Talk Local to Me: Assessing the Heterogeneous Effects of Localistic Appeals

Richard Burke* and Kal Munis†

Abstract: Two trends characterize contemporary American politics, affective polarization (Iyengar et al. 2012) and the nationalization of political behavior (Hopkins 2018). In this paper, we examine whether local framing can decrease voters' reliance on national partisan identities when evaluating their representatives. Relying on both observational evidence from members of Congress' Facebook posts and an experimental study, we find evidence that "talking local" is an effective means for representatives to bypass the "perceptual screen" of partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960).

* PhD Candidate at the University of Virginia Department of Politics. E-mail: rjb4aq@virginia.edu
† Postdoctoral Research Scholar at the P3 Lab of the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University. Email: munis@jhu.edu
Political institutions in the United States are overwhelmingly geographic in nature. From federalism to the electoral college, American political institutional design assumes that preferences and relevant social and economic conditions vary across geographies and that these realities ought to be reflected in the structures and operations of government (e.g., see the Federalist and Anti-federalist papers). Geographically apportioned single-member districts, one of America’s more unique electoral institutions, privileges geography and the particularities of geography to a significant extent, especially when compared to alternative systems (Cain et al. 1987). Recent trends in American politics, however, namely partisan polarization (e.g., Levendusky 2009; Mason 2018) and nationalization (e.g., Hopkins 2018), suggest that there may no longer be much room for “local,” particularistic considerations to sway public opinion. “Going local,” in other words, may be fruitless if voters from Orlando, FL to Ovando, MT overwhelmingly crave homogenized national partisan rhetoric. Moreover, if this is the case, one of the core justifications (e.g., geocentrism of the American political heart and mind) articulated by the American founders for much of American institutional design—particularly regarding our electoral and representational institutions—would no longer be applicable.

In this paper, we consider the effectiveness of local appeals during a time where the American electorate has been characterized by social sorting (Mason 2018) and affective polarization (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). We argue that local appeals can be effective, specifically among voters who do not share the party of their Senator. We first establish this causal relationship using a survey experiment that relies on manipulated Facebook posts. Next, we turn to data on Senators’ Facebook posts and find that Senators in competitive states are more likely to post about local topics and that local posts boost approval among contra-partisans and independents.
Why Local Sells:

In October of 2020, as political polarization approached its asymptote, the Facebook posts of one Maine Senator reflected a more genteel era of American politics. Rather than the highly-contentious presidential election or the Supreme Court confirmation battle, Susan Collins (R-ME) posted about her work to strengthen Maine’s fishing industry, renovate the Eastport Municipal Airport, and provide Mainers with personal protective equipment during the Coronavirus pandemic. She also posted about her work to bring 82,000 young Mainers federally-subsidized lunches and to fund medical research on Alzheimer’s disease, a disease that afflicts 28,000 people in her state.

Collins’ communication sought to disentangle her campaign from the national, partisan battles fought in Washington. In light of opinion polls that showed Joe Biden with a comfortable lead in her state, this strategy made sense. Collins was vindicated once the final votes were tallied. Despite Joe Biden’s statewide win margin of 10 percentage points, Collins still managed to win her senate seat by a comfortable margin of 7 percentage points. Collins’ story suggests that local appeals work in a national, partisan age.

Previous research suggests that voters are likely to value local cues because they send two primary signals: 1.) mutual identity between candidate and voter; 2.) representational quality. First, symbolic geographic units, including cities and states, can serve as the basis of one’s social identity (e.g., Tajfel 1974; Jacobs and Munis 2020). Appealing to voters’ social identities is effective because it signals to voters that the candidate cares about their ingroup. The part of one’s social identity attached to symbolic geography is referred to as place identity (e.g., Proshansky et al. 1983). Broad place identities such as state identity are best thought of as superordinate identities.
Superordinate identities are ‘large’ higher level identities that encapsulate a number of smaller identities within them. In addition, most forms of place identity are largely apolitical (Munis 2020). Combined, the superordinate and apolitical nature of most place identities makes them ideal for purposes of bridging divides or, in the context of a political campaign, expanding one’s electoral coalition.

