

When Access Backfires: The Representational Consequences of Improving Access to Parliament

2025 Zweitstimme Workshop

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CARLSBERG
FOUNDATION

UNIVERSITY OF
COPENHAGEN



Roadmap

Motivation

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Results

Followup I: MP outcomes

Followup II: Speech outcomes

Conclusion

Parliaments and the ‘problem of space’



- Democracy has a built-in ‘problem of space’:

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- candidates representing remote constituencies face costly tradeoffs btw. representation and constituency service
- to ease these tradeoffs, many reforms seek to **ease access to parliament** for remote representatives
- do such initiatives work? How do they affect representation?

Literature on geographic representation

Demand-side focus: Voters' preferences for ...

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1. ... local candidates

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- Institutional determinants of geographical inequality in representation (Carella and Eggers, 2024).

Link btw. MPs' residence and constituency

Table: Characteristics and expectations for parachutist vs. local MPs

	Locals	Parachutists
Relationship to constituency	Live in	Live outside
Expected geographical link	Strong	Weak

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- **Parachutism hypothesis:** Improved access to parliament → parachutist candidacies ↑.

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Identification: The opening of the Great Belt Bridge in 1998



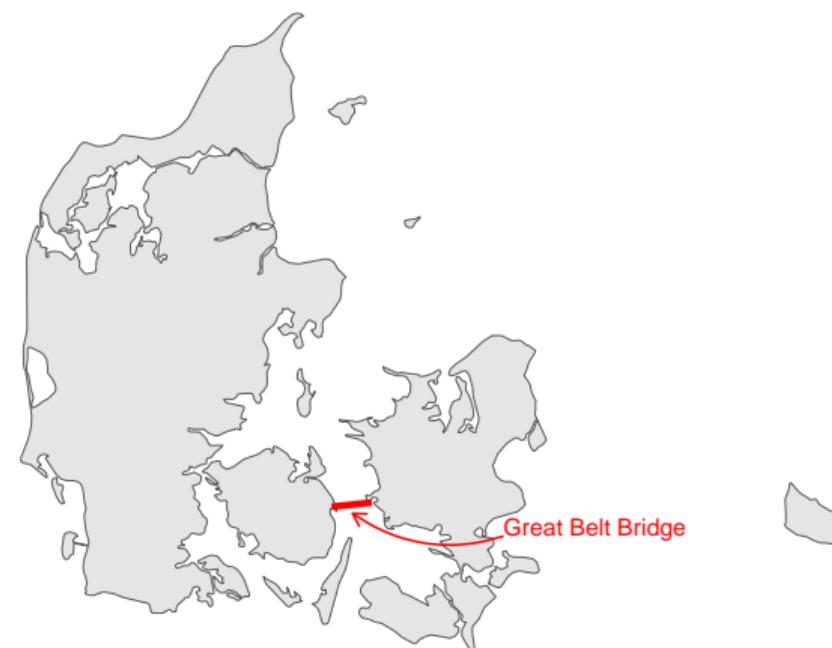
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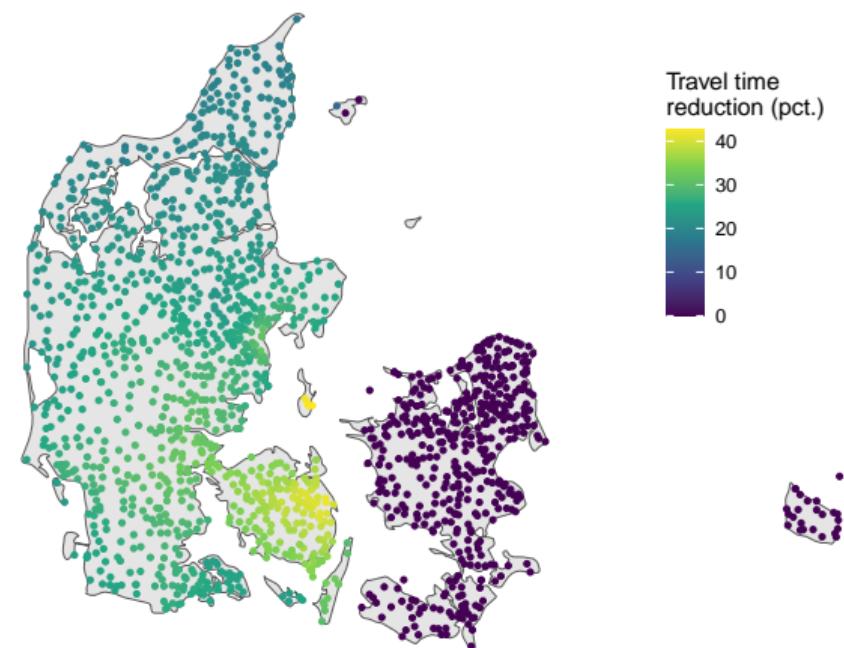
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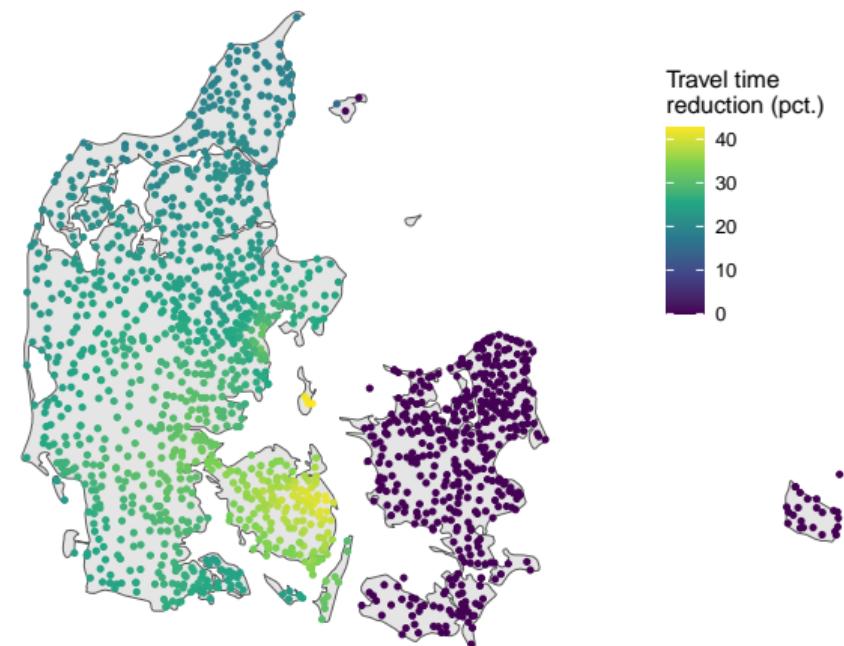
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- Improve access to parliament for localities **west of the Belt**.
- Large reductions in travel time:
~~ 25% on average, but up to 40%.
- Supplemented by additional access reforms (e.g., MP apartments) based on the same discontinuity



