpowered.

What if I applied more creative methods? For example, generalized propensity scores are often used to estimate the effects of a continuous variable, like residency length. However, candidates clustering at high residency lengths is again a problem. Even if there were more variation, this does not magically allow us to balance on unobserved confounders, and it assumes no unmeasured confounding between residency length and electoral outcomes. Additionally, municipality-level differences likely violate overlap assumptions.

In sum, the challenges of causal inference are vast. However, the descriptive trends uncovered in the paper are important independent of causally identifying an effect of rootedness on winning or running. My argument about the importance of roots in local politics does not suffer from this limitation.

L. Municipality-level residency tenure and population size

Table L1: Relationship between Population Size and Residency Tenure (control for rurality)

	log(Years Lived)			log(% Life Lived)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
log(Population)	-0.0532**	-0.0140	-0.0462**	-0.0008	0.0490+	0.0210*
	(0.0064)	(0.0260)	(0.0103)	(0.0088)	(0.0273)	(0.0096)
Rurality (0-1)	-0.0664+	-0.0529	-0.1264+	-0.0027	-0.0460	-0.0530
	(0.0378)	(0.1923)	(0.0702)	(0.0642)	(0.1923)	(0.0611)
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,338	586	4,873	1,338	586	4,873
	Constituents	Mayoral	Council	Constituents	Mayoral	Council

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This replicates Table 5, but excludes the control for age.

Figure L1: Distribution of Residency Tenure Using Individual-level Constituent Data

Note: This presents the distribution of years registered in the municipality for constituents and candidates. Here, I use all constituents, not the average across municipalities, meaning this distribution is driven by larger cities.

Table L2: Relationship Between Population and Mentions of Embeddedness

	Mention Length		Mention Connections	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
log(Population)	−0.0130	−0.0203*	−0.0010	−0.0057
	(0.0086)	(0.0100)	(0.0072)	(0.0079)
Rurality (0-1)		−0.1140+		−0.0727
		(0.0678)		(0.0521)
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,955	1,955	1,955	1,955

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This presents the relationship between municipality population size and mentions of embeddedness in councilors' candidate statements. Robust standard errors are clustered at the municipality level.

Figure L2: Distribution of Residency Tenure Using Percent of Life lived

Note: This presents the distribution of residency tenure, but rather than using years registered, I use the percent of adult life registered.

Table L3: Average Residency Tenure by Population Bucket

pop.bucket	Average Tenure (Years)	Average Tenure (% Life)
Up to 10,000	10.15	24.05
10,000-19,999	9.39	23.67
20,000-49,999	9.20	24.60
50,000-99,999	8.91	23.61
100,000-199,999	8.63	23.08
200,000+	7.89	22.68

Note: This presents the average tenure of municipalities within each population bucket. I take the average tenure within each municipality and average across those averages.

M. Relationship between statement mentions and L2 residency tenure

Table M1: Mentions of Length/Connection and Residency Tenure

	Length	Connection	Length	Connection
Prop. Life	0.225**	0.137*		
	(0.083)	(0.063)		
Length			0.392**	0.453***
			(0.123)	(0.088)
Constant	0.440***	0.792***	0.446***	0.719***
	(0.058)	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.039)
N	655	655	655	655
Adjusted R^2	0.010	0.008	0.014	0.047

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

Note: I regress mentions of length or other connections from candidate statements on length of residency (rescaled 0-1) or proportion of life lived in a place. This includes the 655 candidates for whom I both have statements and an L2 match. Greater residency tenure is associated with a higher likelihood of mentioning length of residency. Despite limited variation in connection, there is also a positive association here as well. I use robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

N. Alternative Measures of Roots and Winning

Candidate statements: For constituents to base their electoral decisions on candidates' roots, they need to be aware of candidates' residency tenure. In California, official candidate statements provide accessible information on candidates, as every voter receives a guide with these statements. In smaller communities, voters may already know the person running for office, but in mid-to-large-sized cities, the candidate statement could be the only information available before voting. While methods of information-sharing vary across states, this remains the most direct way to measure the information voters have.

Table N1: Mentions of residency tenure & winning

	Total		**Percent**	
	Mentions	**No Mentions**	**Mentions**	**No Mentions**
Winning Candidates				
Length	325	235	58.04	41.96
Other Connection	531	29	94.82	5.18
Either Length or Other Connection	544	16	97.14	2.86
Non-Winning Candidates				
Length	366	225	61.93	38.07
Other Connection	492	99	83.25	16.75
Either Length or Other Connection	533	58	90.19	9.81

Note: This table presents mentions of residency tenure and community connections among the 560 winning candidates and 591 losing candidates in 2022. "Either Length or Connection" counts candidates who mention length, connection, or both.

