Abstract: Throughout the mid-twentieth century, scholars identified considerable contextual variation in American electoral politics. Party platforms varied significantly across the country, split ticket voting was commonplace, and candidate idiosyncrasies appeared to matter a great deal to voters. In particular, candidates’ roots seemed especially important to voters, with homegrown candidates enjoying a boost at the polls. Scholars dubbed this the “Friends and Neighbors Effect.” Despite recent anecdotal examples suggesting candidate roots still matter, there is good reason to expect that they may not. Partisan politics have polarized and nationalized. Both trends suggest little to no role for apolitical candidate characteristics to factor into voters’ evaluations of candidates. To reassess voters’ appetite for local candidates, this paper features observational and conjoint experimental studies designed to discern whether individuals still view candidates’ roots as important. Results indicate that, despite trends of partisan polarization and nationalization, voters continue to consider candidate roots important. Furthermore, this preference appears especially strong among those with a strong place identity, suggesting that those for whom geographical identity is most important are particularly sensitive to geographical cues.

Keywords: place, localism, place identity, political geography, conjoint experiments, vote choice, candidate evaluation.
Introduction

“Well, they [the Matt Rosendale campaign] wanted to nationalize the race, and we wanted to talk about issues that impacted Montana…and I think Montanans connected up with that…I was a Montanan. I still farm. I was raised there, work there, raised my kids there, was educated there—the whole works—and I think people could relate with that.”

—U.S. Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), in an interview with MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow (11/30/2018), responding to a question regarding how he won re-election to a third term, in a “red state,” in 2018.

Previous research has identified particularistic candidate attributes as being of notable importance in single member “first past the post” electoral districts (Cain et al. 1987; Carey & Shugart 1995; Popkin 1994). This has been especially true in the United States, where candidate characteristics are often front and center—at times even perhaps more salient in voters’ minds than party labels (Hunt n.d.; Michelson 2005; Parker 2014). Generally, scholars understand this importance to be rooted in political psychology. A candidate’s local roots can serve as an information short-cut suggesting that the candidate may be better attuned to local issues and concerns (Tavits 2010), and a local candidate may also prime respondents’ place identities, thus activating in-group vs. out-group considerations that could alter election outcomes (Collignon & Sajuria 2018). Recent news coverage and scholarly work (e.g., Parker 2014) pertaining to Congressional elections in the United States has suggested that local roots may still be an effective way of garnering votes, with recent high profile cases of this strategy including the political campaigns of Joe Manchin in West Virginia, Jon Tester in Montana, and Abby Finkenauer in Iowa (amongst many others).

However, while local roots and the politics of place may have been an important force in American politics in the past (e.g., Key 1949), there is reason to question whether this is still the case. Two trends—partisan polarization and the nationalization of political discourse—that have characterized our recent political epoch may both threaten the role of non-partisan geographically particular considerations, such as candidate roots. Why this is the case becomes
clear when one thinks about the nature of polarization and nationalization. Partisan polarization in the mass electorate has been conceptualized variously as involving either a growing ideological gulf between adherents of the two parties (Abramowitz & Saunders 2008), or a growing mutual disdain for members of the opposite party, despite marginal changes in ideological composition of the mass electorate (Fiorina et al. 2005; Iyengar et al. 2012). Both conceptualizations of polarization imply a diminished role for non-partisan considerations in elections, such as place, as increasing partisan divergence (whether ideologically or socially) should equate to partisanship becoming more meaningful to voters. Similarly, because nationalization can be defined as the predominance of national partisan considerations in the evaluation of politics at every level, from fence viewer (an elected office in Massachusetts, Vermont, and Nebraska) to President of the United States (Hopkins 2018), considerations that do not feature as part of the national partisan discourse are, in theory, pushed to the margins of relevance.

If local considerations, such as candidate roots, do still matter, we should expect that they are most likely to matter to those individuals who identify strongly with where they live. Though the relationship between place identity and politics is understudied as a whole, existing work suggests that place identity may be a key driver of political participation (Panagopoulos et al. 2017; Wong 2010), as well as how individuals interpret politics and situate themselves within socio-political hierarchies (Cramer 2016). Apart from the expected positive association between place identity and a preference for candidate roots in the current study, I focus on place-based identities in this article because, if local considerations are to matter both currently and in the future, it is likely amongst this group that they will continue to be a central concern moving forward, despite the forces of nationalization and partisan polarization.
Overall, I make two central arguments throughout this paper. First, I argue that candidate roots are still an important consideration to voters, both when individuals are asked directly about candidate roots, as well as when respondents reveal their preferences when considering candidate roots alongside numerous other information criteria, including partisanship. Secondly, I argue that, while respondents will on the whole express a preference for candidates with local roots, those high in place identity will be especially likely to express this preference. To support these arguments, I undertake a mixture of observational and conjoint experimental analyses. I find that, on average, respondents indicate a preference for homegrown candidates in both single dimension survey tasks (where respondents are asked directly to assess candidate roots) and multidimensional conjoint tasks (where candidates choose their preferred candidate based on a litany of randomly generated information, including partisanship, candidate roots, and a host of other categories). In addition, my evidence shows that those who identify strongly with place are especially likely to endorse the importance and desirability of candidate roots, irrespective of where they live along the urban-rural spectrum. These results provide strong evidence that candidate roots remain an important and enduring heuristic utilized by contemporary American voters.