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Aggregate city-year dataset into city-election dataset and merge candidate data onto cities:
~ 25,876 city-election dyads from 1971–2022.

Data collection: OCR of Candidate data

Kandidaternes navn, stilling og bopel	Opstillet i kreds nr.	Nomineeret i kreds nr.	Stemmer		Valgt nr.	Stedfortræder nr.
			I alt	Heraf personlige		

A. SOCIALDEMOKRATIET (s. 260–262)

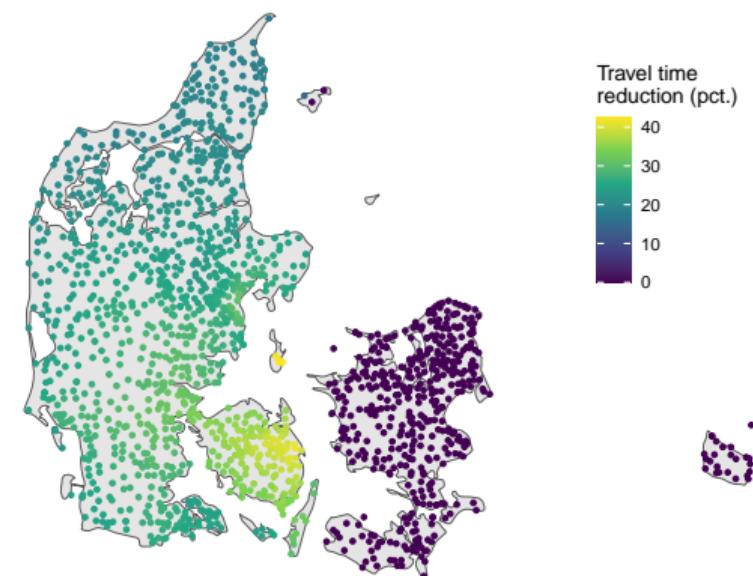
Frederiksborg amtskreds

Erik Andersen, forstander, Jørlunde, Slangerup.....	alle	3	9 269	4 074	3 T	
René Robert Brusvang, eksp.-sekr, cand. jur., Humlebæk...	alle	2	4 475	1 872		2
Inge Fischer Møller, socialrådgiver, Nivå	alle		14 732	6 707	1 K	
Niels Mørk*, maskinarbejder, Helsingør	alle	1	8 235	4 315		1
Bent Sørensen, borgmester, Hundested	alle	4	10 638	5 566	2 K	

page	district	elected	party	greater_district	residence	name	occupation
1	alle	3T	A. SOCIALDEMOKRATIET	Frederiksborg	Slangerup	Erik Andersen	forstander
1	alle		A. SOCIALDEMOKRATIET	Frederiksborg	Humlebæk	René Robert Brusvang	eksp.-sekr , cand. jur.
1	alle	1K	A. SOCIALDEMOKRATIET	Frederiksborg	Nivå	Inge Fischer Møller	socialrådgiver
1	alle		A. SOCIALDEMOKRATIET	Frederiksborg	Helsingør	Niels Mørk	maskinarbejder
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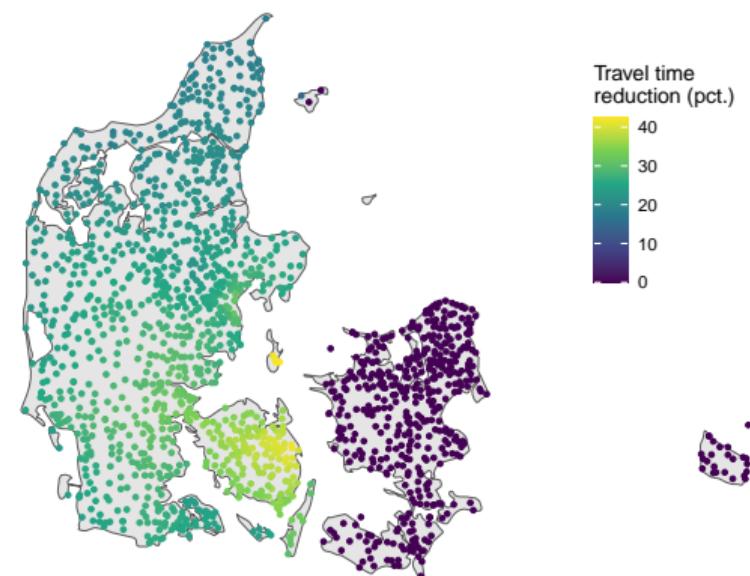
Linking candidates, residences, districts

