# ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE: ROOTS, REELECTION, AND REPRESENTATION IN THE MODERN CONGRESS

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Prior scholarship has alluded to the importance of biography and other differentiating characteristics between candidates that are reflected in divergent electoral support from their voters. However, recent trends in partisanship and nationalization of congressional elections have led many to believe that these differences are no longer meaningful to voters or elites. In this dissertation, I argue for the continued importance of one aspect of the constituent relationship that has gone previously unstudied: the lived local roots in their districts that members of Congress often (but do not always) share with their constituents. I argue that the shared local identity that emerges from these mutual roots strengthens these legislators' constituent relationships, and as a result improve legislators' electoral dynamics in their districts.

This project has multiple theoretical and empirical aims: first, to disentangle the concept of local district roots from related but ultimately distinct concepts like the incumbency advantage, "home styles", and the personal vote; second, to use originally-collected biographical data from nearly 3,000 members of Congress to more precisely specify what district roots are, and to capture the full breadth of benefits they provide both legislators and constituents; and finally, to use advanced quantitative methods to demonstrate the significant positive effects that district roots continue to have on the quality and durability of a legislator's relationship with their constituents.

I first demonstrate in Chapter 3 that when legislators have deep local roots in their district, they are uniquely suited to cross-cut partisanship and outperform their party's presidential nominee in their district. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that deeply rooted legislators have broader, more supportive constituencies than similarly-situated legislators without District route, and that as a result they outperformed expectations in both the primary and general election stages. Finally, in Chapter 5, I show that in part because they are so influential the legislator-constituent relationship, district roots also have a significant effect on legislators' campaign spending activity. Deeply-rooted legislators require significantly less campaign spending to achieve results comparable to otherwise-similar legislators without deep local roots; and when they do spend, they do so at much higher proportions within the geographic

confines of their districts. All three sets of results demonstrate that district roots are not only an important component of many legislators' relationships with their constituents, but are also positive conditioners of their electoral dynamics in the district. I close in Chapter 6 by summarizing my results, and by laying out several noteworthy implications that these findings have on future research in congressional elections and representation. I also make a broader case for why, in many circumstances, deep local roots in the district are a normatively desirable component of congressional representation.

# Home Field Advantage: Roots, Reelection, and Representation in the Modern Congress

**By Charles R. Hunt**

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# Dedication

*To Mom and Dad, whose support and love can't be matched;*
*and to the rest of my family, in all their blessed forms.*

# Acknowledgements

**To my family and friends**: You all know who you are; but it's worth mentioning that without you, the past five years would have had significantly more downs than ups. Instead, it's been a sometimes-harrowing, mostly-uplifting, and always-exciting adventure. I'm so lucky to be able to do what I do for a living, but it's only worth it because I have you all to share the joy with. Thank you for loving and supporting me.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Jon Ossoff spent most of his time during his unsuccessful run for Georgia's 6th Congressional District seat playing defense against his own party's reputation. "Pelosi plays star role in Georgia special election," blared a Politico headline from just days before the special election in June of 2017. The narrative of the race, which was the crucial first federal special election since Donald Trump took office as President, had converged on Ossoff's lack of an authentic connection to the district. To fight back against this narrative, there followed a cavalcade of outside money, much of it from the Democratic Party itself, pouring into the district to support him and sway the election.

But this money didn't help Ossoff establish local credentials. Instead, it prompted accusations in opposition TV advertisements that Ossoff was a "D.C. liberal"; or even worse, that if elected he would be "San Francisco's Congressman." The overriding message of these ads was that Ossoff was not "not one of us." He was an outsider, and not in a good way.

**Figure 1.1 - Frame From Ad Opposing Jon Ossoff (D-GA), Entitled "Not One of Us"**

Ossoff's own campaign ads didn't help to dispel these accusations. In none of his ads does he talk about the district itself, or any previous connection he has to the area - primarily, because he didn't have any particularly strong ones. He instead touts his overall qualifications as a national security aide in Washington and as a documentary filmmaker. Ossoff's ads focused to a much greater extent on wasteful spending and corruption in DC, with the repeated slogan "Washington should be accountable to you." Not a bad slogan - but this message does not seem to have been enough for voters looking for a candidate who could represent them and their particular local interests. He ended up losing his special election by four points.

Conor Lamb, on the other hand, wasted no time touting his district roots in his contentious 2018 special election campaign for Pennsylvania's 18th Congressional District. In the very first words of his very first ad, Lamb showed why he was the right Democratic candidate to run in a district Donald Trump had won by 20 points in 2016: "He grew up here," the voiceover declared over photos of the candidate as a youth, clad in a football uniform for the local Central Catholic High School. This ad, and many that followed, touted Lamb's schooling in college and law school at the nearby University of Pennsylvania. After getting his degree and a brief period of military service, Lamb returned to his District as Assistant U.S. Attorney prosecuting opioid-related crimes in and around the 18th. Lamb is also the product of a family with a deep political legacy in the district: his grandfather was a major figure in the Pennsylvania state legislature, and his uncle was comptroller for the city of Pittsburgh, part of which falls within the 18th. With these credentials in hand, Lamb made his strong pre-existing connection with the district a focal point of the campaign, and voters and activists noticed. "He's got local

ties," said Tim Waters, political director for the 18th's local United Steelworkers union. "He's a local guy."[1] Before he even began his first campaign for office, Conor Lamb had numerous "local ties" that contributed significantly to his eventual victory over Republican candidate Rick Sacconne. With a razor-thin margin of under 1,000 votes, it seems unlikely that Lamb could have prevailed in such a deep-red district without these roots.

**Figure 1.2 - Frame From Conor Lamb's (D-PA) First TV Ad, Entitled "Bio"**

This divergence between the partisan outsider and the "local boy" with deep roots in the district was also reflected in the money raised and spent in their respective races: The special election in the Georgia 6th was the most expensive in the history of the House, with over $28 million in spending from outside groups, most notably the party

[1] Vox.com: "Pennsylvania's neck-and-neck special congressional election, explained." https://bit.ly/2oILLCh

organizations themselves. Lamb's race in the Pennsylvania 18th, on the other hand, only garnered about $8 million from outside groups.[2]

Part of this dynamic was likely due to the perceived competitiveness of the Ossoff race as opposed to the Lamb race, which was initially deemed too far of a reach for the Democrats. However, most political commentators agree that Lamb's extensive and authentic local reputation enabled the Democratic Party to play a limited role in the race rather than spend more to introduce and brand him to his district's voters. This helped Lamb establish his own local reputation with his future constituents; let that reputation guide his outreach behavior during the campaign; and improve his overall electoral performance. Voters felt that Lamb had a pre-established background in the district that made him "like them" in ways that went beyond partisan affiliation, and convinced them that he would have their best interests at heart when serving them in the House.

*I. A Theory of Local District Roots*

The Ossoff/Lamb dichotomy is a prime illustration of the importance of the central subject of this dissertation: the local district roots established prior to a legislator's career in the House, and used to their electoral and representational benefit throughout their career. District roots are an understudied aspect of congressional representation that get to the core of what it really means to "represent" one's particular constituents. Since district roots are established before a legislator ever takes office, they lack the confusing entanglement of concepts like "home style" and the "personal vote", which are behaviors inherently dependent on electoral demands. Instead, district roots are a signal of shared

[2] OpenSecrets.com: "2018 Outside Spending, by Race." https://bit.ly/2fmc64o

local experience and familiarity with one's constituents. As a result, district roots are wholly divorced from the whirlwind of presidents, policy and partisanship that sweeps up many members' behavior once they arrive in office. They are fixed elements of representation that cannot be altered or manufactured once a legislator takes office. District roots therefore represent a deeply authentic local connection established between a legislator and their particular district prior to their service in Congress.

As demonstrated in the Ossoff/Lamb narrative above, these local roots can take many forms. I define these roots using a composite of six original member-specific measures, which include: whether a legislator was born in the district; whether they went to high school, undergraduate, or postgraduate school in their district; the extent of a legislator's familial ties in their district's politics; whether they own a business in their district; and whether they have distinctly local political experience. I argue that these roots strengthen the foundation of a legislator's relationship with their constituents in a number of distinct ways before they ever take office; and that this strong foundation has lasting positive effects on the legislator-constituent relationship throughout their career. These effects are evident in incumbent legislators' electoral outcomes, where district roots benefit legislators across a variety of crucial metrics.

The advantages of a local connection with the district have been touched on by a number of important areas of research, but these district roots differ from existing scholarship in a number of important ways. First, roots are distinct from concepts that fall under the theoretical umbrella of incumbency advantage. Chief among these is the "personal vote" (Cain *et al.* 1987), in which members of Congress use constituency service, the franking privilege, and other institutional resources and powers of the office

to retain the support of constituents. Incumbents also tend to have wider name recognition, which gives them a strong baseline advantage over challengers when relatively uninformed voters enter the voting booth (Groseclose 2001, Hayes and McKee 2009). But these concepts only capture how sitting legislators, all of whom have theoretical access to the incumbency advantage, wield this blanket institutional power over challengers. Too few scholars of congressional elections and representation have examined differences *between* incumbent legislators based on their personal characteristics, or their differing methods of relating to their particular constituents in the district.

A number of early works took a qualitative look at some of these differences, including Richard Fenno's seminal legislative studies of members' differing in-district activity (1978). Fenno importantly focused attention on local connections that members formed and maintained with their particular constituents on the campaign trail. But like all legislator behavior, this activity is deeply dependent on concurrent electoral considerations, and on the type and quality of constituent relationship that already exists. Rather than what a member *does* while they are in office, local district roots are very distinctly about who a member *is before* they take office.

Other areas of research have identified how pre-existing differences between candidates have implications for their electoral dynamics, but these studies lack a connection to the district that I argue is crucial. Candidate quality, for example, captures certain biographical characteristics and experience that can transcend partisanship and aid legislators electorally (Adams and Squire 1997, Levitt and Wolfram 1997). However, the advantages associated with differences like candidate quality are usually only applied to

challengers (Bond *et al.* 1985, Krasno and Green 1988, Epstein and Zemsky 1995), or are too generally considered -- that is, they focus on prior political experience of any kind rather than more detailed yet important differences between otherwise-similar candidates. These findings also downplay the importance to members of relating personally to their particular constituents, rather than simply appearing qualified to a generic voter.

However, V.O. Key's (1949) seminal work on so-called "friends and neighbors voting" suggests that there are electoral advantages of local candidate connections. More recent works also have examined how much better "local candidates" perform than those not originally from a particular area (Tatalovich 1975, Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983, Johnston *et al.* 2016). Of the research that follows from Key's initial insights, however, none parses out the full set of mechanisms by which localism strengthens the relationship between representative and constituent. Nor have any examined these connections using original, comprehensive cross-sectional data on all members of the U.S. Congress. Moreover, Key's seminal insight on the value of local connection is nearly 70 years old. Today's parties are widely believed to be more partisan and nationalized (Brady *et al.* 2000, Jacobson 2015, Abramowitz and Webster 2016, Hopkins 2018) than at the time Key wrote, which raises the question of whether – and how – localism matters today.

This dissertation successfully bridges these gaps by testing the effects of local district roots on a number of distinct and important electoral outcomes in the district. First, I find that legislators with deep district roots have reputations that help them significantly outrun their party label in the district, even during an era of intense partisanship in Congress and in the electorate. Second, I find that due to this local advantage as well as enhanced name recognition and organic grassroots support, deeply-

rooted legislators perform much better at both the primary and general election stages. Finally, I find that district roots offer incumbent legislators a clear resource advantage by increasing the efficiency and flexibility of a legislator's campaign outreach to their constituents during the election. In these ways, members of Congress further enhance the underlying representational relationship credibly and authentically.

These findings hold true while controlling for all other commonly-understood predictors of incumbent success and behavior, such as district partisanship, national political conditions, challenger quality, and length of tenure in Congress. Perhaps most importantly, the predictive power of local district roots in these results - which cover congressional elections from 2002-2018 - shines through in an era in which the behavior of voters and elected leaders alike is thought to be governed almost uniformly by partisanship and national issues. In revealing the importance of a personal, local background in the district, this dissertation examines a crucial and previously untapped element of member biography and characteristics. For legislators who possess them, district roots help establish mutual trust and personal familiarity with their own constituents in ways that go beyond partisanship and strengthen the representational relationship throughout their careers in the House.

*II. Dissertation Overview*

Following this introduction, the second chapter will introduce in more detail the concept of district roots, related background scholarship, and a comprehensive *Theory of Local District Roots* that forms the foundation of the dissertation. I show that local district roots, and the proxies I use to measure them, represent a connection between

legislators and their constituents that predates their time in Congress, and is therefore fully exogenous to member behavior either at home or in Washington after they are elected. I then detail the theoretical argument for why members of Congress benefit from local roots in the district, and more specifically why they enjoy a greater breadth and depth of support among their constituents than similarly-situated legislators without such roots. In connecting previous literature to new observations about how legislators retain support in their districts, I demonstrate that district roots confer upon legislators both practical and symbolic advantages that enhance their constituent relationship in clear and distinct ways throughout their careers, and as a result significantly and positively affect their electoral positioning in their districts. I will also describe the data collection and coding process for the *District Roots Index* used to quantify this connection and describe the six component measures used in the index.

Chapter 3 provides an empirical evaluation of how a legislator's district roots establish a strong local connection with their constituents, and how this localism helps legislators break through partisanship even today. I argue that legislators with district roots are able to relate to their constituents on levels other than partisanship, and are thus able to positively separate their personal reputation from that of their party or major party figures. While most incumbent members of Congress perform better electorally in their districts than their party's presidential nominee, I find that those with deep district roots do so by nearly 12 percentage points more than legislators without such roots. I similarly show that deeply-rooted legislators run about 7 percentage points farther ahead of their party's average incumbent legislator in a given election year. These results demonstrate that even in an era when congressional politics are thought to be structured almost

entirely by nationalized partisanship, local district-specific connections between member and constituent can break through.

Chapter 4 takes on a more instrumental view of the benefits conferred to legislators when they have established roots in the district. In this chapter, I argue that legislators with district roots should have more reliably supportive constituencies at both the primary and general election stages. This is because they enjoy more extensive grassroots networks of support, name recognition, and local political infrastructure not available to other members. As a result, I find that deeply-rooted legislators are nearly 40% less likely to receive a primary challenge in a given cycle, and perform significantly better (by about 12 points) in their primary elections when they *are* challenged. They enjoy similar gains, about 9 additional percentage points, in their general elections as well. Moreover, these gains take place even after taking district partisanship, national political conditions, challenger quality, and other important factors into account. These clear benefits at multiple electoral stages should induce scholars to consider a legislator's district roots among other conventional variables used to predict electoral success in the district.

Chapter 5 shifts the attention to legislators' campaign behavior. I argue that deep roots in the district open up new avenues of voter outreach not available to legislators with no credible claim to these kind of roots. When legislators have deep roots in the district, they possess built-in mutual familiarity with their constituents that goes beyond simple partisanship or name recognition, and extends into economic and political networks unique to their particular district. Legislators with these roots are equipped with the knowledge, networks, and familiarity to spend outreach resources with more

efficiency and precision in the district itself to retain the support of their constituents. Using an original dataset of categorized and geolocated campaign expenditures, I find that, holding other electoral factors constant, deeply-rooted legislators spend around 40% less in campaign funds in their reelection efforts, signaling their stronger standing with their constituents. These effects are strongest for categories like advertising, polling, and consultants, spending on which is an indicator of a lack of understanding about the district on the part of the candidate, and vice versa. I also find that these deeply-rooted legislators spend nearly 10% more of their campaign funds within the geographic confines of their districts. By patronizing more local business, hiring local contractors, and soliciting services within the district, legislators demonstrate their local connection and familiarity, and make a very literal long-term investment in their constituents.

Finally, Chapter 6 draws out a number of broader implications and potential pathways for future research. This chapter considers what the clear importance of local district roots can tell us about how to mitigate partisan polarization both in the electorate and in Congress. Relatedly, the power of district roots should also compel scholars to rethink what truly matters to voters, what's valuable to candidates, and what makes a given district electorally safe or competitive. I also consider the value of district roots to the field of candidate emergence, specifically how parties and outside groups might consider the presence or absence of these roots when considering potential candidates to run in certain districts. Finally, I argue for the normative good that district roots do for representation in the House, and the alignment of a deeply-rooted form of individual, locally-focused representation with the purpose of the "People's House" originally envisioned by the framers of our constitution.

## Chapter 2 - District Roots and the Representational Relationship

> It must be terrible to be without roots, without a place to call home. I have a profound sense of identification with these rural people. My wife still worries about me a little bit in this respect - that I'm still too much of a country boy. But life's too short to play a role or strike a pose.
>
> - Former Rep. Barber Conable, from *The Challenge of Congressional Representation* (Fenno 2013)

### *I. Reconsidering the Representational Relationship*

The central focus of this dissertation is the ways in which legislators' district roots improve their electoral dynamics in the district by strengthening the representational relationship they share with their constituents. This relationship and its component parts have been defined in varying ways in congressional scholarship, often in terms of how aligned representatives and their voters are on the issues (Miller and Stokes 1963, Eulau and Karps 1977). Much of the recent work in this area has done a skillful job of examining this relationship in terms of partisan or policy congruence between legislator and constituent (Ansolabehere *et al.* 2001, Canes-Wrone *et al.* 2002). However, this research has tended to undervalue more place-specific elements of representation that continue to have tremendous implications for the representation voters are supposed to enjoy from their House members.

The most important of these elements is the fact that the representational relationship between legislators and constituents in the U.S. Congress is inherently dyadic. This means that the relationship is shared only between a representative and their particular constituents, who hold the fate of the representative in their hands via the electoral process. While they undoubtedly respond and are responsible to other actors in

the political system[3], representatives need only to sufficiently satisfy their own constituents to keep their jobs. Ansolabehere and Jones (2011, 4) speak to this very specific form of dyadic representation particular to the U.S. House: "The selection of legislators from districts grounds politics in local geography. Members of the U.S. Congress represent communities and places." Therefore, when legislators are running for reelection, the relationship at the forefront of their mind is -- or at least, should be -- the one between them and the voters *in their district*.

What determines the quality of a representational relationship between members and constituents? Earlier generations of scholars highlighted factors like policy congruence when evaluating the representational relationship (Miller and Stokes 1963, Achen 1977, 1978, Powell 1982, Zaller 1992, Stimson *et al.* 1995). Scholars have generally found that legislators' actions reflect the partisan or ideological preferences of their constituents (Fiorina 1974, Wright *et al.* 1985, Erikson *et al.* 1993, Jessee 2009), but others have maintained that this reflection is based only on voters with the time and resources to actively engage in political participation (Ginsberg 1986, Russell Neuman 1986, Verba *et al.* 1995).

More recently, scholars have focused more precisely on the partisan match between legislators and their districts. Scholars have demonstrated how congressional politics, and elections in particular, have become more nationalized around the two political parties or around national political figures like the president, rather than the individual congressional candidates themselves (Jacobson 2015, Abramowitz and Webster 2016, Hopkins 2018). If nationalized partisanship is in fact the overriding

[3] I.e. party leaders (Cox and McCubbins 2005, Meinke 2009), outside interest groups (Carpenter *et al.* 2004, Hall and Deardorff 2006), and the president (Mayhew 1991)

consideration, then we might expect that in many districts, one could simply swap out any party's candidate for any other without a significant change in how constituents assess the quality of the representation provided by their particular legislator. Yet when we look at Congress, this does not appear to be the case. There are many legislators who could not believably "fit" with another district, even if their partisan orientation is the same. For instance, it is hard to imagine that constituents in rural Georgia would see their Republican House member as interchangeable with a Republican House member from wealthy, cosmopolitan southern California simply because they are both Republicans.

While true that congressional representation is to some extent nationalizing on a partisan basis, representation in the House remains primarily a place-based enterprise that must be accounted for. Congressional districts and their voters vary significantly in their geographies, demographics, economies, and accompanying policy problems. They therefore differ significantly in the type of local representation they require. This is, of course, also one of the primary reasons that the framers of the constitution established a Congress in the first place, and why they split it into an upper chamber (the Senate), which would represent statewide interests, and a lower chamber (the House), which would represent more particularistic local interests (Hamilton *et al.* 1788).

As long as representation in the House is based on geography, the representational relationship will depend primarily on the strength of the bond between representatives and the constituents in their own particular district. Therefore, when legislators can differentiate themselves in a positive way from nationalized partisan politics based on unique shared geography with constituents, they are seizing an opportunity to be truly representative of all voters in the district, and not just those of their own party. In

embracing their district roots, which signify a shared local identity with their constituents, legislators are tapping into an element of the representational relationship that is deeply valued by many voters, but undervalued in the political science literature.

*II. What District Roots Are, and What They Are Not*

I define district roots as a legislator's local background in the district before they were first elected. This background is based in personal, lived experience in the district and surrounding areas, and as such provides a strong foundation for the unique connection they share with their constituents. There are three key characteristics of local district roots that help to give them potency in the legislator-constituent relationship, and which differentiate them from related but theoretically distinct concepts previously addressed in the literature.

The first key characteristic of a legislator's district roots is that they *vary extensively between legislators*, and therefore contribute to differences in their underlying relationship with constituents that play out leading up to and on Election Day. Some legislators have deeply local roots in the district that confer significant electoral advantages; others have no such roots, and may have only had experience in their district for a short time before representing it in Congress. In this way, district roots differ from institutional factors that offer a blanket "incumbency advantage" to all members of Congress (Gelman and King 1990, Levitt and Wolfram 1997, Carson *et al.* 2007, Hall and Snyder 2015). All legislators, for example, have the franking privilege, which enables them to communicate expense-free with their constituents. Incumbents also enjoy significant fundraising advantages (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014), and availability of staff

and district offices to respond to constituents in an official capacity and assist them in navigating the federal bureaucracy. These and other perks of incumbency can be wielded against challengers who do not enjoy these benefits (Cover 1985, Serra 1994, Goodman and Parker 2010). But district roots are not about shared institutional leverage over other candidates. Rather, roots are specific to each legislator and the district that they represent, and vary extensively between them. As a result, the electoral benefits that district roots provide are only available to those members who have them.

The second defining characteristic of district roots is that they *predate a legislator's time in Congress*. This means that while district roots vary significantly between members, they do *not* vary over the course of a legislator's career.[4] District roots are forged, as the name implies, within the geographic boundaries of the district and among the people of the district before a legislator ever runs for that office. They therefore are determined with complete independence from institutional restraints, directives from party leaders, or national political conditions that take significant agency away from members once they are in office. Although legislators can take actions to build up their relationship with the district once in office, these types of foundational connections are nearly impossible to build from scratch. In his classic work *Trust: Representatives and Constituents*, Bill Bianco addresses possibly the most crucial advantage that pre-existing district roots confer to a representative who has them: Many legislators "will find it extremely difficult to build the reputations necessary for trust," he argues. Other legislators, however, "may arrive in office with their reputations ready-

[4] The exception to this condition is when a legislator is significantly redistricted such that their new district no longer overlaps with the geographies in which they developed their local roots. These changes are fully reflected in the observational data discussed later in the dissertation.

made." (Bianco 1994, 9). In this way, district roots are distinctly about *who you are* to your constituents before you're elected to the House, rather than *what you do* once you get there.

District roots do share some qualities with other personal factors and activities previously discussed in the literature such as "home styles" (Fenno 1978, Friedman 2007) or "personal vote" activities like constituent service, casework, and official office communications (Parker and Parker 1985, Cain *et al.* 1987, Serra 1994, Herrera and Yawn 1999, Goodman and Parker 2010). Many of these activities have been shown to strengthen or at least maintain the connective tissue of empathy, identification, and trust between member and constituent (Fenno 1978, Romero 1996).

However, the problem with using behaviors once in office to examine the role of nonpartisan connections with constituents is that these behaviors are strategic, and shaped by electoral considerations (Johannes and McAdams 1981, McAdams and Johannes 1981, 1988). More bluntly, members take into account their electoral prospects when making decisions while they are serving in Congress (Mayhew 1974). Empirically speaking, this means that modeling the effects of these representational activities suffers by nature from endogeneity. However, district roots are completely exogenous to events, activities, and choices that take place once a member of Congress is first elected.[5] District roots therefore offer us a clean empirical measure of the extent to which local, nonpartisan connections with constituents matter in an era whose politics are thought to be dictated largely by the partisanship of legislators and their constituents.

[5] In fact, I demonstrate in Chapter 5 that many campaign choices legislators make in the district are determined in large part by the depth of this kind of personal background.

This is not to say that legislators' actions while they are in office do not matter. Many authors, for example, have shown that legislators differ in their legislative styles, skills, and priorities, as well as in their choices of what to emphasize to their constituents (Fenno 1978, Yiannakis 1982, Friedman 2007, Grimmer 2013, Volden and Wiseman 2014, Bernhard and Sulkin 2018). But district roots, and the shared local identification that they confer to legislators and their constituents, cannot be manufactured once the legislator has taken office. Even worse, a legislator can appear "phony" or deeply inauthentic by misrepresenting a supposedly-organic personal background (Arbour 2014). The list is long of candidates caught appearing out-of-touch with constituents based on non-local upbringings to which voters cannot relate. One well-known example is that of rising Democratic star Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who faced criticism from conservatives following her unexepected 2018 primary victory for exaggerating her roots in New York City's Bronx borough. While Ocasio-Cortez still won, the discrepancy distracted from her campaign, including the bold progressive ideas that she had clearly hoped would define her reputation (Groves 2018).

This point highlights the final and most important characteristic of local district roots: *they are unique and specific to that legislator's district and their constituents*. Because district roots are created, developed, and deepened within the boundaries of the district and its communities, they represent a dyadic bond of significant value. This bond is authentically homespun, and therefore cannot be credibly claimed by an outsider, whatever that outsider's other qualities and qualifications. Having a personal background in one's district provides a legislator not just with an appearance of, but what Richard Fenno called an "underpinning" of authenticity (Fenno 2007) that pays irreplaceable

dividends in strengthening the foundation of the constituent relationship from the outset of a legislator's career.

The specificity of place and people that defines district roots diverges significantly from previous related work examining the power of a candidate's overall credentials and qualification for office. Many have compellingly demonstrated, for example, that qualifications like prior elected experience is desirable for any candidate for office (Jacobson 1990a, Stone *et al.* 2004). Some differentiate between "character" and "competence" qualifications that candidates highlight in their advertising (Arbour 2014), but tend to frame candidate-centered credentials as having to do primarily with abstract characteristics like "personality" and "likability." These studies highlight the generic benefit of legislators' past experiences, but both the experience and the benefits are conceived of in the most general manner. Experience in any type of politics, in any point in time, in any place is treated the same.

Most importantly, studies on "qualification" typically set aside the question of what qualifies a legislator to represent the interests of *the specific constituents in their district.* District roots reflect more than just a lengthy resume: the credential that district roots confer unto a legislator is a dyadic one that puts value in the extent to which these credentials were earned among the people they represent. For constituents, district roots run deeper than just a vague sense that a legislator has general qualifications to hold office *anywhere*; they instead signal that a legislator is uniquely qualified to represent the people who live *here*.

District roots also reinforce the inarguable condition of American political representation as primarily geographic (Rehfeld 2005). Even amidst an increased role for

partisanship in the electoral process, the U.S. House remains a fundamentally place-based body of political representation in which candidates are assessed based on their ability to represent that particular geographic area. One contribution of this dissertation, therefore, is to reestablish geography and personal familiarity as key elements of American political representation, as intended by the framers of the Constitution. I argue that local, pre-existing roots in a legislator's particular district are a signal to constituents that the legislator will fulfill the spirit and the substance of this type of representation.

To demonstrate these characteristics more concretely, we can examine the real-life differences in district roots between two currently-serving members of Congress. Daniel Kildee (D) of Michigan's 5th Congressional District, which includes the city of Flint, was born and raised there and attended Michigan schools his whole life. His family also enjoys a robust history and community presence in the district that dates back generations (his uncle, Dale Kildee, also represented the Flint area in Congress). Early in his career, Kildee served in local Flint government as member of the Board of Education, County Treasurer, and Mayor before running successfully for Congress in 2012. Kildee's extensive background in the district, social networks, and intimate mutual understanding with his voters and the issues they care about made him a shoo-in for the seat: even with a major-party challenger, he ran over 20 points ahead of President Obama in 2012 (and of Hillary Clinton in 2016).

Alex Mooney (R), on the other hand, has no such background. A representative for West Virginia's 2nd District, Mooney was born in Washington, DC and educated in Maryland and New Hampshire before moving back to Washington as a staffer for the House Republican conference. After unsuccessfully running for a New Hampshire State

Senate seat, Mooney served two terms in *Maryland's* State Senate, was defeated for reelection, then considered a run for U.S. Congress in Maryland. Mooney eventually decided against it, opting instead to move to West Virginia less than a year before his first successful congressional run in 2014.[6] Mooney was barely reelected in 2016 and 2018 by margins 22 and 27 points lower than that of his party's candidate for President, Donald Trump.

These examples clearly demonstrate how the key elements of district roots work to the advantage (or disadvantage) of both legislators. First, there is clearly significant *variation* between these two members in terms of the depth of their local roots in the district: Kildee has extensive, multi-tiered roots based in his early life, local government experience, and family connections, while Mooney is the very definition of a "carpetbagger." Second, the varying depth of both legislators' district roots *predate their service in Congress*: both descriptions demonstrate clear advantages and disadvantages, but include nothing about their actual time in Congress. Finally, and most importantly, Kildee's local roots are *unique to his district and constituents* in Flint and surrounding areas, which adds to the unique and valuable nature of his particular experience. What little experience Alex Mooney did have, on the other hand, was not particularly local, and notably took place well outside of the community he currently represents in Congress. On all key elements of local district roots, Kildee had distinct advantages over Mooney that are reflected in constituent support by way of their respective electoral outcomes.