The second reason why going local may be effective is that voters may use local cues to infer representational behavior. Previous research focusing on non-American contexts has found that voters use local cues (“descriptive localism”), such as those regarding candidate roots, as a proxy for a candidate’s likely “representational localism” (Campbell et al. 2019). In other words, evidence suggests that, at least in some non-American contexts, voters take local cues as a sign that the legislator is more understanding of the constituency and more likely to represent it faithfully in the legislature.

A tertiary reason why voters may feel compelled by localistic appeals is that the local is generally what they are most intimately acquainted with and aware of (Cutler 2007). Local economic conditions have been shown to significantly influence evaluations of political

1 In this paper, we study voter preferences for candidates who deploy local rhetoric. In both our observational and experimental studies, we focus on U.S. Senators, which means that the relevant symbolic geography (i.e., place) are American states. As others have demonstrated, state-based identity is a form of place identity meaningful to voters and one that can, under the right conditions, become temporarily relevant to politics (Jacobs and Munis 2020; Young 2015). An exception to this general rule are urban-rural place identities, which have become notably politicized within the American context (Cramer 2016; Jacobs and Munis 2019; Munis 2020).
incumbents above and beyond national economic conditions (Reeves and Gimpel 2012). Indeed, Reeves and Gimpel (2012, p. 531) find that “Far from being an echo chamber of the national media, voters form their attitudes about the economy based on their limited exposure to their localities, variously defined.” However, while voters may be able to naturally detect and process things such as local economic conditions via osmosis as they go about their daily lives, many other criteria that voters use to determine who to vote for require an intermediary (e.g., news media) to relay that information. For such media-reliant elements of public opinion, whether local or non-local considerations predominate is largely a function of the broader communicative environment – an issue we cover in more detail in the next section.

**Ambivalent Partisans, the Politically Detached, and Independents**

While American politics currently finds itself firmly within the grips of nationalized, partisan polarization (Iyengar et. Al 2019, Hopkins 2018), it is important that we bear in mind that these forces impact people differently – and that, indeed, some may not be impacted at all. Again, it must be acknowledged that many partisan voters now dislike out-group partisans (Abramowitz and Webster 2018) and find them to be bad people (Iyengar and Westwood 2015). For these people, electoral victory for their party is perhaps more important than policy victory (Mason, Huddy & Aaroe 2015). Yet, we also know that many Americans are not particularly happy with their partisan affiliations and a smaller, though still potentially pivotal, subset are true-independent voters (Klar and Krupnikov 2016). In other words, despite nationalized polarization (and the importance of mobilization that polarization entails), there is still a persuadable segment of the electorate that, in some contexts, are pivotal for election outcomes (Hill et al. 2020).

Voters are comprised of many different considerations, of which partisanship is only one – albeit the most important (Campbell et al. 1960; Cramer 2016; Zaller 1992). Making meaningful
identities or other considerations salient to voters can disrupt the sway that partisanship holds over some. Socially cross-pressured voters – such as rural Democrats, college educated female Republicans, or Democrats high in white identity – tend to be weaker partisans and may be especially vulnerable to partisan defection (Jardina 2019; Mason 2018). Intra-party factions are another important consideration. Partisan coalitions are often made up of disparate groups (Cohen et al. 2008) – for example, in our current period social conservatives are joined with libertarians (Noel 2013). The internally divided nature of American parties increases the likelihood that large swaths – or factions – within the parties may become disaffected (especially if they consistently lose intra-party power struggles).

A considerable number of voters, especially independents and weak partisans, are disapproving of politicians who are perceived as too partisan, uncompromising or extreme (Costa 2020). Carson et al. (2010) find that voters punish representatives who tow the party line on crucial roll call votes. Many voters chafe when exposed to the partisan warfare that takes place in Congress and state legislatures (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). Furthermore, many voters actually like compromise (Harbridge et al. 2014, Wolak 2016). Considering that elite polarization has seemingly far outpaced that of the electorate, it would seem that voters have plenty to be disaffected by (Fiorina 2005; Hill and Tausanovitch 2015).