“Friends and Neighbors,” or the Preference for Local Candidates

Investigation of local advantages enjoyed by native sons and daughters running for political office represents a rich and well-developed area of inquiry in political science. Such research was initially undertaken by V.O. Key in *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949), who argued that Southern voters in the early twentieth century were prone to distinguishing among candidates along geographic lines rather than policy ones. Key noted that this “friends-and-neighbors” voting was especially pronounced in the home counties of candidates, with
decaying effects in neighboring and more distant counties. At the time of his writing, Key’s observations provided a major insight into electoral behavior and pushed back against the notion popular during the period that voters were singularly preoccupied with partisanship and policy when evaluating candidates.

Following Key’s pathbreaking work, a bevy of scholars extended the friends and neighbors model to contexts beyond the South. Across a broad array of contexts, ranging from local contests to American presidential elections, a voluminous amount of evidence was uncovered in support of Key’s (1949) claim that residency and proximity were primary determinants of candidate support: a candidate garners support “not primarily for what he stands for or because of his capacities, but because of where he lives” (37). Research finds that at the presidential level, candidates receive up to a four-point boost in their home states (Lewis-Beck & Rice 1983). Similarly, vice presidential tickets garner an additional three percentage points on average in their home states (Heersink & Peterson 2016). An abundance of evidence has also been found in investigations of state-wide contests (Gimpel, et al. 2008; Bowler, Donovan, and Snipp 1993; Aspin & Hall 1987) and local elections (Brunk et al. 1988; Johnston 1974; Tatalovich 1975). Meredith (2013) suggests that the electoral effects of the friends and neighbors vote can spillover to other races, specifically finding that local candidates running for high profile state level races influence vote share for their co-partisans in down ballot races. Most recently, Panagopoulos, Leighley, and Hamel (2017) have argued that place clearly matters for mobilization - when candidates and citizens share a “home county,” individuals are more motivated to turn out to vote.¹

¹ Recently, these results have been replicated and extended—see Panagopoulos and Bailey (2019).
On the whole, this literature suggests that, at least at one time, a desire for descriptive representation extended beyond considerations such as gender, race, and ethnicity to include place identity (Childs & Cowley 2011). Consistent with descriptive representation more broadly, it is assumed that many desire local candidates due to the belief that local candidates are more likely to understand local needs and, thus, be more likely to address those needs (Shugart, Valdini & Suominen 2005; Tavits 2010). While there is some reason to believe that a preference for local candidates may be most impactful in single member districts, given how central candidate personalities are in such races, local preferences have been documented in other electoral systems as well, suggesting that this may be a more universal preference (Carey & Shugart 1995; Childs & Cowley 2011; Collignon & Sajuria 2018; Jankowski 2016).

Owing to the preponderance of evidence accumulated in the friends and neighbors literature, there can be little doubt that homegrown candidates enjoyed an electoral advantage, whether via mobilization or persuasion, throughout the American patchwork during the twentieth century. Whether this advantage exists today, as well as whether it is due to a genuine preference for local candidates (rather than a spurious result owed to endogenous factors, such as canvassing advantages) is less clear. This ambiguity is partially due to relatively little research being conducted on this question in recent years. As importantly, however, are considerations that, to some, may cast the continued relevance of friends and neighbors voting into doubt, namely partisan polarization (Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2018) and a recent trend toward nationalization (Hopkins 2018). Indeed, as the world continues to “shrink” and as the forces of globalization and nationalization bear down on our social and political lives, prominent scholars have dismissed the need for thinking about contextual factors of political behavior (Hopkins 2018; King 1996). It should also be noted that scholars have not been alone in their suspicion
that the role of geography and physical proximity in shaping political behavior is diminishing.\footnote{As an illustrative case, the 2016 gubernatorial election in Montana pitted Democratic incumbent and Montana native, Steve Bullock, against Greg Gianforte, a Californian who spent considerable time living in New Jersey. The Montana Democrats successfully framed Gianforte as an outsider who was out of touch with Montanans on issues that mattered most to them, chiefly the right to access public land for recreation, though political observers disagreed as to whether it mattered much to voters—some arguing that this framing helped carry Bullock to a narrow win over his Republican challenger in a year where Trump won the state by over 20 points, while others maintained that candidates’ place of birth mattered not to voters. For an overview of Democrats’ efforts to play up their candidate’s in-state roots to voters and a take on the role it may have played in the 2016 Montana gubernatorial election, see: David Greene, “A Singing Cowboy, A Millionaire, and Rifles Dominate Montana Special Election,” NPR News. URL: \url{http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=526349463}. Editorial Board, “Remember Why Gianforte Lost Nov. 8,” Billings Gazette. URL: \url{http://billingsgazette.com/news/opinion/mailbag/remember-whygianforte-lost-nov/article_a500ce8f-4374-591f-a1b6-44b3bf5cb66.html}. Note, however, that Montana Public Radio reporter, Chuck Johnson, repeatedly cast doubt on the importance of candidate place of birth; see, for example (beginning at around 3:00): \url{http://mtpr.org/post/infrastructure-attack-ads-and-conrad-burns-legacy}.}

Meanwhile, a nascent literature conceptualizing place as a form of social identity has emerged that suggests that establishing a candidate’s place-based bonafides can be instrumental in capturing the hearts and minds of some voters, particularly amongst the rural population (Cramer 2016; Jacobs & Munis 2018; Parker 2014).