While both incumbents ended up winning (as most do each election cycle), Kildee and Mooney operate in vastly different campaign contexts as a result of the quality of

[6] All biographical details from the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.*

their constituent relationships. For example, even as a Republican in a deep-red district, Mooney was forced to both raise and spend nearly twice as much campaign funds as Kildee just to narrowly defeat a low-quality challenger.[7] Though both were eventually victorious, not all incumbents are; and the difference in time, expense, and overall effort needed to win each race should make it clear to both scholars and lay readers which of these two district dynamics is more favorable to an incumbent.

*III. Previous Work on Candidate Localism and the Politics of Place*

While some well-known scholarship has some overlap with the concept of district roots, the most relevant subliterature to the concept of district roots and candidate localism explores what V.O. Key coined as the "friends and neighbors" effect in his classic *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. This phenomenon is essentially the advantage candidates enjoy in the town, county, state, or other geographic area that the candidate calls home. As Key found in his descriptive analysis, "Candidates for state office tend to poll overwhelming majorities in their home counties ['friends'] and to draw heavy support in adjacent counties ['neighbors']." (Key 1949, 37) Key attributes this effect to both a "calculated promotion of local interest," or that is is simply filling a void of unified statewide parties and interest groups.

Subsequent work has found general support for the friends-and-neighbors voting effect at different levels of government (Tatalovich 1975, Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983, Johnston *et al.* 2016). Specifically, the friends-and-neighbors literature has demonstrated the premium that both voters and institutions place on local connections. These works

[7] Source: OpenSecrets.org

have found, for example, that constituents both recognize and value local candidates (Rice and Macht 1987a, Bowler *et al.* 1993, Shugart and Valdini 2005, Johnson and Rosenblatt 2006, Jacobs and Munis 2018, Stevens *et al.* 2018). On the institutional side, parties in the comparative context have been shown to actively seek out candidates with local ties, or limit their searches to within the constituency's geographic area, even absent a residency requirement (Gallagher 1980, Parker 1982, 1986, Weeks 2008). This collection of findings indicates that political actors in many contexts identify localism as an electorally valuable connection between voters and their elected leaders.

There have been a number of important works in recent years that have expanded the arguments in favor of friends-and-neighbors voting, while qualifying when, where, and for whom these effects are strongest. A few recent works, for example, have found that the effect varies considerably by geography, and has heterogeneous effects on candidate support as a result. For example, Meredith (2013) finds that some statewide candidates enjoy a more significant "friends-and-neighbors" boost than others. Some scholarship has also identified rural or less-populated geographic areas as more likely to value local candidates (Jacobs and Munis 2018). Others argue that voters with a stronger sense of regional identity are more apt to appreciate locally-tinged representation (Panagopoulos *et al.* 2017, Sajuria and Collignon 2018). Notably, however, most of this work takes place either in the comparative context (primarily in the UK), in statewide contests in the U.S., or in a lab experiment setting. While all of these analyses provide important findings, none have done so in the context of the U.S. Congress.

The *District Roots* concept I explore here builds on these early insights about the importance of geographic connections between candidates and voters, but diverges in a

few important and relevant ways from the traditional understanding of the "friends-and-neighbors" effect. In doing so, this project makes 2-crucial contributions to our understanding of local connections, the contexts in which they matter, and why they improve the representational relationship between legislators and their constituents in Congress.

The first major contribution this project makes is to properly define when, why, and how we measure local connections between representatives and constituents. First, I use a novel empirical approach to spell out important differences that exist between legislators, and which have substantial impacts on variation in their electoral performance in their districts. This approach differs from prior work on candidate localism in a number of important ways. The friends-and-neighbors literature has traditionally examined the boost in support candidates receive in geographic subsets of their total constituency by virtue of residing there or having been born there. They are therefore measuring *within-legislator* variation in geographic support based on local connections. Key (1949), for example, demonstrated county-level variation in electoral support for candidates running statewide based on the candidate's county residence.

In this project, however, I examine *between-legislator* variation in how locally-connected they are to the local areas they represent in Congress. Put differently, I use the logic of localism that "friends-and-neighbors" scholars pioneered to demonstrate the value that local connections provide to some deeply-rooted legislators relative to their counterparts in other districts. Doing so widens the scope and potential power of local candidate effects by examining legislators who represent smaller-scale local constituencies - in this case, congressional districts - and the electoral benefits they garner

by being locally-connected to their entire district as a whole. This approach leverages important differences between incumbent legislators to more fully evaluate crucial differences in electoral outcomes that haven't been fully explained by prior work.

This project also takes major steps to situate local representational connections in the modern national political context rather than as an isolated effect. I do so by applying this concept to the congressional chamber of Congress for which local representation is most relevant and important: the U.S. House of Representatives. Scholars have paid little to no attention to the federal level in terms of how a legislator's local background affects their relationship with their constituents, and how that relationship translates into electoral support. This is an important task, particularly in light of the intense partisan polarization in Congress that recent research has thrown into sharp relief (Theriault 2008, Lee 2009, 2016). If politics is nationalizing, as many have posited (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, Hopkins 2018), is there room for localism as a factor in congressional elections?

I examine the logic of local connections that the friends-and-neighbors literature has introduced, but in the modern context with unique observational data. I employ a complete cross-section of all incumbent members of the House over nine congressional election cycles (2002-2018), which includes both presidential and midterm years, as well as "wave" elections for both Democrats and Republicans. Examining local roots in this way puts their impact to the test by examining them during a time which many agree is riven by partisanship; and at the federal level, which is widely agreed to be the most fertile ground for polarized partisanship to thrive. If local roots in the district can have an

impact in his time, and at this level, it speaks enormously to the importance of local connections to American political representation and elections.

Assessing whether or not this is the case, however, requires a more comprehensive empirical definition of what district roots are that captures the full range of benefits they offer to legislators. This dissertation uses an array of original and distinct measures at the legislator level to capture these concepts in the empirical analysis and assess their impact. As addressed earlier, recent work designed to demonstrate the benefits of localism has focused primarily on simple geographic closeness to either candidate birthplace or current residence, and often treat both the same (Meredith 2013, Panagopoulos *et al.* 2017). These are no doubt useful measures. My work, however, makes a significant leap, using six original component measures to capture the wider range of benefits that district roots provide. These include: whether a legislator was born in their district; whether they have local elected experience; whether their family has a pre-established political legacy in the district; whether they attended high school, undergraduate, or postgraduate school in the district; and whether they own a business in the district.[8]

The second major contribution I make in this dissertation is to provide a more organized and comprehensive *Theory of Local District Roots* that more clearly defines the benefits they confer to legislators in pursuit of reelection in their districts. I argue that local roots in the district provide legislators with both practical and symbolic benefits that improve their relationship with the voters at the outset of their careers. Previous scholarship has made some effort to identify, for example, whether the "friends-and-

[8] The following section of this chapter provides detailed explanations and coding procedure, sources, etc. for each of these measures.

neighbors" effect is a result of mobilization of new voters, or the conversion of out-party voters (Rice and Macht 1987b).[9] But not enough work has been done to specify the wide-ranging set of theoretical mechanisms by which a strong local connection between a legislator and their constituents positively affects the representational relationship between them. This is the main theoretical task I take up in this dissertation.

First, I demonstrate that district roots yield significant *Practical Benefits* for both legislators and constituents. Shared district roots provide extensive social, political, and economic networks connecting legislators, local leaders, and constituents in their district. By boosting mutual understanding and practical name recognition, district roots significantly improve the electoral dynamics in the district for legislators. Second, I demonstrate that district roots provide valuable *Symbolic Benefits* to both legislators and constituents. I build on recent work demonstrating the power of identity in American politics and posit that local identity serves to unify constituencies and connect them with their representative by establishing locally-cultivated trust. In doing so, I demonstrate that local identity is not only an important component of the member constituent relationship alongside factors like race, religion, and economic status; but that it is uniquely suited to break through powerful modern political identities like partisanship.

In expanding this scope of theoretical benefits, I show that previous related work has significantly undervalued the importance of localism to modern congressional representation. In the following sections, I will demonstrate in more detail the empirical and theoretical contributions this project makes to our understanding of legislators' district roots, and of local representational connections more generally.

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[9] Rice and Macht (1987) demonstrate that both mechanisms are at work.

*IV. Measuring District Roots Empirically: Multi-faceted Local Connections*

To capture the effects of a legislator's district roots on the representational connection between them and their constituents, precise empirical measurement of these roots over numerous incumbent legislators is crucial. To achieve this precision, these measures must include all three key elements of district roots described earlier: they must vary by legislator; predate a legislator's time in Congress; and be unique to their particular district and constituents. In this dissertation, the six binary component indicators of District Roots described in detail below can be found in Table 2.1, along with their distributions across the nine election cycles in the data, as well as their sources.

All seven component measures were collected originally by the author for the 108th-115th Congresses (2002-2018) using the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress,* the U.S. Census Bureau, and *Congressional Quarterly*'s *Member Profiles.*

**Table 2.1: *District Roots Index* Component Measures, Distributions and Sources**

| District Roots Component Measure | % of Incumbents | Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Family Political Roots | 9% | *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress* |
| Born in District | 42% | *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress; U.S. Census Bureau* |
| High School in District | 57% | *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress; U.S. Census Bureau* |
| Undergrad in District | 21% | *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress; U.S. Census Bureau* |
| Postgrad in District | 10% | *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress; U.S. Census Bureau* |
| Local Political Experience | 32% | *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress* |
| Business Owner in District | 21% | *Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress; Congressional Quarterly Member Profiles* |

First, to capture early political roots in the district, I employ a little-used measure of whether or not a legislator is a "legacy" member of Congress - that is, whether or not their family has held elected office and thus appeared on the ballot in the district. Most legislators with this distinction are children or grandchildren of former members; for example, Darin LaHood (D-IL, son of Ray LaHood) or now-Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV, daughter of Arch Moore, Jr.); Others include husband-and-wife connections, as in the case of Debbie Dingell (D-MI), whose husband John served prominently in that district for decades before retiring. The *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* systematically captures this data point, which I extracted from the

text using regular expressions.[10] However, I do not include legislators whose legacy family member did not serve in an office that overlapped the current member's district.

Family political legacy confers to an incumbent legislator a number of key advantages: first, if a previous family member has high-profile political experience in and around the district, then the legislator should also have increased access to local networks, fundraising opportunities and overall support that is built in before they are ever elected. Second, family political roots confer high-profile name recognition not available to other candidates; and most importantly, a prior connection to a family member who has successfully represented the district in some capacity makes the current legislator a trusted, "known quantity." Constituents have experience with and were, at least for awhile, satisfied with the representation they received from that family member. Rep. John Duncan (R-TN), who served Tennessee's 2nd District following his father, put these advantages plainly at a recent event: "Because my daddy and I held this office for 54 years, if my constituents know one thing, it's the name 'Duncan.'"[11] Prior family roots in the district are therefore a kind of shortcut for constituents to see that the legislator is equipped with an understanding of their district and its needs, and can therefore be trusted to represent them in Congress.

A second set of district roots indicators captures the extent of lived personal experience in the district at different stages of a legislator's life. First, I use a binary indicator of whether or not a legislator was born in their district. Candidate birthplace is a data point that has been used effectively in previous work (Shugart and Valdini 2005,

[10] An example of these congressional biographies, as well as a narrative explanation of my process for coding and extracting the relevant information using regular expressions, can be found in Appendix A.
[11] From live "Congressional Exit Interview" event from the R Street Institute; 9/13/18

Tavits 2010, Meredith 2013), but rarely at the federal level. If a legislator was born in their district, they likely grew up there, understand the area, and perhaps have sentimental attachments to their locality that deepen their connection to the place, and by extension to the voters who live there currently. Relatedly, I also capture whether a legislator went to high school, college, or graduate school in the district. If a legislator attended school at one or more points, they are much more likely to have lived, worked, or made personal and professional connections there throughout the course of their pre-Congress life. These measures of district presence during young adulthood and early-career adulthood help account for whether a legislators may have moved into the district at an earlier age. I code these measures based on whether the city or town of a legislator's birth or educational institution is either fully or partially located in their current district.[12]

The purpose of the birth and education measures is to capture the depth of a legislator's direct and personal background in their district. This type of background can strengthen a legislator's pre-established relationship with constituents primarily by conveying a unique understanding of what it is actually like to be a voter in the district. Growing up or attending school in the district gives legislators a sense of what their constituents are thinking and feeling because they themselves have been a constituent in the district for some time. In essence, these legislators *are* the people they are

[12] It is of course possible that the exact geographic location of their birth is not technically located within the boundaries of the district; but city/town overlap is the metric most likely to be perceived and valued by voters. This is the same distinction made for the High School, Undergraduate and Postgraduate In-District measures. Since most constituents have very little concrete understanding of exactly where district lines begin and end, whether the birthplace or educational institution is technically within district boundaries amounts to a distinction without a great difference. As a robustness check, I ran all models swapping these variables for whether a legislator was born (or went to school) in their home state; while directionally both showed the predicted effects, the district-level measure provided more consistent results and is closer to the concept of district roots. It also avoids the issue of varying state size. All alternate specifications for the district roots index can be found in Figures A1.5 and A1.6 in Appendix A.

representing. At a more practical level, growing up and attending school in the district increases the reach of legislator's pre-congress social networks. This advantage is particularly present for the undergraduate and postgraduate degree measures, since these As I will discuss in the following section, the benefits of establishing such grassroots-level personal support prior to their time in Congress is crucial to legislators' continued electoral success.

The sixth component of the index is a related but theoretically distinct measure: whether a legislator obtained *local* political experience prior to their time in Congress. This type of experience means service in local office such as mayor, city/town council, county-level office, or local boards (Board of Supervisors, Zoning Board, School Board, etc). By isolating the variable only to *local* elected office, this variable captures the extent to which a legislator has an understanding of local issues and public experience dealing with problems unique to the district.[13] In addition to name recognition in the community that usually comes with prior elected experience, local experience has an added advantage because it conveys understanding of their particular district's political culture. Importantly, it does so without the partisan baggage that comes with most state or federal offices. This is because many if not most of local political posts are nonpartisan, and because the issue profile is distinctly local rather than national. By serving in local office, legislators can credibly claim to know how to solve local issues, and to bring those solutions to Congress. They also have valuable and authentic knowledge of local political power centers, thought leaders and opinion makers in the district.

[13] Although it is theoretically possible that a legislator gained their local political experience or family political roots in a geographic area vastly different than the one they represent in Congress, manual checks of legislators with this designation corrected any observations in which this might have been the case (very few existed).

This is a departure from previous scholarship analyzing political experience, which has for the most part followed the lead of Jacobson (1990) and simply measured whether a candidate has prior political experience of any kind, including at the state or federal level (Banks and Kiewiet 1989, Jacobson 1990a, Bond *et al.* 1997, Carson *et al.* 2007, Jacobson and Carson 2015). They have also done so mainly for challengers rather than incumbents, with some exceptions (Fulton *et al.* 2010).[14] This is because the concept these scholars have attempted to capture is that of generic "qualification" for higher office on the part of any candidate. This is a crucially important concept, but not the one addressed in this dissertation. It is also one not particularly relevant to incumbent legislators, whose voters are more likely to judge their general legislative qualification based on their service in Congress rather than prior political experience. Instead, my measure of local political experience is specific to the dyadic connection between legislator and constituent that district roots help to create.

Put a different way, undifferentiated political experience is an important type of general "education" in the political and policymaking process; but local political experience is specific training for the exact job a candidate is running for. It therefore is a fairly untarnished measure of local political and issue knowledge that a legislator without district roots would be unlikely to possess. Thus, while in-district birth or school attendance gives a legislator information about what it's like to be a *voter* in the district, local political experience is a preview of what it's like to *represent* that district.

The final component measure of the District Roots Index is whether a legislator owns a business in the district. Members of Congress have traditionally held extensive

[14] Those who have separated office types in the experience variable have done so primarily to capture constituency size (Bond *et al.* 1985, Krasno and Green 1988).

business experience compared to the general public (Ornstein *et al.* 2009), and numerous studies have explored these backgrounds as potential influencers of policymaking activity. Unlike most of these studies, however, I am more concerned with the place-based aspect of legislators' business experience. Using *Congressional Quarterly*'s Member Biographical Profiles, which provide extensive narrative descriptions of a legislator's pre-Congress career and political journey, I determined which members of Congress had begun businesses of their own or inherited a local family business in cities and towns that intersect with their districts.

Rather than a simple qualification or expertise that comes with generic knowledge of the business world, I argue that actually owning a business in or near the district in particular provides legislators with the valuable experience of what it's like to be a business owner in their district, and the place-based challenges and rewards that come with it. This unique perspective is bound to be valuable in helping them relate to and create connections with other business owners in the district, who tend to wield considerable political influence in local politics. Owning a business in the district can also provide valuable inroads to economic networks that can pay dividends in campaigns - specifically in the fundraising and spending realms. And more broadly, owning a local business creates the opportunity for countless personal interactions with actual voters in a legislator's district long before they ever decide to run for office. In short, being a local business owner establishes a number of deeply valuable connections that legislators can then capitalize on in their reelection campaigns.

While these components are not fully comprehensive measures of a legislator's district roots, they are meaningful proxies that capture the key elements of the concept.

These previously underutilized variables will be tested primarily as part of an original *District Roots Index* that adds together the component variables to create a scale from 0-7.[15] These six component variables were chosen not simply because they capture the underlying concept of local roots in the district; they also represent legislator presence and lived experience in the district at different points in their life. Since other more exact measures of district roots - for example, the number of total number of years lived in the district - are time-prohibitive or impossible to collect for all members, these components serve as important landmarks of legislators' local roots in the district.

The presence of each of these component measures create the opportunity for a potent pre-Congress relationship between a legislator and their constituents, but only if their constituents are in a position to experience and appreciate it themselves. As noted earlier, recent work in the "friends-and-neighbors" literature has noted an urban/rural divide in terms of the potency of place-based appeals and identities (Jacobs and Munis 2018). The mechanism underlying these findings likely has to do not necessarily with the nature of the places themselves, but rather the extent to which voters, like their representative, are "homegrown" and therefore value authentic local qualities in their representation (Panagopoulos *et al.* 2017, Sajuria and Collignon 2018). When district mobility is low, the homespun quality of the district's culture becomes a more salient part of its unique identity, much like the prevalence of a certain racial or ethnic population would increase the salience of that identity. Voters in this type of district will therefore

[15] Notably, there is no legislator in the data that achieves all seven component measures of District Roots; therefore, the unweighted *District Roots Index* only scales observationally from 0-6 (see Figure A3.3 in the Appendix for the full distribution).

assign greater value to this common identity with their legislator than they otherwise would.

More practically, voters are more likely to have had actual experience observing or perhaps crossing paths with their legislator in some capacity if they grew up in the same place, thus amplifying the aforementioned advantages of name recognition and local trust. Therefore, I argue that the greater the proportion of a legislator's constituents born in or around their district, the greater the substantive personal impact their district roots are likely to have. I specify this condition by weighting the District Roots Index by an American Community Survey measure of the proportion of constituents in a legislator's district who were born in their home state. District roots therefore carry more weight for a legislator if their constituents share a similar long-term connection to the district.

In each chapter of this dissertation, I report empirical results from the additive *District Roots Index*, which simply adds the values of the six district roots component variables just discussed for each legislator in the dataset, and then weights that added value by the local-born proportion of the district's constituents. While these six components all measure the underlying concept of a legislator's district roots, it is important to note that they also capture different ways in which district roots can be impactful. Adding these components together into the District Roots Index ensures that there is no bias towards or against any one of these mechanisms, and that legislators get proper credit when they possess more than one of these background attributes.

Moreover, I do not expect that any one component should be any more profoundly impactful than the others. This is because all six components also capture

different opportunities legislators have to deepen their underlying local roots at different points in their pre-Congress lives; they are therefore not in any way mutually exclusive.[16] The purpose of the index, and of this analysis generally, is not to measure the independent effects of each of the six component measures on legislators' electoral strength in the district. It is rather to capture the cumulative local connection a legislator has with his or her district. I argue, and will demonstrate in subsequent empirical chapters, that each additional component connection a legislator can possess is highly desirable, and serves to strengthen the overall local connection the legislator has with their district.

*V. Benefits for Legislators and Constituents: A Theory of Local District Roots*

The empirical advances this project makes in the study of district roots and legislator localism are clear. But why specifically do they matter to constituents, and why should they matter to legislators? What is their impact on electoral politics in the district, and what is their wider conceptual impact on congressional representation? In formulating an original *Theory of Local District Roots*, I argue that district roots offer legislators in the House a number of distinct, but equally important electoral benefits that have not been comprehensively spelled out by previous work. These advantages positively impact a legislator's representational relationship with their constituents, as demonstrated by their individual electoral outcomes and behavior on the campaign trail. By detailing the wide-ranging importance of localism to the broader "electoral

[16] Indeed, several legislators tally as many as six of these measures - others (about 17% of the sample) have no district roots whatsoever (see Figure A1.2 in Appendix A for the full distribution).

connection" legislators share with constituents, I demonstrate that these theoretical benefits go far beyond the "friends and neighbors" effect addressed earlier.

The first broad mechanism by which a legislator's district roots have a positive lasting effect on their constituency relationship is through the tangible, practical benefits they offer a legislator in building a deep and lasting coalition of voter support in the district. These benefits stem directly from connections, coalitions and experience developed well before a legislator ever takes office. Deep roots offer legislators a "head start" in terms of building political infrastructure in the district, establishing a positive local reputation, and ultimately broadening their base of support.

For instance, legislator traits like prior local political experience or long-term residential backgrounds in the district provide a naturally higher baseline of name recognition and grassroots support in the district (as opposed, for example, to national party support from outside the district). The literature tells us that incumbent members of Congress profit electorally from local name recognition and personal identification among constituents, particularly by outperforming simple straight-ticket voting on the ballot (Mayhew 1974, Parker and Davidson 1979, Mann and Wolfinger 1980, Cain *et al.* 1987, Friedman 2007). There is no doubt this is true; for example, a great deal of research has shown that pure name recognition is a significant contributor to the "incumbency advantage" (McDonald and Samples 2007, Herrnson 2015).

District roots, however, offer a different, deeper, and ultimately more advantageous brand of name recognition that is not borne out of broadly-known celebrity, but that is organically grown at the grassroots. This happens in part due to a more solid foundation of political infrastructure in the district not available to other candidates

without district roots. Previous work has theorized, for example, that local name recognition and local political connections are a key mechanism fueling the "friends-and-neighbors" effect described earlier in this chapter (Bowler *et al.* 1993, Gimpel *et al.* 2008, Johnston *et al.* 2016). A legislator with an extensive personal history in the district will have a more expansive base of social, economic, and political networks that predate their election and aid their fundraising, outreach and overall campaign efforts throughout their career.

Some of these networks are political ones; for example, district roots can grant a legislator legitimacy among local party organizations, as well as with more grassroots constituent organizations like local labor unions, service clubs, or local issue advocacy groups. These groups are more likely to organize on a legislator's behalf if they have a shared history through a common background. Other valuable networks help a legislator integrate more tightly in the district's economic community; for example, knowledge of local businesses and economic power centers is crucial during reelection campaigns, which cost more than ever before (Fouirnaies and Hall 2014, Herrnson 2015, Jacobson and Carson 2015). These legislators have a wide-reaching and natural understanding of the local business community, fundraising pools, and a broader set of economic relationships they can tap to shore up a campaign war chest. These networks are also important in the act of campaigning itself: by being more locally plugged-into the district, deeply-rooted legislators can more quickly and efficiently hire the best local political talent as campaign staff, navigate the district and its political power centers, and campaign effectively in ways a "carpetbagger" could not, regardless of their partisan or occupational credentials developed outside the district. As a result, these grassroots

networks help deeply-rooted legislators build and maintain political infrastructure that is organic and lasts throughout their careers.

These networks of locally-connected politicos and a legislator's direct experience in the district also equip them with an authentic understanding of local issues that are particular to the district. If a legislator has grown up in local politics and is tightly integrated into the political, social, and economic community they are seeking to represent, they need not spend time learning about what issues voters care about: because they have been a voter in the district, or because they have participated firsthand in local policymaking, they already know and understand these issues. Legislators without such knowledge about their districts, on the other hand, must either spend scarce resources getting to know the district, or forgo it entirely and instead rely on, for example, more narrowly partisan forms of representation to win their constituents' support. Moreover, legislators with deep district roots begin their careers with a built-in understanding of constituents' opinions, values, and daily lives - an understanding that makes them more likely to "see" and understand a greater portion of their constituency than they otherwise would (Miler 2010).

The second set of benefits that deep district roots confer to legislators who possess them are more symbolic and abstract, but every bit as important as the more practical benefits just described. Because of the shared value of local community they signify, district roots imbue within constituents a sense that they are being represented in a deeply authentic and credible way by their legislator. A legislator, for example, who was born and raised in the district can far more credibly claim to understand what it's like to be on the other side of the equation as a voter in the district simply because they have

extensive personal experience as one. Constituents in these districts therefore feel as though their representative is "one of them," and will have their best interests at heart in all aspects of their representation.

This perceived representational benefit on the part of the voters is well-reflected in prior work on descriptive representation (Mansbridge 1999, 2003). One particularly illuminating observation from Jane Mansbridge illustrates the symbolic but very real demand among constituencies to elect someone with a local background:

> Long-term residents in a town often argue for electing to office someone born in the town on the implicit grounds that lifetime experience increases the representative's common experience with and attachment to the interests of the constituents ... 'Being one of us' is assumed to promote loyalty to 'our' interests.
>
> - Mansbridge 1999, p. 629

The assumption is that when political or policy crises arise at the federal level, voters will feel natural and comfortable turning to their representative for answers and support. In short, constituents "can expect the representative to react more or less the way the voter would have done, on the basis of descriptive similarity" (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 644; see also Mansbridge 2003) One of the members of Congress whom Richard Fenno followed during his original *Home Style* interviews perhaps put it best when describing his overarching message to his constituents. Based on the depth of his local roots in the district, he credibly claimed on the campaign trail that:

> I am like you; I feel at home with you; I identify with you; I understand you; I have walked in your shoes; I can put myself in your shoes; we are part of the same community; I hear your concerns; I will look out for your interests; **I will do what you would do if you were in my place. You can trust me.**[17]
>
> - Former Rep. John Flynt (D-GA)

Fenno and Mansbridge are not alone in these observations. Literature both old and new has identified how members of Congress interact with constituents in the district in order to mimic the local ties that district roots provide (Cain *et al.* 1987, Fenno 2007, Grimmer 2013, Chiru 2018). Members engage in activities like constituency service, official office communications, and staged campaign events designed to facilitate personal interactions with their constituents and get a better sense for their preferences (Mayhew 1974, Fenno 1978, Cain *et al.* 1987, Parker 1989a, 1989b, Friedman 2007, Grimmer 2013). But these avenues of building up a personal relationship with constituents through district attentiveness are a lackluster substitute for district roots. If constituents only know a legislator as their elected member of Congress with no prior identity in the district, they are more likely -- for good or for ill -- to be associated with all the baggage that comes with being a member of Congress, making the establishment of a shared local identity difficult; they are just another politician rather than their district's Representative. District roots have the advantage of occurring naturally, prior to a member's service in Congress, and thus instilling in constituents the sense that the legislator's connection to the district is authentic and not superficial.

Additionally, legislators' time and attention is more constrained than ever, making opportunities for "home style" types of activity more scarce than ever before. This is in

[17] Bolded emphasis added by the author.

part because districts have gotten larger (the average district population has nearly doubled in the last half-century), making one-on-one campaigning and interactions with constituents less effective. More and more, legislators' time is structured such that organic grassroots engagement in the district is squeezed out in favor of fundraising, "call time", and national party-building activity (O'Donnell 2016). As a result, most constituent interaction has increasingly devolved into one-way blanket communications from legislators, such as newsletters, emails, and campaign ads that strip the relationship of much of the personal, reciprocal quality found in early scholarly work on Congress. In this way, pre-established district roots are all the more valuable to legislators today because legislators without them have less time to make up for this deficit by spending time in the district among their constituents.

Mansbridge and Fenno described the importance of local connections and identification as a powerful descriptive link between representatives and constituents; but district roots are in many ways more valuable than other descriptive or ideological connections. While in office, legislators can relate to voters on a number of different dimensions, many of which are relevant to some constituents but not others. The effect of these subgroup relationships can be a net positive for many legislators, but also presents challenges since many of these identities are not always (and in fact are rarely) unifying in a way that maximizes constituent support. This is because traditional conceptions of how shared identity bolsters the representational relationship focus on subgroups within the district based on descriptive links like race, religion, and class (Pitkin 1967, Bobo and Gilliam 1990, Gay 2002, Banducci *et al.* 2004)

Localism, however, represents a *district-wide* identity that can be shared between the legislator and *all* their constituents, rather than one subconstituency or another. Because they represent a place-based connection that can potentially encompass every voter in the district, local roots have the capacity to go beyond subconstituency identities in a way that offers legislators significant electoral benefits. Importantly, these benefits to the representative's relationship with the district are not concentrated in subgroups, but widely distributed. Sharing a racial or religious identity with a subset of one's voters, for example, obviously improves a legislator's relationship with that particular subgroup, but likely has no effect on -- and can perhaps even be alienating to -- other subgroups of constituents in the district. These attachments no doubt help to cultivate the kind of trust that Bianco (1994, 1) correctly describes as "a critical piece of the 'electoral connection' between legislators and their constituents,"; but they can only be felt by constituents with that particular identity, thus limiting the potential to strengthen the overall relationship a legislator shares with their constituents (Bishin 2000, 2009, Hurley and Hill 2003, Miler 2010).