Increasing the amount of information in an electoral environment can also break down voters’ reliance on the partisan heuristics (Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Peterson 2017). When made salient in an election, considerations such as race (Visalvanich 2017; Jardina 2019), place (Parker 2014), gender (Costa and Schaffner 2018), and legislative effectiveness (Butler et al. 2019), among others, can influence voters’ decisions.
The American media landscape has experienced massive transformations which have made national information far more abundant than local information. An emerging line of research demonstrates these changes have exacerbated polarization. Darr et al. (2018) find that local newspaper closures are associated with a decline in split-ticket voting and greater reliance on national news and partisan heuristics (2018). Moskowitz (2020) finds that voters who are in-state media markets are more likely to split their ticket in state-wide races for Governor and Senator than voters who are in out-of-state media markets. While voters are impacted by changes in the media landscape, they don’t seem to like these changes. Martin and McCrain (2019) find that shifts in ownership of local news channels that result in more national news content is associated with less satisfaction among viewers within those media markets. Together, the studies overviewed in this section suggest that candidates may benefit by “going local,” despite polarization and nationalization. That is, if candidates are able to successfully make local considerations salient in their campaigns, then this may help them win over some voters – particularly independents and weak partisans on the other side. Below, we investigate this question using both observational and experimental data.

**Experimental Evidence Regarding the Heterogenous Effects of Local Appeals**

First, we present the results of a survey experiment designed to test the effects of localized frames versus nationalized and politically charged frames. Our experiment, which was
programmed in Qualtrics, was fielded online via Lucid in early December 2019. The sample, which is a non-probability sample of American adults, is comprised of approximately 3,000 respondents, is broadly nationally representative.

Once respondents agreed to participate in the study, they were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: 1) localized policy frame, 2) nationalized policy frame, or 3) ideological (identity) policy frame. Stimuli in each condition were micro-tailored to each respondent’s state of residence. Stimuli were constructed in such a way as to realistically mimic Facebook postings that U.S. Senators regularly issue in real life. The stimuli were attributed to one of the respondent’s U.S. Senators, and which senator the respondent was assigned to see was issued at random – as an example of the possible stimuli for a respondent from Montana, see Figure 1.

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3 In a recent study, Coppock and McClellan (2019) find that Lucid results mirror those of studies using high quality and supremely respectable samples, including the American National Election Studies.

4 Sample composition on a list of variables relevant to political science research including:

Gender (52% female), Age (mean = 44, s.d. = 17), Race (73% white), and Partisanship (Democrats including leaners = 45%, pure independents = 17%, Republicans including leaners = 37%).

5 Respondents were debriefed at the end of the study that the posts were constructed by the researchers. Stimuli for each state were constructed to be as realistic as possible. To this end, we used the profile name, and profile photo of each Senator’s official Facebook page at the time that the study was conducted in constructing our stimuli. Some Senators have multiple profiles – one for electioneering and one for conveying information regarding their activities in Washington.
Figure 1: Example Experimental Stimuli

Local Frame Condition

Despite all the distractions in Washington, many important issues remain for the United States Senate and healthcare is at the top of the list. As a Senator from the great state of Montana, I have fought tirelessly to protect Obamacare. While some have attacked the Affordable Care Act, it continues to benefit Montana’s bottom line and has made countless everyday Montanans’ lives better. As Montana’s Senator, I will continue to fight for the policies that make sense for Montana.

National Frame Condition

Despite all the distractions in Washington, many important issues remain for the United States Senate and healthcare is at the top of the list. As a Senator, I have fought tirelessly to protect Obamacare. While some have attacked the Affordable Care Act, it continues to benefit America’s bottom line and has made countless everyday Americans’ lives better. As Senator, I will continue to fight for the policies that make sense for America.