In this paper, I undertake a fresh investigation of friends and neighbors voting in an age of national partisan polarization. Using observational data, I employ logistic regression to explain variation in attitudes regarding the importance of candidate birth place. Then, using a conjoint experiment, I assess whether voters exhibit a preference for “homegrown candidates” in the face of other considerations known to be determinative of vote choice, such as partisanship. My results show that, despite partisan polarization and the forces of nationalization, preferences for local candidates remain a phenomenon worthy of consideration by public opinion scholars and others.

**Heuristics and Voting**

Dating back to the early behavioral studies pioneered by the Columbia and Michigan schools, perhaps the most consistent, near axiomatic finding in political science has been that the
mass public apparently possesses a low level of political knowledge, on average (Achen & Bartels 2016; Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Lazarsfeld et al. 1944). However, research has also found that even low-information voters are able to make decisions efficiently by relying upon cognitive short-cuts, also referred to variously as cues or heuristics (Downs 1957; Mondak 1993; Popkin 1994). In the context of candidate evaluation, heuristics allow voters to venture a reasonable guess as to what the various candidates stand for, with far less than complete information (Lupia & McCubbins 1998—though, see Achen and Bartels 2018).

Without a doubt, the most powerful heuristic for voters in the candidate evaluation process is partisanship. In a world in which the parties are sorted and increasingly polarized on ideological grounds, partisan labels provide voters information regarding the broad contours of candidates’ policy preferences. Apart from its overtly political quality, partisanship is a powerful political heuristic owing to the fact that party identification serves for many as a stable social identity for many voters (Green et al. 2002), and increasingly one that acts a sort of super-identity encompassing multiple group memberships (Mason 2018).

While partisanship is the most important heuristic that voters rely on, it is not the only heuristic that voters use to choose among candidates. Prior research has identified a number of other candidate identity related traits that function as useful information shortcuts, including ethnicity and race (Brady & Sniderman 1985; Bullock 1994; McDermott 1998), gender (McDermott 1997, 1998; Ono & Burden 2018), class (Carnes & Sadin 2015; Sadin 2014), and job experience (Atkeson & Hamel 2018; Bond et al. 1997; Kirkland & Coppock 2018). Group identities serve as a heuristic because they allow individuals to infer that the candidate will think like them, or perhaps safeguard the interests of the group. Apart from a few recent exceptions,
scholars have largely overlooked how peoples’ place identity (i.e., psychological attachments to the where they live, work, and play that comprise a key component of individuals’ sense of self) could serve as a useful political heuristic. Considering that geographical identities serve as a fundamental way for individuals to distinguish themselves from others (Agnew 2014; Cramer 2016; Wong 2010), as well as evidence that many voters assume homegrown candidates to be better at understanding local (and, thus, “their”) problems and needs (Tavits 2010), I examine more carefully how place can serve as a heuristic in the candidate evaluation process.

**Localism and Political Psychology: The Role of Place Identity**

Previous studies suggest that voters use candidate related place-based cues when determining who to vote for (Collignon & Sajuria 2018; Hunt n.d.; Key 1949; Parker 2014). Campaigns also appear to make explicit and strategic appeals to place in order to entice voters (Cramer 2016; Jacobs & Munis 2018; Parker 2014). Place is able to act as a heuristic because place also serves as the basis for social identity. Social identities are group attachments that comprise an essential component of individuals’ sense of self (Tajfel 1981). Place identity (or place-based identity) differentiates people from one another by signaling that “we” live here, while “others” live elsewhere. Moreover, place identity provides individuals with a sense of security and informs their behavior (Cramer 2016; Lalli 1992; Proshansky et al. 1983; Tamir 1995; Stedman 2002). Individuals can identify with multiple different places (i.e., “symbolically charged sites” (Osborne 2006)) of varying scales, including the neighborhood, town/city, state, region, as well as other socially and symbolically meaningful categories, such as the urban-rural continuum (Hidalgo & Hernandez 2001; Lalli 1992). Place identities, like many other identities such as ethnicity or gender, are not inherently political identities (contrast this with place “consciousness,” which others—including Cramer (2016) and Wuthnow (2017) have focused on.
in more depth). However, if activated by environmental stimuli, they can become temporarily politically salient. Previous research has shown that, once activated, place identity can be important regarding both mobilization (Panagopoulos & Bailey 2019; Panagopoulos et al. 2017; Wong 2010) and vote choice (Collignon & Sajuria 2018; Parker 2014). From these studies previewed in this and the previous sections, two hypotheses can be generated:

**Hypothesis 1:** On average, respondents will prefer homegrown (i.e., local) candidates to non-local candidates.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant and positive relationship between place identity and the likelihood of preferring homegrown candidates.