Shared district roots represent a powerful local identity that can cross-cut other powerful but far more narrow identities. In a time of significant partisan polarization, partisan identity is perhaps the most salient example of this phenomenon. In part because of the expanded political, personal, and professional networks available to them, legislators with deep district roots are likely to have more expansive co-partisan *and* out-party constituencies in the district. This is because they represent constituents who, because of their shared local identity, are motivated to a greater extent by their dedication to that legislator in particular; these constituents can, but need not, be of the same

political affiliation as the legislator. Local roots in the district deepen the support of co-partisan voters by giving them an additional dimension on which to relate to the legislator (Panagopoulos *et al.* 2017). On a practical level, constituents have a reason to support the legislator over other candidates with whom they might identify on a partisan or ideological basis. District roots also broaden a legislator's overall support in the district by helping them appeal to out-party voters with whom they share their local, nonpartisan identity, even if they don't share a partisan identity. With both of these benefits in hand, incumbent legislators with deep local roots in their districts are equipped with a broader, more reliably supportive electoral constituency.

In addition, because the nature of this shared local identity is district-specific, it is far less likely to be seen as interchangeable with that of a challenger, or a representative from another district. For example, Southern Baptist constituents in one district can share a religious identity with a Southern Baptist representative from a different district -- much like partisan voters often identify with elected leaders in Congress from other districts or states, or presidential candidates campaigning nationwide for various reasons. In contrast to this type of surrogate representation (Mansbridge 2003), district roots are a more specific and rare type of shared identity that distinguishes a legislator who has them from otherwise similar legislators. Voters who value a local connection with a political figure cannot find these attachments just anywhere, or with just anyone; this condition makes local roots in the district a rare but highly valuable commodity for legislators who possess them.

District roots engender many of these same feelings of attachment and trust as other types of identities, but they do so in ways that do not provoke negative out-group

feelings. More narrow identities like race and religion, while powerful, can often activate reactionary attachments to out-groups: for example, previous work has shown that a candidate's race-oriented campaign advertising negatively affects evaluations and turnout among out-group voters (Mendelberg 2001, Krupnikov and Piston 2015, Krupnikov *et al.* 2016). And because these subgroup identities tend more and more to fall along partisan lines (Green *et al.* 2002, Mason 2016, Mason and Wronski 2018), these appeals are becoming more divisive each cycle. District roots, on the other hand, are unifying rather than divisive because they appeal to all voters in the district. Even if some voters have only recently moved to the district and do not share in that local identity, they are unlikely to have a visceral negative reaction to appeals based on this local identity. These appeals are therefore unlikely to activate negative responses, and are an essentially "lossless" form of representation.

In contrast, efforts to appeal to voters on an ideological basis by courting independent voters are risky because they can either fall flat, or even backfire and alienate co-partisan voters. If, for example, a legislator moderates their policy views or legislative activity in an effort to gain independent or opposite-party constituent support, these actions may weaken a legislator's electoral support among their more polarized co-partisan voters, who might see the legislator as having "sold out." But constituents of all partisan persuasions or social identities can appreciate that a legislator has grown up in the district or has direct experience with issues that affect their particular voters. District roots therefore do not require sacrificing one subconstituency for another. In this way, local roots are an unadulterated positive asset for a legislator who possesses them.

In summary, district roots put legislators in a better position to win the trust and long-term support of more of their constituents, as well as enable more substantive local representation on policy issues specific to the district. Particularly in the modern Congress, party and race are crucial components of the representational relationship between legislators and constituents. But representation based on these factors does not imbue all constituents with the same sense of loyalty and trust that a shared personal background does. Local identity has the potential to cut across -- and, as I demonstrate in later chapters, even eclipse -- these factors as beneficial to the legislator in the electoral support they receive from their constituents, as well as the effort necessary to retain it.

While the importance of the local connection between legislators and their constituents is clear, measuring the benefits of this aspect of the representative relationship can be a difficult task. The relationship between legislator and constituents can at times feel abstract. But in truth, this relationship -- and therefore the impact of district roots on it -- is directly related to the very tangible congressional elections process. The quality and durability of the underlying representational relationship between member and constituent is and should be at the heart of the study of congressional elections, which are nothing if not a referendum on that relationship. For incumbent legislators, electoral outcomes are a reflection of the quality of underlying relationship they share with those they represent. The following chapters capture this in terms of legislators' nonpartisan reputation in their district; their electoral performance in the primary and general elections; and in the deployment of campaign resources in their quest for reelection. I argue that in strengthening the foundation of their relationship with their constituents, district roots provide significant benefits to legislators in their efforts to

secure reelection. These qualities help reinforce the relationship between legislator and constituent as one that runs in **both** directions: with legislators are uniquely qualified to represent their particular district; and constituents who reward this qualification throughout the electoral process.

District roots - both as a concept and as an empirical measure - represent a unique and previously understudied element of the underlying relationship between members of Congress and their constituents. The following first empirical chapter analyzes the extent to which local connections can continue to have an effect on the legislator-constituent relationship amidst an era thought by many to be defined by nationalized partisanship.

## Chapter 3 - Beyond Partisanship: District Roots and the Persistence of Localism

> *In any contest between the federal head and one of its members the people will be most apt to unite with their local government.*
>
> - *The Federalist* #25, 163-164

> *We're about to find out whether partisanship is so deeply entrenched that federal races might as well be censuses of Democrats and Republicans rather than contests between individual candidates with unique strengths and weaknesses.*
>
> - Dave Wasserman (*Cook Political Report* and *FiveThirtyEight* Analyst)

The above quotations reflect a central struggle in modern congressional representation that this chapter takes up. The first, from one of America's unofficial founding documents, *The Federalist,* speaks to the local attachment many Americans feel (or at least, felt) towards their government representatives who are elected on a more local scale, emphasizing how this attachment can trump the one they might share with a national figure like a president. The second, uttered before one of the many special elections that took place prior to the 2018 midterms, contrasts this local attachment with the more modern consensus that nationalized partisanship stands nearly alone as the key determinant of vote choice at the federal level. The public, the media, and scholars of American politics seem to agree that the partisan balance of a congressional district and the national partisan mood together tell us almost everything we need to know about

electoral competition in Congress, and how a legislator is assessed and viewed by their constituents.

There's no doubt that in an era of more nationalized and party-competitive congressional politics, it is tempting to view congressional districts as simply "red" or "blue." But stopping at that characterization ignores considerable variation that still exists in congressional elections. This variation goes beyond partisanship and is crucial to understanding congressional representation. Both Republican and Democratic incumbents run far ahead – and in some cases, well behind –other co-partisan candidates on the ballot, such as their party's presidential nominee. Even if both candidates come away with a win, this difference in margins has significant effects on how members of Congress campaign for and subsequently represent their districts. An incumbent who outstrips their president in their district, for example, enjoys more political independence at home and in Washington than they would otherwise. These legislators likely allocate staff differently, campaign differently, and relate to their constituents differently. As I will demonstrate, partisanship alone does not explain these differences; but what can?

*The Federalist*, as well as the discussion in the previous chapter, offer one compelling answer: that even today, local connections can cause constituents to view their representatives more positively than they would a standard-issue "generic" partisan, and potentially even change their vote choice because of these connections. In this chapter, I examine the size and substance of the effect a legislator's local roots in the

district have on how positively constituents relate to and assess them compared to national partisan figures. I argue that this localism, when shared as a common value with constituents, represents a key way in which members can break through the power of partisanship in modern congressional politics.

I first demonstrate that while nationalized partisanship explains perhaps as much of constituents' actual vote choices as it ever has, it falls short in explaining electoral dynamics in the district that continue to deviate from the national partisan narrative. I argue that the localism manifest in a legislator's district roots can differentiate them from other partisan figures in the eyes of their constituents, based on the appeal of shared localism and its unique ability to operate outside the bounds of nationalized partisanship. I then demonstrate this differentiation empirically using analysis of the electoral performance of incumbent House members from 2002-2018. Holding other relevant electoral factors equal, I find that legislators with deep district roots run nearly twelve points farther ahead of their party's presidential nominee in their districts compared to their more carpetbagging counterparts. These results suggest that having roots in the district provide legislators with a local connection that helps them advance their reputation in the district beyond that of their national party and the partisanship that comes with it.

*I. District Roots and Partisan Differentiation*

At both the district and national levels, the influence of parties and partisanship has been the central focus of the literature on congressional elections and representation for much of the last twenty years, and for good reason. Scholars have compellingly argued that the recent increase in partisanship in various forms should lead us to view competition in congressional elections as structured largely by partisan politics (Bartels 2000, Herrnson 2015, Jacobson 2015, Jacobson and Carson 2015). Members have become more partisan in their legislative activity on Capitol Hill (Layman and Carsey 2002, Theriault 2008, Lee 2009), and their constituencies have become more homogeneous in their partisanship due to natural demographic, ideological, and geographic sorting (Green *et al.* 2002, Bishop 2009, Levendusky 2009, Lang and Pearson-Merkowitz 2015), an effect thought by many to be augmented by partisan gerrymandering (McDonald 2006, McDonald and Samples 2007).

As a result, electoral dynamics in the district seem to be increasingly dependent on both the partisan balance among a district's voters, as well as the favorability of their representative's party at the national level leading up to an election. Moreover, the literature has asserted that because politics has become more nationalized, voters do not meaningfully separate their assessments of their home-district representative, and that

representative's party (Jacobson 2015, Abramowitz and Webster 2016, Hopkins 2018). Under this assumption, the only truly meaningful characteristic of an incumbent legislator is their party label; and therefore that the only meaningful connection and identification with their constituents is a partisan one.

The data, however, do not fully bear out this trend in terms of actual vote choice at the district level. In practice, many districts continue to split their tickets at varying rates, demonstrating that partisanship is not the only metric voters use when assessing their congressional representatives. Figure 3.1 displays this variation by summarizing the difference between the district-level victory margins of incumbent House members and their own party's presidential nominee in the 2002-2018 elections. The sample only includes incumbents with a major-party challenger; if included, unopposed incumbents would all appear in the far right end of the distribution.

Figure 3.1 illustrates a valuable measure for understanding considerable differences between legislators based on connections to constituents that go beyond party attachment. As a number of authors have argued in recent works, presidential nominees are highly salient national figures whom voters can name and identify, oftentimes more easily than with their legislators. Presidential nominees are the overt leaders of the national party whose incentives lie in emphasizing broad national issues that trigger national party attachments in the electorate (Skowronek 1993, Whittington and Carpenter 2003, Lee 2009).

**Figure 3.1: Incumbent Margins vs. Presidential Margins in District, 2002-2018**

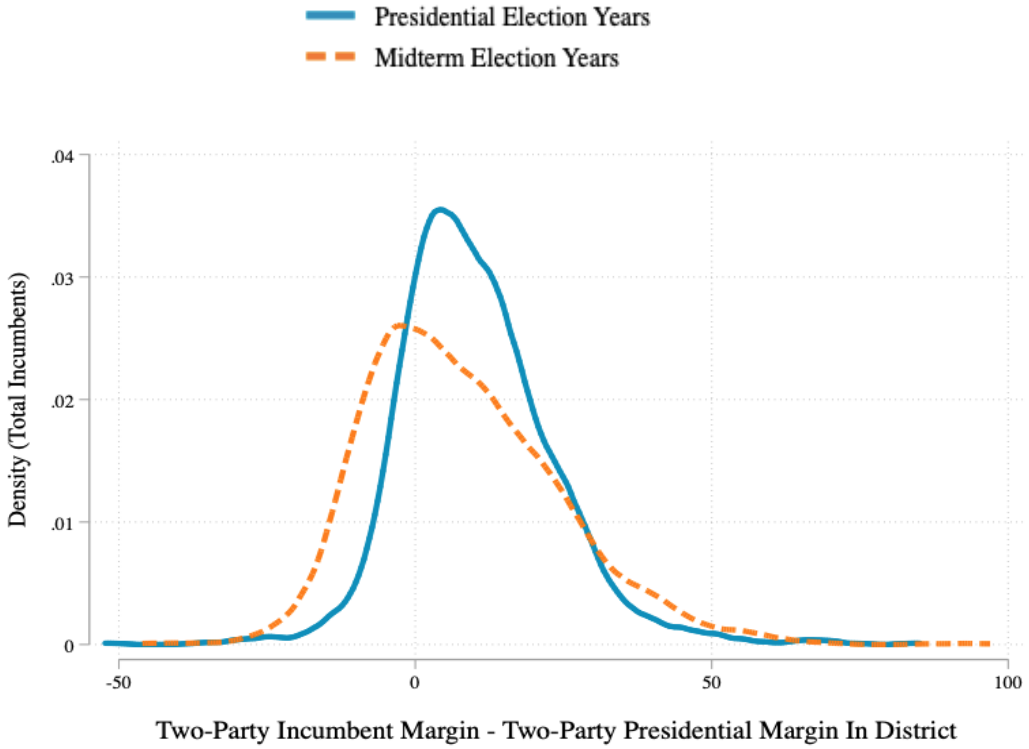



Figure 3.1 displays distributions of district-level ticket-splitting separately for midterm and presidential election years from 2002-2018. The variable is calculated by subtracting a presidential nominee's margin in the district from that of their co-partisan incumbent House member.

As a result, scholars argue persuasively that voter's choice in a presidential election is a reliable proxy for an individual's partisan attachment. This attachment also plays out the district level; in most electoral forecasters' ratings (and in most reliable scholarly models) prior presidential vote is commonly used either on its own or as part of larger indexes, to measure district-wide attachment to one party or the other. More broadly, strong electoral alignment indicates that constituents perceive and assess their legislator and their presidential nominees through a similar, partisan lens. When voting at the House level, these constituents do not have a reason to deviate from their partisan

presidential choice. If nationalized partisanship were the only criteria by which constituents evaluated their representatives at the ballot box, then we would expect most incumbents to perform similarly to their party's presidential candidate. This condition is illustrated by incumbents who fall closely to zero on the x-axis in Figure 3.1, for whom the difference between their margins and those of their party's presidential nominee is minuscule.

But in truth, only about a quarter of incumbent House members run within five percent of their party's nominee, while over half of all incumbents since 2002 were elected with a difference of more than ten percent in either direction. As a result, legislators who ran either well ahead or (in fewer cases) well behind their party's presidential nominee continue to make up a huge proportion of the House membership. Notably, Figure 3.1 excludes incumbents without a major-party challenger, which avoids any artificial inflation of the far right tail of the distributions. This indicates that for reasons not fully explained in the literature, a legislator's reputation among their constituents varies in ways that go beyond partisanship. This variation is important because it demonstrates that a party's House and presidential candidates are assessed differently by their constituents in the district for reasons other than partisanship.

I argue that a primary reason for the observed variation in Figure 3.1 is that a legislator possesses either an abundance or deficit of local roots in the district that they share with their constituents. These roots are indicative of a local connection shared

between legislators and their constituents that exists outside of partisan affiliation and increases local support for the legislator. Deep local roots therefore equip members of Congress with a valuable reputational advantage that pays dividends on Election Day, particularly compared to national partisan figures who have no such access to these local connections.

One reason district roots have an impact on voters' evaluations of their representatives is because these shared characteristics have a broadly positive valence. Much was made during the 2004 presidential election over which candidate voters would "most want to grab a beer with." And for better or for worse, the average American would most likely want to grab a beer with somebody who is "like them" on any number of dimensions. Previous work has shown time and again that voters prefer candidates with whom they share common identities and characteristics, particularly for salient identities like race (Bobo and Gilliam 1990, Grose 2011, Fraga 2016), gender (Plutzer and Zipp 1996, Matson and Fine 2006), and even partisanship (Theodoridis 2017, Mason and Wronski 2018).

This is in large part because shared identity is a valuable cue for voters as to who they trust more to represent them (Fenno 1978, Mansbridge 1999). And while politics is undoubtedly nationalizing to some extent, localism has been demonstrated to be a key identity for many voters in the "friends and neighbors voting" literature, and one for which they reward their legislators for sharing with them (Key 1949, Tatalovich 1975,

Panagopoulos *et al.* 2017, Sajuria and Collignon 2018). This scholarship consistently shows that candidates enjoy significantly higher margins of support among voters to whom they are in close residential or (in fewer studies) birthplace proximity.

I argue that this happens because close local connections reflect an underpinning of trust stemming from mutual interests, backgrounds, and identities (Fenno 1978). District roots represent a valuable connective tissue that creates a sense of trust among constituents that a legislator has their best interests at heart and truly are "one of them" on dimensions that have nothing to do with their partisan label. For example, in Fenno's qualitative masterpiece *Home Style*, he interviewed (among many others) a member of Congress who attributed his electoral success as being rooted in trust and distinctly local identity because of his background before he came to Congress. He went to high school and college in the district, was a star athlete, and held local office shortly after graduating. Asked why voters seem to trust him so much, the member replied that it was mainly "because they've known me over a period of years. They know my father and my family's reputation. I'm a known quantity… people know your general reputation, your family name, your kids. They know you in athletics. People can put their finger on you." (Fenno 1978, 79)

When constituents can "put their finger on" their elected legislator, it represents a significant reputational advantage for that legislator in terms of differentiating themselves in a positive way not just from their own party, but from partisan conflict of all kinds.

District roots are a crucial component to this reputation because they are a valued signal to constituents of local credibility and authenticity. If a representative grew up in their district, went to a local high school, or owns a business that's a local institution, their voters recognize these as credentials that qualify them to represent their interests in the House. This is particularly true in districts where localism and "place" are particularly relevant and important parts of constituents' identity (Panagopoulos *et al.* 2017). Therefore, when both constituents and their representative both have a meaningful personal history in and around the district, it creates an overlapping identity that informs how well-represented constituents feel.

This shared background translates into votes that diverge positively from straight-ticket partisan support. Specifically, I argue that this favorable response to legislator localism persists even amidst the more nationalized, party-centric electoral contexts that have characterized recent congressional elections. In fact, localism is uniquely suited to help legislators go beyond partisanship because it emphasizes shared qualities and identities that are based in shared local geography that are not malleable and can cross party lines. By its very definition, the localism that shared district roots bring to the representational relationship reflect a connection with voters that national partisan figures like presidential nominees, whose reputations are steeped in national issues, partisan positions, and campaigns, cannot possibly have. Because district roots represent an authentic localism that can only be shared between a legislator and their particular

district, they can induce constituents to support legislators who may not share their partisan identity, but instead share a more personal local identity.

With this in mind, I test the following hypothesis to capture the extent to which a locally-rooted incumbent is meaningfully differentiated from nationalized partisanship:

> **Hypothesis 3.1***: The deeper an incumbent legislator's local roots in their district, the better they will perform electorally compared to their party's presidential nominee.*

*II. Data and Methodology*

To capture these effects, I use merged district-level election return data from *Congressional Quarterly Elections* (for House vote shares) and *DailyKos Elections* (for presidential vote shares by congressional district). The dependent variable for Hypothesis 3.1 -- Presidential Partisan Differentiation -- is constructed by subtracting the two-party margin of victory for the presidential nominee from the legislator's party from that of the legislator themself.

To capture a legislator's district roots, I use the index of the seven component measures discussed in Chapter 2. The *District Roots Index* comprises binary indicators of whether a legislator:

- Has political family roots in the district;
- Was born in the district;

- Completed their high school education in the district;
- Completed their undergraduate education in the district;
- Completed their postgraduate education in the district;
- Has local political experience in the district;
- Owns a business in the district.

While these components are not exhaustive measures of a legislator's district roots, they are meaningful proxies that capture the key elements of the concept. The collective District Roots index adds each of these binary indicators by legislator to create a scale from 0-7 for each legislator.[18] Finally, I weight this index by the percentage of constituents who were born in the state to account for how apt constituents are to appreciate and identify with a legislator's district roots. I also include this measure separately to control for any effect that constituent localism has on electoral dynamics independent from the connection it strengthens with similarly-local legislators. The District Roots Index is the primary independent variable used throughout this dissertation to assess how impactful district roots are for a legislator's relationship with their constituents.

Beyond this primary independent variable concept, I include two crucial controls for partisanship. First, I measure the extent to which an incumbent has a strong partisan advantage in their district compared to their major-party opponent. This is

[18] Notably, there is no legislator in the data that achieves all seven component measures of District Roots; therefore, the unweighted *District Roots Index* only scales observationally from 0-6 (see Figure A3.3 in the Appendix for the full distribution).

operationalized by capturing how partisan a district is compared to the rest of the country as a whole using a modified version of two-party presidential vote in the district in prior elections. I argue that how the party's presidential nominee performs in the district affects the extent to which an incumbent legislator can rely on co-partisan voters for reelection. That is, the more heavily partisan a district tends to vote, the more likely elections are to be decided on those terms at all levels. Therefore, the more one-sided a district's voters are in terms of partisanship, the greater alignment in vote share we should expect between incumbent legislators and presidential candidates. Many scholars use prior two-party presidential vote in the district as a barometer for district partisanship, but this can introduce bias towards one particular election or presidential nominee, and is particularly problematic in this project given the nature of the dependent variable. For this reason, I use the Cook Political Report's *Partisan Voting Index* (PVI). The PVI has two distinct advantages as a measure of nationalized partisanship in the district: first, it compares the partisanship of the district to the national average, thus putting all districts on a consistent plane of measurement; it also averages the district's distance from the previous two presidential elections, thus avoiding selection bias on a particular election or candidate. Both advantages also help to avoid entanglement with the dependent variable in this model.

National political conditions also affect voter behavior in the district for a number of reasons, including attention to national issues, affecting the opinions of independent

constituents, and mobilizing (or de-mobilizing) partisan ones (Herrnson 2015). For example, when national political conditions favor the party opposite the president, then co-partisan incumbents may be incentivized to distance themselves from their party's leader in their campaigns. With this in mind, I include a variable that measures contemporary national political contexts operationalized by using the RealClearPolitics average of the two-party share of the Generic Congressional Vote ballot question at the national level in a given election. There are multiple measures that other scholars have used to assess national political conditions, including presidential approval, national congressional popular vote, and national unemployment rate adjusted by party. However, the generic ballot question has been shown to be a reliable indicator of national political conditions, and as such is a significant predictor of electoral dynamics in the district. It also is specifically tied to Congress, making it more appropriate to predict dependent variables related to congressional elections. Regardless, models run using these alternate measures produced similar results that do not change the main findings of this or subsequent chapters.

Additionally, there are a number of factors that fall outside of a partisan framework that have been found to affect district electoral dynamics and which are included here. The most significant of these is the quality of the challenger in the congressional election. High-quality challengers have been found to significantly affect how well incumbents perform electorally by raising and spending money, running ads

that challenge them publicly, and forcing them to respond to public issues (Bond *et al.* 1985, Krasno and Green 1988, Squire 1992). Since presidential contests in the district always feature two well-known (and usually highly-qualified) candidates, an incumbent's race more closely mirrors their presidential counterpart's when they face a quality challenger. Therefore, the presence of a quality challenger should have a negative effect on the ability of a legislator to outperform a presidential nominee regardless of a legislator's local roots. I operationalize this using the commonly-used indicator of whether a challenger has prior elected political experience at any level of government.

Another important control included is that of a legislator's length of service in Congress. This is an important factor not just in congressional elections generally, but is particularly relevant as a potential differentiator between legislators and their party's presidential nominee. Many (in fact, most) legislators have appeared on the ballot in their district several times, while presidential nominees are often appearing for only the first or (at most) second time. Longer-serving legislators have also had extensive opportunity to build up their relationship with voters and leaders in the district regardless of their pre-established roots, while many if not most districts in the U.S. are overlooked by presidential candidates during their campaigns, and most voters have little to no opportunity to interact personally with them. As a result, legislators' tenure length is a potential driver of outsized vote share in the district for legislators compared to their presidential counterparts.

I also address race as a key potential difference in the way constituents view their congressional representative as opposed to a presidential candidate. If a legislator shares a descriptive racial identity with their constituents, but a presidential nominee does not, this could be a key electoral advantage for the former compared to the latter. First, I create a binary measure of the extent of descriptive racial alignment between a legislator and their constituents - in this case, whether the percentage of a legislators constituents who share the legislator's race is above the median for currently-serving legislators of the same race.[19] I then calculate whether the legislator and presidential nominee were the same race. To address the differential effects this alignment might have, I then create a variable that assigns a zero if both (or neither) legislator and presidential nominee are racially aligned with the district (no advantage for either); a 1 if the legislator is co-racially aligned, but the presidential nominee is not (an advantage for the legislator); and a -1 if the presidential nominee is co-racially aligned, but the legislator is not (a disadvantage for the legislator).

Other control variables include whether the legislator faced a primary opponent and whether they held a leadership position in Congress; these are included because they are prevalent in models that seek to explain variation in electoral outcomes among incumbents. Primary opposition may weaken incumbent House members or force them to

[19] A detailed discussion this quantitative choice can be found in Appendix A.

spend more scarce resources, thus deflating their general election margins and bringing them closer to their party's presidential nominees, who also tend to face contentious, resource-draining primaries. The directional effect of legislator leadership in the chamber is less clear, but likely produces a different kind of relationship with their home constituents that may or may not more closely resemble that of a presidential candidate.

I have also included whether the state in which the election is occurring allows single-mark straight-ticket voting. I expect this condition to naturally deflate the marginal differences in electoral performance between presidential candidates and their co-partisan House counterparts on the ballot, since voters in these states can choose all same-party candidates with one vote. Finally, I include a categorical time variable (1-9 corresponding with election years 2002-2018) based on the likelihood that partisan alignment between congressional and presidential candidates has naturally increased in the aggregate over the course of the time period tested (2002-2018). Descriptive statistics for all observations in this chapter can be found in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

Descriptive Statistics - Contested Non-Open House Races (2002-2018)

| *N=2973* | **Mean** | **Std. Deviation** | **Min** | **Max** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Partisan Differentiation (Presidential) | 9.1 | 14.9 | -52.3 | 97.0 |
| Partisan Differentiation (Congressional) | -8.6 | 18.0 | -75.6 | 69.1 |
| District Roots Index | 1.1 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 4.2 |
| % Constituents Born In-State | 0.6 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.96 |
| Racial Alignment with District | 0.0 | 0.5 | -1 | 1 |
| District Partisan Advantage | 9.3 | 10.0 | -27.1 | 44.0 |
| National Partisan Advantage | 49.7 | 3.7 | 43.8 | 56.2 |
| Primary Opposition | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0 | 1 |
| Chamber/Party Leader | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0 | 1 |
| Terms Served | 5.5 | 4.3 | 1 | 29 |
| Challenger Quality | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0 | 1 |
| Straight-Ticket Voting Allowed | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0 | 1 |

To estimate the effects for Hypothesis 3.1, I employ Generalized Least-Squares regression with random effects and clustered standard errors by legislator. Applying random intercepts by legislator captures the theoretical assertions made earlier: that district roots established before a legislator's time in Congress do not vary over their career, but rather offer a "head start" in building up and deepening their relationship with constituents that varies by legislator and transcends partisanship. Given data availability for both the independent and dependent variables, these models predict partisan differentiation for incumbent House members with major-party general election challengers spanning the nine congressional elections from 2002-2018 (N=2,973). This time period in particular provides a high bar for local roots to clear given the recent well-

documented nationalized partisanship and polarization in congressional politics. If such a distinctly nonpartisan local connection with constituents can matter during this time, it speaks volumes about its importance to the legislator-constituent relationship going forward.

*III. Results*

The results of these tests show clearly that the local roots legislators have in their districts play a significant role in positively shaping their reputation among their constituents. These results in Table 3.2 demonstrate that the depth of an incumbent legislator's local district roots have extensive and statistically-significant positive impacts on their reputation compared to their party in the eyes of their constituents. The District Roots Index is statistically significant well below the .01 level in predicting positive differentiation from their party's presidential nominee, and has a clear and positive effect on how much a legislator's reputation transcends nationalized partisanship in their district. Other control variables of interest, including District Partisan Advantage, terms of service in Congress, challenger quality, and straight-ticket voting, also have their expected effects.

**Table 3.2**
**Effects on Presidential Partisan Differentiation (Complete Results), 2002-2018**

| Dependent Variable | Presidential Partisan Differentiation | Presidential Partisan Differentiation (Presidential Elections) |
|---|---|---|
| District Roots Index† | 2.55*** | 2.77*** |
| | (0.43) | (0.51) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | 3.75 | 2.79 |
| | (2.41) | (2.64) |
| Racial Alignment With District | 0.48 | 0.43 |
| | (0.41) | (0.52) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | -0.25*** | -0.25*** |
| | (0.04) | (0.06) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 1.43*** | -0.04 |
| | (0.04) | (0.10) |
| Primary Opposition | -1.05** | -2.31*** |
| | (0.43) | (0.61) |
| Chamber Leadership | 1.49* | 1.42 |
| | (0.85) | (0.95) |
| Terms Served in Congress | 0.21*** | 0.38*** |
| | (0.08) | (0.10) |
| Quality Challenger | -3.45*** | -2.75*** |
| | (0.67) | (0.90) |
| Straight-Ticket Voting Allowed | -1.38* | -2.04** |
| | (0.79) | (0.90) |
| Time | -1.62*** | -1.33*** |
| | (0.10) | (0.14) |
| Constant | 15.12*** | 14.34*** |
| | (1.26) | (1.39) |
| R-Squared (Between-effects) | .32 | .27 |
| N | 2973 | 1324 |

*Results found using random-effects generalized least squares regression*
*Standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by incumbent*
† = *Weighted by state size and % of constituents born in-state*
*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

To get a sense for the more precise effect of a legislator's District Roots on partisan differentiation, I use the results from Table 3.2 to generate predicted partisan differentiation based on different values of the *District Roots Index*, which range from 0

to 4.86. The result of these predictions can be found in Figure 3.2, which displays the linear effect of a legislator's district roots bounded by 95% confidence intervals. We see from this Figure that an incumbent legislator with no district roots (a zero on the District Roots Index) runs, on average, about 6 points ahead of their party's presidential nominee in the district. This six-point advantage reflects the well-documented benefits of the incumbency advantage available to all congressional incumbents, including the "personal vote" and legislator tenure length. However, this difference is outshined by the predicted difference gained by incumbents with deep district roots (4.86 on the District Roots Index). These legislators, by comparison, enjoy a positive partisan differentiation in their districts of around 18 points. This total effect of around 12 points demonstrates that deep shared roots induce voters to support legislators by margins that go beyond those predicted by simple partisanship, and which do so on top of the traditional incumbency advantages that legislators have in their districts. They also do with high levels of statistical confidence.

