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Local Context, Social Networks and
Neighbourhood Effects on Voter Choice

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ABSTRACT

Most elections, both for the composition of a legislative body (a Parliament, say, or a city council) and for a single legislator (such as a president or mayor) are contested across a territory that comprises a number of – if not a myriad – separate places. Overviews of election results often treat the territory as a homogeneous unit – relationships between voter characteristics and choices are assumed to be invariant across all of the places. Much research has shown that this is rarely the case, however, and that there are significant differences between places in voter behaviour. Such differences are often grouped together as neighbourhood effects, and their cause associated with the flow of information through local social networks. This chapter reviews that literature, focusing not only on the role of conversation in the formation of political attitudes and voter behaviour in contests between parties but also on: voting for particular candidates – friends and neighbours effects; voting on the basis of local rather than wider matters – local issues; and voting patterns influenced by campaigns that vary locally in their intensity.

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Much media and other commentary on voter behaviour, and some academic studies, therefore (implicitly at least) treat~~s~~ members of the electorate as isolated atoms who make decisions on whether to vote and who or what to vote for without any reference to the places where they live and the people they interact with there. Many treat them as members of some idealised concept – such as a social class – but fail to recognise that none of those concepts are 'natural'; they are social constructions and if people are both assigned to a group and accept its membership, they then have to learn what that membership involves and how they are expected to behave. Such learning – like all other forms of learning – involves interactions with others and, despite the growing importance of the internet and electronic communications, most of those interactions occur in places: they literally take place – we do not yet live in placeless worlds.

~~Recognition of the important fact that, h~~However important membership of particular groups – age, gender, ethnicity, social class etc. – are in the structuring of society and as influences on patterns of behaviour, therefore, place matters as a behavioural context ~~has been~~ exemplified in a wide range of studies of public opinion and voting behaviour. This chapter reviews that literature~~; , focusing not only on the role of conversation in the formation of political attitudes and voter behaviour in contests between parties but also on: voting for particular candidates – friends and neighbours effects; voting on the basis of local rather than wider matters – local issues; and voting patterns influenced by campaigns that vary locally in their intensity. i~~Its main sections illustrate three separate – though in most cases inter-linked – place-based vote-winning strategies: inter-personal interactions in local contexts; local environmental effects; and organisational effects.

Neighbours and networks: the neighbourhood effect

A very substantial component of the literature on voting patterns and local contexts concerns what has become known very widely ~~– much more widely than in studies of voting behaviour alone –~~ as the neighbourhood effect. The classic work was by Tingsten (1937), who noted that working-class support for the Swedish socialist party increased the more working-class the voting precinct in which class members lived. The implication was that people's political opinions are influenced by their neighbours', so that, for example, the more socialist party supporters individuals encountered in their neighbourhood (or at their workplace, or in a range of other formal – such as churches and trades unions – and informal organisations and settings) the more likely they were to be influenced by them and vote socialist too.

Many have followed Tingsten's example and found ~~similar~~ evidence that where a party's support base was strong, in terms of an area's class structure, for example, it tended to attract above-average levels of support, but where it was weak its vote was below-average; electorates were

spatially more polarised in their support for particular parties than they were in the social characteristics of the individual members. That this polarisation came about through personal influence was in most cases only inferred, however, because the evidence was obtained from aggregate data only: Cox (1971), for example, knew how many manual workers (ouvriers) there were in each district in a sample of Parisian arrondissements, and what percentage of the votes cast there were won by the Communist party, but could only infer that the larger Communist vote in the districts with most ouvriers resident there resulted from inter-personal influence – what Miller (1977) referred to as 'people who talk together vote together'. But the findings were consistent with Cox's (1969; see Johnston and Pattie, 2012) model of voting decisions in a spatial context. Individuals operate as nodes on social networks – receiving, processing and sending out information along their links. Many of those networks are spatially restricted, focused on the individuals' home neighbourhoods, so that if (some) people (at least) are influenced in their political opinions by those they interact with, then where the weight of information in an area favours one party over others participants in its social networks are more likely to vote for the majority party than their contemporaries who may have similar individual characteristics but live in areas where the party has much less support.