**Research Design, Method, and Results**

To assess whether candidates’ place of birth continues to be a meaningful cue to voters, both observational and experimental techniques were utilized. Using observational survey data (Study 1), I assessed beliefs regarding the importance of candidate birthplace and whether homegrown candidates make better representatives. Then, in Study 2, using a discrete choice conjoint experiment, I exposed respondents to two hypothetical candidates for U.S. Congress wherein I vary two place-based candidate characteristics: current place of residence of the candidates and candidates’ birthplace (whilst simultaneously varying a litany of other factors, including partisanship).

**Study 1: Observational Analysis of 2019 Lucid Survey Data**

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3 As with other social identities, place identity can, under certain conditions, develop into a form of “group consciousness,” thereby becoming overtly and chronically politicized (McClain et al. 2009; Miller et al. 1981). Group consciousness emerges when group members perceive that their position in society has been unjustly, and perhaps deliberately, diminished relative to other groups.
Data

I make use of a novel dataset featuring two questions pertaining to place and politics, which I utilize as dependent measures below—one question that directly captures the self-reported importance respondents place on candidate roots, and a second question regarding whether respondents believe that rooted candidates are better able to understand the needs and problems facing their constituents. The question wording for each of these DV’s was “micro-tailored” to the each respondent’s state of residence in order to prime them to think about their own electoral context rather than consider the question in a broader abstract sense. These questions are ideal for the purposes of this paper, as they allow me to assess directly support for local candidates, as well as beliefs regarding what sets local candidates apart from others. These data are comprised of a nationally representative non-probability sample and were collected in Spring of 2019 (sample demographics data are presented in Table A1).

The key independent variable used to assess Hypothesis 2 above is a five-item psychometric scale measure of place identity comprised of slightly modified (micro-tailored to respondents’ place of residence) items from well validated place-identity scales (Hernandez et al. 2007; Lalli 1992; Nanzer 2004; Stedman 2002). These items, which are listed in Table A2 of the Appendix, have a high degree of internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.87) and were combined into a normalized scale measure. As control variables, I included a range of respondent level variables that previous studies have established as being highly predictive of vote choice, including a normalized measure of racial resentment (Kinder & Sanders 1996), a normalized

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4 Question wording for the two dependent measures are as follows: (1.) How important do you think it is for candidates running for Congress in [Respondent state] to have been born in [Respondent state]?; (2.) In general, do you think that candidates born in [Respondent state] are better at understanding the values and needs of people in [Respondent state] than candidates born elsewhere?
measure populist attitudes (Schulz et al. 2017), party identification, level of education, age, sex, region, race (binary variable indicating whether the respondent is White), and urban-rural classification.

Method

To assess respondents’ reported beliefs regarding candidate roots, basic descriptive statistics are utilized. Namely a percentage of respondents within each response category for each of the questions is reported. To determine whether high place identifiers are more likely to regard candidate roots as important, as well as believe that homegrown candidates are better attuned to the needs of their constituents, a series of logistic regression models are estimated for each dependent measure including the variables listed above. Because a large number of respondents reported that they believe it is “moderately important” or “very important” that candidates running for Congress in their state to have been born there, I dichotomized the variable, where 1 = “very important” and 0 = all other responses. This decision is defensible as it is those in the “very important” category I am most interested in, since it can reasonably be assumed that these are the group of respondents for whom candidate roots could potentially matter in the voting booth. In addition to standard logit coefficients, the predicted probability of being in the category coded 1 for each variable are reported at different levels of place identity. Finally, the marginal effect of place identity on the probability of being in the category coded 1 for each dependent measure is also calculated at different points along the urban-rural continuum.

Results
First, basic frequency statistics were examined to determine the percentage of respondents who selected each response category for the question “how important do you think it is for candidates running for Congress in [R state] to have been born in [R state]?.” The distribution of responses indicates that a majority of respondents’ report candidate roots as being either moderately (33.9%) or very important (36.1%). Together, less than 1/3rd of respondents reported that candidate roots were only slightly important (14.7%) or not at all important (15.3%). Considering recent nascent work on nationalization, these results—particularly that “very important” netted a plurality of responses—are somewhat surprising. These descriptive findings lend some support for Hypothesis 1, though are unconvincing on their own since real world candidate evaluation involves assessing candidates on multiple dimensions (e.g., partisanship, gender, political experience, etc.). Moreover, while this question is useful in capturing respondents’ general attitudes toward homegrown Congressional candidates in their states, due to how the question is worded we cannot conclude whether respondents are reporting their own personal attitudes or whether they are reporting what they assume to be the average or typical response of their fellow state residents.