**Figure 3.2 - Predicted Partisan Differentiation, All Incumbents with Major-Party Challengers, 2002-2018**

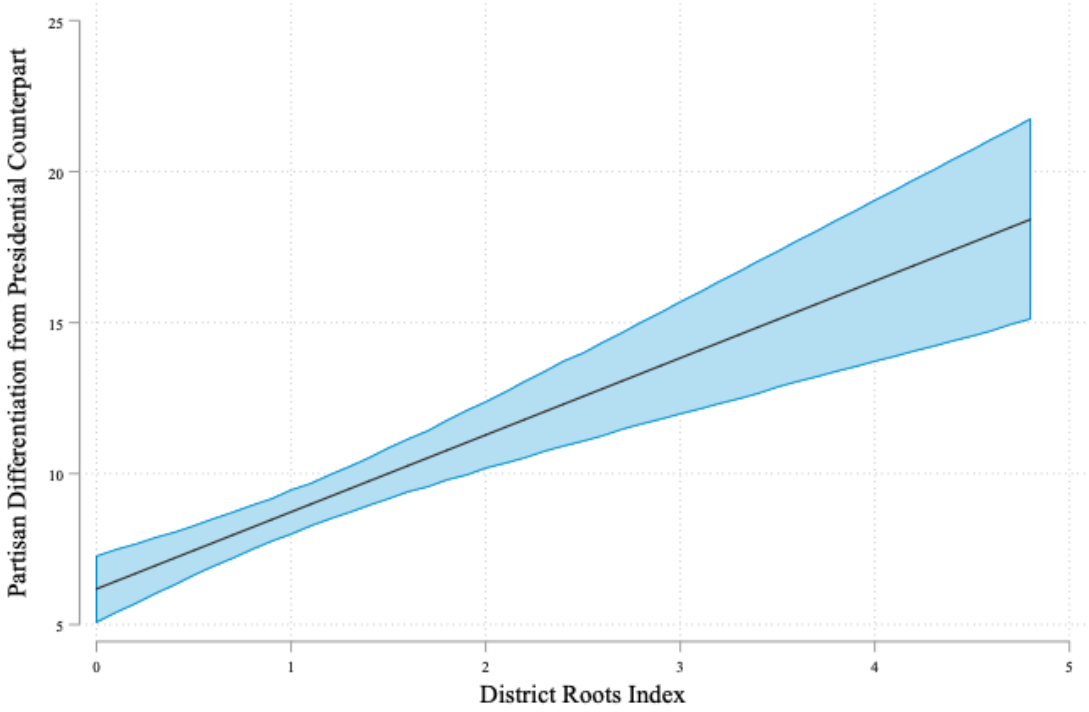



Figure 3.2 displays author-generated predicted partisan differentiation in the district based on the incumbent's local roots in the district as measured by the District Roots Index. Upper and lower bounds around the linear prediction represent 95% confidence intervals for predicted effects. Effects found using random-effects generalized least squares regression with standard errors clustered by incumbent.

The substantive effect of deep district roots is even clearer when compared directly to that of a lengthy tenure in Congress (defined here as ten terms, which is at roughly the 80th percentile for incumbents in this sample). As discussed earlier, a long-serving legislator should be expected to have cultivated a reputation in the district during their time in Congress using the power and privilege of the office, and other advantages that come with incumbency. These are advantages that even nationally-known partisan

figures like presidential candidates do not possess. But, as Figure 3.3 indicates, the effect of deep district roots (twelve additional points on the margin) is more than five times larger than the effect of serving in Congress for ten terms, which notably is more than twice the median of four terms for incumbents during this period. The fact that a legislator's pre-existing local district roots so far outstrips these effects indicates that *what a legislator does* during their time in Congress matters much less for their nonpartisan reputation than *who they were* in the district before they arrived in Congress. Given the attention that has been paid in the literature to legislators' time in Congress, particular as compared to a legislator's pre-Congress background, this is a striking finding that calls into question which legislator attributes and actions voters really care about.

The finding that tenure length has such paltry effects compared to district roots may reflect the fact that time spent in Congress is defined primarily by partisanship in recent years. Much of Washington activity is determined by party leaders in the chamber or policy choices by the president, significantly constraining the amount of time and activity legislators can expend differentiating themselves in their lawmaking activity. In this way, legislator's service in Congress is tinged with partisanship no matter what they do. Having served in the chamber for a long time, while beneficial in other ways, is therefore not as useful in helping a legislator establish a reputation that transcends partisanship. Local, nonpartisan roots in the district, on the other hand, have no such

baggage in part because they are in place long before a legislator's service in Congress. Their association is with distinctly nonpartisan qualities that constituents of any political persuasion can find appealing. It is perhaps not so surprising, then, that district roots help differentiate a legislator's reputation from that of their party's leaders in Congress in a way that chamber seniority does not.

**Figure 3.3 - Predicted Effects on Margin Difference with Party's Presidential Nominee, 2002-2018**

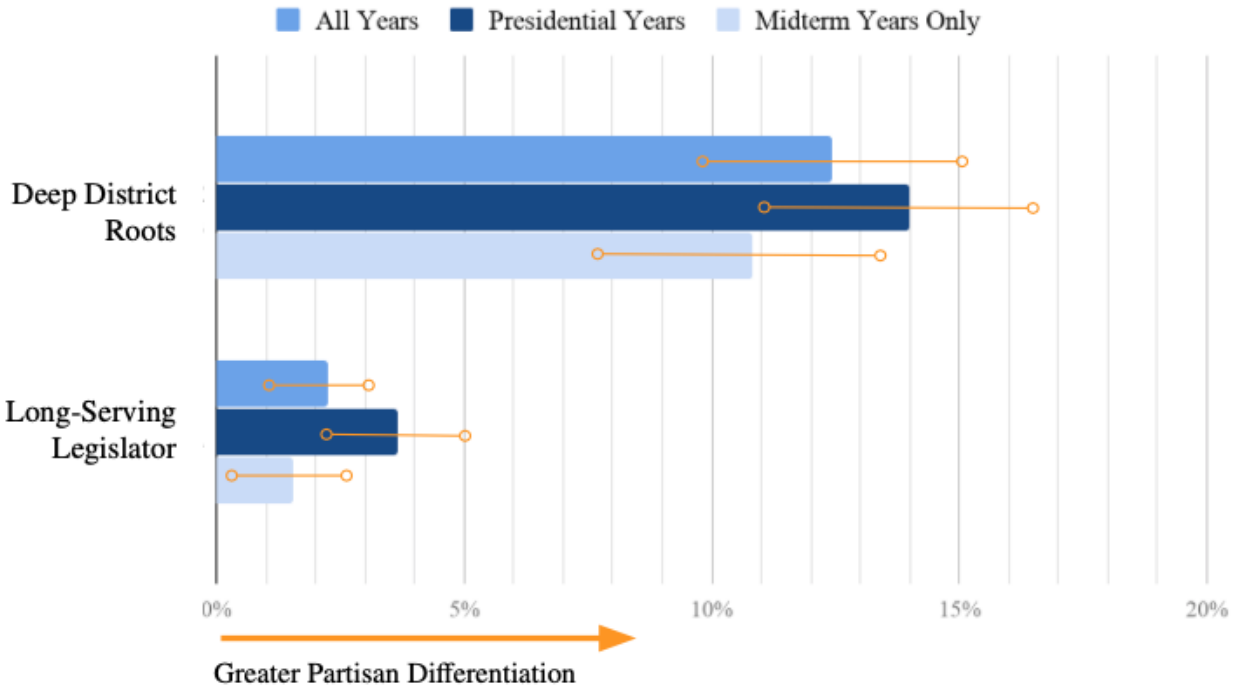



Figure 3.3 displays author-generated predicted effects of selected independent variables on incumbent partisan differentiation in the district. Orange lines reflect 95% confidence intervals of predicted total effects. Effects found using random-effects GLS regression.

In addition to time spent in Washington, however, a long-serving legislator has also spent years returning to their districts on weekends and long congressional recesses, getting to know their constituents, and letting their constituents get to know them. That twenty years of home visits, campaigning, and opportunities to build further name recognition and incumbency advantage in the district are so far outstripped by a legislator's pre-Congress roots in their district is striking. This finding speaks to the aforementioned value voters attach to untarnished *authentic* lived experience in the district, as opposed to more electorally-motivated "personal vote" activities undertaken while in Congress.

Given a number of systematic differences between presidential and midterm election years, it is also important to test the effects of district roots separately. One might expect, for example, that during midterm elections, incumbents (and congressional campaigns generally) occupy more space in the average voting constituent's mind than in presidential years. The effects of district roots hold both substantively and statistically when limited to either election type, as Figure 3.3 indicates. Interestingly, however, the effect is slightly weaker when tested for midterm years only. This could be due to systematic anti-incumbent bias that has occurred in several midterm elections in the past two decades. Regardless of whether it is a presidential or midterm election, however, the effect of district roots on Partisan Differentiation significantly overwhelms those of tenure length, challenger quality, racial alignment, and other variables thought to create

recognizable differences between House members and their party's presidential nominees.

As an additional robustness check on the findings in Table 3.2, Table 3.3 presents results of models that predict a legislator's partisan differentiation from their party's average congressional incumbent in a given election cycle, rather than their party's presidential candidate, which I term Congressional Partisan Differentiation. These largely confirm the findings on presidential partisan differentiation, showing that legislators with deep district roots run between 6 and 7 points farther ahead of their party's average incumbent than those without roots. While substantively and statistically significant, these smaller effects are reflective of the tighter distribution around the Congressional Partisan Differentiation dependent variable.

**Table 3.2**

**Effects on Congressional Partisan Differentiation (Complete Results), 2002-2018**

| Dependent Variable | Congressional Partisan Differentiation | Congressional Partisan Differentiation (Midterm Elections) |
|---|---|---|
| District Roots Index† | 1.21*** | 1.83*** |
| | (0.48) | (0.49) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | 1.82 | 1.44 |
| | (2.51) | (2.53) |
| Racial Alignment With District | 2.08*** | 1.57** |
| | (0.70) | (0.74) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 1.18*** | 1.37*** |
| | (0.04) | (0.04) |
| Primary Opposition | -0.70 | -1.01 |
| | (0.44) | (0.64) |
| Chamber Leadership | -0.33 | -0.50 |
| | (0.82) | (1.11) |
| Terms Served in Congress | 0.26*** | 0.27*** |
| | (0.08) | (0.09) |
| Quality Challenger | -3.39*** | -2.68*** |
| | (0.65) | (0.91) |
| Time | -1.07*** | -0.90*** |
| | (0.12) | (0.12) |
| Constant | -18.40*** | -20.84*** |
| | (1.33) | (1.31) |
| R-Squared (Between-effects) | .63 | .65 |
| N | 2973 | 1649 |

*Results found using random-effects generalized least squares regression*

*Standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by incumbent*

† = *Weighted by state size and % of constituents born in-state*

*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

*IV. Conclusions*

Much of the literature on congressional elections and representation of the last twenty years has focused on the effects of partisanship on the actions of legislators, the voting behavior of constituents, and the electoral relationship that binds them together every two years. Both scholarship and popular media posit nationalized partisanship as an unbreakable foundation on which the representative relationship in Congress rests, with the corollary that almost nothing can break through it.

These results show that the literature has prematurely dismissed localism as a binding force in many of the relationships that members of Congress share with their constituents. The roots a legislator develops in the district prior to their time in Congress, when shared with constituents who value this localism, have a clear and substantive effect on the nature of this relationship. The variation in how legislators perform relative to their party label may have decreased as partisanship has become more salient, well-sorted, and well-defined; but member and district-specific factors like localism continue to have an impact on the electoral support legislators try to foster and maintain among their constituents. The results in this chapter indicate that this reputation is foundationally stronger when legislators identify with their constituents based on pre-existing local roots in the district.

That these elements of the member-constituent relationship can have such a substantial impact in this partisan era makes these results all the more striking. The recent

emphasis on the overwhelming power of parties and partisanship in congressional elections can leave campaigns feeling deterministic, as if nothing about candidates other than their party matters. Scholars, political analysts and commentators have pointed out the increasing correlation between partisan vote choice in congressional and presidential elections in this century. But the parties also continue to field uniquely compelling local candidates with biographies that help them significantly outperform their party's presidential nominees in districts they had no business being competitive in, at least from a partisan perspective. The empirical analysis in this chapter demonstrates that this local advantage is not isolated, but rather a wide-ranging effect that is robust across all parties, candidate types, and electoral conditions.

In addition, because party majorities in Congress are more volatile than they have been in nearly a century (Lee 2016), for incumbents their party label itself can be a blessing in one election, and a curse in the next. Local roots in the district have the opposite effect: while they likely do not pack quite as powerful a punch as partisanship does, they are an unfettered benefit for legislators aiming for a positive reputation among their constituents. When legislators have deep local roots in the district, they have more stable constituent relationships, with stronger and more meaningful foundations that should help them withstand partisan competition and change at the national and district levels. Presumably, without deep district roots, more legislators would be more vulnerable to the increasingly volatile partisan winds in any given election. This happens

in part because their reputation is based on dimensions other than partisanship, and therefore creates additional layers of support with their constituents. The following chapter will delineate these layers in more detail, and identify how and how much a legislator's district roots improves their fortunes at both the primary and general election stages.

## Chapter 4 - Points on the Board: How District Roots Expand Electoral Support Across Constituencies

> My voters trust me because they've known me over a period of years. They know my father and my family's reputation. I'm a known quantity… people know your general reputation, your family name, your kids. They know you in athletics. People can put their finger on you.
>
> - Congressman interviewed by Richard Fenno in *Home Style* (1978, 79)

Legislators' local roots in the district help them connect with their constituents thanks to shared values of geography and place. Even in an era of nationalized political upheaval based on polarized partisanship, district roots capitalize on a shared sense of localism that improves a legislator's electoral performance in the district. Having established that local connections continue to be relevant in modern congressional elections, it is important to next address how these shared local roots in the district boost a legislator's electoral support among different subconstituencies. Here, I address the multiple ways in which district roots improve the constituent relationship -- and by extension, legislators' reelection chances -- at two crucial stages of the reelection process.

Specifically, I show that local roots in the district improve a legislator's electoral standing among the two subconstituencies responsible for their success or failure at the general and primary election stages. First, I argue that local roots in the district improve a legislator's electoral standing among the group of constituents who vote in the general election. Roots have this effect by inducing out-party voters to support legislators who have them, as alluded to in Chapter 3; and by imbuing co-partisan general election voters with a sense of personal loyalty that makes them more likely to turn out for them in the general election. As hypothesized, I find that deep local roots in the district significantly

improve a legislator's general election margins, holding all other common electoral factors equal.

I also argue that district roots offer legislators a unique advantage by expanding their support among same-party voters who not only support a legislator in the general election, but who also support them above other co-partisan candidates in the primary. Deep local roots in the district expand the proportion of a legislator's co-partisan electorate who is personally committed to them in ways that go beyond the party label. In many cases, potential primary challengers recognize this connection, and are deterred from challenging deeply-rooted incumbents; and when these incumbents do face a primary challenge, they have a stronger connection with primary voters than they otherwise would. Empirical results support these conclusions, showing that legislators with deep local roots are nearly 40% less likely to attract a primary challenger than legislators without such roots. And among legislators who *do* receive a primary challenge, those with deep district roots gain considerably more support in their primary electorate than those without. These three empirical tests show that district roots represent an electorally important connection between legislators and the voters they need at different stages of the electoral process.

*I. District Roots: Expanding Supportive Constituencies at All Electoral Stages*

The practical and symbolic benefits of district roots laid out in Chapter 2, as well as the clear crossing of traditional partisan boundaries demonstrated in Chapter 3, establish a groundwork by which district roots expand key electoral constituencies for

deeply-rooted legislators. Here, I differentiate between these constituencies, theorize why district roots expand them, and show how this constituency expansion leads to better electoral outcomes for legislators at multiple stages of the electoral process.

Some of the mechanisms by which district roots produce these positive results apply to all constituents in the district. For example, many of the practical benefits ascribed to district roots in Chapter 2 better equip legislators to connect with constituents of all stripes in meaningful ways. Legislators with deep district roots are equipped with an authentic understanding of the issues that affect their local communities because they have lived in the district or have political experience dealing with these issues in the context of their district. These legislators are better-equipped to represent the district because they have direct experience as a voter in the district. Constituents value this type of understanding, identity, and personal experience; they are instilled with the sense that the legislator is "one of them" and reward this status with their vote. Many of these benefits, as well as the party-crossing qualities of localism addressed in Chapter 3, produce deeper support across a broad cross-section of voters in both the primary and general elections.

There are many mechanisms, however, that are equally important but which only operate at either the general or primary election stages. With this in mind, it is important to distinguish between a legislator's distinct supportive subconstituencies in the district. One appropriate framework can be found in Fenno's (1978) delineation between *Primary* and *Reelection Constituencies* in his classic work *Home Style*. While there are obviously other valuable ways of meaningfully dividing constituents within the geographic confines of a congressional district, Fenno's framework is appropriate for this analysis because of

the well-understood legislator goal of reelection. Elections are, if nothing else, a test of the quality and durability of the relationship between a legislator and their constituents. I have argued that district roots improve this relationship, and as a result are electorally advantageous. Since the goal of this chapter is to demonstrate this advantage in both the primary and general election contexts, these two subconstituencies are the most relevant.

While district roots improve the overall constituent relationship in the aggregate, they also expand a legislator's general and primary election constituencies in a few specific but separate ways. While the primary election stage comes first in the calendar, I will first consider a legislator's constituency of voters who are apt to support them in the general election, since many of these mechanisms of vote support are applicable to both stages. These can be constituents of the same party, opposing party, or independents. Since most legislators survive their primaries, their general election constituency is consistently the most consequential subconstituency on their minds at any given time. If this constituency is sufficiently large at the time of the general election, the legislator will win another term in office. As a result, it is crucial to understand exactly how district roots help legislators cultivate and maintain support among them.

First, the modern legislator's general election constituency is thought to consist mainly of co-partisan voters. As addressed in Chapter 3, there exists a perhaps well-founded assumption that general election outcomes are essentially a tally of Democratic- and Republican-identifying voters in the district. But legislators with deep local roots in the district have a built-in advantage that helps them appeal to all constituents regardless of party affiliation. By relating to voters of the opposing party as well as unaffiliated voters on a dimension other than partisanship, deep-rooted legislators can expand their

general election support by pulling these voters over to their side, or at least dampening these voters' desire to replace them.

This is not, however, the only mechanism by which district roots expand this constituency. In addition to pulling over out-party constituents, personal ties in the district are also likely to make same-party voters less likely to "roll off" and only vote for top-of-the-ballot candidates for Senate or President because of the stand-out nature of the locally-grown legislator (Meredith 2013). Shared roots are also likely to induce lower-propensity same-party voters, who either vote only in presidential races or rarely at all, to turn out at greater rates, thus increasing legislators' general election margins. This increased turnout is even more likely thanks to the aforementioned practical networking advantages district roots offer to legislators and their campaigns. As a result of this increased support, I hypothesize the following:

> **Hypothesis 4.1***: The deeper an incumbent legislator's local roots in their district, the higher their margins of victory will be in the general election.*

Many similar mechanisms also have effects on the size and strength of a legislator's primary election constituency, but operate in slightly different ways. While most legislators survive their primary elections, they present a number of unique challenges for legislators seeking renomination, and eventually reelection.

For example, in *Home Style*, Fenno defined his "Primary Constituency" abstractly as constituents who not only support the legislator, but will "do work" for them in their reelections. The support from these "die-hard" constituents goes "beyond a vote" and is

defined instead by the "intensity and durability" of their support (19). Fenno specifically notes that this group does not necessarily mean every constituent who votes for the legislator in their primary election; but rather, "the strongest supporters from whom [s]he expects a special solidity of support in a primary election." (18) In this chapter, I do explicitly estimate the effects of district roots on electoral support in the primary, as well as a legislators' ability to scare off opponents in these contests. However, Fenno's observations hint at a number of important reasons that a legislator's district roots are particularly effective at the primary election stage.

One notable and perhaps obvious characteristic of primary voters is that legislators already relate to them on a partisan dimension, and therefore are also in greater alignment with them on the issues than other voters. But in the primary election stage, partisanship is essentially controlled for, and ideological alignment between candidates is obviously much closer. And while primaries are often fought in the ideological space, prior work has shown that ideological differences between the candidates are usually slight (Poole and Steven Daniels 1985, Brady *et al.* 2007).

The built-in similarities between a legislator and potential primary opponents on other dimensions make district roots all the more effective of an electoral advantage. When candidates are indistinguishable on traditional dimensions like party and ideology, it makes other distinctions between the candidates more meaningful and relevant than they otherwise might be (Banks and Kiewiet 1989). One obvious and well-studied distinction between primary candidates is that of incumbency. Scholars have noted with varying certainty the additional boost incumbency offers to legislators running for reelection, particularly in primary elections where the difference in quality between

incumbents and challengers is considerable (Gelman and King 1990, Ansolabehere *et al.* 2007, Carson *et al.* 2007). However, the analyses throughout this dissertation estimate effects on electoral variation *between incumbents* rather than *between incumbents and challengers* at any election stage. All observations in these analyses have theoretical access to the advantages incumbency is said to bestow; as a result, the incumbency distinction in both primary and general elections is essentially controlled for. Instead, I argue that the extent of the candidates' local connection with their voters is one such distinction that incumbent legislators can capitalize on if they have deep roots in the district.

Local roots in the district add distinction to a legislator's standing with primary voters in several important ways. As with out-party voters, district roots offer legislators an additional dimension on which they can relate to these constituents. They instill in a legislator's co-partisan constituents a sense of loyalty to that legislator in particular, rather than just any generic co-partisan candidate. When a voter can identify with a member who, for example, grew up in the same town as they did, the connection between them is multi-layered, and transcends the partisan connection they may already share. In short, when party loyalty is irrelevant as a distinguishing characteristic between candidates, personal loyalty plays a larger role. Primary voters are therefore less likely to waver in their support for a locally-rooted representative in a primary election.

In addition to the increased personal loyalty that supportive constituents have for deeply-rooted legislators, local roots in the district have the effect of making these legislators less expendable as a representative. Legislators with deep roots in the district have a greater awareness of local issues, and a personal connection with many of their

constituents that predates their political careers and is disconnected from other political considerations. The knowledge, familiarity, and ultimately the loyalty these legislators enjoy is deeply valuable to the constituent relationship (Fenno 1978, 2000, Feld and Grofman 1991, Bianco 1994, Gay 2002); and when it is cultivated as a result of pre-established local roots in the district, it cannot be easily manufactured or replaced because it is homegrown. While other co-partisan candidates could move to the district with impressive educational or professional credentials, these do not specifically qualify a candidate to represent that particular district in the way that local roots do. Because district roots are a rare commodity, co-partisan constituents who already support a deeply-rooted legislator will value them even more, and perceive them as far less replaceable. By imbuing a greater number of co-partisan voters with this particular attachment, legislators with local roots have a more expansive set of supportive constituents at the primary stage.

There are also several practical ways in which district roots expand their support in the primary. As addressed earlier, local roots in the district expand a legislator's political infrastructure, as well as personal and professional networks. Pre-established relationships with local activists, business interests, social clubs, and professional organizations are invaluable to candidates in terms of organizing not just around a party, but around that particular legislator. By predating their time in Congress, these networks help legislators develop and maintain a core of personally-dedicated supporters who have been with them "from the beginning." These voters will therefore fight against any effort to replace them, or at the very least be unlikely to abandon them for another otherwise-similar candidate.

Beyond their voters, they are also more likely to have prior personal ties with local and state party organizations, having begun their political careers in their midst, and often with their help. This may make both formal and informal local party organizations more likely to fight for you, as well as deter potential challengers for the nomination by denying them resources and networks that the incumbent locked down long ago. One anonymous member of Congress described this advantage in more intimate detail to Richard Fenno:

> To be honest with you, I couldn't have a difficult primary. No, I grew up with the party people and have kept up with them through the years. I've been in and out of the party machinery since I was in college… I've been in the home of every person active in the Republican party in my district. I've stayed in many of their homes overnight… I have an ideal relationship with the party people. Nobody could touch me in a primary.
>
> - Congressman interviewed by Richard Fenno in *Home Style* (1978, 19)

Of course, such a personal involvement with the local party organization may not be as commonplace today. More recent scholarship, for example, has found a diminishing role for state and local party institutions in American politics (Hershey 2017), particularly in how influential they are in shaping candidates' careers (Carson and Roberts 2013). But even if the actual organizations themselves are weak (and in many cases they are not), future legislators can attract the attention, the help, and in many cases the resources of current party elders and elected officials in the district if they themselves are present and active in their districts beforehand. Experienced professional staff of former elected members of the party, for example, may be more likely to advise or join the campaigns of locally-established legislators. High naturally-occurring overlap between these personal and professional networks not only help locally-rooted legislators get their start, but to

monopolize local political networks such that potential political foes are deterred from trying to break through. The gravitational pull of localism that draws voters from the area to deeply-rooted legislators should produce the same positive attachment for local party leaders, organized or not. The blessing of, for example, former elected officials (and the professional help of their former staff) can make or break electoral fortunes for young legislators.

All of these mechanisms amount to a significant expansion of the subset of constituents who are a legislator's most ardent co-partisan supporters. This support makes it far less likely that potential co-partisan opponents will emerge in the primary. As a result, I propose the following:

> **Hypothesis 4.2***: The deeper an incumbent legislator's local roots in their district, the less likely they are to attract a challenger in the primary.*

For many of the same reasons, I also expect that even when legislators *do* receive one or more challengers in their primary election, they will far more easily dispatch with them. It is true that incumbents rarely fail to be renominated by the party's voters in the district. But given the well-established link between competitiveness and fundraising necessity (McAdams and Johannes 1987, Jacobson 1990b, Gerber 1998), winning their primaries by as great a margin as possible is clearly a deeply desirable outcome for incumbents, who must immediately begin spending enough money and time to win in the general election. For these and other reasons, it is important to estimate the extent to which district roots can boost incumbent legislators who do attract primary opponents. As a result, I propose the following:

**Hypothesis 4.3***: The deeper an incumbent legislator's local roots in their district, the higher their margins of victory will be in their primary elections.*

*II. Data and Methodology*

To capture the depth of a legislator's local roots in their district, I again use the District Roots Index described in detail in Chapter 2. As in Chapter 3, all measures are weighted by the percentage of constituents in the district who were born in the state.

The dependent variable for Hypothesis 4.1 (incumbent victory margin) was calculated using the two-party vote shares for both incumbents and challengers in all contested House races from 2002-2018, which I collected from the *Congressional Quarterly Elections* data bank. I then subtracted the challenger's two-party share of the vote from the incumbent's to produce the incumbent's two-party margin of victory (or defeat). For Hypothesis 4.2, I used FEC election returns to create a binary indicator of whether an incumbent faced a primary opponent or not. To account for the presence of primary opponents with little campaign or who mount no serious challenge, I classify as unopposed in the primary election all incumbents who received 95% or more of the primary vote.[20] Finally, for Hypothesis 4.3 (primary victory margin), I used the same FEC election returns[21] to create a continuous measure of primary margin of victory: the

[20] As noted in the previous chapter, these high-percentage incumbents were clear descriptive outliers in the data: that is, there is a small but significant clustering of incumbents from 95-100% of primary vote share, while the rest of the sample is fairly normally distributed around a median of 80%. This raised the suspicion that while these incumbents were technically challenged in that an opponent's name appeared on the ballot, there was no meaningful campaigning and participation on the part of voters and candidates was therefore minimal. These incumbents can thus be said to be virtually unopposed. Only about 7.6% of the sample of incumbents fit the 95-100% designation, and removing it does not substantially alter the results.

[21] One exception is the 2018 primary returns, which were unavailable from the FEC at the time of analysis. I instead used *Congressional Quarterly*'s Voting & Elections data bank for this cycle.

incumbent's share of the vote minus the combined shares of all other candidates on the ballot.

Control variables for Hypothesis 4.1 are largely the same as the controls used in Chapter 3 (see previous discussion); however, given some key differences between primary and general elections, I make several adjustments to account for factors that determine the probability of a primary challenge.

First, I include an indicator of whether the state in which the primary is held uses the "closed primary" system, which limits primary voting only to voters affiliated with that party. By narrowing the voting constituency, closed primaries also narrow the pool of viable candidates who would be acceptable to this constituency; as a result, I expect closed primaries to produce fewer primary challenges. I also include an indicator of whether a state uses a jungle primary, in which all candidates from both parties run in the same primary. In districts subject to this type of primary, the likelihood of seeing an opponent in the primary increases. In many cases, it also produces challengers from both parties. Given the theoretical cross-partisan advantages of district roots addressed earlier, this was therefore a crucial condition to control for. [22]

It is important to note that the model for Hypothesis 4.3 omits one potentially desirable control: the "quality" of primary election challengers. It is omitted because there exists no easily attainable measure of primary challenger quality, mainly because primary challengers tend to be more obscure political amateurs who would likely not be considered "high-quality" by traditional standards (Bond *et al.* 1985). Even if many

[22] I alternatively considered whether to simply omit these states from the sample; results for this limited sample and the model I present here - in which presence of a jungle primary is a control - yielded nearly identical results.

primary challengers did have prior political experience (the traditional measure used in general election models, as discussed in Chapter 3), this information would be nearly impossible to attain in any systematic way, even with modern data innovations. As such, I do not explicitly control for primary challenger quality when testing Hypothesis 4.3. However, Table A4.3 in Appendix B displays the raw results of an analysis identical to that of Table 4.3, but which also controls for total combined fundraising of all primary challengers as a proxy for quality. This is a problematic measure given the inherent endogeneity between campaign fundraising and electoral margins, and as such I do not include it in the main model in the text. Even so, the substantive and statistical significance of the District Roots Index declines only slightly in the alternate specification in Table 4.3. This robustness should ease concerns over the omission of a primary challenger quality measure.