Many patterns of voting consistent with this 'contagion by contact' model have been identified, but researchers have realised that the evidence presented is usually circumstantial only, and that similar patterns could be the outcome of different processes: people favouring a particular party may choose to live in areas where it is already strong, for example, so that the observed neighbourhood effect is a result of self-selection rather than 'conversion by conversation' (Walks, 2004, 2006, 2007; Gimpel and Hui, 2015: that argument is also central to Bishop and Cumming's, 2008, contention that the recent growing spatial polarisation of voting in the USA reflects selective migration – an argument strongly countered by, among others, Abrams and Fiorina, 2012; but see Johnston et al, 2016). To counter that researchers have sought more convincing evidence that the processes are as assumed. This has invariably involved using data obtained from individuals, taking advantage of small and large social surveys that include data on conversations and behaviour. Work by, for example, Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) and Mutz (2006) has provided convincing evidence of the 'contagion by contact' model's veracity, and although not all of the applications of this approach have had locational data relating to the geography of the social networks involved (though see Pattie and Johnston, 2000), it has become increasingly clear that the socio-spatial polarisation of electorates is the norm.

The tendency for people to align their party support with that of their conversation partners is at the heart of the classic neighbourhood effect, therefore, and research shows that people who talk together do, to a noticeable degree, vote together, as a result of conversion processes. However, this hardly ever results in complete unanimity within neighbourhoods or within conversation networks: dissent persists. In part, this is because conversation networks are rarely politically homogeneous: most people talk to supporters of several different parties and of none. And as a result, they are open to sometimes heterodox opinions. Not all conversations point in the same direction (Huckfeldt et al, 2004). In part, too, it is because some voices are more influential than others. People pay more attention to those they know well than to strangers, to those whose opinions and judgments they trust, and to those who they think have expertise on the subject than on those whose views and judgements they trust less (Huckfeldt, 2001; Huckfeldt et al, 2014). And, nNot surprisingly, the stronger an individual's own political views and partisanship, the less likely he or she is to be influenced by divergent views coming from conversation partners (Cox, 1969; McClurg, 2006). Not all of the studies such as those discussed here have data on the geography of the conversation networks studied; those undertaken by Huckfeldt do, however, and a reworking of the data showed that most conversations took place between people living no more than three miles apart (Eagles et al., 2004: see also Johnston and Pattie, 2006).

Of course, very few neighbourhoods are exclusive to one social class, and many social networks contain individuals who differ in their political persuasions. All networks and districts are open to external – and challenging – influences, therefore, and although continuity is the dominant pattern in any area's voting over time change is possible as a result of new information flows, perhaps introduced through what Granovetter (1973) termed weak ties (as illustrated in Huckfeldt et al., 2004). Area populations change too, as people die and others move out, and their replacements may bring new ideas and affiliations. Those who move away from a neighbourhood where they spent their formative years may retain the attitudes learned there, however, as illustrated by Wright's (1977) study of voting for the American Independent Party (Southern populist and segregationist) candidate George Wallace in the 1968 US presidential election: the larger the black population of the area in which white voters lived, the more likely the latter were to vote for Wallace – but it was the level of black concentration where they lived in 1940, when many of those who voted for Wallace thirty years later were being politically, socially and culturally socialised, rather than where they lived in election year itself, that had the strongest impact on their political attitudes. (In this example, the smaller the white minority in an area the greater the cohesion around attitudes against the local black majority.)

When change is slow, new residents in an area may be strongly influenced by the majority opinion there – especially if they are both open to persuasion and participate in neighbourhood activities. Many studies of political attitudes have found that while some people are strongly committed to one set of ideas and one party, and vote for it whatever challenging information they may encounter, others (and an increasing proportion of the population in many countries) are less committed thant their predecessors and open to considering alternative ideas and party manifestos. Research (e.g. Johnston et al., 2005) has found that those with strong levels of neighbourhood social capital were more likely to conform to local electoral behaviour patterns than those who were 'spatial isolates'; joining local social networks encourages embracing local majority attitudes.

Many studies of neighbourhood effects have, because of the nature of the available data, been constrained to analyses of its operation at one spatial scale only – basically, whatever data are available at a scale that seems to approximate that of the neighbourhoods within which (many) people interact. As more data have become available and as it has become possible to merge social surveys comprising data on individuals with census and other data on aggregate populations at a variety of scales, so more sophisticated modelling of neighbourhood effects – broadly defined – has become feasible. One scale largely omitted from most studies has been that of the individual household, yet this is the context within which most people are politically socialised. People who live together, and especially those who talk politics together at home, should show the effects of inter-personal influence – a hypothesis confirmed by studies using data on all members of households: not only do they vote together but they also tend to change their partisan preferences together (Johnston et al., 2005b; Zuckerman et al., 2007). And not all research focuses on interactions within neighbourhoods: Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), for example, looked at church congregations as local contexts, and Mutz and Mondak (2006) explored workplace contexts, both with the same results – people who worship together, vote together, as also do people who work together.