Table N1 shows the data on electoral outcomes and mentions of length or other connection for 2022 statements (where I had greater access to data than for 2024). Among the 560 winning candidates with statements, only 16 mention neither their length of residency nor other connections to their community. This is not too different from losing candidates, among which only 58 out of 591 make no mention of these ties. The majority of candidates provide information to voters about who they are in relation to their communities. Non-winning candidates mention length at marginally higher rates than winning candidates. The opposite is true and the magnitude of the difference is larger for mentions of other connections. Among winners, 97% of candidates mention either length or connection. While there is still a high rate among losers, there is some evidence of an expected difference here: winners talk about their connection more on average. Though, even non-viable losing candidates (those who lost by margins of greater than 5-10 percentage points) are more likely to mention their connections and length of residency than to not do so.

Not every winning candidate discusses their residency tenure, but very few candidates discuss neither length of residency nor other connections to their community. Among the 16 winning candidates who did not mention either, they are in an uncontested race, are running against another person who does not mention community ties, put a heavy emphasis on preserving the community for locals, or have a list of endorsements that highlight their connections without explicitly stating those connections. For example, one of these candidates asserted, "We need a city that puts locals first, before the casinos, before the developers,

and before the resorts. Locals are being priced out..." Rather than explicitly stating their own connections, they discuss the importance of preservation of the local community, which may signal something about their connection as well.

If mentioning ties to one's community were important for winning and candidates were aware of this, it would follow that all candidates would mention these connections. Only candidates who fail to do so – whether by oversight or miscalculation – would be exceptions, and those who neglect this yet still succeed likely possess compensatory strengths, such as community endorsements. The candidates who do not mention length do emphasize other connections, seemingly either making up for the fact that they have weak roots or assuming their other connections signal roots.

Table N2 shows that only half of all races for which I have candidate statements in 2022 include a mix of candidates who mention and do not mention length of residency, and less than a quarter include a mix of candidates who do or do not mention other connection. In the majority of races that have a mix of people who mention length and those who do not, most candidates do mention some other connection. To compare win rates for candidates who mention roots and those who do not would require observing this relationship within an electoral race, but given most races do not include this mix, we would not learn much from that comparison.

Table N2: Proportion of Races with mix of candidates who mention and do not mention roots

	Electoral races with candidate mix
Length	0.516
Other connection	0.236

Note: An electoral race with a candidate mix indicates there are multiple candidates in the race and there is at least one candidate who mentions roots and another who does not.

When candidates with shorter residency tenure do run, they tend to compete in races where their opponents also have relatively weak roots. These candidates also often compensate by emphasizing other forms of community engagement, further supporting the notion that local connections are perceived as valuable electoral assets. These patterns support the argument that roots shape local electoral competition through candidate entry and campaign messaging, even if their direct effect on winning is difficult to isolate.

Wikipedia Scrape

Ideally, I would be able to identify additional indicators of candidate rootedness to both evaluate entry into candidacy and compare across winners and losers in local elections. Birthplace, for example, is commonly used in studies of roots in state and national politics, but this information is not available in the L2 voter file. To supplement, I use de Benedictis-Kessner et al. (2023) data on mayors to scrape Wikipedia for candidate names and obtain birth place. I generated a dataset of 655 unique mayoral candidates from 1989-2021. 31.01% of candidates from these large cities were born in the city in which they ran for mayor. However, most local candidates, especially those who lost and those from smaller municipalities,

do not have Wikipedia pages. As a result, the data are very incomplete. Table N3 presents the results of the scrape, but they should be interpreted with caution due to high rates of missingness. This limitation highlights the need for improved strategies to systematically collect local candidate information in future research.

Table N3: Mayors Born in Their Municipality

Roots	Total	Percent
Born Elsewhere	464	75.32
Born in Municipality	191	31.01

O. Public survey descriptives

Figure O1: Locations of Public Survey Respondents

Note: This presents public survey respondents' locations. The map excludes 1 municipality in Hawaii.