To specify all three models, I preserve for both hypotheses the random effects by legislator used throughout this dissertation. As in Chapter 3, I use Generalized Least-Squares regression with these random effects for Hypotheses 4.1 and 4.3. For Hypothesis 4.2, I use random-effects logistic regression to model an incumbent legislator's likelihood of attracting a primary challenger.

*III. Results*

First, I assess the extent to which deep district roots expand a legislator's supportive constituency in the general election. This expectation is borne out in the results, which are depicted in Table 4.1: district roots have a clear positive effect on incumbent general election margins. The effect of district roots is highly statistically

significant, even after controlling for factors like partisanship, tenure length, racial alignment, and challenger quality, which are more commonly-discussed influencers of incumbents' electoral support in the district.[23]

**Table 4.1**
**Effects on House General Election Outcomes, 2002-2018**

| Dependent Variable | Incumbent GE Margin |
|---|---|
| District Roots Index† | 1.76*** |
| | (0.44) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -1.07 |
| | (2.35) |
| Racial Alignment with District | 1.35** |
| | (0.63) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 1.20*** |
| | (0.04) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 1.37*** |
| | (0.04) |
| Primary Opposition | -0.30 |
| | (0.42) |
| Chamber Leadership | -0.41 |
| | (0.77) |
| Terms Served in Congress | 0.34*** |
| | (0.07) |
| Quality Challenger | -4.99*** |
| | (0.61) |
| Constant | -26.94*** |
| | (1.32) |
| R-Squared (Between-effects) | .70 |
| N | 2973 |

*Results found using random-effects generalized least squares regression*
*Standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by incumbent*

† = *Weighted by % of constituents born in-state*

*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

[23] The regressions in this and some subsequent models contained election year dummy variables, all of which were negative and statistically significant at the .01 level. Because they were not relevant to the substantive analysis, they are not included in Figure 4.1 due to space constraints; but full numerical results for this and all other models with such restraints can be found in Appendix B.

Given the high degree of statistical certainty, we can fairly precisely estimate the size of the increase in support gained by having deep local roots in the district. For a better understanding of this more substantive effect, Figure 4.1 plots the predicted values of the general election margin of victory based on all values of the District Roots Index. Legislators with deep local roots in the district win by margins nearly nine points higher than a comparable legislator without these roots. This substantive effect, while in the single digits, can have tremendous outcomes in a House race. From 2002-2018, 325 races with incumbents were decided by two-party margins less than nine points, meaning that the influence of deep local roots in the district has almost certainly been pivotal in any number of races.

**Figure 4.1 - Predicted General Election Margin of Victory Based on District Roots**

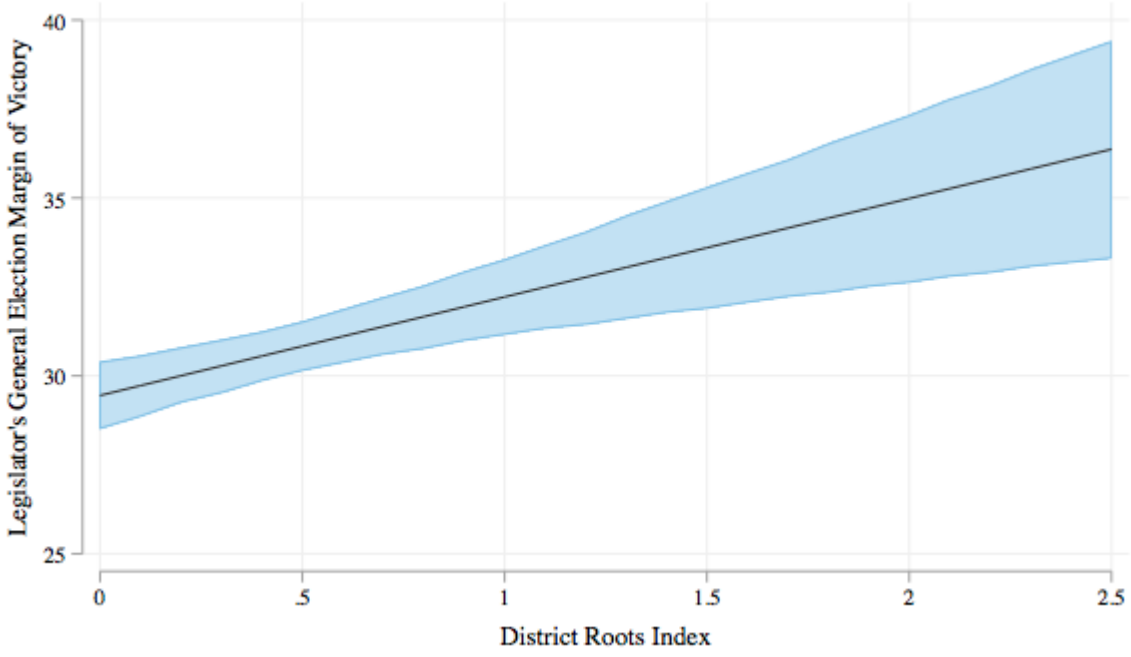



Figure 4.1 displays author-generated predicted incumbent margins of victory based on the incumbent's local roots in the district as measured by the District Roots Index. Upper and lower bounds around the linear prediction represent 95% confidence intervals for predicted effects. Effects found using random-effects generalized least squares regression with standard errors clustered by incumbent.

Additionally, this substantive influence is comparable to or well exceeds that of other control factors commonly understood to affect electoral dynamics in the district. Figure 4.2 illustrates this by comparing the predicted total effects of deep district roots with those of district- and national-level partisanship, challenger quality, racial alignment with the district, and incumbent tenure length. These effects were calculated by predicting incumbent margins at low and high measures of the statistically significant independent variables. For example, the total effect measured for District-level Partisan Advantage is measured by predicting an incumbent's margin when their district is relatively even in its partisanship, and when it is 20 points more partisan than the national average, then subtracting the difference.[24]

It is unsurprising that a strong partisan advantage in the district is a clear foundation for an incumbent's electoral success. Before any other district factors, politicians (as well as campaign strategists, commentators, and political scientists) consider its partisan balance first and foremost, and with good reason. But this analysis shows that the effect of deep local roots in the district is more than ⅓ as large as that of a strong partisan advantage in the district.

[24] The total effect for National-level Partisan Advantage is measured by an incumbent's party being even with the other in the generic congressional ballot question to being ahead by 6 points; Quality Challenger and Racial Alignment are binary; Long-Serving incumbent is measured from 1 term served to 10.

**Figure 4.2 - Predicted Effects on General Election Margin of Victory**

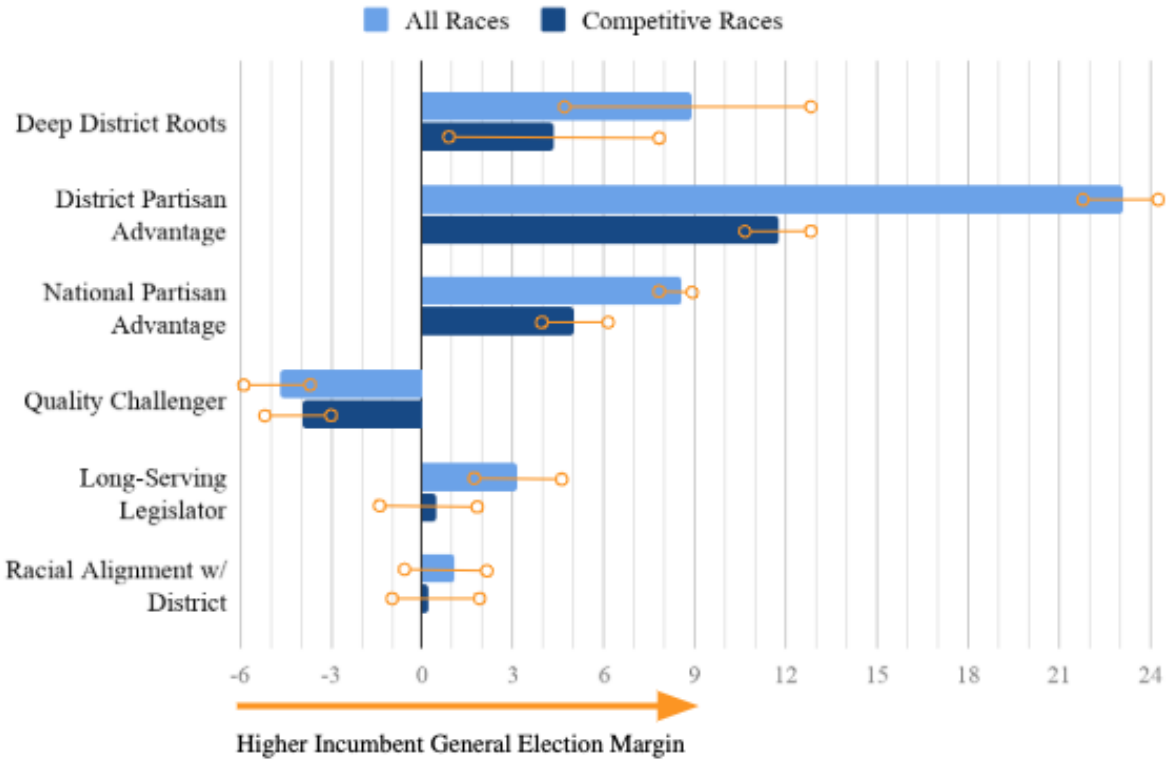



Figure 4.2 displays author-generated predicted effects of selected independent variables on incumbent general election vote share. Predicted effects are bounded by orange 95% confidence intervals. Effects found using random-effects GLS regression.

Perhaps even more notably, deep roots in the district help an incumbent more than twice as much as facing a quality challenger hurts them. They also help even more than having a strong partisan advantage at the national level, which is measured by predicting the victory margin when an incumbent's party is tied with the other on the generic ballot question, as opposed to when it is 8 points ahead. This is essentially the effect of a "wave" election[25], yet deep district roots outpace this effect by several points. Particularly

[25] For reference, Republicans led the generic ballot question by an average of about 9 points immediately preceding the 2010 midterm elections; Democrats led by 7.3 points ahead of the 2018 midterms. As with district-level general election margins, I use the two-party rather than raw difference in the RCP polling average for consistency across elections.

after the 2018 elections, where national sentiment in favor of the Democrats is thought to have swept droves of Republican incumbents out of office, this finding should raise the awareness of scholars looking to model electoral outcomes in Congress. Finally, district roots also have a much more significant substantive impact than a legislator's lengthy tenure in Congress or descriptive racial likeness to their constituents.

Of course, if district roots only have significant effects among, say, safe incumbent legislators, they are unlikely to actually be decisive. Perhaps district roots are only relevant when the partisan competitiveness of a district isn't a factor, and other factors are better-able to shine through. But Figure 4.2 also provides evidence that the effect of district roots on general election margins is robust to whether or not a race is competitive.[26] In these races the effectiveness of local roots in the district continues to be comparable to other crucial district factors in this sample. In fact, it is one of only four factors (along with national and district partisanship, as well as challenger quality) that continue to have any substantive effect on competitive outcomes. Additionally, since competitive elections are by nature decided by much smaller margins, this significantly increases the likelihood that district roots have been decisive in incumbents' general election outcomes.

Local roots in the district clearly give legislators a leg up in their general elections by significantly expanding the breadth and depth of their constituent support. But do they have similar effects on their primary-voting subconstituency? First, I estimate whether district roots have the hypothesized negative impact on how likely a legislator is to receive a challenge at all in the primary. Table 4.2 displays the logistic regression

[26] Full regression results with election year dummies included can be found in Appendix B. Competitive races are coded as such if they were decided by a two-party margin less than 20 (n=856).

estimates showing once again that district roots have a statistically significant effect on this likelihood. Additionally, the effects of the added control variables point in the expected directions: for example, closed primaries limit the range of constituents who can vote in primaries, thus dampening the demand for a wider range of candidates; and the jungle primary condition significantly increases the probability of attracting a challenger.

**Table 4.2**
**Effects on Likelihood of Primary Opposition, 2002-2018**

| **Dependent Variable** | **Likelihood of Incumbent Primary Opposition** |
|---|---|
| District Roots Index† | -0.16*<br>(0.08) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -1.23***<br>(0.44) |
| Racial Alignment With District | 0.03<br>(0.12) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 0.02***<br>(0.10) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 0.00<br>(0.01) |
| Closed Primary | -0.83***<br>(0.16) |
| Jungle Primary | 0.94***<br>(0.18) |
| Chamber Leadership | -0.01<br>(0.17) |
| Terms Served in Congress | 0.05***<br>(0.01) |
| Constant | -1.03***<br>(0.27) |
| Wald Chi-2 | 287.35 |
| N | 3460 |

*Note: Results found using random-effects logistic regression*
† = *Weighted by % of constituents born in-state*
*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

To assess the substantive impact of district roots, I generated predicted probabilities of primary opposition based on all observed values of the District Roots Index, which are depicted in Figure 4.3. The results of this exercise are perhaps the most striking yet: deep local roots reduce the likelihood of facing primary opposition by nearly half. Holding all else equal, legislators without district roots attract a primary challenger about 36% of the time, while those with such roots do so only 22% of the time. This represents a nearly 40% reduction in the probability that an incumbent legislator faces a legitimate primary challenge at all.

**Figure 4.3 - Predicted Probability of Primary Opposition Based on District Roots**

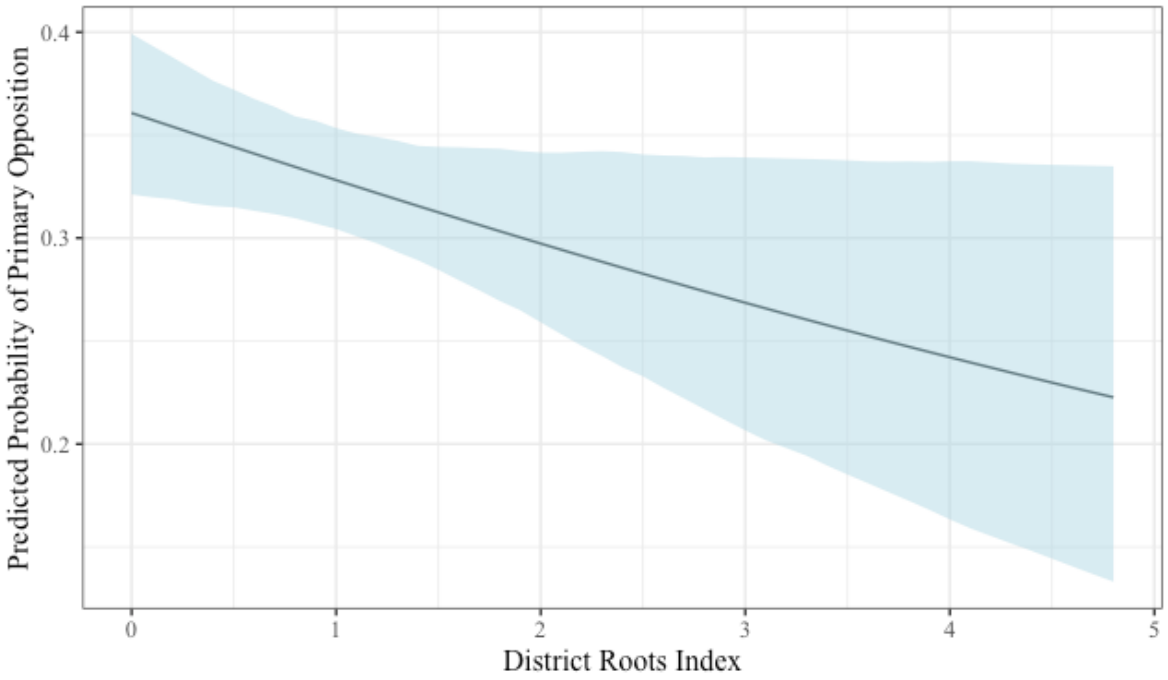



Figure 4.3 displays author-generated predicted probabilities of incumbent primary opposition based on the incumbent's local roots in the district as measured by the District Roots Index. Upper and lower bounds around the linear prediction represent 95% confidence intervals for predicted effects. Effects found using random-effects logistic regression.

This is a tremendously significant result for a variety of reasons. Even if incumbents are rarely ousted in the primary, a serious challenge drains crucial campaign resources that would otherwise be available in the general election, as well as the time and energy a legislator must spend campaigning. Facing such a challenge provides co-partisan constituents with a viable ideological alternative to an incumbent legislator, and sows doubt among those whom the legislator should theoretically have strong support. This can happen in part because a legislator may be faced with a primary challenger who themself has deep roots in the district. If an incumbent legislator has no local roots in the district, it is likely that their support in the constituency is based on other factors, and is more tenuous. When, however, a legislator has district roots firmly established, they are better-able to seal off that particular avenue by which primary challengers can win over co-partisan voters.

Of course, whether or not a legitimate opponent materializes in the primary is ultimately the result of the whims of potential challengers, and many incumbents attract these challengers even if their underlying electoral dynamics in the district are favorable. But even when legislators are unable to stave off such a challenger, district roots continue to offer an invaluable connection to their co-partisan constituents. Table 4.3 displays regression results[27] for Hypothesis 4.3, and indicate with high levels of certainty that district roots are perhaps even more valuable in the primary than they are in the general election.

[27] Full results with election year dummies included can be found in Appendix B.

**Table 4.3**
**Effects on Primary Election Margin of Victory, 2002-2018**

| Dependent Variable | Incumbent Primary Election Margin |
|---|---|
| District Roots Index† | 2.50** |
| | (1.21) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -18.97*** |
| | (7.07) |
| Racial Alignment With District | 0.96 |
| | (1.83) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 0.23** |
| | (0.11) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 0.20 |
| | (0.17) |
| Closed Primary | -6.58** |
| | (2.57) |
| Jungle Primary | -23.82*** |
| | (2.47) |
| Chamber Leadership | 4.90** |
| | (1.97) |
| Terms Served in Congress | -0.15 |
| | (0.21) |
| Constant | 72.76*** |
| | (4.35) |
| R-Squared (Between-Effects) | .18 |
| N | 1278 |

*Note: Results found using random-effects logistic regression*
† = *Weighted by % of constituents born in-state*
*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

Notably, the number of terms a legislator has served in Congress appears to have null, and perhaps even negative, effects on their primary election margins. This is a particularly significant finding given the attention that has been paid to the incumbency effect in the previous literature, and its potential as a distinguishing factor that primary voters use to positively differentiate incumbents from lesser-known challengers. One

might imagine, for example, that legislators who have served in their districts for many terms have established themselves as the candidate of choice for their party's voters, as well as fundraisers and local political leaders.

District roots, on the other hand -- which are unrelated to incumbency -- have highly statistically significant effects in primary elections. To ascertain more substantively exact estimates of their impact, Figure 4.4 displays the predicted primary election margins of victory based on all values of the District Roots Index. This distribution of effects indicates that district roots affect incumbent legislators' vote shares in the primary by about twelve percentage points - an even higher rate than they do in the general election.

**Figure 4.4 - Predicted Primary Election Margin of Victory Based on District Roots**

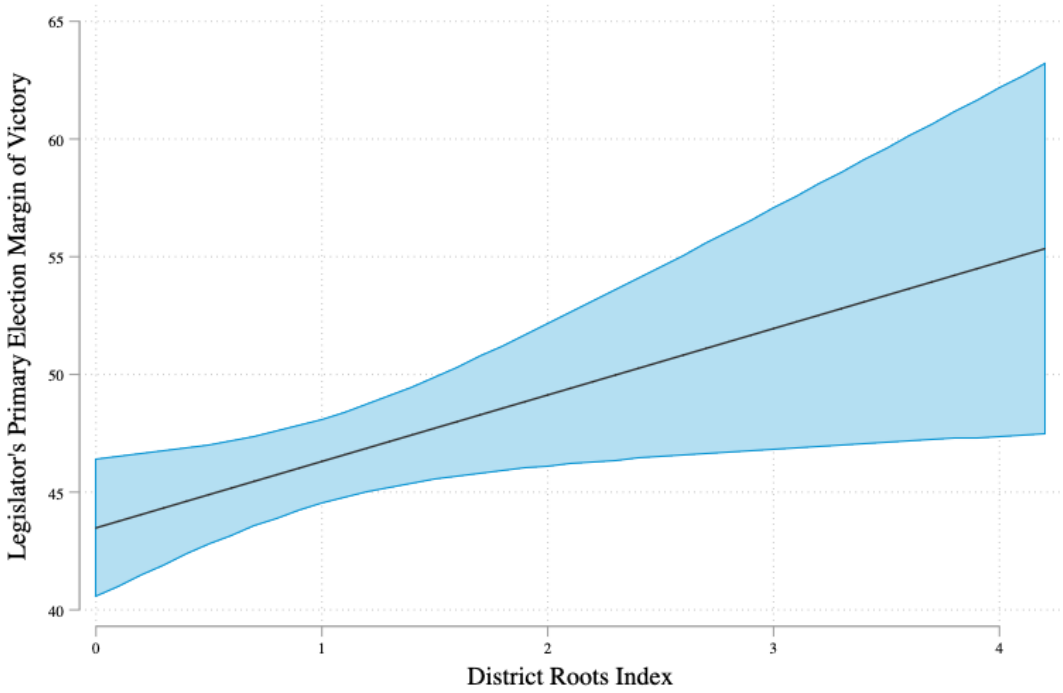



Figure 4.4 displays author-generated predicted incumbent primary election margins of victory based on the incumbent's local roots in the district as measured by the District Roots Index. Upper and lower bounds around the linear prediction represent 95% confidence intervals for predicted effects. Effects found using random-effects generalized least squares regression with standard errors clustered by incumbent.

The substantive impact of district roots in contested primaries may be best assessed by again comparing them with the predicted total effects of the other independent variables in the model. Figure 4.5 does so, showing not only that district roots compare favorably with other measures, but that it significantly outpaces all other factors except the jungle primary condition. Jungle primaries essentially double the number of voters and candidates who can run in a primary; they also (usually) attract candidates from both parties who are of much higher quality than usual. It is therefore especially notable that the effect of district roots is more than half as large as the jungle primary condition, which fundamentally alters the nature of the primary contest in the district.

**Figure 4.5 - Predicted Effects on Primary Election Margin of Victory**

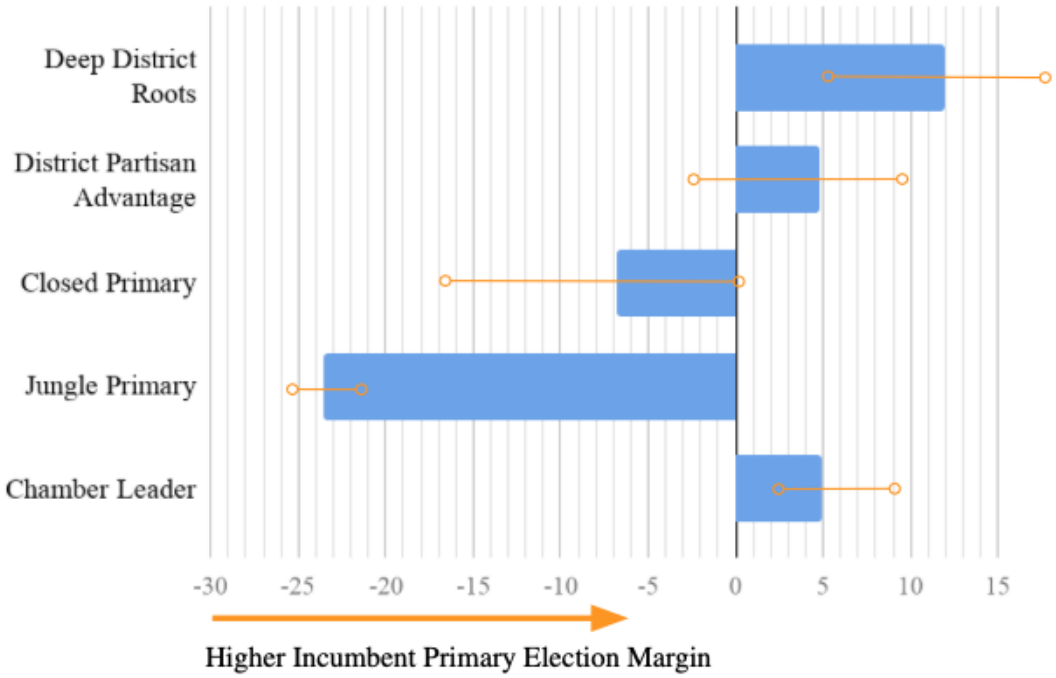



Figure 4.5 displays author-generated predicted effects of selected independent variables on incumbent primary election vote share. Predicted effects are bounded by orange 95% confidence intervals. Effects found using random-effects GLS regression.

*IV. Conclusions*

In this chapter, I have expanded on the mechanisms by which the local district roots a legislator possesses facilitate more supportive constituencies at both the general and primary election stages. Tests of the effects of district roots on the outcomes at both stages showed striking evidence that these roots, and the local connection they represent, have significant power in determining the favorability of electoral dynamics for a legislator in their district. I found that legislators with deep local roots win by margins 9 percentage points higher than comparable legislators without roots; that deeply-rooted legislators are nearly 40% less likely to attract a primary challenger; and that when these legislators *are* challenged in the primary, they win by margins 12 percentage points higher than they would without district roots.

These results should cause scholars of congressional elections to reconsider what factors shape electoral dynamics in the district at both the primary and general election stages. First, as alluded to in Chapter 3, modern general elections in the House are thought to be structured almost entirely around the partisan balance of the district, as well as national partisan conditions. Put differently, the belief pervades that a legislator's supportive constituency in general elections is to a greater extent than ever made up only of co-partisan voters. The findings in this chapter confound these expectations by showing that nonpartisan factors, like the depth of a legislator's local roots in the district, have a substantial impact on general election outcomes. By cultivating personal loyalty among co-partisan voters, and appealing to out-party voters, district roots help legislators establish a more widely supportive constituency that pays dividends on Election Day.

I also find that the support legislators can expect at the primary election stage depends in large part on the depth of their local roots in the district. Local roots offer an important distinguishing characteristic for incumbent legislators in primary contests where partisan and ideological differences between the candidates are either slimmer or nonexistent. They also help legislators establish deep and lasting political, economic, and social networks that follow them to Congress and help them deter potential rivals for their party's nomination in the district.

Overall, these results indicate that the depth of a legislator's local roots among their constituency should be considered alongside other more traditional factors in models used to predict electoral outcomes in the district. Not only do district roots have substantial substantive impacts at both the general and primary election stages, but the magnitude and statistical confidence of these impacts rival or in many cases overtake those of other important determinants of electoral outcomes like partisanship, challenger quality, tenure length, and election laws. Importantly, district roots vary extensively between incumbent legislators, and help explain different electoral outcomes that occur between otherwise-similar incumbents. Local roots are therefore distinct from the "incumbency effects" that are the subject of much of the recent literature on congressional elections, and should be taken seriously as a significant determinant of electoral dynamics in the district.

The consistent advantage that district roots provide to legislators is even more striking given the differing nature between a legislators' primary and general election constituencies, including the criteria each use to decide whether and how much they support an incumbent. As a result of these significant differences, legislators often are

required to go to great lengths to please both subconstituencies sufficiently to be reelected (Key and Others 1966, Brady and Schwartz 1995, Schmidt *et al.* 1996, Gerber and Morton 1998, Michael Alvarez 1998), and in many cases must sacrifice support with one subconstituency to please another. One identity that both constituencies have in common, however, is their shared geography. However highly-engaged, deeply partisan, and ideologically extreme primary voters may be, they live in and care about the district as a place, and as their home; so, too, do general election voters who may not relate to a legislator on a partisan or ideological basis. District roots therefore represent a rare commodity for reelection-seeking legislators: a local connection with their district that can theoretically appeal to everybody. The results of this chapter provide convincing evidence of this cross-constituency appeal.

This appeal may also have a cascading effect that can help explain why district roots remain powerful throughout a legislator's career. I have demonstrated in this chapter that when a legislator has deep local roots in the district, they are not only better able to stave off primary challenges, but also that even if they are challenged, they are more likely to notch larger electoral victories at the primary and general election stages. In addition to being an electorally desirable condition in a vacuum, these larger victories likely also help stave off future serious challenges by boosting the perceived formidability of the legislator. In doing so, deep district roots codify the reputation of an incumbent legislator as electorally "untouchable," and thus disincentivize potential future challengers from undertaking an effort that's unlikely to be successful.