The greater flexibility of modern datasets – many of which are now geocoded – has seen the introduction of what are known as 'bespoke neighbourhoods' to voting studies. Instead of relying on data at one scale only – such as the census tract – investigators have been able to compile data on the characteristics of either all individuals living within a prescribed distance of a survey respondent's home, or on those of the nearest number of individuals (say 2,000) to that address. As many censuses now report data at very small spatial scales – with average populations of only a few hundred at most – it is possible to construct a spatial hierarchy of such bespoke neighbourhoods

(such as neighbourhoods comprising the nearest 250 persons to a survey respondent's home, nested within neighbourhoods with the nearest 1,000 persons, nested in those with the nearest 2,500, and so on…). This enables an evaluation of at which scales neighbourhood effects are most intensive. One early study, for example, found that in 1997 British working-class individuals were more likely to vote Labour the more working-class the Parliamentary constituency in which they lived; within those constituencies, they were more likely to vote Labour the more working-class the district in which they lived; and within those districts, the more working-class the immediate neighbourhood around their homes, the greater still the probability that they voted Labour (MacAllister at al., 2001). Investigations of such multi-scalar influences have been advanced by the adoption of multi-level modelling strategies (Jones et al., 1992). Their application in analyses of two British general elections showed significant variations in voting behaviour at two local scales (the immediate neighbourhood – within 250 metres of the individual's home – and its wider locale – within 2000 metres) as well as between regions (Johnston et al., 2005c:; a similar set of findings wereas reported in a study of voting at Taiwanese elections: Weng, 2015; and Bisgaard et al., 2016, have shown that individual Danish voters' perceptions of the state of the national economy were influenced most by the level of unemployment in their immediate neighbourhoods – as the area was enlarged the effect of local context on perceptions diminshed).

Friends and neighbours voting

In most elections voters are faced with a choice between rival political parties, even though the mark they make on the ballot paper may be against named candidates: most of the latter are supported not on the basis of their personal characteristics but rather because of the parties they represent. Nevertheless, there are some situations where the individual candidates' characteristics are among the major criteria influencing voters' decisions.

The classic study of such situations was V. O. Key's (1949) on *Southern Politics* in the USA. Many states there during the first half of the twentieth century were dominated by a single party and the main electoral contests were between candidates seeking its nomination for a local, state or national office. Key's examples showed that many performed better in the areas around their home than elsewhere within the territory being contested. He interpreted this as voters, in the absence of any other criteria on which to base their decisions, plumping for the local candidate (whom they may know), as a way of promoting local interests. This became known as friends-and-neighbours voting: people vote for local candidates because either they know them personally or know people who do – or they believe somebody with local links will best represent them in the relevant legislative body or office. Such personal knowledge is rarely extensive, however, especially in large territories, and voters depend on other cues to direct them to the characteristics of and likely benefits to accrue from support for local candidates – such as local media, as illustrated by Bowler et al. (1993) in a Californian study. Candidates who get – and may seek – high profiles in local media which cover part of the electoral territory only may well perform better there than in other parts of the territory as a consequence.

Given the predominance of parties in most elections, friends and neighbours voting may be considered a minor element to the geography of voting behaviour, being characteristic of just those contests, many of them intra-party, where the choice set invites electors to deploy other criteria when determining which candidates to support – as illustrated by studies of city council elections in New Zealand (Johnston, 1973). Particular voting systems may encourage such behaviour. In both Australia and Ireland, for example, the single transferable vote system requires candidates to be rank-ordered. Where a voter is determining which of a party's candidates to rank first, a local candidate – if there is one – may be preferred (Johnston, 1978; Parker, 1982). More importantly, as clearly illustrated by some Irish studies, in order to maximise the number of its representatives who

win election, a party's campaigning may focus on different candidates in different parts of a multi-member constituency (Gorecki and Marsh, 2012, 2014)