Ideological Frame Condition

Despite all the distractions in Washington, many important issues remain for the United States Senate and healthcare is at the top of the list. As a progressive Senator, I have fought tirelessly to protect Obamacare. While some have attacked the Affordable Care Act, it continues to benefit our bottom line and has made countless lives better. As a progressive Senator, I will continue to fight for the progressive policies that make sense.

Note: The 6 images above provide examples of each condition. In this example, a respondent from Montana would be randomly assigned to one of three conditions (local, national, or ideological) and then, within those conditions, randomly assigned to one of the state’s two U.S. Senators (Jon Tester or Steve Daines in Montana’s case).

DC and in their district – and, in those cases, we always based our stimuli on the profiles that are not tied directly to campaign efforts, since these pages are most consistently active.
The issue discussed across all three policy frame conditions was the same: healthcare. We chose healthcare (general stance toward the Affordable Care Act, specifically) as the issue to feature in our stimuli for two reasons. First, it is an issue on which basic stances do not vary within partisan caucuses in the U.S. Senate. Second, we felt that it represented a relatively “hard test” regarding whether local policy frames can influence opinion since healthcare is a salient issue in American politics and has been, especially since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, a highly politicized issue. We expect that any detectable framing effects would only be enlarged in contexts involving comparatively less hot-button political topics.

We test four hypotheses using our experimental data. We are primarily interested in whether localized rhetoric can help candidates move beyond the “perceptual screen” of partisanship and partisan-aligned identities (Campbell et al. 1960). In other words, we are interested in whether going local helps make candidates more appealing beyond their base.

**Hypothesis 1**: Independents assigned to the local frame condition will be more likely, on average, to agree with the Senator’s message than those assigned to either the national or ideological conditions.

**Hypothesis 2**: Out-partisans assigned to the local frame condition will be more likely, on average, to agree with the Senator’s message than those assigned to either the national or ideological conditions.

**Hypothesis 3**: Independents assigned to the local frame condition will rate the Senator as more likeable, on average, than those assigned to either the national or ideological conditions.

**Hypothesis 4**: Out-partisans assigned to the local frame condition will rate the Senator as more likeable, on average, than those assigned to either the national or ideological conditions.
To test our hypotheses, we first estimated an OLS model wherein we regressed respondents’ level of agreement with the policy statement on an interaction term of the treatment condition the respondent was assigned to and a variable indicating whether the respondent’s partisanship was a co-partisan, contra-partisan, or neither (i.e., the respondent is a “pure independent” who does not lean toward either party). Because we are interested in heterogeneous effects of local appeals across different values of partisan congruency, we estimated the marginal effect of national and ideological appeals, treating localistic appeals as the baseline comparison category, on support for the Senator’s policy across different levels of partisan (in)congruency.

Results, which are listed in Table 2, strongly support Hypothesis 1 – compared to independents in the local frame condition, independents in both the national frame and ideological frame conditions reported significantly lower average levels of agreement with the senator’s position. In other words, framing one’s policy positions in localistic terms is significantly more persuasive to independents, on average, than national and ideological frames. Results do not support Hypothesis 2, however. That is, contra-partisans randomly assigned to the local frame condition were neither significantly more likely nor significantly less likely to agree with the senator’s position than were those randomly assigned to the national frame and ideological frame conditions.

### Table 1: Marginal Effect of Treatment on Policy Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisan Congruence</th>
<th>Nationalized Frame</th>
<th>Ideological Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\frac{\delta y}{\delta x}$</td>
<td>$P&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Contra-Partisan”</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Independent”</td>
<td>-0.268</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Co-Partisan”</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Agreement with the Senator’s position was measured using a 5-pt Likert scale item ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.
Note: Respondents randomly assigned to the local condition constitute the baseline comparison group.