## Chapter 5 - Power of the Personal: How District Roots Dictate Campaign Spending

> My opponent held a press conference and introduced the man they brought in from the outside to run his campaign - some guy from Massachusetts who had run forty-one campaigns in twenty-one states. I suppose he's a smart fella, but you don't come out and tell people he's from outside! Not people out here! It was amazing! I couldn't believe it - telling everybody he was from the outside! Maybe if he came from someplace nearby you might get away with it… but Massachusetts!
>
> - "Congressman C", from *Home Style* (1978, 49)

> If we think of representation as a process, then campaigning for Congress is as central a representational activity as voting in Congress.
>
> - Richard Fenno, from *Congress at the Grassroots* (2000, 18)

When campaigning for reelection, legislators behave in ways that they believe will most effectively strengthen the representational relationship they have with their constituents (Fenno 1973, Mayhew 1974, Jacobson and Kernell 1983, Carson 2005, Herrnson 2015). But these behaviors do not occur in a vacuum: legislators' behavioral choices reflect the type of representational relationship they already share with their constituents (Grimmer 2013; Bernhard and Sulkin 2018). Previous chapters have demonstrated that the quality of this relationship, and therefore a legislator's chances of reelection, depends on a number of crucial factors, including the depth of their local roots in the district. This chapter therefore focuses on the ways in which legislators' district roots shape how they reach out to their constituents during their reelection campaigns. I show that House members adjust their campaign spending behavior in two distinct but equally consequential ways based on the depth of their district roots.

The first is by decreasing the quantity of resources necessary for a legislator to capture the trust (and instrumentally, the vote) enough constituents to win reelection. As

discussed in previous chapters, district roots essentially provide legislators a practical head start in the development of the constituent relationship that is unavailable to other legislators. Local roots in the district confer far-reaching social, political, and fundraising networks that improve legislator name recognition and overall grassroots support in the district from the outset of their careers rather than through the actions they take while in office. Because of these practical advantages, legislators with deep roots in the district need not expend nearly as much effort maintaining or expanding the support of their voters. Specifically, I find that these legislators spend nearly 40% less in campaign funds over the course of an election cycle compared to those without such a background in the district.

Second, district roots affect not just the quantity, but also the method and manner of legislators' outreach to their constituents via campaign spending. Specifically, I examine how local roots affect the proportion of legislator campaign spending that takes place within the boundaries of the district. Roots are influential in this area because they predate a legislator's time in Congress, and give them a deeper knowledge and direct understanding of the local area that advantages them over otherwise-similar legislators. Because these legislators have a built-in base of grassroots support in the district, they spend less of their campaign funds on outside services and instead reinvest in their more local power base. Even more practically, the increased local knowledge available to deeply-rooted legislators also produces lasting economic relationships that influence their ability to effectively invest time and money in the district. As a result, I find that deep district roots significantly increase the proportion of local campaign spending by over nine percent, a rate that exceeds those of other factors like length of service in Congress,

chamber leadership, or partisanship. I also demonstrate that this effect is independent from that of total spending.

*I. District Roots, Electoral Dynamics, and Campaign Spending*

Scholars as early as Mayhew made the case that "a power base that is substantially independent of party" is critically important for reelection. (Mayhew 1974, p. 26) While many partisan and other political dynamics have obviously changed since this time, the principle remains that having a unique and independent base of support - one that is based on personal dedication and local connection, rather than simple partisanship - offers a significant advantage electorally. I have demonstrated in the previous chapters that the depth of a legislator's local roots in the district provide a solid foundation of support that lasts throughout their career. The electoral advantages of district roots are seen in how constituents relate to shared local ties and react when casting their votes.

This chapter, however, focuses on The advantages of deep district roots for how legislators behave in their campaigns. Legislators with deep roots, and therefore with a more extensive and diverse "power base" separate from the party, have significantly more flexibility and self-contained political power in their districts because their constituents are more personally dedicated to them than to the party. Members therefore need not rely solely on the party or outside expertise and assistance to direct their resources and govern their behavior in the district, but instead can rely on their own familiarity with their district. In this chapter, I find substantial evidence for these advantages in the context of incumbent legislators' campaign spending decisions.

Campaign spending is often overshadowed as a key element of congressional elections by the importance placed on raising money. For example, building up a campaign "war chest" is a signaling device on the part of incumbent legislators to demonstrate their viability to voters, interest groups, donors, and potential challengers (Jacobson 1990b, Epstein and Zemsky 1995, Potters *et al.* 1997, Coate 2004). However, while an incumbent's fundraising totals can tell us a great deal about the contours of a congressional race early on, the actual disbursement of these resources in a campaign setting offers more details about how legislators themselves perceive the strength of their underlying relationship with their constituents. This is in large part because unlike taking in contributions, the disbursement of resources is an action over which the legislator and their campaign enterprise have total agency. Spending reflects the active steps members take to reinforce or strengthen their connection with constituents in an effort to win reelection. For this reason, factors that structure this relationship should also be expected to have profound impacts on their spending decisions. I argue that the depth of a legislator's local roots in the district independently affects both the quantity and the content of their campaign spending.

Above all else, campaign spending is a highly precise measure of voter outreach. It is in many ways an uncommonly quantitative example of what Fenno called "presentation of self" (1978): a way of literally investing in their district in order to broaden their constituency relationship to encompass more supportive voters, and to deepen this relationship with those who may already support them. Many studies have uncovered a confounding negative relationship between incumbent spending totals and electoral support (Feldman and Jondrow 1984, Ragsdale and Cook 1987, Levitt 1994).

But this is not because spending is ineffective or harmful to a legislator's relationship with their constituents; it is rather that greater spending is the result of a representative-constituent relationship that is unsatisfactory for one or more of the reasons addressed earlier. There's no doubt that spending is an effort to strengthen the bond between representative and constituent; but as previously discussed, this effort is inherently dependent on the strength of the bond that already exists (Gerber 1998).

It is therefore deeply relevant to legislator campaign spending behavior that, as demonstrated in previous chapters, deep local roots help to cultivate a reputation among their voters that diverges positive from partisanship, and therefore a broader, more reliably supportive constituency at both election stages. These findings get to an initial basic reason why district roots impact legislator campaign behavior: Because their baseline of constituency support is higher (and thus, their reelection effort is less competitive), a legislator's local roots in the district also reduce the quantity of resources and outreach necessary to retain the support of their constituents.

Other previously-discussed elements of district roots are particularly influential in decreasing overall campaign spending. Because these legislators also spent significant amounts of time in the district before representing it, they are also more of a known quantity to their constituents. When legislators have deep local roots, their constituents possess a greater pre-established understanding of their policy positions and personal biography. Even more tangibly, a deep personal history in the district increases the probability of prior personal contact with voters, thus increasing voter familiarity, trust, and support in candidates. Voters have, in essence, had the opportunity to "kick the tires" on a representative and gotten to know them beforehand. The practical effect of this prior

knowledge and establishment of personal trust is that, in campaign scenarios, legislators do not need to spend as many valuable resources convincing their constituents that they can be trusted or that they have their best interests in mind as their representative.

Additionally, deep district roots cultivate a preexisting personal familiarity with the district and its voters that has significant impacts on their campaign outreach in the district. When legislators know their districts, they have a better awareness not just of the politics and policy their constituents care about, but of the larger political and economic institutions that frame the narrative of political life in the district, and therefore of the campaigns undertaken to represent it. In previous chapters, I addressed why a legislator who is well-acquainted with the district should have more expansive social and political networks that predate their election and aid their fundraising and campaign efforts throughout their career. Deep district roots also help obviate many of the "startup costs" of campaigns, particularly in early stages of a legislator's careers because they have already established long-standing economic relationships with local business and political networks with grassroots organizations who know the ins and outs of campaign management and execution in that particular district. Since district roots are established prior to even their first campaign for the House, these legislators need not expend resources and effort forging economic and political networks; or even worse, hiring others to artificially create these connections for them. These networks, along with more expansive and well-established firsthand knowledge of the local economy and political environment, helps legislators build and maintain campaign infrastructure that is organic and consistent throughout their careers. Therefore, when legislators possess a more

intimate firsthand knowledge of the district, its voters, and its political environment, they should be expected to allocate their resources more wisely and efficiently.

I first expect that because deep local roots in the district significantly increase an incumbent's support among their constituents from the outset of their careers, they therefore decrease the amount of outreach necessary to retain this support. In short, the better a legislator's relationship is with their constituents to begin with, the fewer resources they must invest in campaign activity undertaken to improve it. As a result of this expectation, I predict the following:

> **Hypothesis 5.1**: *Members of Congress with deep local roots in their districts will spend less on their reelection efforts than those without such roots.*

In addition to establishing a stronger foundation of support that decreases the quantity of resources necessary to win, local roots in the district also affect the manner in which legislators distribute these resources. In this chapter, I argue that the proportion of legislator campaign spending that takes place within the boundaries of their district.

I argue that incumbent legislators spend more of their money in the district when they are more personally and uniquely connected there in the first place for several reasons. First, a significant local background in the district enables legislators to spend their resources in ways that reflect a deeply-held familiarity with the area. Legislators with deep district roots are more likely to patronize local vendors simply because they know of them or have done so in the past. The more pre-existing local connections a legislator has built up prior to their time in Congress, the more economic relationships within the district they will be able to draw upon during their campaigns.

Second, this local connection concentrates a legislator's key sources of political support - their "power base", as Mayhew described it - within the district itself, rather than with outside sources like parties, consultants, and national interest groups. This local power base is an advantage that deeply rooted legislators have compared to, for example, neighboring incumbents without deep roots. When shared local geography is a particularly important component of the relationship between a deeply-rooted legislator and their constituents, more local spending is an advantageous campaign behavior for this legislator. Spending within in the district, and on local vendors with whom they have a relationship, has the effect of making this identity more salient in a way that is advantageous to deeply-rooted legislators. And by consistently investing resources in the district, locally-rooted legislators are likely to compound this political support among voters and vendors alike who benefit from higher proportions of local spending.

Finally, increased spending within the district also reflects the decreased necessity for services like polling, advertising, and consultants which are more typically purchased outside the district. These services in particular are more necessary when a legislator needs to know more about their constituents, or wants their constituents to know more about them, both of which reflect a lack of mutual familiarity and history between legislator and constituent. However, when a legislator shares with their constituents a unique and intimate understanding of their district and of each other, it should lead to less spending on these kinds of services. Therefore, more deeply-rooted legislators will instead spend where their strongest source of support exists - inside the district. With this in mind, I expect the following:

**Hypothesis 5.2**: *Members of Congress with deep local roots in their districts will spend a greater proportion of their campaign resources inside the boundaries of their districts than those without such roots.*

It should be noted that local spending captures an effect that is almost completely uncorrelated with the overall levels of spending captured by Hypothesis 5.1. Figure 5.1 demonstrates this lack of correlation by plotting the dependent variables from Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.2 against each other. The scattered values indicate that however local district roots affect legislator outreach to constituents, they do so in at least two different but important ways. While total spending is undoubtedly correlated, for example, with overall electoral competition and broad constituency support, local spending represents an independent dimension of the constituency relationship.

**Figure 5.1 - Total Legislator Campaign Spending (Natural Log) vs. % of Funds Spent In-District**

Figure 5.1 displays a scatter plot comparing observations by their total amount of campaign spending (x-axis) with the proportion of their campaign spending conducted within district boundaries (y-axis).

*II. Methodology*

I estimate the independent effects of a legislator's local roots in the district on two distinct measures of their campaign spending behavior. The data for these dependent variables were obtained from the Federal Election Commission's candidate expenditure data for the House of Representatives, which compiles every individual transaction from each filed candidate for the House for the 2004-2018 cycles. While the FEC data comes largely pre-processed, it contains a number of little-used measures that I take full advantage of in this project to measure precise spending decisions that go beyond simple sumtotals.

To test Hypothesis 5.1, that a legislator's deep local roots in their district will lead them to spend less total campaign funds, I aggregated transaction-level dollar amounts for each candidate over the two-year cycle for each election. I then subtracted the portion of spending attributed to transactions that in reality are contributions to other same-party candidates, or transfers of dollars to national, state, or local party committees, which would have the effect of biasing the actual campaign-oriented spending totals of safer incumbents, as well as spending that takes place outside of the district.[28]

Additionally, I used the natural log of total non-transfer incumbent spending for two reasons: first, since most House races are not particularly competitive, a heavy leftward skew of total dollar amounts makes straightforward linear predictions

[28] For example, safer incumbents tend to take in campaign funds in significant excess of what they actually need to win. They therefore offload a much greater proportion of their funds to other, needier candidates, or to the party organization to redistribute themselves. Additionally, spending on services like consulting and advertising tend to take place more often outside of the district. However, the substance and statistical significance of the results detailed later in this chapter hold in models that do include this excess spending.

problematic. Figure 5.2 shows the distribution of the logged dependent variable for Hypothesis 5.1, indicating a more standard normal distribution. Second, by using the logged version of this variable, the model will generate predicted percent changes rather than raw increases and decreases, which makes the effects of each independent variable more uniform and generalizable across all observations.

**Figure 5.2 - Density Plot of Total Legislator Campaign Spending, 2002-2018 (Natural Log)**

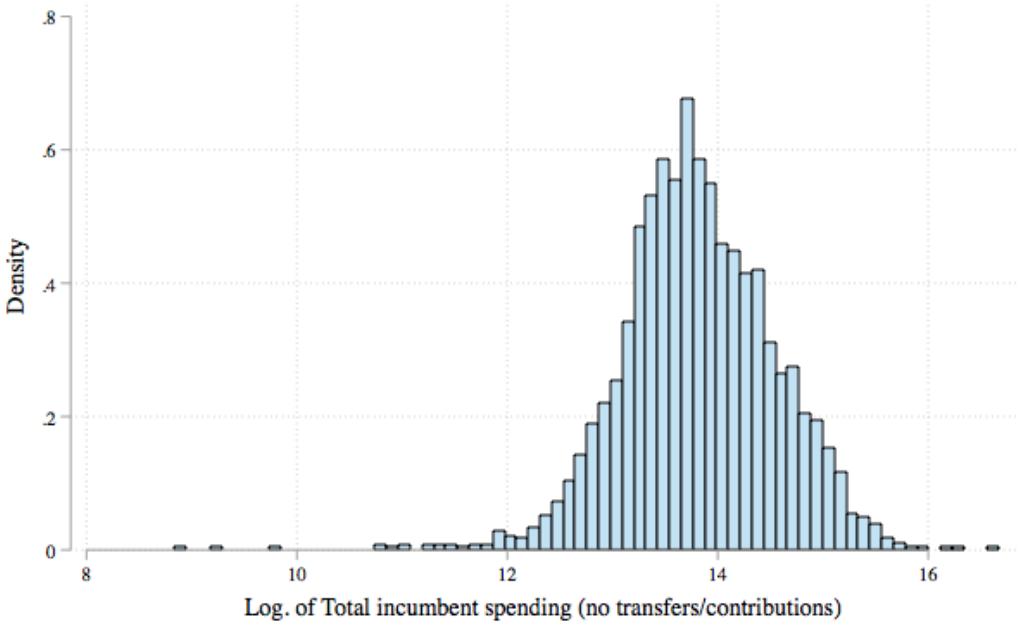



Figure 5.2 displays the distribution of the natural log of total non-transfer campaign spending for all legislators with major-party challengers from 2002-2018. The natural log was taken to produce more reliable linear predictions in light of a strong leftward skew of raw dollar totals.

Most importantly, it makes interpretation of effects more consistent across all levels of electoral competition. For example, an increase of $100,000 in campaign spending is a much more substantively significant increase for a safe incumbent than for a competitive incumbent, who is already spending several times more funds in their campaign. If, however, a certain campaign factor results in a 20% increase in spending, we can assume with greater certainty that this applies consistently across different types of races.[29]

Hypothesis 5.2 predicts that deep district roots will increase the proportion of campaign funds expended locally - that is, within the incumbent's district. This measure, which has not been used in previous spending analyses, requires more rigorous processing. To generate this variable, I used the full address, zip code, city and state of the recipient of each transaction as provided by the FEC. These addresses were geocoded using ArcGIS and plotted on maps containing district shapefiles for the appropriate congress to ascertain whether each transaction took place in the candidate's district or not. For observations that were unsuccessfully geocoded, I matched them to their corresponding districts based on overlapping zip codes and city names. I then aggregated the per-candidate dollar totals for in-district and out-of-district spending, and produced an original variable measuring the percentage of total dollars that were spent inside the district. As with the total spending amounts by each legislator, these percentages do not include excess "spending" on candidate contributions or party transfers, which would almost exclusively take place outside the district and heavily bias the sample.

[29] However, the substance and statistical significance of the results detailed later in this chapter hold in models that use the raw dollar spending totals as the dependent variable.

In addition to the primary independent variable of the *District Roots Index*, and controls used in previous chapters that structure incumbent legislators' reelection efforts, I have included in this chapter's tests an additional set of controls that account for geographic distinctions between districts that are likely to influence spending patterns, particularly for Hypothesis 5.2. First, I include an indicator variable for whether a district is primarily in an urban location. This variable accounts for the increased costs of a campaign in urban districts, which should have a positive effect on total spending (H5.1). I also include in the local spending model (H5.2) American Community Survey population estimates for the percentage of constituents with business-oriented occupations. This measure, as well as the "urban district" indicator, may have the effect of artificially inflating the percentage of a legislator's local spending due to a heavier concentration of vendors likely to offer the services campaigns require and spend money on.

To estimate the effects for Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.2, I employ Generalized Least-Squares regression with random effects and clustered standard errors by legislator. Applying random intercepts by legislator captures the theoretical assertions made earlier: that district roots established before a legislator's time in Congress do not vary over their career, but rather offer a "head start" in building up their relationship with constituents that varies by legislator. Given data availability for the dependent variables, these models predict spending habits for incumbent House members with major-party general election challengers spanning the 2002-2018 congressional elections for Hypothesis 5.1 (N=2965) and the 2004-2016 elections for Hypothesis 5.2 (N=2243).[30]

[30] The FEC provides total non-transfer spending figures for each candidate going back several decades, hence the inclusion of 2002 in the results for Hypothesis 1. Itemized, transaction-level spending data,

*III. Results*

Regression results[31] for Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.2 - modeled separately using the *District Roots Index* and its component measures - can be found in Table 5.1. On the whole, these results indicate strong support for both hypotheses. The index indicating the overall strength of a legislator's local roots in the district is strongly statistically significant in the directions indicated by Hypotheses 5.1 and 5.2 (positive and negative, respectively). Legislators with deep district roots spend significantly less overall, but spend a much higher proportion of their campaign funds in the district. These effects hold even when controlling for other powerful forces that determine legislators' outreach to constituents - such as district- and national-level partisanship, length of service in Congress, and challenger quality - and those that condition geographic-based spending patterns like urban status and business density.

however, is only available from 2004-present. Transaction-level data for 2018 was not yet available in full from the FEC at this time, but aggregate spending totals were - hence, 2018's inclusion in H1 but not H2.

[31] Full results with election year dummies (only included for H5.2; H5.1 used a single linear "Time" control) available in Appendix B.

**Table 5.1**

Effects on Non-Transfer Legislator Campaign Spending, 2002-2018

| **Dependent Variable** | **Total Spending (% Change)** | **% of Spending In-District ☍** |
|---|---|---|
| District Roots Index† | -0.06***<br>(0.02) | 2.17***<br>(0.73) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -0.01<br>(0.13) | -0.34<br>(4.07) |
| Racial Alignment With District | -0.04<br>(0.04) | -1.02<br>(0.99) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | -0.03***<br>(0.00) | 0.30***<br>(0.07) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | -0.03***<br>(0.00) | 0.19**<br>(0.09) |
| Primary Opposition | 0.08***<br>(0.03) | -2.58*<br>(1.46) |
| Chamber Leadership | 0.15***<br>(0.06) | 0.66***<br>(0.16) |
| Terms Served in Congress | -0.01*<br>(0.00) | -5.70**<br>(2.88) |
| Quality Challenger | 0.14***<br>(0.03) | N/A |
| Urban District | -0.03<br>(0.06) | -5.70**<br>(2.88) |
| District Business Density | N/A | 0.21<br>(0.18) |
| Time | 0.06***<br>(0.01) | N/A |
| Constant | 13.82***<br>(0.07) | 28.65<br>(3.78) |
| R-Squared (Between-effects) | .26 | .14 |
| N | 2965 | 2243 |

*Results found using random-effects generalized least squares regression*

*Standard errors clustered by legislator*

† = *Weighted by % of constituents born in-state; *p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01*

☍ = *Data only available for 2004-2016*

At a substantive level, the results are striking in their scope: holding all other variables constant, a legislator with a deep local background in the district spends nearly

40% less over the course of an election cycle than a similarly-situated legislator with no such background. The accompanying changes in raw dollars resulting from this prediction vary, of course, based on the competitiveness of a district: the median incumbent legislator among those in competitive districts spent around $2.6 million, while the median legislator in a safe district spent around $800,000.[32] A 40% decrease in spending for these two legislators obviously produces different changes in nominal dollar amounts, but both changes are of clear and substantial importance to the campaigns of each legislator.

The results also show striking effects in the opposite direction that district roots have on the proportion of spending in the district. The substantive trajectory of this effect is demonstrated visually in Figure 5.3. Holding all other factors constant, a legislator with deep local roots in the district spends nearly 10% more of their campaign funds inside its boundaries, compared to the same legislator without such a background. For the median legislator, this would represent more than $150,000 of spending in the local district economy. In a competitive race, this number is even higher. This significant effect is due both to the more expansive social, political, and economic networks available to legislators with roots in the district, and to the increased salience of shared local identity among grassroots supporters in the district that should induce deeply-rooted members to spend more resources there.

[32] In this case, "competitive" districts were those dubbed "Lean" or "Tossup" by the Cook Political Report in that particular year; "safe" districts were those dubbed "Likely" or "Safe" for one party or the other.

**Figure 5.3 - Predicted Effects on Local Legislator Campaign Spending**

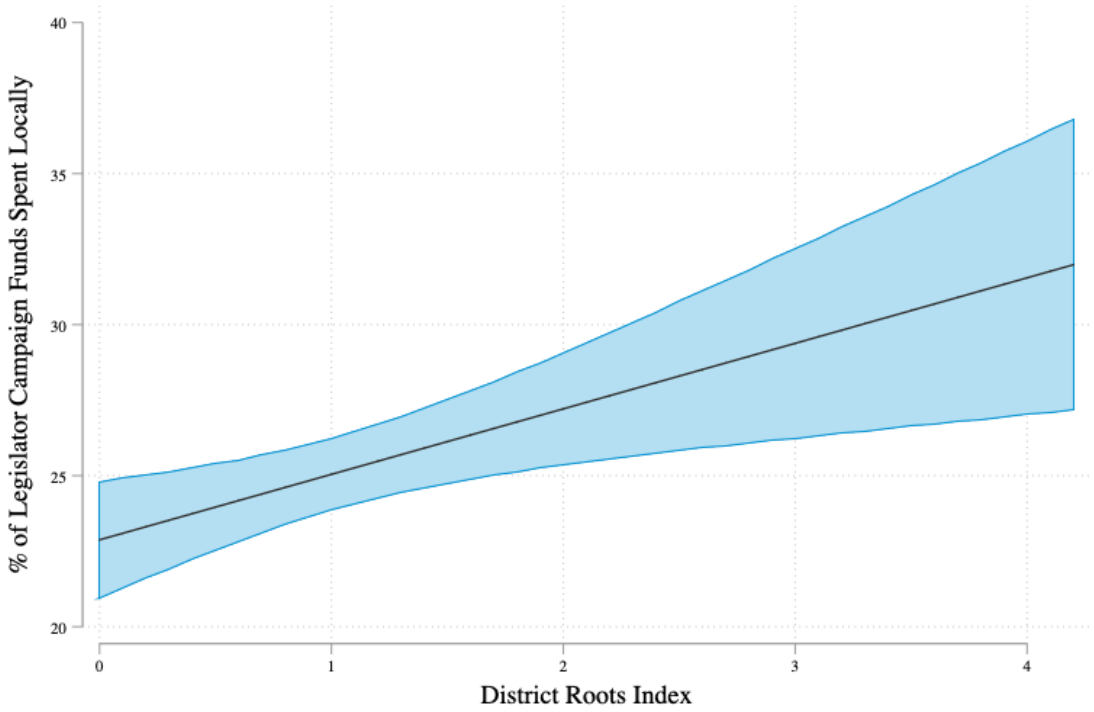



Figure 5.3 displays author-generated predicted proportions of local spending based on the incumbent's local roots in the district as measured by the District Roots Index. Upper and lower bounds around the linear prediction represent 95% confidence intervals for predicted effects. Effects found using random-effects generalized least squares regression with standard errors clustered by incumbent.

Perhaps the most striking results, however, come from a comparison of these effects with those of other factors previously shown to influence legislators' campaign spending. Figures 5.4 and 5.5 compare the effects of an incumbent's district roots on spending decisions to those of other statistically significant variables. To do this, I generate predicted values of the dependent variable at low and high values of each of the independent variables, and subtract the difference to produce the percent change in the dependent variables that result from low-to-high changes in the independent variables. The resulting comparisons show that a legislator's district roots dictate their spending decisions at levels that meet or exceed that of other factors covered widely in the literature.

**Figure 5.4 - Predicted Effects on Incumbent Spending (% Change), 2002-2018**

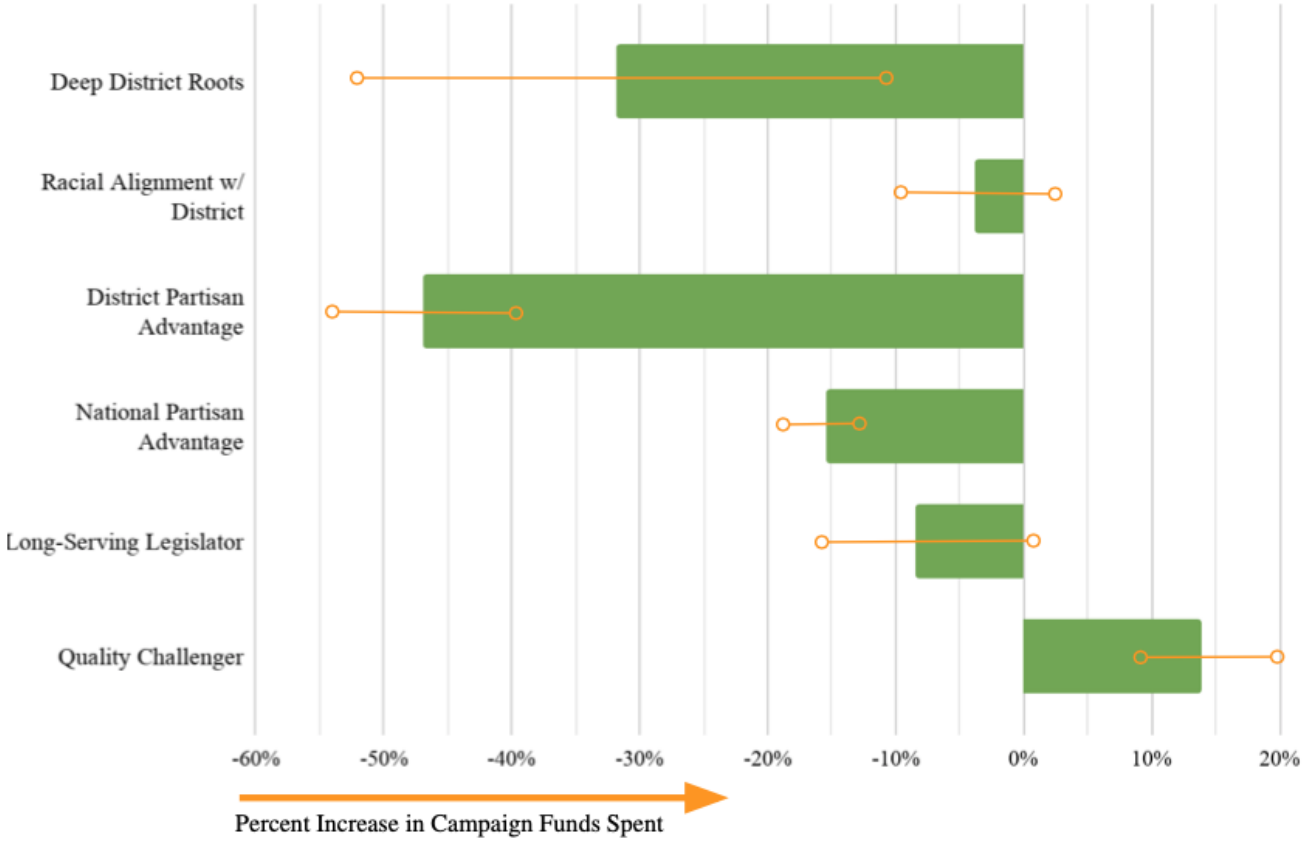



Figure 5.4 displays total effects on the percent change in legislator campaign spending in an election cycle. Total effect estimates bounded by orange 95% confidence intervals. Effects found using random-effects generalized least squares regression with standard errors clustered by legislator.

First, Figure 5.4 displays the differences in predicted values for total amount of non-transfer campaign funds spent by the average legislator over an election cycle. As expected, a strong partisan advantage in the district, as a key contributor to constituent support in the district, has an unsurprisingly large and negative influence on the quantity of spending conducted in congressional races. Much more surprising is not just the extent to which deep district roots lead to lower incumbent spending, but that its effects are

several times greater than those of well-established elements thought to influence legislator campaign behavior, such as challenger quality and a favorable national political environment. A strong "National Partisan Advantage" as defined by Figure 5.6 shows the predicted differences between an incumbent whose party is tied in the generic congressional ballot to one whose party is ahead by eight points. As noted in the previous chapter, this is essentially the effect of a "wave" election. Analysts have observed, for example, that candidates advantaged by a wave have a significant head start in public support and fundraising, and therefore needed to expend fewer resources per voter than their disadvantaged opponents (Malbin 2018). That this effect is so far outpaced by that of district roots should throw into sharp relief just how large an effect these roots have on campaign spending activity, and how fundamentally they structure the ongoing legislator-constituent relationship.