Table O1: Respondents by Population

pop.bucket	Total	Percent
Up to 10,000	189	19.07
10,000-19,000	133	13.42
20,000-49,000	187	18.87
50,000-99,000	161	16.25
100,000-199,000	118	11.91
200,000+	203	20.48

Table O2: All US Municipalities vs. Public Survey Sample

	All		Survey Sample		
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Pct. Of Sample
Population	10706	1206	399577	46202	
Rurality (0-10, rural to urban)	3.87	2	1.66	1	
Pct. White	75.53		64.84		76.39
Pct. Black	7.72		16.14		11.3
Pct. Asian	1.59		7.57		9.69
Pct. Hispanic	9.68		17.18		8.38
Pct. Voting Age Population	75.34		72.76		100
Pct. Over Age 65	19.93		16.27		7.87

Table O3: Gender Distribution

Gender	Count	Pct. of Total
Man	493	49.75
Woman	488	49.24
Other	10	1.01

Table O4: Regional Distribution among Respondents

Region	Respondents	Pct. of Respondents
East North Central	149	15.04
East South Central	52	5.25
Middle Atlantic	144	14.53
Mountain West	62	6.26
New England	36	3.63
Pacific West	164	16.55
South Atlantic	234	23.61
West North Central	53	5.35
West South Central	97	9.79

Table O5: Party Distribution

Party	Respondents	Pct.
Democrat	455	45.91
Republican	238	24.02
Pure Independent	115	11.60
Independent Lean Democrat	99	9.99
Independent Lean Republican	60	6.05
Pure Other	10	1.01
Other Lean Democrat	13	1.31
Other Lean Republican	1	0.10

P. Open-ended Text Analysis

Importance of Long-Term Residents in Office

Terms: understand, idea, trust, know, grasp, familiar, care/caring, position, invest, motivated, connect

As outlined in the paper, I generated binary variables for each of the terms and then hand-checked that each was capturing an actual instance related to that term. For example, a response that included "I have no idea" would not be considered an instance of a constituent believing rooted officials have a better idea about what is best for the community.

Perceived Issue Division

- Housing: development, develop, growth, grow, zoning, zone, land use, housing, houses, space, preserv, density, dense, home size, lot size, expansion, permit, use of land
- Safety: police, policing, public safety
- Taxing: tax, taxing, taxes
- Budget: budget, budgeting, spending, revenue, spend
- Race: race, racism, ethnicity, racial
- Immigration: immigrant, immigration, migrant
- Business: business, businesses, company
- Schools: school, schools, education, schooling
- Infrastructure: infrastructure, roads, bridges
- Utilities: water, gas, utilities, electric

Q. Residency Tenure and Candidacy

Table Q1: Residency Length (scaled) regressed on candidacy

	Years Lived (Scaled 0-1)	
	(1)	(2)
Candidate	0.2072**	0.1769**
	(0.0058)	(0.0021)
N Candidates	586	4,873
Observations	39,097,818	39,097,818
City × Year FEs	✓	✓
Election	Mayoral	Council

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This replicates the results in Table 4, but here the outcome variable is not logged, but instead rescaled from years to 0-1 (minimum to maximum years).

Table Q2: Residency Tenure (logged) on candidacy (controls)

	log(Years Lived)		% of Life Lived	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Candidate	1.435***	1.355***	0.4159***	0.4042***
	(0.0280)	(0.0113)	(0.0115)	(0.0047)
Age (std.)	0.4429***	0.4429***	-0.0323***	-0.0323***
	(0.0042)	(0.0042)	(0.0014)	(0.0014)
Woman	0.0037	0.0038	-0.0020**	-0.0019**
	(0.0025)	(0.0024)	(0.0010)	(0.0010)
Democrat	-0.1091***	-0.1090***	-0.0230***	-0.0230***
	(0.0047)	(0.0047)	(0.0014)	(0.0014)
Observations	27,295,330	27,295,330	34,275,392	34,275,392
City × Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Election	Mayoral	Council	Mayoral	Council

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This replicates Table 4, but includes controls for age, gender (L2 estimate), and party (L2 registration).

Table Q3: Candidacy on Residency Tenure (logged)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
log(Years Lived)	$1.98 \times 10^{-5**}$	0.0001^{**}		
	(1.75×10^{-6})	(9.07×10^{-6})		
log(% of Life Lived)			$1.56 \times 10^{-5**}$	0.0001^{**}
			(1.37×10^{-6})	(7.53×10^{-6})
Observations	39,097,818	39,097,818	39,097,818	39,097,818
City × Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Election	Mayoral	Council	Mayoral	Council

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: This presents the relationship between candidacy and residency tenure, but here, candidacy is the outcome. This tests how predictive tenure is of candidacy. *Candidate* indicates whether the registered voter is a candidate or not in the election year. Robust standard errors, clustered at the municipality level, are in parentheses. The small coefficients reflect the rarity of the outcome. Very few individuals run for local office, meaning even potentially strong predictors like residency tenure will appear to have minimal marginal effects in absolute terms. These estimates speak more to the direction and consistency of the relationship than to substantive magnitude.