Next, to test Hypotheses 3 and 4, we estimated an OLS model regressing how strongly respondents liked or disliked the senator on an interaction term of respondent treatment condition and partisan (in)congruency with the senator.\(^7\) Results (Table 3) provide partial support for Hypothesis 3, indicating that independents assigned to the local frame condition rated the senator as being significantly more likeable than did independents assigned to the ideological condition. Differences in likeability evaluations were not significantly different between independents assigned to the local condition and those assigned to the national condition, though the estimated difference was in the hypothesized direction and marginally significant (p = 0.08). Results also partially support Hypothesis 4, with incongruent partisans (i.e., outpartisans) assigned to the local frame conditions rating the senator significantly more likeable, on average, than those assigned to the ideological condition. The difference in average likeability ratings between incongruent partisans assigned to the local frame and those who were assigned to the national frame was in the hypothesized direction, yet statistically insignificant (p = 0.25).

Table 2: Marginal Effect of Treatment on Senator Likeability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisan Congruence</th>
<th>Nationalized Frame</th>
<th>Ideological Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( \frac{\delta y}{\delta x} )</td>
<td>P&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Contra-Partisan”</td>
<td>-0.167</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Independent”</td>
<td>-0.270</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Co-Partisan”</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Respondents randomly assigned to the local condition constitute the baseline comparison group.

Taken together, the experimental findings presented above present compelling causal evidence that going local can be an effective strategy for politicians, particularly those vying to

\(^7\) Senator likeability was measured using a 7-pt Likert scale ranging from 1 = Dislike a great deal to 7 = Like a great deal.
represent states or districts that are competitive and perhaps even somewhat more amenable to the opposite party. This strategy appears especially effective among pure independents, who were both more persuaded on policy substance and found the senator more likeable, when compared with the treatment conditions. Out-partisans, meanwhile, did not find local frames to be significantly more persuasive than national or ideological frames, but they did find senators who go local to be more likeable than those who adopt divisive ideological frames.

**Going Local on Facebook**

For our observational study, we rely on data provided by Pew Research Center that measures the proportion of Facebook posts that are “local” among members of Congress.\(^8\) According to Pew researchers who collected the data, any post that references “a local event, institution, organization or individual” is considered “local.” Relying on a partially supervised method, a sample of Facebook posts were first coded by expert coders and then by workers for Amazon’s *Mechanical Turk* (MTurk). A learning algorithm coded the remainder of the posts. Each MC received a value between 0 and 1 which indicated the amount of their Facebook posts dedicated to local content. We confine our analyses to the U.S. Senate.

Due to its relatively low costs, social media is a tool that politicians often use, both inside and outside of what would be traditionally considered “campaign season.” As with any other form of political communication stemming from politicians, each post attached to their name represents

a strategic decision. It has been well established that partisanship is the most important determinant of vote choice in American politics (e.g., Converse 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017). However, due to the United States’ first-past-the-post single-member district system of representation, it is not uncommon for partisan elected officials to represent constituencies wherein their co-partisans do not comprise a majority of the electorate. In those cases, politicians must tread carefully regarding their use of partisan and ideologically charged language, as it may be off-putting to the majority of their district, even if a plurality are co-partisans. “Going local” is a potentially effective means through which politicians can connect with their constituents and politicians who are more electorally vulnerable from the perspective of their district’s partisan composition may feel more pressure to do so in lieu of, or in addition to, engaging in potentially more divisive partisan and/or ideologically based framing styles.

Figure 1: Distribution of Local Posts in U.S. Senators’ Facebook Feeds in the 114th and 115th Congresses

To assess whether electorally vulnerable Senators are more likely to “go local” in their social media communication, we first merged several variables into our Pew Facebook data. Most
importantly for testing, we merge in data capturing the “partisan lean” of each state for both the 114th and 115th Congresses. Partisan lean is a measure developed by researchers at 538 that seeks to measure the overall partisan proclivities of a state by weighting the 2016 presidential election results within the state weighted at 50%, the 2012 presidential results weighted at 25%, and the most recent state legislature vote totals weighted at 25%.9 We transformed the measure so each state’s value relates to the party of the individual senators of that state, with positive values indicating that the state is more amenable toward that member’s party than the country as a whole, while negative values indicate that the state is more hostile toward that member’s party than the country as a whole.10 We also include a binary variable indicating whether the Senator was born in the district, a binary variable for partisanship, and a binary variable indicating whether the Senator is a moderate.11

9 For more on Partisan Lean, please see https://github.com/fivethirtyeight/data/tree/master/partisan-lean (accessed on 10/14/2020).