- Use an LLM (GPT-03) to match all free-form residences to official city names



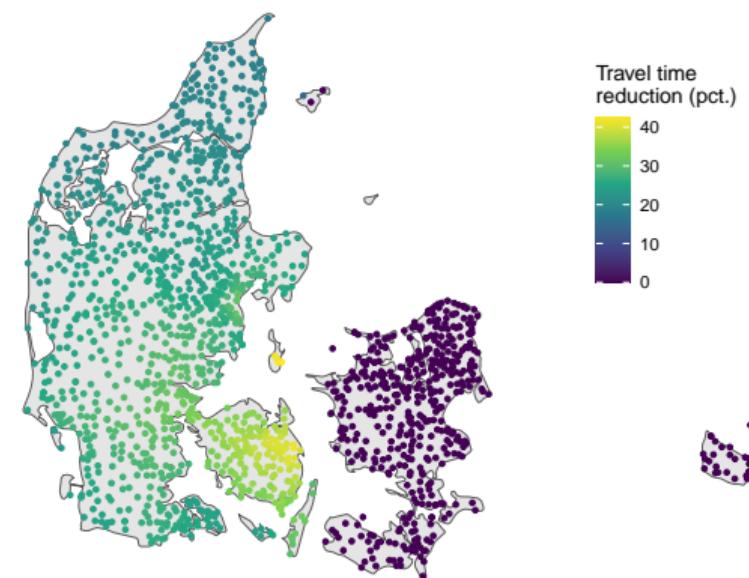
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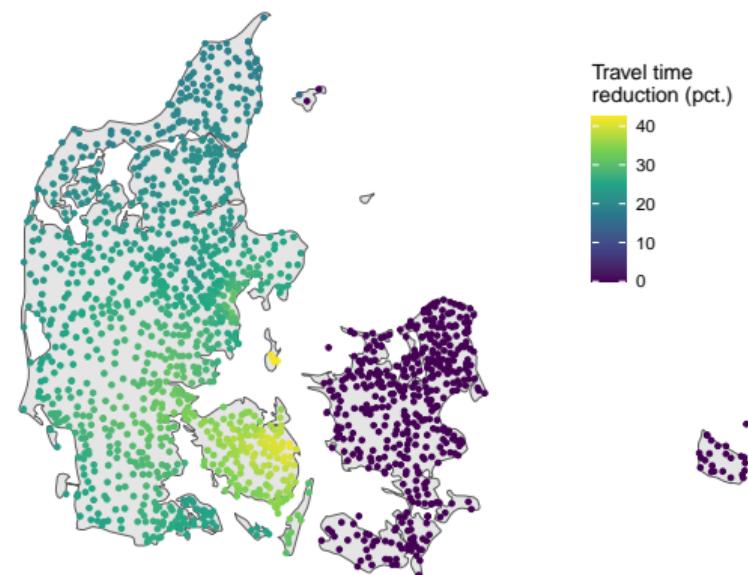
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- Measure distance to parliament by car using Google Maps API
- Link each residence to historical district boundaries to distinguish btw. locals and parachutists



Spatial distribution of population, candidates, and MPs, 1973–2022

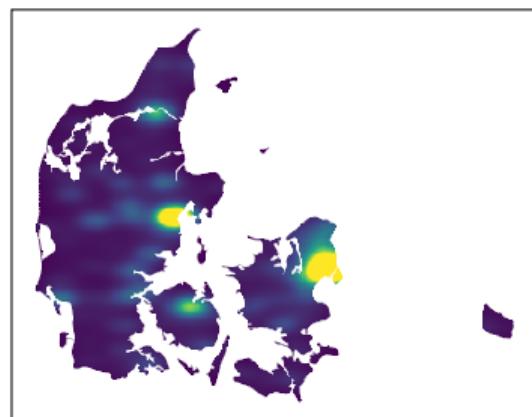


Figure: Population density

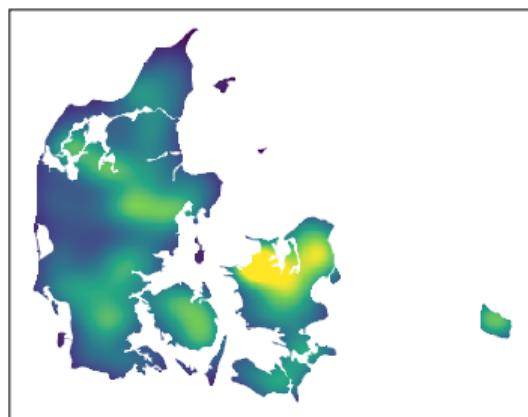


Figure: Candidates pr. 100,000

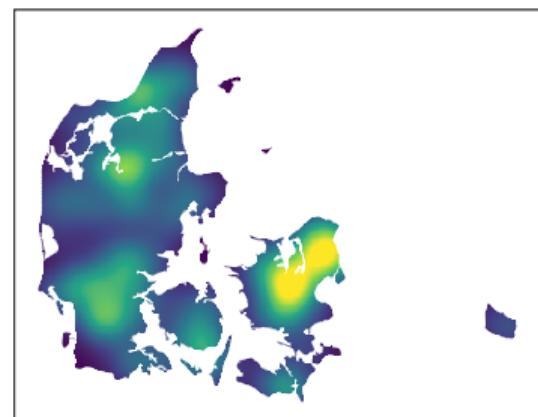


Figure: MPs pr. 100,000

Speech outcomes



Speech outcomes



1. Within-district place mentions,
measured using a BERT-based
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Speech outcomes



1. Within-district place mentions, measured using a BERT-based named entity recognition model (**GLiNER**) (Zaratiana et al., 2023)
2. Topics covered, measured using a BERT-based topic model (**BERTopic**) (Grootendorst, 2022)