Next, basic frequency statistics were also examined to determine what percentage of respondents answered “yes” to the question “In general, do you think that candidates born in [Respondent state] are better at understanding the values and needs of people in [Respondent state] than candidates born elsewhere?” As with the previously analyzed question, a sizeable majority of the respondents answered the question in a favorable light for native born candidates, with some 63% of respondents selecting “yes.” These results are consistent with existing theory

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5 Within the Qualtrics survey interface that respondents used to respond to the survey, the original response options for this question were Yes, No, and Unsure/Don’t Know. For subsequent logistic regression analysis, the No and Unsure/Don’t know categories were collapsed into a single category, coded as 0 for purposes of analysis.
regarding why voters might prefer local candidates (Tavits 2010). Regarding our hypotheses, if we assume that voters prefer candidates who are more attuned to the values and needs of their constituents, then these numbers would appear to provide additional support for Hypothesis 1.6

To evaluate our second hypothesis, I now turn to describing a series of logistic regression models—see results in Table 1. In Model 1, I regress a binary variable capturing whether respondents reported a candidate’s place of birth (either in the district or not) as being very important on place identity and a vector on controls. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the likelihood of reporting that it is very important that congressional candidates be born in the state in which they are running increases as place identity strengthens, on average, after taking into account the influence of other factors. Predicted probabilities, plotted in the lefthand pane of Figure 1, indicate that those high in place identity (Pr = .46) are over twice as likely as low place identifiers (Pr = .21) to report that candidate birthplace is a very important consideration. In addition, owing to a spurt of scholarship focusing on distinctions in public opinion between urban and rural areas (e.g., Cramer 2016; Hopkins 2017; Jacobs & Munis 2018), as well as the fact that many recent high profile cases of candidate birthplace taking on a high degree of salience having occurred in rural states, I also estimated the marginal effect, along the urban-rural continuum, of place identity on the likelihood of indicating that candidate roots are very important. Results of this marginal effects analysis, which are presented in Table 2, indicate that the marginal effect of place identity is significant and remarkably similar in magnitude across the urban-rural continuum, which suggests that those high in place identity are more likely to be attracted to local candidates, irrespective of where they live. Model 1 results suggest that those

6 As with the other survey question regarding candidate roots, this question is not without its problems. Most notably, because this question employs a simple yes/no/unsure list of response options, there is some concern regarding acquiescence bias (i.e., the propensity of respondents to select the “yes” option even if truly they are unsure or believe the opposite).
higher in place identity are significantly more likely to be within that 36% of respondents who indicated that they find candidate roots to be very important than those with lower place identity. Together, these results provide strong evidence that place, despite recent trends in American politics, could still matter for our elections.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Analyses—Place Identity and Attitudes Regarding Candidate Roots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important that Candidates be Born in My State</th>
<th>Local Candidates Better Understand Values &amp; Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place Identity</td>
<td>1.35* (0.27)</td>
<td>1.04* (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Resentment</td>
<td>0.71* (0.26)</td>
<td>0.69* (0.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populism</td>
<td>10.44* (1.01)</td>
<td>10.44* (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-independent</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.19)</td>
<td>-0.03 (0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Republican</td>
<td>0.26 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.07* (0.03)</td>
<td>-0.07* (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.02* (0.00)</td>
<td>-0.02* (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.24* (0.24)</td>
<td>0.24* (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-midwest</td>
<td>0.21 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.21 (0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-south</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.16)</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-west</td>
<td>-0.24 (0.18)</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.01)</td>
<td>-0.02 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place Perception</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, a nearly identical set of models were estimated, the only difference being that the belief that local candidates are more understanding of constituents’ values and needs was set as the dependent variable. Results for Model 3, presented in Table 1, indicate that higher levels of place identity are, on average, associated with an increased likelihood of belief that local (i.e.,
born in the district) candidates are better able to understand their constituents. The right pane of Figure 2 shows that estimated shift in probability of this belief is substantial, from low levels (Pr = .49) to high levels of place identity (Pr = .72). Similarly, the estimated marginal effects of place identity on the belief that local candidate are more attuned to constituent needs are positive and significant across the urban-rural divide, except in very rural areas, with highest magnitudes in urban areas.

All together, the results of these models provide considerable evidence in favor of both hypotheses. These results lend especially strong support to Hypothesis 2, suggesting that place is particularly meaningful cue in the candidate evaluation process to those high in place identity. Evidence regarding Hypothesis 1, however, while supportive, is less convincing, particularly insofar as general election (i.e., partisan) elections are considered, given the multidimensional nature of candidate evaluation and vote choice, and the outsized role that other considerations play in that process, particularly partisanship. To gather more compelling evidence regarding Hypothesis 1, we now turn to Study 2, an original conjoint experiment.