The friends and neighbours effect was divided into three main components in a recent study of the 2010 contests for the leadership of the UK's Labour Party ~~2010~~ (Johnston et al., 2016), in which one part of the electoral college involved voting by party members conducted in and reported for each of Great Britain's 632 Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs). Voting by party members in each candidate's home constituency was by people who almost certainly knew the candidate – they were local friends. Candidates were much less likely to be known personally to party members in adjacent constituencies, but the flow of information across constituency boundaries through social networks and via local media could promote their cause among neighbours. Finally, there was the potential influence of political friends in other constituencies. In order to contest the election, candidates had to be nominated by a number of their fellow MPs, and those who nominated a candidate may have influenced members of their own local parties to support the person they preferred. Analyses showed that all three were relevant; even though the contest was for the leadership of one of the country's largest political parties, and thus for a potential Prime Minister, these local effects were clearly discernible. For example, one candidate – Andy Burnham – averaged only 8.8 per cent of the members' first preference votes across all 632 CLPs: he got 69.1 per cent in his home constituency, an average of 34.1 per cent in the five adjacent constituencies, and 19.4 per cent across the remaining 68 constituencies in the northwest region where his constituency was located; he also averaged 20.9 per cent in the 33 constituencies whose MPs nominated him, and 25.0 per cent in the 23 whose MP gave him their first preference vote.

Recent work has also identified voting patterns consistent with the 'friends and neighbours' argument at British general and local elections. At the 2010 general election, for example, Arzheimer and Evans (2012: see also Gimpel et al., 2008, for similar findings in the United States) found that the distance between survey respondents' home addresses and those of candidates in their constituency was negatively related to their propensity to vote for those candidates (other influences being held constant); similar results emerged from their study of voting at local government elections (Arzheimer and Evans, 2014). But the effect doesn't always work. Some candidates for the American presidency choose vice-presidential running mates whom they hope can deliver substantial support from certain groups and/or areas: Devine and Kopko (2016), however, found no evidence of vice-presidential candidates making a significant difference to the outcome in their home states.

Local issues

Most election campaigns, especially those to national and regional legislatures and to leadership positions, focus on issues with a wide relevance across the electorate – those that large numbers of voters consider the most important (such as the economy and immigration) and on which the contestants are offering alternative perspectives and policies. Even so, many of these salient policy issues vary locally: an economy may be booming in some parts of the country but relatively depressed elsewhere; the housing market may be buoyant in some places but ~~depressed~~ not elsewhere. If those situations are important to the voters, their responses may well vary according to the local circumstances. Thus, for example, Johnston and Pattie (2001) found that in 1997 British voters decided whether to punish or reward the incumbent Conservative government on the basis of both their personal financial situations and the performance of their local economy rather than the national situation; indeed other research showed that some people voted altruistically, against the incumbent government because many of their neighbours were suffering economically, even though they themselves were not (Johnston et al., 2000). Similarly, Pattie et al. (1995) found that voters' likelihood to support the incumbent UK government at the 1992 general election was related to the

performance of the local housing market during its slump in the preceding years; where that slump was deepest voters, especially those who themselves experienced negative equity, were less likely to vote for the government's candidates (Pattie et al., 1995).

As well as these spatial variations in the nature of some of the key elements in an election campaign, local issues may be more influential on some voters in a place than the general ones, and may be linked to the local candidate(s). Incumbents seeking re-election, for example, may be punished by the local electorate for their performance – as to a small extent with the UK expenses scandal a year before the 2010 general election – and their party performs less well there than anticipated as a consequence (Pattie and Johnston, 2014; for a comparable US 'scandal' which involved Congressmen writing cheques on overdrawn accounts, and suffering in the subsequent polls as a consequence, see Banducci and Karp, 1994; Williams, 1998). Others may be rewarded by local voters – as illustrated by the large American literature on pork barrel politics, with legislators who deliver benefits for their local community, such as a major infrastructure investment, getting electoral returns as a consequence (Ferejohn, 1974; Johnston, 1980). And legislators will sometimes reflect local issues when voting in Parliamentary divisions, even if it means opposing the party line and whips. In late 2015, for example, UK Conservative MPs were whipped to abstain in the vote against a Labour amendment regarding changes in the tax credit regime, but twenty voted for that amendment, a number of them representing marginal constituencies where the proposed cuts could significantly impact uponreduce their majority.[1]

> **Commented [CP1]:** Maybe better to say 'reduce' as 'significantly impact' could also imply an increased majority – in which case why not do as the government asked?