Table Q4: Logit of Candidacy on Residency Tenure (logged)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
log(Years Lived)	1.506^{**}	1.306^{**}		
	(0.0511)	(0.0191)		
log(% of Life Lived)			1.554^{**}	1.587^{**}
			(0.0661)	(0.0270)
Observations	9,459,054	30,215,105	9,459,054	30,215,105
City × Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Election	Mayoral	Council	Mayoral	Council

$^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$

Note: I test whether tenure predicts candidacy using logistic regression, with robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level. Models 1 and 3 present log odds for mayoral candidacy; Models 2 and 4 for council candidacy. Coefficients represent changes in the log odds of running for office associated with a one-unit increase in the logged measure of tenure. Substantively, a shift from 5 to 15 years of residency – a one-unit increase in log(Years Lived) – is associated with a 4.5-fold increase in the odds of running for mayor ($\exp(1.5) \approx 4.5$). Because candidacy is a rare event, the absolute increase in predicted probability is small but meaningful: in the mayoral model, the probability of candidacy increases from approximately 0.0001 to 0.00045.

Table Q5: Comparison of Standard and Rare-Events Corrected Logit Models

Model	Intercept	Intercept_{SE}	Slope	Slope_{SE}	Pseudo_{R2}	N	Correction
Mayor (Corrected)	-14.8280	0.1666	1.5651	0.0535	NA	49381351	Yes
Mayor (Standard)	-14.9282	0.1666	1.5651	0.0535	0.0916	49381351	No
Council (Corrected)	-12.3999	0.0541	1.4614	0.0177	NA	49381351	Yes
Council (Standard)	-12.5002	0.0541	1.4614	0.0177	0.1011	49381351	No

Note: This table compares estimates from standard logistic regression and rare-events corrected models using King and Zeng's (2001) prior correction method. Given candidacy is extremely rare, the intercept in standard models could be biased downward. The corrected models apply a constant offset to adjust the baseline rate of candidacy. As expected, the intercepts shift slightly, but the slope estimates remain virtually identical, indicating that the observed relationship between residency tenure and candidacy is not driven by rare-events bias.

Table Q6: Relationship Between Characteristics and Candidacy

Panel A: Mayoral Candidates					
	20+ Years	10+ Years	Male	Age: 50+	White (predicted)
Candidate	0.5621**	0.6805**	0.2337**	0.2183**	0.0965**
	(0.0237)	(0.0152)	(0.0213)	(0.0214)	(0.0220)
City × Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	49,381,351	49,381,351	48,672,166	49,381,351	49,381,351

Panel B: Council Candidates					
	20+ Years	10+ Years	Male	Age: 50+	White (predicted)
Candidate	0.4659**	0.6309**	0.1846**	0.0857**	0.0945**
	(0.0086)	(0.0057)	(0.0077)	(0.0080)	(0.0070)
City × Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	49,381,351	49,381,351	48,672,166	49,381,351	49,381,351

Note: Each observation is a registered voter. Panel A shows mayoral candidacy; Panel B shows council candidacy. Coefficients indicate how candidates and noncandidates differ on the characteristics in each column: (1) 20+ years of residency, (2) 10+ years of residency, (3) male (L2 estimate), (4) age 50 or older, and (5) predicted white (1 = white, 0 otherwise). Robust standard errors, clustered at the municipality level, are in parentheses.

Figure Q1: Distribution of Residency Tenure for Non-Incumbent Mayoral and Council Candidates

Note: The black bars display data on mayoral candidates, and the blue bars present data on council candidates. Length refers to the number of years since voter registration. Percent of adult life is calculated as years since registration divided by the number of years since the candidate turned 18, multiplied by 100. These data only include non-incumbent (did not serve in the prior term) candidates.

Figure Q2: Distribution of Residency Tenure for First-Term Officials

Note: The black bars display data on top officials who responded to the survey and the blue bars are for governing board members. Length refers to the number of years they indicate living in their municipality. Percent of life is calculated as years lived divided by their age, multiplied by 100. These data only include first-term incumbents, which limits the sample to only 389 respondents.