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Conventional DiD:

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Outcomes:

1. Candidates pr. 100,000
2. Local candidates pr. 100,000
3. Parachutists pr. 100,000

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The bridge decreases locals and increases parachutists

	Candidates		Locals		Parachutists	
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
West of Belt × Bridge	-2.502 (3.355)		-5.541+ (2.997)		3.039* (1.391)	
Drive Time Reduction (pct.) × Bridge		-0.170 (0.118)		-0.267* (0.107)		0.096* (0.047)
City-Election Obs.	9699	9699	9699	9699	9699	9699

Note: Standard errors clustered by city-election.

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Baseline: 4.59 parachutists pr. 100,000 → $\beta = 3.0 \approx 66$ pct. increase.

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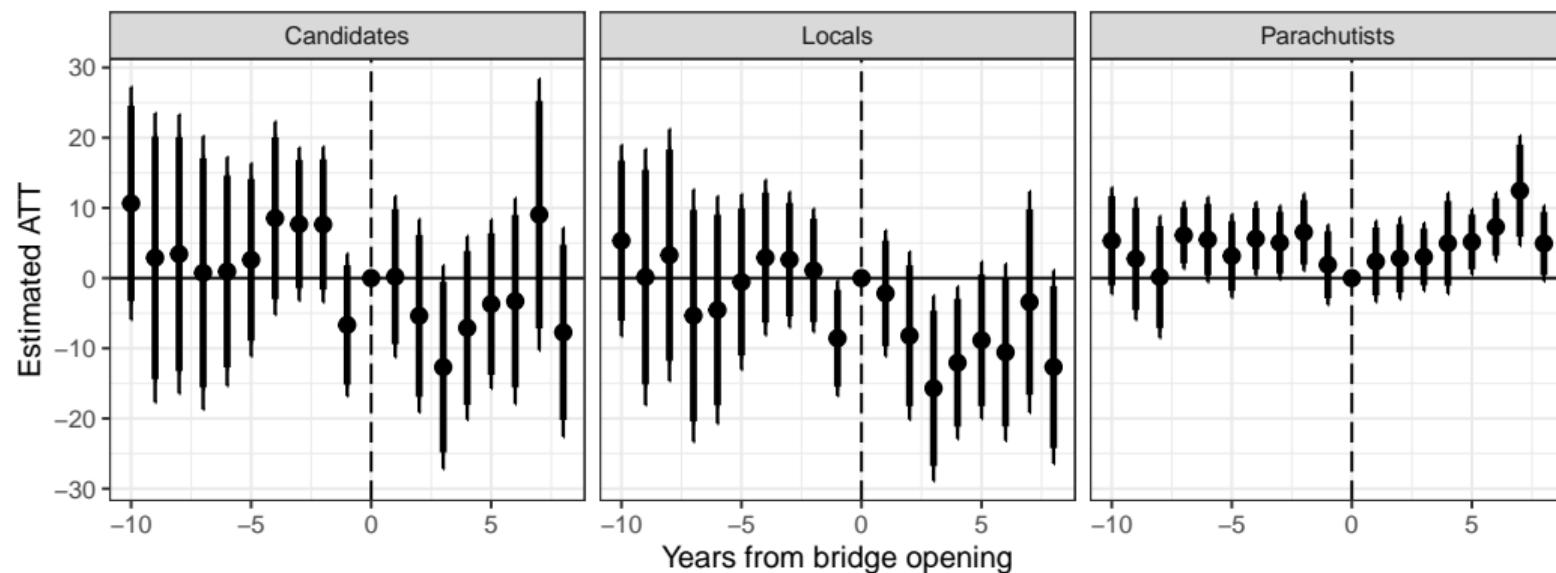
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$\beta = 0.096 \times 25 \approx 5$ pct. increase for the average treated city.

Annual ATTs



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Followup I: MP outcomes

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↔ the marginal parachutists mobilized by the bridge are **disfavored by voters**.