An example of the impact of a specific issue affecting parts of an area only was voting for the Mayor of Christchurch, New Zealand in 1971. The two main candidates – one representing a relatively right-wing group and the other a left-wing party – drew votes across the city largely reflecting the class composition of different neighbourhoods. The city was to host the Commonwealth Games in 1974. The right-wing candidate (and incumbent mayor) backed one of the proposed sites for the main stadium, and he performed better than expected at the polling booths close to that site; his opponent favoured an alternative site – and his performance around it was better than average (Johnston, 1976). In a different context, research in Colombia has shown that people who move from a state-controlled part of the country to an area where right-wing militias hold sway are more likely to support a right-wing candidate for the country's presidency (García-Sánchez, 2016).

In many countries – especially those using plurality electoral systems with single-member constituencies – tackling local issues, whether personal to individual voters, relating to a local community within the territory, or concerning the area as a whole, is a major component of their representatives' workload, and what their constituents expect (Campbell and Lovenduski, 2015). In the United Kingdom, for example, acting as a local caseworker and champion is seen as one of the MPs' two main roles (Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 2010; Morris, 2012); they are expected to maintain an office and a home in their constituency and to be active in social, cultural and economic as well as political life there. This can bring electoral rewards: MPs perceived by the electorate as effective operators within and for their constituents can be rewarded by greater support when they seek re-election. British studies have shown that this benefit is especially conferred on new MPs seeking re-election for the first-time (Wood and Norton, 1992; Buttice and Milazzo, 2011; Curtice, Fisher and Ford, 2015).

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[1] http://www.conservativehome.com/parliament/2015/10/20-conservatives-revolt-over-tax-credits-five-of-them-are-2015-intake-members.html?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Friday+30th+October+2015&utm_ content=Friday+30th+October+2015+CID_c9c6e7f9b4b40aba7f0e84dfba4b668d&utm_source=Daily%20Email&utm_term=20%20Conservative%20MPs%20revolt%20over%20tax%20credits%20Five%20of%20them%20are%202015%20intake%20members

Some MPs are more assiduous at the constituency role than others, although in the UK a very large proportion now give it a great deal of attention, making regular and frequent visits to the area and holding regular surgeries there, as well as (through their staff) responding to an increasing number and range of requests for assistance (many of them by email). In addition, some parties are generally more assiduous than others in the local activities undertaken by their members, in local as well as national government. In Great Britain, for example, the Liberal Democrat party built its Parliamentary vote share (to over 20 per cent at the 1983-1987 and then the 2005-2010 general elections) on the foundations of local activism and local government performance (as illustrated for one constituency in a former leader's autobiography: Ashdown, 2009; see also Dorling et al., 1998, and Cutts, 2006a, 2006b). The MPs elected on this foundation had strong local roots, therefore, which were reflected in their electoral support. At the 2015 general election, for example, the Liberal Democrat's national vote share fell to 8.1 per cent from 23.0 per cent five years earlier. The party was defending 57 seats; in the 46 being contested by an incumbent MP, its vote share fell by 14.3 percentage points on average, whereas in the eleven where the incumbent had retired and was replaced by a new candidate the fall was much larger at an average of 21.8 points. A similar spatially-structured campaign was the centrepiece of the electoral strategy developed by the United Kingdom Independence Party for the 2015 general election (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2015).

Parties and candidates seeking votes: campaign and canvass effects

The main actors in almost all elections are the parties and their candidates, who actively seek support from the voters. Many campaigns, especially at general elections, are dominated now by the print, radio and TV and, increasingly, electronic media and forms of communication: parties put out messages promoting themselves and their candidates (especially their leaders). Alongside that, their local organisations and candidates make direct contact with voters within their own electoral districts.