District roots have similarly striking comparative effects on the local spending measure, as displayed in Figure 5.5. As predicted by Hypothesis 5.2, deep district roots significantly increase the proportion of spending that takes place within the district. They do so by a little over 9%, which is significantly greater than any of the other statistically significant control variables. One certainly might expect, for example, that a long-serving legislator[33] would have established local ties during their time in Congress such that they would spend more of their campaign dollars where their constituents physically lived. The effect is no doubt there, but it is exceeded by that of the district roots a legislator establishes well before their time in Congress.

[33] Defined here as one who has served for 10 terms, which is above the median.

**Figure 5.5 - Predicted Effects on % of Local Legislator Spending, 2004-2016**

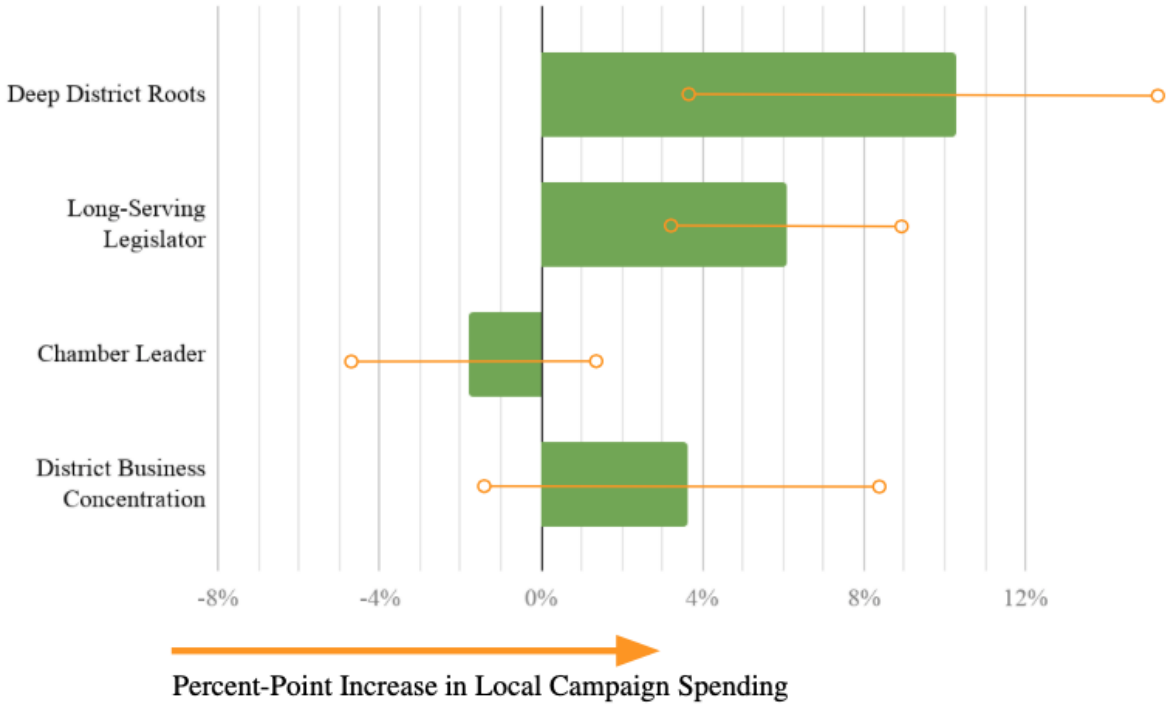



Figure 5.5 displays total effects on the proportion of incumbent campaign spending conducted within district boundaries. Total effect estimates bounded by orange 95% confidence intervals. Effects found using random-effects generalized least squares regression with standard errors clustered by incumbent.

This particular difference in effect between district roots and length of congressional service is clear evidence that the type of local constituent connection legislators develop prior to their service in Congress is both theoretically and observationally distinct from their reputation as an elected representative. Service in Congress, when conducted effectively, can clearly help legislators build a legislative reputation on national issues, as previous work has shown; members can even work hard to develop a nonpartisan reputation based on things like constituent casework. But by their very nature, district roots are based in shared lived experience in the community and

are untethered to national political or partisan concerns of the time; and so these roots cannot be easily manufactured simply by serving for an extended period of time.

A second important comparison is with the percentage of constituents with business occupations, which I use as a proxy for how receptive a district is to the economic activity produced by congressional campaigns. A district with high values in this variable should (and clearly does) attract more of spending activity generated by legislators running for reelection. The fact that District Roots outshine this effect by a factor of more than three is an indication that campaign spending in the district depends not just on economic and political attributes the district itself, but on the types of candidates running in these campaigns. This is a clear finding in favor of candidate-centric theories of campaigns, even in an era when campaigns are thought to be increasingly nationalized "cookie cutter" outfits run and funded by the parties.

*IV. Conclusions*

Members of Congress share relationships with their constituents that vary significantly between members. This chapter provides strong evidence that this variance is based in no small part on the local roots a member establishes in the district before he or she ever campaigned to represent it, and that legislators are responsive to these forces. This chapter's specific aim was to capture the extent to which the depth of these roots affect the quantity and locality of their outreach to constituents via campaign spending. I theorized that in addition to well-covered factors like partisanship and length of service in Congress, the depth of a legislator's district roots also strongly dictate spending behavior.

The two models used to test this theory uncovered significant and independent effects of district roots on both the quantity of monetary resources needed to maintain their desired relationship with constituents, and on the proportion of these resources spent within the district as a signal of the depth of the relationship.

First, these results clearly indicate that deep local roots in the district deliver a demonstrable advantage for legislators in part by reducing the total amount of campaign spending needed to successfully maintain their bond with constituents. I find that a legislator's district roots create a strong foundation of support in their constituent relationships, which preempts the necessity to spend scarce campaign resources on improving that relationship in pursuit of reelection. I also find that the magnitude of the effects of these roots on overall spending rival those of district partisanship, and vastly exceed those of the national partisan environment, challenger quality, and length of service in Congress, among other important elements of congressional campaigns.

Independently of their effect on total spending, a legislator's district roots dig even deeper by significantly increasing their propensity to spend these scarce resources inside the local boundaries of their district. District roots do this in part by conferring to a legislator unique knowledge and understanding not just of the hearts and minds of their voters, but of social, political, and economic networks that preclude the need to reach outside the district for campaign services or information about their district. Local spending, beyond being a value-based indicator of the depth of an incumbent's relationship with their constituents, is also a way to maintain contact with and retain the support of those benefited by the financial transactions. One possibility that is ripe for exploration in future work is the extent to which this investment of resources in the

district reaps future electoral benefits for incumbents, perhaps by creating “lifetime supporters” of business owners and their extended networks.

## Chapter 6 - Broader Implications and Future Directions

> The common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it.
>
> - President George Washington, in his Farewell Address

> He pointed out landmarks - prehistorical and colonial… He told me how he dug arrowheads as a boy, put on Indian dances as an Eagle Scout, and, as a young man, lectured to Rotary Clubs on the prehistory of the area. "I can still give a pretty good talk on the prehistory of the area," he said later. Throughout his public career, he would maintain the strongest of ties to the keepers of local history. All in all, it was aremarkable and enthusiastic tour de force - a commanding combination of knowledge, memory, and tale-telling. It centered on a place and on the depth of his connectedness to that place.
>
> - Richard Fenno (2013, 25), on traveling with a locally-rooted Congressman around his district.

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that shared values of localism between many legislators and their constituents not only continue to be relevant in this more nationalized partisan moment in American politics, but is a crucial component of the relationship these legislators share with their constituents. I use multiple, original measures of legislators' local roots in the district to show how localism continues to shape electoral dynamics in the district by improving the quality of the representational relationship, and extending this relationship to more of their constituents. After a brief summary of the findings in each chapter, I will conclude by offering a number of important implications and avenues for future research in this area.

I began by introducing the concept of local district roots, and detailing a number of original measures that capture the pre-existing local connection that legislators have or do not have with their districts. I then elaborated on a comprehensive *Theory of Local District Roots* that described the ways in which local connections improve a legislator's

relationship with their constituents and vary extensively between legislators. Some legislators have numerous, long-lasting ties to their district that create a unique, dyadic connection with their constituents: recall Dan Kildee (D-MI), who was born and raised in the Flint area, held multiple local political offices, and carries on his family's long-standing political legacy in the district. Kildee consistently outperforms his party label in each election, avoids primary challengers, and spends less money to achieve the same general election results as other incumbents. Other legislators, such as Alex Mooney (R-WV), embody the carpetbagger image, having moved to the district shortly before becoming members of Congress. Legislators like Mooney must instead rely on other types of appeals to their constituents in their representation, and as a result consistently underperform partisan expectations in their districts. These differences in background produce attendant differences in both practical and symbolic connections that legislators share with their constituents, and which aid them in their reelection efforts.

After introducing the concept of district roots and arguing why they are crucial to the representational relationship, I conducted an initial test of whether these roots can break through amidst a noisy era of partisanship in congressional elections. Chapter 3 showed that the shared local identity that district roots provide to the representational relationship induce constituents to support deeply-rooted legislators beyond what their party label would suggest. Specifically, I find that on average, deeply-rooted legislators win by margins about 12 points greater than their party's presidential nominees in their districts. These results indicate that a legislator's local district roots help them positively differentiate themselves from nationalized partisanship in a deeply polarized era; and that

they do so in part by improving their nonpartisan reputation in the district among both co-partisan and out-party constituents alike.

Chapter 4 dug deeper into the ways in which district roots improve legislators' standing among their constituents by assessing their effect at different stages of the reelection effort, and with the voters who participate in each stage. I first demonstrated that district roots significantly increase the size of the constituency on whom legislators can rely to support them in the general election by around 9 percentage points. I also showed that in related yet distinct ways, local roots in the district also increase the size and strength of a legislator's primary election constituency: their strongest, most personally-dedicated co-partisan supporters. Legislators with deep local roots in the district face a primary challenger with much less frequency than legislators without such roots; and even when locally-rooted legislators *do* face primary opponents, they win with much greater ease - by about 12 percentage points greater than legislators without district roots. These results tell us that district roots are an incredibly valuable attribute that many legislators embody, and that expands the breadth and depth of their electoral support among their constituents.

Finally, the depth of a legislator's district roots has significant implications for their campaign spending decisions. Based on the strong underlying relationship locally-rooted legislators enjoy with their constituents, they have a significant head start in their efforts to convince them to be supportive. As such, legislators with deep district roots spend significantly less on their reelection efforts than otherwise similar legislators with little connection to their districts. Indeed, locally-rooted legislators spend on average nearly 40% less campaign funds than those without roots. Second, I argue that because of

their extensive social, political, and economic networks, as well as their significant firsthand knowledge of the district, locally-rooted legislators are positioned to spend a greater proportion of their campaign funds within the geographic confines of the district. Accordingly, I find that these legislators spend over 9% more of their campaign funds in their local communities rather than hiring outside firms and services, even after controlling for competitiveness, district economies and other crucial factors.

All three sets of results produce a singular inescapable finding: that when legislators possess deep local roots in their districts, they share an identity that strengthens their representational relationships with many different types of constituents, and as a result significantly improves their electoral dynamics in the district. But there are a number of important implications from these findings that go beyond practical electoral advantages in the district, and which have tremendous implications for other related areas of research, and for the future of American political representation generally.

*I. Reconsidering Representation: Emergence vs. Immersion*

One important facet of congressional representation that should be reconsidered in light of the clear importance of district roots is the set of mechanisms by which legislators can relate to their constituents in a personal, nonpartisan way. In Chapter 2, I addressed the important distinction between two related but distinct ways this type of representation manifests itself: first, in the personal representational activity legislators undertake in various contexts following their election to Congress such as their home styles, or "personal vote" activities like constituent casework; and second, in the local ties

they establish in their districts prior to their time in office, as captured in this dissertation by their local roots in the district.

This distinction is thrown into sharpest relief by contrasting the views of two foremost scholars on congressional representation. Articulating one of these views is Gary Jacobson, who in *The Politics of Congressional Elections* posits that "personal ties in the district pay electoral dividends, but only as long as members are willing to invest the time and energy to maintain them." (2016, 81) Jacobson takes the position that "personal vote" activities conducted throughout their time in office and during their reelection efforts are more important and powerful aspects of representation than "who a legislator is." As a result, legislators who desire the "electoral dividends" paid out by these personal, nonpartisan ties must put in tremendous time and energy to maintain them. Additionally, there is concern that these types of personal ties are receding from the public consciousness as legislators have less and less agency over their own time and resources. For example, legislators have been shown to spend greater and greater amounts of time – whether in the district, ot in Washington – conducting fundraising activities from wealthy donors as the costs of campaigns has risen precipitously (Ferguson 2013, O'Donnell 2016)

Barry Burden puts voice to an alternative viewpoint that assumes a principal-agent framework for congressional representation: that a primary function of elected legislators is to be a reliable agent of the wishes of the principals, their constituents. Moreover, one critical path to being a reliable agent is simply to be like the people you represent. In *The Personal Roots of Representation*, Burden argues that "voters would do better to elect someone who is like them than to hope to change a representative who is

not." (2007, 11). Put another way, legislators should not rely solely on the institutional powers of their office - such as constituent casework, particularistic benefits like grants, and even electoral campaigning - to win over the personal affection of voters post-facto. Instead, a legislator provides better representation (and thus benefits electorally) if they already share personal ties with voters before they are elected. Burden argues that the principal-agent framework originally envisioned for Congress works best when it is "enforced by selection at the outset, not conversion thereafter." (11, see also Bernstein 1989)[34]

While legislator activity, both in their official capacity and on the campaign trail, is undoubtedly important, the empirical evidence in this dissertation provides compelling evidence in favor of Burden's theory: sharing pre-established values with one's constituents is preferable to attempts to forge them after the fact. As indicated by the results in Chapter 5, legislators with pre-established connections based on values like localism can either achieve better electoral results than those without these connections, or they can achieve similar results with significantly less effort, time, and resources. This runs contrary to Jacobson's assertion that personal ties in the district are only valuable when legislators can put in significant time and effort to maintain them. Because they are established prior to their service in Congress, district roots put no additional strain on legislators' schedule once they're elected. Given the frenetic pace and increasing time demands placed on modern members of Congress, and the ever-lengthening nature of the

[34] This selection-oriented approach draws on a larger and older discussion about the role of selecting like-minded representatives in order to best ensure ideological congruence and favorable policy outcomes. For example, Miller and Stokes (1963) argue that constituency representation on policy and legislative accountability is best served when voters select like-minded legislators or rely on legislators' perceptions of what voters want.

"permanent campaign", one can assume that legislators place a high value on traits, characteristics, or backgrounds of any kind that would reduce this pressure.

However, while Burden's work focuses solely on legislators' preexisting personal connections to various policy issues important to their constituents, this dissertation focuses on legislators' lived, local experience rooted in geography and place: specifically, the district they represent. I show that the local roots some legislators share with their constituents prior to their time in Congress have a significant effect on the representational relationship, resulting in highly favorable electoral dynamics in the district. Voters clearly recognize and respond positively to legislators who can make authentic claims to a shared local identity; and legislators have an easier time campaigning for reelection when they are closely connected to the district and its political and socioeconomic networks.

As a subject of empirical study, district roots also have the advantage of being completely exogenous to the current political conditions a legislator faces. Legislator activity once in office, including policymaking activity, constituent service, and campaigning for reelection are all inherently dependent on electoral competition in the district - that is, whether their seat is "safe." This is the essence of the "electoral connection" that Mayhew (1974) introduced in his classic work about Congress, and emphasized by countless authors since: that as "reelection seekers", members of Congress respond to electoral pressures first and foremost. Since local roots are by definition forged in the district long before a legislator runs for Congress, they are completely independent of these electoral pressures; they are not (in fact, they cannot be) strategic reactions to the electoral climate or political moment. As a result, electoral

dynamics and outcomes are an *effect* of district roots, rather than a *cause*, as they are with district-oriented legislator behavior like constituent casework and service. This condition makes the depth of a legislator's district roots all the more valuable to them. As Burden puts it, elections are "a more powerful mechanism for enhancing representation when constituents are able to choose a candidate who **already shares** their value systems." (2007, 11) [35]

Given the striking findings about the impact of local roots on electoral outcomes and campaign behavior, future research should examine whether – and how – district roots may affect other electoral and representational dynamics as well. For instance, given the preexisting nature of local roots, one important question is how localism shapes candidate emergence, as well as the campaigns and electoral circumstances for non-incumbents. For example, do candidates, voters, and parties take the presence or absence district roots into account for open seat opportunities? If, as Burden asserts, representational congruence is best enforced during selection, then district roots should have significant implications for these processes. Specifically, the results in this dissertation indicate that district roots should factor into parties' calculus of whether to encourage potential candidates to run in certain districts, or for outside groups to endorse or direct campaign resources to them once they do. In addition to the normative benefit of running more well-rounded candidates, this renewed focus on candidate localism would have practical benefits for the parties: my data show, for example, that deeply-rooted representatives on average serve nearly a full additional term in Congress compared to legislators with shallow roots.

[35] Emphasis added.

*II. District Roots, Partisanship, and Electoral Competition*

By helping legislators relate to their constituents in decidedly nonpartisan ways, shared local roots in the district shape electoral politics in ways that rival and in many cases surpass a number of conventional forces. The empirical findings of this project show that district roots are a crucial set of characteristics not just in abstract terms of congressional representation, but in the practical politics of congressional elections. I demonstrate across multiple outcomes that local roots in the district rival other causal forces in determining the electoral dynamics in a legislator's district when they run for reelection. Scholars often include factors like partisanship, challenger quality, and tenure length (among many others) in empirical models regarding congressional elections, and professional analysts like FiveThirtyEight and Cook Political Report use them in their predictive forecasts of electoral outcomes. The findings in this dissertation not only indicate that district roots should be considered alongside these factors when addressing questions of electoral competition, but that this connection is more consistently impactful than nearly any other single factor except partisanship.

In addition to practical applications such as election forecasting, these results should also refocus our scholarly attention on the nuances of legislators, their districts, and importantly, the voters rather than simply two undifferentiated groupings of "red" or "blue" districts. The "electoral connection" that Mayhew famously described is, after all, not between legislators and party leaders, national issue groups or out-of-town donors; it is between representatives and the voters - specifically, *their* voters. Ultimately, it is the voice of their constituents that matters most to legislators. This examination of local roots

reveals a great deal about what constituents care about in their representation, and as a result what might make them support their representative.

A great deal of attention has appropriately been paid in the scholarship and in the media to the quality of legislators' relationships with party leaders, presidents, and other national political players. But the value of district-specific localism demonstrated in this research clarifies the importance of the most important relationship a legislator has to maintain: the one with their constituents, and the geographic space they (and only they) share. The locally-specific connections that district roots provide help us remember that districts are not simply amorphous arrangements of two sets of nationalized partisans, as they are often portrayed in the media; but rather are specific, unique, and ultimately dynamic communities with varied cultures, histories, values, and institutions that cause voters to think differently about what matters most for their representation in Congress.

No scholar would deny that traditional factors like partisanship play a tremendously crucial role in modern congressional elections, and I will not do so here. But scholars also make a mistake when they set aside the diverse set of criteria that constituents in a given district use to elect - and in this case, reelect - their representatives of Congress. While candidate-centric theories of congressional elections have tended to be discarded in favor of partisanship, these theories deserve a space in contemporary debates about congressional representation.

Some recent work has given these theories their due: Arbour (2016), for example, makes a compelling case for why candidate-centered campaign strategies continue to be effective and relevant even in modern, more partisan campaigns. But Arbour also asserts

that voters are "ill-served by the emphasis on candidate centered appeals."[36] (2014, 15) I disagree, and argue that variation between partisan candidates according to their districts based on factors like local roots are good for congressional representation, and may offer an answer to the many threats and challenges presented by the partisan polarization that is currently gripping American politics.

*III. District Roots: Homegrown Representation as the Framers Intended*

The power of candidate- and district-level local roots as compared to more partisan connections with constituents relate closely to some final considerations about shared district roots. In this section, I argue that this connection is in many ways a normatively desirable component of American political representation. Specifically, I argue that the framers of the Constitution understood local interests to be central to our representational system. As a result of this as well as a number of concerning contemporary trends, I argue that shared local identity remains both relevant and essential to representation in Congress. The results of this dissertation indicate that voters do - and legislators should - continue to value the local, nonpartisan connection between them, particularly amidst serious concerns over the perils of increasingly nationalized partisanship, and the overall quality of representation Congress is providing today. In spelling out the consequences of moving towards a political culture dominated by nationalized partisanship, I argue that the unifying local identity that district roots provide

[36] Specifically, Arbour argues that these appeals tend to ignore important issues at the expense of "personality." However, I believe Arbour undersells the value of candidate biography as speaking to many issues of personal experience that voters care about.

is not only, as I have demonstrated, important to voters, but continues to be crucial safeguard against the worst of these effects.

As I have argued and demonstrated, the local roots a legislator establishes in their district prior to their congressional career are a strong indicator of legislator-constituent congruence on a number of important levels. Shared experience in the district gives legislators a unique and valuable objective understanding of local issues, local public opinion, and a tangible sense of the "state of the district" - where it's been on important economic, demographic, and cultural descriptors, as well as where it might be going. These are lived place-specific realities of the district that cannot simply be gleaned from, for example, the partisan balance of voters in the district; instead, they require an authentic perspective gained from a homegrown background in the area. Voters appreciate legislators who have a tangible sense of the district, and believe that these legislators will represent them better because of it.

Just as importantly, district roots offer a type of representational understanding that is difficult to replicate: the subjective experience of what it's like to be a voter in that particular district. A deeply-rooted representative shares the same formative attachments and sentiments towards local places as their constituents, based on genuinely-gained life experience. While the importance of this type of subjective experience can be difficult to capture empirically, it is a formative aspect of the legislator-constituent relationship in locally-rooted communities. This type of congruence of both objective and subjective experience should surely be a primary goal of any successful representative relationship, particularly in a nation with interests and geographies as diverse as the United States.

The desirability of this type of representation was perhaps captured best (as it often is) by Richard Fenno in one of his classic qualitative examinations of members of Congress in their home districts. In describing the type of representational connection one of his locally-rooted research subjects had with their district, Fenno identified it as "the type of attachment the Founding Fathers surely had in mind… personal, whole, and genuine." (Fenno 2000, 74) Fenno's claim is that local connections are at their core a proxy for a manner of constituent representation that accurately reflects the original intent of our nation's first leaders. Moreover, the original design of the Executive and Legislative branches of the federal government indicates that this assertion has merit.

Because there are substantive differences between the issues we face as a nation, as a collection of states and as differing, geographically dispersed communities, the framers designed separate institutions to represent different types of often-conflicting interests in the federal government. The President, as our sole representative in foreign affairs, and chosen in the aggregate by the entire nation, would be elected to represent broad, singular national interests; the Senate, with members elected on a statewide basis, would represent the policy and political issues that faced whole states; and the House of Representatives - the "People's House" - would represent the interests of local communities, which often differed (and still differ) dramatically from those of the states, much less of the entire nation, of which they are a part. By consciously separating these three institutions, the framers aimed to ensure that local, less powerful geographic interests would be a check on each other, but just an importantly that they were not subsumed by broad national or partisan interests.

This disentanglement was and is an elegant solution to the problem of competing geographic interests famously feared by the founders. It was also an ingenious method of handling the often messy process of aggregating citizens' interests as a whole, so that their will can be most effectively and accurately reflected in the federal government. These foundational choices strongly suggest that the founders believed it was of crucial importance that geographic interests - rather than, say, partisan interests - be equally represented in the federal lawmaking process. And the fact that local, geographic roots in their districts continue to be so influential in the electoral process for both legislators and constituents suggests that this design choice is worth adhering to.

This deliberate separation of interests points to another crucial reason why the continued relevance of shared local identity is essential to the continued health of American democracy, and to the levels of faith and trust that citizens have in our representational system. Many scholars have noted the increasing structuring of American political culture around the two major parties, and the attachment to them that both voters and legislators demonstrate in their political behavior at home and in Washington. Important scholarship in recent years has found that both voters (Green *et al.* 2002, Levendusky 2009, Mason 2018) and elected leaders (Poole and Daniels 1985, Theriault 2008, Lee 2009, 2016) are polarizing based on increasing social, ideological, and cultural distance between the two major parties. These findings have given rise to the concern that American politics at all levels of government, and in each branch of the federal government, is becoming increasingly defined by partisan conflict between two nationally-oriented factions, rather than by competing, but inherently diverse factional interests disaggregated by geography as the framers envisioned. In one of the definitive

recent works on this subject, *The Increasingly United States* (2018), Daniel J. Hopkins makes the case that elections are fully nationalized "when voters use the same criteria to choose candidates across the federal system." (2018, 3) Hopkins argues - and the framers warned - that when this happens, local interests, issues, and needs are ignored in favor of nationalized partisan ones.

As a result of these changes, there is renewed attention to possible remedies for structural inequalities like partisan gerrymandering and imbalances in partisan representation that are believed to contribute to nationalized politics (McDonald 2006, McDonald and Samples 2007, Fraga 2016). These studies embody the viewpoint that, as a result of nationalized partisanship, representation in Congress is nothing more than a process of party surrogacy, in which the representation of voters' interests in Congress (and other legislative bodies) should be based almost entirely on a partisan dimension. For example, many have increasingly advocated for systems such as proportional representation (Iglesias 2017) or ranked-choice voting (Lessig 2018), the aim of which is to form a Congress that more accurately reflects the partisan makeup of the different states. These types of systems may very well be healthy for the long-term survival of American democracy. In fact, it seems likely that, at the very least, the *partisan preferences* of a greater proportion of the electorate would be taken into account under such systems, which would no doubt be an improvement in terms of partisan fairness and representation.

But crucially, this is only a normative good if maximizing partisan preference is the ultimate output towards which our system of representation should truly be aiming. In fact, these types of reforms would do little to alleviate many of the concerns the founders

made clear in their debates over the Constitution and our various founding documents. To the founders, the problem with partisanship had little to do with how well or how evenly partisan interests are heard; but rather, they were concerned with the zeroing out of nonpartisan, *subnational* citizen interests that would ensue from a politics ossified around two diametrically opposed *national* factions. Put differently, the founders were worried that partisanship would drown our local voices and interests at the heart of representation in the House. As a result, it is almost impossible to imagine that the framers of the Constitution would have favored a system of proportional representation based solely on ensuring partisan balance and fairness. Members of the House of Representatives were originally intended not to represent one of two national factions, but rather the unique, decentralized, and vastly divergent interests of their local communities to prevent any one (or, in today's case, two) factions from wielding too much power (Hamilton *et al.* 1788). The representative could only do this, the framers argued, if he was "acquainted with the interests and circumstances of his constituents." (Madison, *Federalist* 56)

Legislators in the House were therefore intended to represent their districts on a more personal level, guided by local issues, descriptive characteristics, and unique opinions specific to their districts. In doing so, the House and its members, with their varied and diverse local interests, would be a check against national parties whose interests were not always, and in fact rarely, aligned with the interests of a particular local community: the congressional district. This is why locally-focused representation is so powerful, and why constituents value locally-rooted experience in their legislators, as I have demonstrated in this project. The continued relevance of shared local identity, and of district roots specifically, helps to ensure that district-specific interests and needs do

not fall through the cracks, as they would if legislators are simply representing one of two powerful nationalized factions.

These consequences are important to consider as scholars observe trends such as a declining focus on local issues in the media, declining local sources of information, and issue nationalization and realignment around the two-party structure (Christen and Huberty 2007, Hopkins 2018). If members of the House of Representatives were to become easily interchangeable based only on their party, it would mean that local, district-specific issues and citizen concerns that do not fit comfortably into one of two national party platforms are not being represented in Congress. This would be a fundamental violation of the founders' original intentions, and of the stated purpose of the House of Representatives. The findings in this dissertation, however, demonstrate that voters continue to perceive important differences between incumbent legislators, and place a high premium on their local experience and credibility, even in the face of rising partisanship.