10 For instance, suppose that State-X’s partisan lean is -5 points less Democratic than the country as a whole and that its Senate delegation is split by partisanship (i.e., it has one Democratic and one Republican senator). In this scenario, the Democratic Senator’s partisan lean score in our dataset would be -5, whereas the Republican’s would be +5.

11 Independent Senators Bernie Sanders (VT) and Angus King (ME) were coded as Democrats in this analysis, since that is the party they caucus with. Candidates are considered moderate here if they fall within the third quintile (i.e., middle) on DW-Nominate’s first dimension (Poole & Rosenthal 1997).
Next, we estimated an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model, with time (Congress) fixed effects, regressing the proportion of each Congress member’s Facebook posts that are locally focused (or dependent measure) on their state’s partisan lean, as well as our three control variables. Results, which are listed in Table 3 below indicate that, on average, Senators “go local” in their social media communication more often as the partisan tendencies of their state becomes less favorable to their party. This suggests that politicians likely make strategic decisions regarding what extent to nationalize or localize their content online – going local when they are more electorally vulnerable and focusing on (presumably) more national issues, which are often more divisive along partisan leans, when they are more electorally secure.

Table 3: Predicting the Proportion of Local Posts in U.S. Senators’ Facebook Feeds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship: Democrat</td>
<td>-0.0751</td>
<td>(0.0627)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homegrown (Native) Candidate</td>
<td>0.0045</td>
<td>(0.0034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology: Moderate</td>
<td>0.1254*</td>
<td>(0.0304)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Lean</td>
<td>-0.0018*</td>
<td>(0.0002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Congress clustered standard errors in parentheses. Asterisk indicates statistical significance at the $p<0.05$ level.

While Table 3 suggests that local posts are strategic, does this strategy work? Are senators able to win support from contra-partisans and Independents by going local? To assess this, we merged the data provided by Pew with survey responses from the 2016 and 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Surveys (CCES). Our dependent variable is Senatorial job approval. We transformed this variable into a 4-point continuous measure which ranges from “Strongly
Disapprove” to “Strongly Approve”. We omitted respondents who indicated that they have either never heard of their senator or that they neither approve nor disapprove.

In our models, we subset the data by three groups: independents who do not lean toward either party, co-Partisans, and contra-Partisans. Our independent variable of interest is the proportion of a Senator’s Facebook posts that are local. We employ OLS regression that controls for the state’s party lean, the senator’s ideology, the strength of the respondent’s partisanship, as well as their age, family income, and education. We use a dummy-variable to indicate responses from the 2018 wave of the CCES.

We test the following two hypotheses using our observational data:

**Hypothesis 5:** Independents will be more likely, on average, approve of Senators who have higher local topics scores.

**Hypothesis 6:** Out-partisans assigned will be more likely, on average, approve of Senators who have higher local topics scores.

The results from our analysis are presented in Table 4. As we can see, local topics have different effects depending on a respondent’s partisan congruence with their Senator. For co-partisans, as the proportion of a Senator’s Facebook posts that are local move from 0 to 1, a Senator’s approval increases by approximately 1.1 percentage points, on average. However, this effect is not statistically significant. However, local posts do significantly boost approval among both contra-partisans and Independents, which supports Hypotheses 5 and 6. Specifically, as the proportion of a Senator’s Facebook posts that are local move from 0 to 1, a Senator’s approval increases by approximately 13.86 percentage points among contra-partisans, on average.