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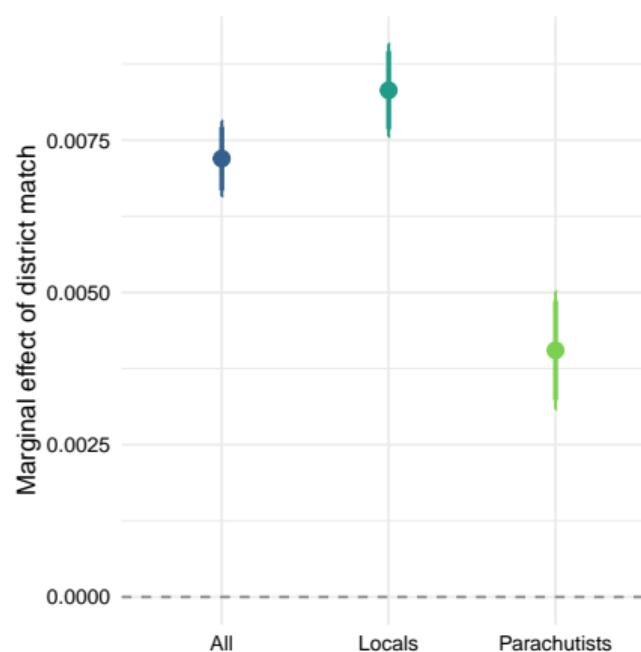
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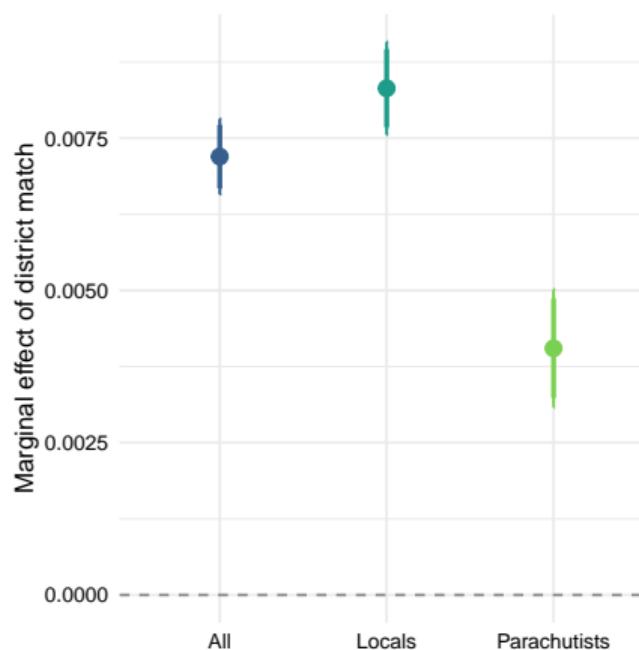
Followup II: Speech outcomes

Mentions of within-constituency places:

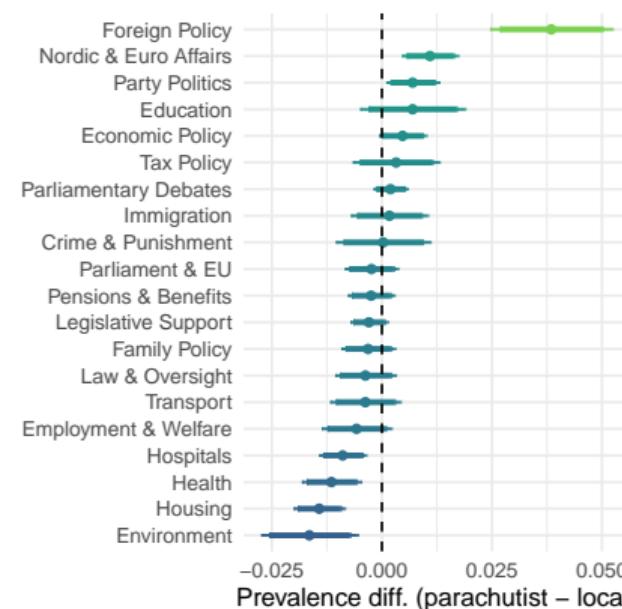


Followup II: Speech outcomes

Mentions of within-constituency places:



Differences in topic prevalence:



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- Geography shapes representation: preferences for locals reflects real behavioral differences.
- Infrastructural changes rarely evaluated in political science, but can have first-order political consequences.
- Solving the *problem of space* is two-edged sword: Parachutists might take advantage of improved access.

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References

Thanks for your attention!

ODER: Origins of Descriptive Representation

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