Although the procedure varies from country to country (and sometime within countries) the main goal of the local campaigns is to identify the party's supporters and then contact them – personally at their home if possible – to encourage them to remain firm in their support, and to express that support by turning out to vote on election day. Over time, parties build up databases – annotated versions of the electoral register – of their supporters who will almost certainly vote for them, those who do not support and will not vote for them, and those who may support the party. These have to be regularly updated, because of population mobility and to ensure that people have not changed their predispositions. Thus in the months before an election is due parties – especially in marginal districts where a seat could be won or lost – canvass support through a variety of means, both personal contact (on the doorstep) and indirectly (through telephone calls and email contacts where numbers and/or addresses are known). To a considerable extent these 'get out the vote' strategies are not random exercises: parties concentrate their efforts where they are more likely to get substantial rewards – in neighbourhoods within districts where their supporters are concentrated which they identify using geodemographic classifications of small-scale census and other data. (See Cutts, 2006, on the activities of the Liberal Democrats in one English city, Green and Gerber's, 2004, account of controlled experiments designed to test the efficacy of such campaigns, and Barwell's, 2016, detailed description of his own campaigning in a marginal constituency; see also, however, the negative findings reported by Cantoni and Pons, 2016.) Leaflets are distributed in those areas to ensure voters know of the election, the party's candidate there and what policies are being promoted, and there are follow-up calls, particularly on polling day when get-out-the-vote tactics are deployed to check whether supporters have voted and, if not, encourage them to do so before polling closes. Increasingly, those local efforts are enhanced by direct contact with local voters from the party's central (or regional) campaign organisation, usually through such channels as

bespoke letters, emails and postings on social media sites (Cowley and Kavanagh, 2015; Fisher, 2015). But contact may not always be necessary; in one experiment, Green et al. (2016) showed that the density of posters on lawns in an area had an influence on the advertised candidates' success.

These campaigns have become increasingly sophisticated, as have the techniques deployed to explore their extent and efficacy. In the UK, for example, early studies had to use surrogate data for a campaign's intensity – such as the amount that candidates report having spent on their campaigns (relative to the legally-imposed limits), the number of members and activists working in the constituency, and a range of other measures of campaign intensity (for an overview of much of this work, see Johnston and Pattie, 2014). All reach the same conclusion: the more intensive a local party's campaign, however measured, the better its candidate's performance. But these provide circumstantial evidence only. The development of internet panel surveys has allowed more direct evidence to be elucidated. For example, the 2011 Welsh Election Study asked respondents whether they had been contacted by one or more of the parties during the campaign. Among them, 236 had voted Conservative at the previous National Assembly election in 2007; 181 of these had no contact from the party during the campaign, and 78.5 per cent of them voted Conservative again. Of the remainder, of those whose only contact was to receive a leaflet, 83.3 per cent voted Conservative, whereas among those contacted personally by the party – by a home visit, for example – 93.3 per cent voted Conservative. Of Liberal Democrat voters in 2007, only 36.4 per cent of those not contacted during the campaign supported the party again in 2011, whereas 71.4 per cent of those contacted did so; those ignored by the party in 2011 were more likely to defect to another. Even among those who supported a party in the past, therefore, those who were personally asked to again were more likely to do so; those not contacted were more likely to change their mind and vote for another – especially if it did contact them (Johnston et al., 2016).

Although panel survey data provide much better insight into the impact of local campaigns they are not without problems: a party is more likely to contact its known supporters in the last weeks before an election, for example, and they are more likely to vote for it – for them, contact during the campaign may have little effect as they are already committed to it. Methods have been developed to circumvent this potential problem (the technical term is endogeneity) and confirm that campaign contact has an independent impact (Pattie et al., 2015). Parties and candidates expend much more effort in some places than others in seeking votes – they spend more money on leaflets and posters, they contact more voters in their homes and on the streets, and they visit more of their known supporters on polling day itself to ensure that they vote. And it works: the more active a party is locally, the better its performance relative to places where they make much less effort.

Conclusions

The much-quoted adage, generally associated with former US House of Representatives Speaker Tip O'Neill, that 'all politics is local' may be hyperbole: people vote in a particular way for a variety of reasons, some, if not many, of which may have little to do with their local context. But voters, all other things being equal (which, of course, they very rarely are), prefer local candidates (Campbell and Cowley, 2014; Childs and Cowley, 2011), especially local candidates who know their constituency, it's residents and their concerns and represent those concerns, even if it means acting against their party's wider interests. Parties are, of course, aware of this, of how information about candidates flows through local social networks and influences their behaviour and they act accordingly when seeking support. Election results thus reflect a continuing interplay between the parties and candidates, on the one hand, and the local context, on the other; as studies of an increasing number of countries demonstrate (Guigal et al., 2011; Weng, 2015; Amara and El Lagha, 2016), geography is a fundamental component of many aspects of elections, their conduct and their

outcomes. *All* politics may not be local: but where it is locally oriented, there are substantial rewards to be won.

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