12 To calculate this effect size, the authors transformed 4-point approval data into percentage points by multiplying the coefficient by 33. This equates a 0/"Strongly Disapprove" with a value of 0 and a 3/"Strongly Approve" with a value of 99.
Independents, the effects are slightly smaller, but still significant. As the proportion of a Senator’s Facebook posts move from 0 to 1, a Senator’s approval increases by approximately 7.59 percentage points on average. The decreased magnitude of effect may be attributable to the lack of political engagement among pure Independents (Krupnikov and Klar 2016).

The observational evidence presented here buttresses our experimental results and further suggests that “going local” can be an effective campaign strategy for incumbents who seek to win support beyond their own co-partisans and expand their personal electoral coalition.

Table 4: Local Facebook Posts and Senatorial Job Approval, 2016 and 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Co-Partisans</th>
<th>Contra-Partisans</th>
<th>Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Topic Prop.</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.42*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td>(.024)</td>
<td>(.047)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator’s Ideology</td>
<td>-.281*</td>
<td>-.066*</td>
<td>-.053*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.006)</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
<td>(.013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship</td>
<td>.135*</td>
<td>-.023*</td>
<td>.001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.003)</td>
<td>(.004)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.005*</td>
<td>-.007*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.002)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Income</td>
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<td>.003</td>
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<td>-.071*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.004)</td>
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<td>(.007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>.043*</td>
<td>-.061*</td>
<td>.117*</td>
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<td>(.007)</td>
<td>(.013)</td>
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<td>22618</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adj. R ^ 2</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
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</table>
Discussion/Conclusion:

The Framers’ assumed that Americans would be attached to their localities and that these attachments would shape the contours of representation. However, even casual observers of American politics today can easily see that politics is animated first and foremost by polarization among the two national parties. In other words, contrary to the framers’ assumptions, partisanship has long supplanted place as the dominant consideration in American politics and that is especially true today. That said, partisanship and other identity symbols associated with partisanship can only get any given aspiring representative so far and, in many cases, not far enough. Even in an age of nationalized hyper-partisanship, place can still be electorally consequential if candidates strategically localize their rhetoric to connect with voters on a shared local experience and identity.

In this manuscript, we use experimental evidence to show that when Senators justify their position on a controversial policy, namely the Affordable Care Act, in terms of their state’s interest their favorability increases even among contra-partisans. In the observational section of the manuscript, we find that U.S. Senators appear to make strategic decisions in terms of how often they go local. Then, merging this data with CCES survey data, we find further evidence that crafting a local representation style may be an effective strategy for Senators seeking to win over contra-partisans.

Our findings provide several key insights into American politics. First, our findings are consistent with other recent work suggesting that nationalization is a supply-side driven phenomenon – voters are attracted to local appeals, but they do not receive many of them in the real world, due in large part to an ever-weakening local news edifice. Second, as American politics continues to nationalize (i.e., as localism become withers in American campaigns and
representation), polarization will likely continue to worsen our findings provide evidence that localistic rhetoric softens evaluations of out-partisans. Going local, then, appears to be an important tool that candidates can deploy to expand their coalition of support beyond their own party’s base and, in the process, may even serve to help decrease the level of affective polarization within the electorate by deemphasizing the “us vs. them” framing that dominates much of American politics.

Future work should investigate the role local appeals play in Congressional and Gubernatorial campaigns, as well as in legislative activity. Has, for instance, Mayhew’s personal vote-seeking MC been able to survive the polarization Congress has underwent over the past several years (Herrera and Yawn 1999; Mayhew 1974)? Research should also consider further the electorate’s receptiveness to local appeals, particularly their relationship to not only party, but other central identities to American politics such as race and gender. Such work would provide crucial evaluation of the health of American federalism. Finally, future research should further investigate the effects of localized communication in deliberative settings since our results suggest that localized conversation may be less polarizing.
References:


Butler, Daniel M., Adam G. Hughes, Craig Volden, and Alan E. Wiseman. "Do Constituents Know (or Care) about the Lawmaking Effectiveness of their Representatives?." *Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) Working paper* (2019).


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