Study 2: Conjoint Experiment

Data

Data for Study 2 are comprised of a nationally representative sample of 1,000 individuals comprising one module of the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES)—sample demographics are listed in Table A2. These data were collected in two waves in the fall of 2018. Respondents were presented with seven randomly generated candidate pairings and were tasked with choosing the profile from each pairing that they found most preferable. Which candidate is chosen by respondents comprises the dependent measure, while the randomized levels of the
candidate attributes serve as the independent measures in the subsequent conjoint analysis. Since the levels of the candidate attributes are fully randomized, each candidate profile has an equal probability of being generated. Candidate attributes included gender, deliberative style, current residence, where the candidate grew-up/childhood hometown, political experience, veteran status, partisanship, and education history. Two of these attributes, current residence and where the candidate grew up, serve as place cues. Both place related attributes were micro-tailored to each individual respondent’s state of residence. For current city of residence, candidates were listed as either residing in the largest city, by population, in the Respondent’s state, or in a randomly chosen town of approximately 10,000 individuals in the Respondent’s state (care was taken in each case to ensure it was an actual small town, rather than a neighborhood or suburb of a larger city). For the where the candidate grew up attribute, candidates were presented as either having grew up in a city from the opposite coast (New York City for a respondent from Montana or Nebraska, Los Angeles for a respondent from Virginia or Iowa), the largest city within the state from which the highest number of migrants flow into the Respondent’s state (e.g., Los Angeles, CA for a respondent from Montana, Boston, MA for a respondent from New Hampshire), a small town of approximately 10,000 individuals in the Respondent’s state, or the largest city within the Respondent’s state.

**Table 3: Conjoint Attributes and Levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current City of Residence*</td>
<td>Town</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Where Candidate Grew Up**

Coastal city  | Out of state city  | In-state town  | In-state big city

**Political Experience**

Served in U.S.  | New to politics

House

**Veteran Status**

Not a veteran  | Marine veteran  | Army veteran

**Deliberation Style**

Collaborates and cooperates with others  | Acts decisively and takes charge

**Education**

Ivy League Degree  | College Degree

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**Method**

Including a forced-choice conjoint experiment is advantageous as it allows me to address several inferential difficulties posed by the form of observational analysis featured in Study 1 and, thus, allows me to better triangulate on Hypothesis 1. Methodologically, conjoint experiments provide three basic advantages over observational approaches. First and foremost amongst these advantages is that conjoint experiments, in the context of candidate evaluation studies, allow the researcher to assess the potential causal effect of particular levels of conjoint profile attributes/characteristics (e.g., the effect a candidate being born within the state in which they are running versus being born outside of it) (Hainmueller, Hopkins & Yamamoto 2014). A second advantage of conjoint studies is that they allow us to assess the impacts of particular attribute levels while simultaneously varying a litany of other attributes that may impact decisions, whereas, in standard survey research (including the observational analysis in Study 1 of this paper), it is typically the case that attitudes are measured along a single dimension (i.e., where additional considerations are not varied and may not even be present for consideration). This is an important advantage of conjoint experiments, as it allows the researcher to discern
variously the effects (if calculating the average marginal component effect) or overall respondent preferences (if calculating conditional marginal means) associated with profile attribute levels relative to other randomly varying levels. A third benefit of conjoint design is that, relative to standard observational and experimental approaches that utilize survey responses, they help mitigate so called demand effects and social desirability bias (Caruso, Rahnev, & Banaji 2009). Respondents’ concerns regarding social desirability and researcher demand are both forms of bias wherein respondents obfuscate their true preferences because of others’ (perceived) expectations. In the case of social desirability bias, respondents conform with norms deemed acceptable in broader society, whereas a demand effects scenario is one in which respondents attempt to appease the researcher by providing results that the researcher is assumed to desire. Because conjoint experiments randomly vary levels for a multitude of attributes simultaneously, it lessens respondents’ ability to discern what particular facet(s) of conjoint profiles the researcher is interested in.

In the context of this study, respondents are forced to choose between two competing candidate profiles, whose attribute levels are varied randomly. A “forced choice” design is appropriate in this case as it is most reflective of the decision task that voters face when they actually cast a ballot in elections (Hainmueller, Hopkins & Yamamoto 2013). As is standard in the conjoint literature in political science, I make three simplifying assumptions (Hainmueller, Hopkins & Yamamoto 2013). First, I assume stability and no carryover effects, which means that potential outcomes remain stable between choice tasks and that treatment exposure in previous tasks does not influence respondent decisions in subsequent tasks. Second, I assume no profile-order effects, which simply means that the order in which respondents encounter profiles on their screen does not influence the decisions the respondent would make. The third and final
assumption is that attribute levels are randomly generated, which guarantees (assuming proper randomization) that potential outcomes are statistically independent of the conjoint profiles.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, I am primarily interested in discerning overall respondent preferences toward particular candidate characteristics (place cues, in this case) in a multidimensional decision space. Because of this, I calculate and present conditional marginal means below. In the context of a forced choice conjoint design, the marginal mean of an attribute level represents the average level of favorability for profiles featuring that particular attribute level, averaged over all levels of other attributes. As Leeper et al. detail, “in the common forced-choice design with two alternatives, marginal means have a direct interpretation as probabilities” (2018, p. 6)

As multiple recent papers have carefully argued, marginal means are a more appropriate quantity of interest for researchers who are interested in preferences regarding particular characteristics (or feature/attribute “levels” in conjoint parlance) of evaluative objects, rather than the causal effect of characteristics on overall profile evaluation captured by another common estimation strategy (Leeper et al. 2018; Clayton et al. 2019). This same logic applies to research contexts in which subgroup heterogeneity is an interest (Leeper et al. 2018). The most common estimate calculated in the extant social science literature employing conjoint designs is the average marginal component effect (AMCE) proposed by Hainmueller et al. (2014). The AMCE has proven highly attractive to many researchers, as it measures the causal effect of a change in a particular attribute level on respondents’ overall favorability of a profile, averaged over all other respondents and attributes. However, the AMCE is not an appropriate quantity for

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7 Both conditional marginal means and average marginal component effects are calculated using the cregg package in R (Leeper 2019).
researchers interested in preferences, as interpreting them as overall respondent preferences for attribute levels is misleading due to the nature of their calculation—chiefly, the causal effect of an attribute level change is always calculated in comparison to a baseline. In calculating marginal means, I remove the need to derive estimates in relation to a baseline category, which, while not providing the clean causal interpretation of the AMCE, provides an appropriate estimate of respondent preferences, which is the focus on this paper.\textsuperscript{8}

\textit{Results}

Figure 2 plots the probability that favored candidates featured a particular attribute level, as well as a 95\% confidence interval for each estimate, for all 7000 decision tasks. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, I find that candidate roots (i.e., where candidates were listed as having grown up/their childhood hometown) mattered significantly in the candidate selection process. More specifically, respondents appeared to have a significant preference for candidates who grew up in big cities within respondents’ own states, whereas candidates who grew up in coastal cities and in states from which the most migrants flow to respondents’ states were significantly less likely to be selected. Candidates from smaller towns within the respondents’ home states were not significantly less likely nor more likely to be selected. Respondents did not appear to demonstrate strong feelings one way or the other regarding where candidates currently reside. These results comprise clear evidence of place functioning as a meaningful cue in a survey task meant to simulate candidate evaluation and selection processes. Apart from the magnitude of the marginal mean corresponding to partisan (in)congruence, which political scientists have long understood to be the most prominent consideration in political evaluation (e.g., Campbell et al.

\textsuperscript{8} However, because AMCEs have been the most common estimate presented in previous conjoint papers in political science, I also include plots of AMCEs in Figures A1-A3 in the Appendix.
the candidate roots place cue appears to “matter” as much as any other candidate characteristic, when considering the results of all candidate selection tasks.

Figure 3 presents marginal means for decision tasks (n ~ 3,400) that simulated a primary election (i.e., both candidate profiles were of the same party). The pattern of results closely resembles that of Figure 2. When evaluating two candidates of the same party, respondents preferred candidates from large cities within their state, whereas candidates from other states were less likely to be preferred. Once again, candidates from small towns in the respondents’ states were neither significantly more likely nor less likely to be preferred. Current candidate residence was not significantly associated with preference either way. These results support Hypothesis 1 and suggest that place is perhaps a meaningful cue to voters when evaluating two candidates of the same party.
Figure 2: Candidate Attribute Level Marginal Means – All Choice Tasks
Figure 3: Candidate Attribute Level Marginal Means – Primary Election Choice Tasks
Figure 4: Candidate Attribute Level Marginal Means – General Election Choice Tasks
Figure 4 features the marginal means associated with decision tasks simulating a general election environment (i.e., wherein the two candidates presented are of opposite parties). Based on what we know the extant literature on vote choice and candidate evaluation, this subset of the data represents the most difficult test for Hypothesis 1, due in large part to the dominating influence of partisan cues in the candidate evaluation process, particularly in the era of national polarization (Hayes & Lawless 2016; Hopkins 2018; Jacobson 2017). Results indicate that candidates who grew up in in-state large cities were significantly more likely to be chosen as the favorable candidate. While no significant relationships emerged between other candidates roots levels and candidate selection—thus making the results of the “general election analysis” differ from both the primary and combined total analysis—the marginal mean associated with roots in a large in-state city was the only attribute level apart from candidate partisanship to achieve conventional levels of statistical significance. Together, these results along with those from the other two conjoint analyses provide considerable evidence in favor of Hypothesis 1 and suggest that place, via candidate roots, can function as a meaningful cue in the candidate evaluation process—even in general election contexts.

**Discussion & Conclusion**

This paper provides substantial evidence, using multiple samples and methodologies, to support the conclusion that place, via candidate roots, endures as a relevant cue to voters. These results cast doubt on the view, held by many cynical observers of politics, that partisanship is the only consideration that matters in the age of polarization. On the other hand, the results presented above also speak to the power of partisan cues, and are thus consistent with a large body of political science. Indeed, in Study 2, four distinct attributes (and ten attribute levels spread across
those four levels) were significantly associated with a candidate being either more or less likely to be selected in conjoint decisions tasks simulating a primary election. However, in conjoint decision tasks simulating general election contests, with partisanship labels present, only one of these four attributes (and only a single level within it) remained significant—place, in the form of candidate roots. While these findings reaffirm the primacy of partisanship, they also suggest that public opinion scholars’ neglect of considerations of place, perhaps humankind’s most ancient and foundational form of social delineation, is misguided.

Similarly, this paper’s results also speak to recent work on nationalization (Hopkins 2018). To recap, I find that respondents show a preference for homegrown candidates—both when asked directly as well as when presented with a multidimensional candidate choice task. To the extent that nationalization of political behavior has occurred, these results suggest that it may be a mostly supply-side driven phenomenon. This perspective is in keeping with other recent work, such as Martin and McCrain’s study showing that, despite a recent pivot toward the nationalization of news, most folks disdain these developments rather than demand them (2019). As regards recent and future electoral politics, the results of this paper, which are based upon nationally representative samples, suggest that the strategy of localizing races through local roots and place identity employed by, for example, Democrats in prominent 2018 Congressional races in Iowa, Montana, and West Virginia, is one that is worth considering throughout the country, in both primary and general elections—particularly in states and districts where average levels of place identity are high (Hypothesis 2). The findings presented above regarding place identity and the importance of candidate roots to voters extend recent findings from the European context (Collignon & Sajuria 2018), and provide evidence that subnational identities are still of relevance to American electoral politics.
Despite the benefits of the mixed methods approach, and the general persuasiveness of the findings, this study is not without its drawbacks. The most central weakness of this paper, as well as any study that relies wholly on one or both methods employed here, is that I am not observing real world behavior. A number of different strategies could be used by scholars in future studies to address the external validity related weaknesses of this paper, including perhaps the use of field experiments using place-based stimuli to prime place identity regarding some aspect of electoral politics. A second weakness of this paper is that Hypothesis 2, while strongly supported by results of several models in Study 1, was not able to be evaluated in Study 2 due to the lack of a place identity battery being present on the CCES. Future work should address this weakness by assessing whether high place identifiers reveal distinct preferences, particularly regarding place-based characteristics, in a multidimensional decision space.

In all, the results presented in this paper speak to the continuing relevance of place, even in time period in which the relatively new forces of national polarization have joined with perennially salient aspects of American politics, including race, to grip nearly all facets of American political life. In particular, the findings presented above speak to place as an apparently enduring—and potentially powerful—heuristic in American politics and elections.
References


Key, V. (1949). *Southern politics in state and nation*.


Place, Candidate Roots, and Voter Preferences in an Age of Partisan Polarization: Observational and Experimental Evidence

Supplemental Appendix
Table A1: Survey Sample Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lucid Sample</th>
<th>2018 CCES Module</th>
<th>2016 ANES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>44.42</td>
<td>48.01</td>
<td>49.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>51.58</td>
<td>56.50</td>
<td>51.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>74.61</td>
<td>74.10</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Democratic</td>
<td>48.15</td>
<td>44.50</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>4217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Lucid sample collected in March 2019. 2018 CCES data collected in November and December of 2018. Comparison statistics taken from the ANES 2016 Pilot Study available at:*
TABLE A2: Item Wording for the Place Identity Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1: Living in my [place_adj] [Respondent_state] community has helped make me who I am.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2: My community is important to me.</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3: I feel that my community is part of me.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4: I identify with my community.</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5: My community doesn’t mean that much to me.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s alpha = 0.87
Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)

While marginal means are more appropriate for interests in the paper, I also calculate the AMCEs for each attribute level, since this is the most conventionally reported in papers using conjoint design. As Hainmueller et al. (2014) detail, AMCEs have a clear casual interpretation. Baseline categories are those attribute levels whose points in the Figures below that lie precisely at 0 and have no confidence interval band.

AMCE equation:

\[ \Sigma \{ \begin{align*} &E[Y_{ijk} | T_{ijkt} = t_1, T_{ijk[-l]} = t, T_{ijkl} = t_0, \hat{T}] - E[Y_{ijk} | T_{ijkt} = t, T_{ijkl} = t_0, \hat{T}] \} * \]

\[p[T_{ijkt} = t, T_{ijkl} = t] | (T_{ijkt}, T_{ijkl}) \in \hat{T}\]

Where:

- \(i\) = any given respondent
- \(l\) = component number (attribute level number)
- \(j\) = profile number
- \(k\) = choice task
- \(t_x\) = profile set
- \(T_{ijkt} = \) vector of \(L - 1\) treatment components, where \(L\) equals the total number of components
- \(\hat{T}\) = intersection of support of the first and second halves of the equation (those parts of the equation on either side of the multiplication symbol)

The above estimated quantity represents the effect of a given attribute level on the probability that a profile is selected, marginalizing over the distribution of other attributes.
Figure A1. Average Marginal Component Effects for All Conjoint Decision Tasks
Figure A2. Average Marginal Component Effects for Primary Election Conjoint Decision Tasks
Figure A3. Average Marginal Component Effects for General Election Conjoint Decision Tasks