But in fact, the fears espoused by the framers reflect an even deeper, more insidious consequence of a brand of politics structured entirely around partisanship. If left unchecked, partisan polarization could also have deeply troubling effects on how Americans think about themselves, their government, and their fellow Americans. These are also effects that political theorists have warned about for centuries. In his 18th-century treatise on the dangers of a "furious party spirit," English essayist Joseph Addison warned that:

> There cannot a greater judgment befall a country than a dreadful spirit of division as rends a government into two distinct people, and makes them greater strangers, and more averse to one another, than if they were actually two different nations. The effects of such a division are pernicious to the last degree, not only with regard to those advantages which they give the common enemy, but to those private evils which they produce in the heart of almost every particular person. This influence is very fatal both to men's morals and their understandings; it sinks the virtue of a nation, and not only so, but destroys even common sense. A furious party spirit, when it rages in its full violence, exerts itself in civil war and bloodshed; and when it is under its greatest restraints, naturally breaks out in falsehood, detraction, calumny, and a partial administration of justice. In a word, it fills a nation with spleen and rancor, and extinguishes all the seeds of good nature, compassion and humanity.
>
> - Joseph Addison (1711) from his Essay *Spectator 145*

However melodramatic Addison's language, more modern findings and trends suggest that these are consequences well-worth guarding against. For example, the wholesale structuring of political opinion around and attachment to the two parties would have startling implications for trust in politicians and the political process generally. This includes the serious risk that the public would only trust governments controlled by their own party, and would view governments controlled by the opposition as inherently illegitimate. Trust in many of our national political institutions is indeed on the decline (Hayes 2012), and the public's assessment of Congress as an institution has languished in recent years: according to The Gallup Poll, congressional approval ratings have not risen above 30% nationally since August of 2009.[37]

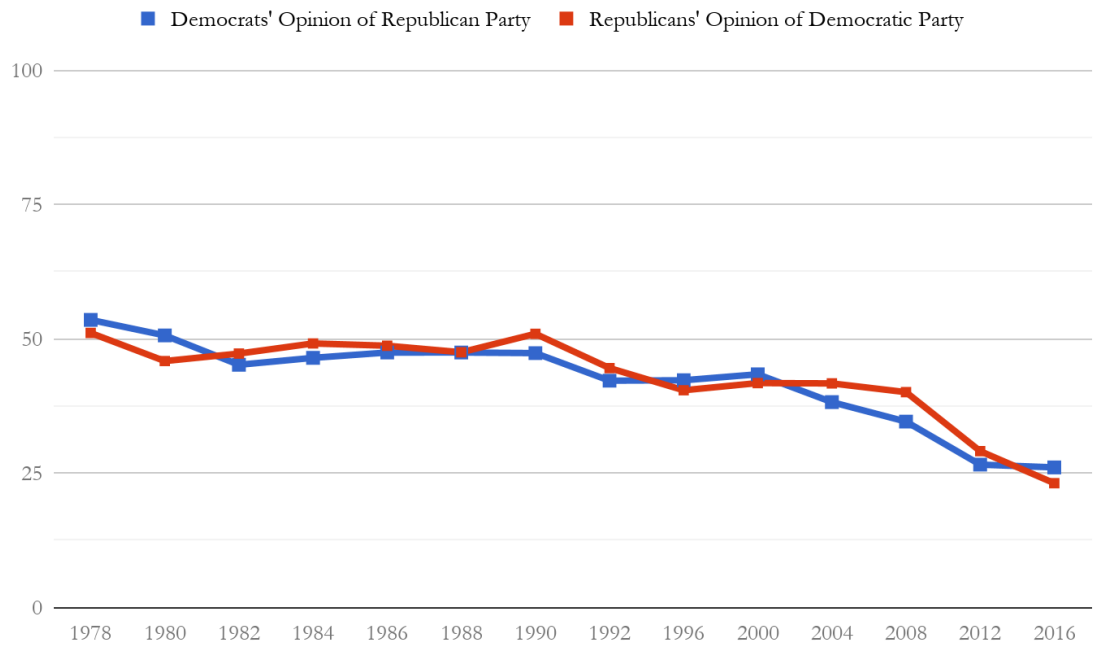
Fortunately, the findings in this project make clear that local, nonpartisan connections are particularly well-suited to safeguard us from the most damaging of these trust issues. The capacity of these types of connections to reinforce public trust in the representational process is well-founded in previous literature. For example, in their

[37] *Congress and the Public*, from *Gallup*: http://news.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx

important 1979 article, Parker and Davidson (1979) observe that Americans have far more favorable opinions of their legislator than of Congress as a whole. Their findings indicate that this discrepancy is due primarily to nonpartisan constituent service and personal qualities of the legislator. Put differently, Parker and Davidson observed that constituents' assessments of their legislators were in many ways insulated against negative assessments of Congress itself, not because of party platforms and political strategy, but rather how well the legislator served and was a close "fit" for their district. District roots therefore help to prevent a leaking of institutional distrust into personal representative distrust, which would likely diminish legislators' flexibility to do what they feel is right for their district, in addition to producing unwelcome downstream effects on the health of American democracy.

Relatedly, the extent to which constituents identify with and feel connected to their representatives in a non-partisan way is also critically important to constituent perceptions of how well they are being represented. In Figure 6.2, we observe a slow but steady souring of Americans' opinions of the opposite party as a whole over the last forty years. Where this progression might lead has serious implications for how voters might view the stakes of elections if we resign ourselves to thinking about representation in strictly partisan terms. What could it mean for congressional elections if each race is nothing more than a high-stakes contest between two fundamentally opposed worldviews - one of which, for many voters, amounts to that of the "enemy?" Our representatives and fellow constituents would not be, as Key (1949) described, "friends and neighbors" with shared values, interests, and destinies; but rather partisan "strangers", as Joseph Addison warned - polarized, diametrically opposed, and unlikely to unify.

**Figure 6.1: Citizen Opinion of Opposite Party - 1978-2016**




Fortunately, shared local roots help protect against the most dismal effects of unbridled partisanship by establishing a built-in commonality that not only can unify voters in the same district with each other, but which they can also share with their elected representative. This is because the geographical situating of voters in the district is something all voters in that district have in common; for most districts, party affiliation is not. Because it can be such a unifying district-wide identity, shared local roots in the district help to ensure that all subconstituencies of a district's voters, regardless of partisan affiliation, are valued and heard in the representational process. When legislators have a credible connection to an element of the district that all constituents have in common - its geography - their capacity to properly represent *everyone* in the district is more fully legitimized. This stands in sharp contrast to a type of representation based

solely on partisanship, in which a consistent subset of voters in many districts - those of the losing party - are likely to be left out of the representational process altogether. In this scenario, voters perceive that legislators of the opposite party are not taking their interests into account - or even worse, that the "enemy" is misrepresenting them in Congress.

But while team-based partisan vitriol is difficult to dispel (Huddy *et al.* 2015, Mason 2015, 2018), shared local identity can be a binding force between constituents, helping to create a sense of "linked fate" (Dawson 2003; Fenno 2003) that transcends the zero-sum nature of partisan competition. The findings in this dissertation demonstrate that there is, in fact, much more to congressional representation then simple partisanship. Local connections not only clearly matter to voters, but they are crucial for the accurate representation of the views and values of all voters in a district. Many commonly proposed electoral reforms aim to ensure partisan balance in order to give a greater proportion of voters a (partisan) voice in Congress. I argue that these types of reforms, while perhaps valuable, largely ignore crucial districtwide identities, interests, and values like localism that voters value. Shared local ties between the representative and the represented create bonds that aren't beholden to a two-party system, and as a result reinforce value-based commonality among voters rather than team-based tribal differences between them.

Even in today's era of high partisanship, we still choose our elected officials based on geographic representation. The framers of the Constitution understood that the unifying nature of a shared community made it important to base our political representation in geography. As Hopkins (2018) elegantly put it in his recent work on electoral nationalization around the two parties, "One doesn't have to espouse certain

political views to be a proud Rhode Islander or South Dakotan." (11) Local district roots and other nonpartisan tools restore a shared sense of community is an important way for those invested in the health of our politics to ensure that the People's House does not simply become the Party's House.

*IV. Future Directions for Research on Local Roots*

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that a legislator's local roots in their district play a decisive and independent role in shaping their relationship with their constituents. Consequently, this local connection with constituents should also be highly influential in other areas of American politics that go beyond electoral margins or campaign spending. There are several important extensions of the concept of district roots that are ripe for future academic research.

First, I've shown in this project that district roots positively shape the underlying representational relationship between legislators and their constituents; as a result, these roots should also impact the way legislators interact with their constituents substantively. This includes both the style and substance of campaign behavior and other in-district activity. For example, given the importance of Richard Fenno's work to this project, the depth of a legislator's local roots in the district are likely to affect the types of "home style" they employ among their constituents. Future work in this area could build on excellent recent studies by scholars like Grimmer (2013), who has used textual analysis to compare the "representational styles" of different members of Congress. We might expect, for example, more locally-rooted members of Congress to emphasize local places,

terminology, and linguistic styles, as opposed to more partisan or national issue-based appeals in their communications with their constituents.

Another important representational activity that district roots are likely to influence is a legislator's policymaking behavior in Washington. For decades, scholars have noted the connection between reelection motivations and member behavior on Capitol Hill (e.g. Mayhew 1974, Herrick *et al.* 1994, Sulkin 2005, Sulkin *et al.* 2015). Since this project demonstrates the clear influence a local connection has on reelection, it stands to reason that deeply-rooted members of Congress behave differently in their legislative activity than those without such roots. One possible expectation is that because of the electoral safety they provide, district roots may provide legislators with significant legislative flexibility in terms of the types of roll call and committee votes, bill sponsorships, and other legislative activity they can "get away with" in Congress. In essence, their constituents give a locally-rooted representative more leeway in their lawmaking because they trust them. This expectation hews closer to formal "Trustee" models of policy representation.

On the other hand, it is also possible that deeply-rooted legislators will adhere more closely to their district's opinions in their legislative activity since, as I have argued, they have a more acute understanding of where their constituents stand on important issues. Additionally, they may take up a greater share of issues that relate specifically to local concerns, since being from the district is more central to their political identity, they may reflect this geographic attention in their legislative choices. This expectation falls much more within the "delegate" model of representation. A third possibility is that localism may simply be less of a factor in Washington than it is at home. As opposed to

the district, member activity on the Hill is more easily constrained by other forces party leaders, committee chairs, and national political conditions. Perhaps these institutional constraints, and sheer geographic distance, force legislators into less independent and locally-informed activity than they may undertake at home.

Another important extension of this research is to expand the analysis to the U.S. Senate. Analyzing the extent to which district roots determine electoral dynamics and representation in the Senate present both unique challenges and opportunities. As discussed in the previous section, the founders intended the Senate and the House to represent different types of interests - those of entire states, and of more local communities, respectively. This is a distinction worth exploring in terms of how rooted each type of representative is expected to be in the unit of geography. However, the differences in geographies present some empirical challenges: The House is a natural unit of analysis for this project not just because the founders envisioned more local representation, but also because all House districts are of a (roughly) similar small size. This makes for cleaner, more internally valid comparisons. Individual senators, however, will of course be differently comparable since states vary vastly in the size of their constituencies: do voters from both large and small states place a premium on localism? Should a senator from California be expected to have the same far-reaching roots in their state as a senator from North Dakota? More specifically, should voters in each type of state value these roots in the same way?

On the other hand, evaluating the Senate provides for some interesting possibilities. First, U.S. senators - and their challengers - tend to be much better-known than their House counterparts. This may make many of the biographical elements

captured by the district roots measures used here more easily-known by voters, and therefore more consequential for electoral outcomes. Additionally, the structure of the Senate, in which two senators represent the same state, provides for a clean natural experiment: if two senators from the same state have vastly differing depths of roots in their states, one could essentially control for important statewide factors like constituencies and state partisan leanings.

A final avenue for future study is to extend this analysis farther back into history in order to track historical changes in the extent to which legislators possess -- and how much their voters care about -- their local roots in the district over time. Even though localism and candidate traits continue to matter today, it is likely that they mattered more, or at the very least, they mattered *differently* during less polarized eras of American politics. We might expect that localism had greater opportunity to shine through as a dimension of representation during these times, particularly prior to the increasingly globalized digital age, where "local" is more of a relative term. However, this expectation makes the continued influence of district roots in the modern era all the more striking. Localism continues to survive and thrive as a crucial component of the relationship between representative and constituent, even in a globalized and polarized 21st century.

## Appendix A: Additional Coding Procedures for Independent Variables

### *Biographical Directory Listing Example - Dan Kildee (D-MI)*

*KILDEE, Dan, (nephew of Dale Edward Kildee), a Representative from Michigan; born in Flint, Genesee County, Mich., August 11, 1958; graduated from Flint Northern High School, Flint, Mich., 1976; attended University of Michigan, Flint, Mich.; B.S., Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Mich.; founder, Genesee County Land Bank; co-founder and chief executive, Center for Community Progress; member of the Flint, Mich., board of education, 1977-1985; member of the Genesee County, Mich., board of commissioners, 1985-1997; Genesee County, Mich., treasurer, 1997-2009; elected as a Democrat to the One Hundred Thirteenth and to the three succeeding Congresses (January 3, 2013-present).*

After scraping these biographies using the "rvest", "httr", and "xml" R web packages, I used regular expressions to ascertain necessary elements of the biography and construct the separate components the District Roots Index. Rep. Kildee's biography above offers examples of many of these components. First, for any representative with a prior family connection in Congress, the Biographical Directory provides the family member in relation in parentheses before the biography begins. This and all biographical notations in the text are consistent in style and structure for each listing, which aided in capturing accurate information for all members.

For example, all members listed a clause reading "graduated from [High School name here], [High School City], [High School State], [Year of Graduation]." Similar structures existed for birthplace, undergraduate, and postgraduate listings, allowing me to pull city/state locations for each and place them as overlapping with the district or not using.

For local political experience, I used regular expressions to search for a number of local offices. These office include:

- Mayor (and all variants)
- City/Town/County Council
- Board of Supervisors/Commissioners/etc
- Zoning/Housing/etc Board
- District Attorney
- Selectmen
- County Commissioner

As is made clear above, these positions are also accompanied by a city or county location, which I then overlapped with congressional districts as above.

For in-district business, I used previously-collected data from *Congressional Quarterly* listing if a legislator had a background in business. For each legislator who did have such a background, I manually searched their CQ biographies to determine whether they owned the business; the location of the business if they did; and then determined whether the business is/was in the district or not.

### *Detailed Coding Procedure for "Racial Alignment" Variable*

To measure this important constituent connection, I used the American Community Survey and Census estimates of racial composition of congressional districts (percent Latino, percent White, etc) and matched with collected data indicating the race of each incumbent. However, a simple continuous measure of percentage of the district who shares an incumbent's race is flawed for two reasons.

First, the variable biases towards White incumbents, giving them higher-than-average scores (i.e. most districts are well over 75% White). Even with the preponderance of many majority-minority districts, the mean of a variable indicating the percentage of co-racial constituents lags far behind for Nonwhite incumbents of all races, and the distribution is much narrower due to historical racial demographic patterns and court rulings related to redistricting and the Voting Rights Act (Grose 2011).

A second issue with this variable is that it treats the racial component of the personal connection the same for all races *in theory* as well as empirically. But this too would be a mistake - the racial connection between a Black incumbent and their Black constituents, and a White incumbent and their White constituents, may both be advantageous electorally as well as representationally, but not at all the same in substance. The shared racial histories and unbalanced power dynamics for White Americans and Nonwhite Americans are so different that strong or weak racial connections with their constituencies likely mean something different as well (Fenno 2003). Therefore, assuming a single continuous measure for all races isn't the proper course.

In order to rectify this, I have made this variable binary, in which an incumbent is assigned a 1 if their percentage of co-racial constituents is above the median among districts with incumbents of that race, and a 0 otherwise. The end result is that of all Black incumbents in my sample, half have a strong racial connection (above the median for Black incumbents), and half do not (below the median). This process was repeated for Latino, White, and Asian incumbents as well. Doing this splits the effects of how co-racial an incumbent's constituency is in ways that are true to the statistical and representational nature of each race's district composition, rather than assuming that racial connection plays out the same way for each race.

### *Alternate Specifications for District Roots Index*

While the weighted District Roots Index used throughout the main results of this dissertation provide consistent results, some concerns may exist regarding the linear assumptions made about the effects of this variable given its left-skewed distribution, as shown in Figure A1.1 below. This skew occurs for two reasons. The first is that the weighting the unweighted District Roots Index compounds the extent to which observations value on the index decreases ask value gets higher. For example, weighting a legislator's raw score by .7 when their score is 1 only decreases their score by .3. However, weighting a legislator's raw score by the same amount when their score is 5 decreases their score by 5 times that amount. The second reason is that, as indicated by Figure A1.2 below, there are simply fewer observations at the higher end of the unweighted index.

**Figure A1.1: Distribution of District Roots Index (Weighted)**

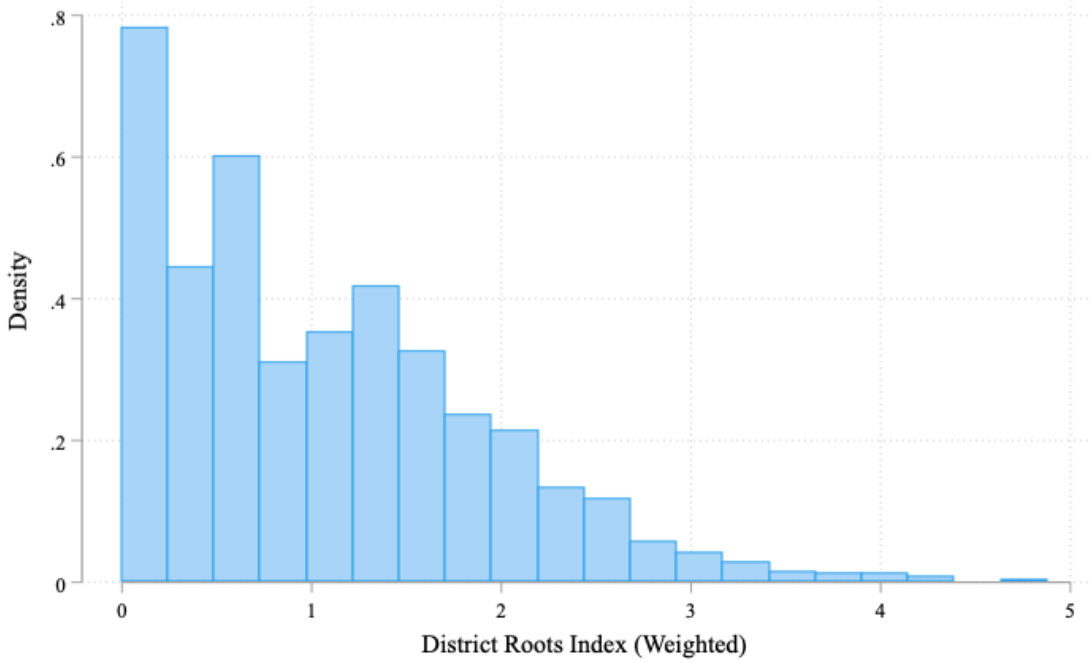
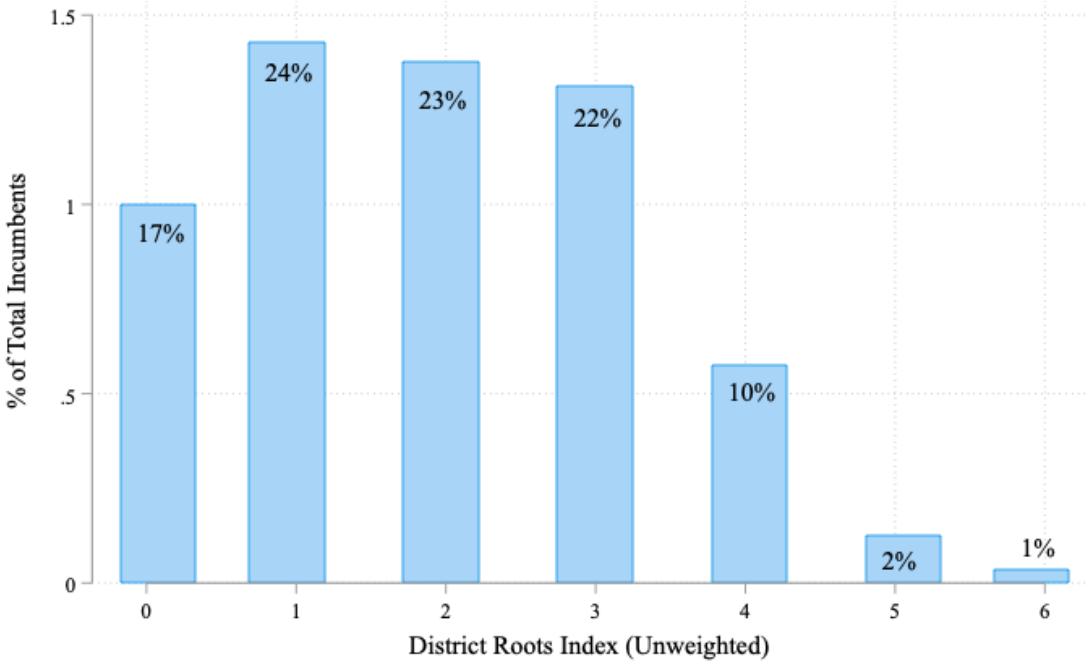


**Figure A1.2: Distribution of District Roots Index (Unweighted)**




As a result of this issue, I used two other alternate specifications of C weighted index to conduct the robustness checks. First, I used factor analysis to allow for more variation in the separate effects of each of the component variables of the index. Doing so produced a more normal distribution, as depicted below in Figure A1.3. I also produced a simple logged version of the weighted index in order to produce a more normal distribution, as depicted in Figure A1.4.

**Figure A1.3: Distribution of District Roots Index (Factor Score)**

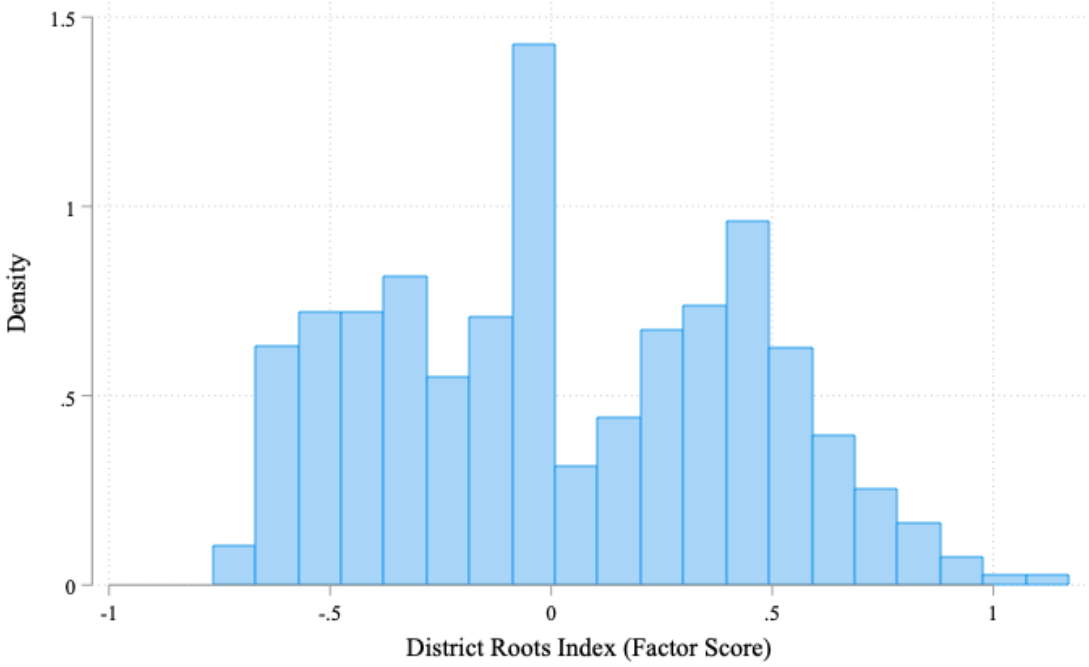



**Figure A1.4: Distribution of District Roots Index (Logged)**

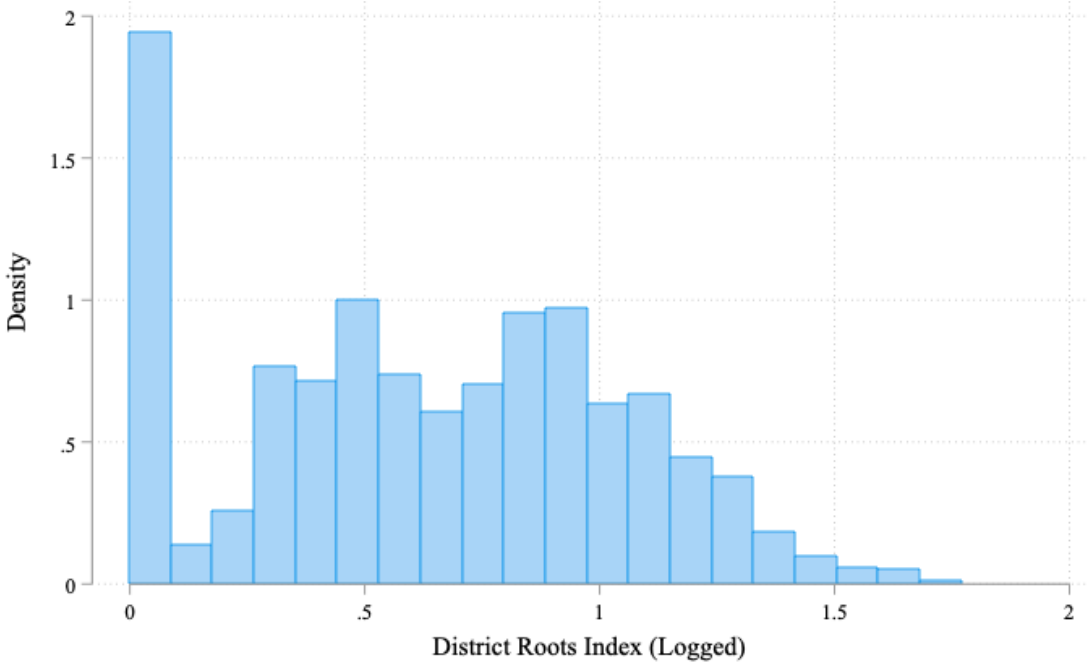
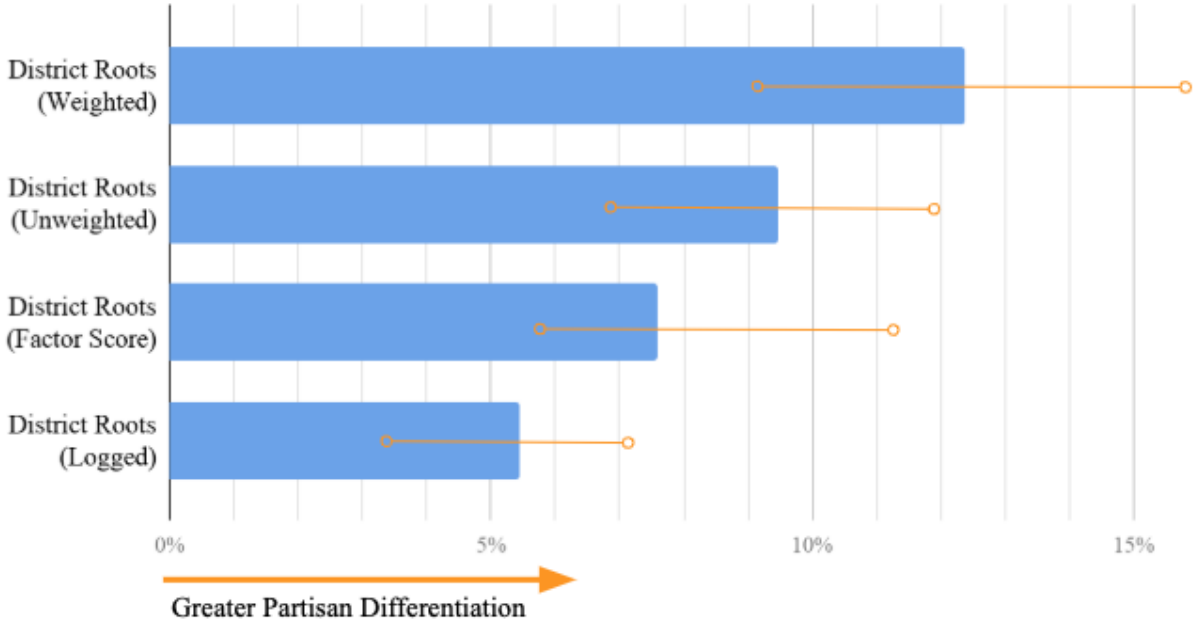


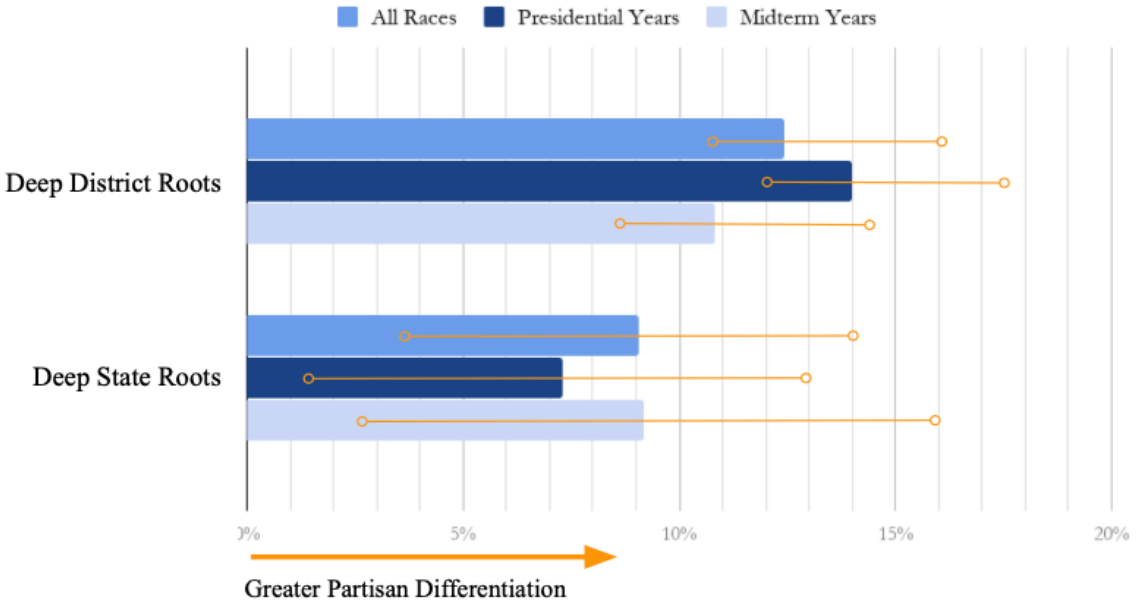
Figure A1.5 is a visual representation of the total additive effect that each alternate District Roots specification has on Partisan Differentiation, the primary dependent variable for Chapter 3. While there is some slight variation in the total effects, all specifications have both substantively and statistically significant effects in the expected direction. Effects are similarly consistent for subsequent models in Chapters 4 and 5 as well. Given the robustness of all specifications, I chose to continue to use the weighted District Roots index because it created greater fidelity to the original data values, and produced more intuitive descriptive scores and marginal effect predictions for each of the models.

**Figure A1.5: Predicted Effects of Alternate District Roots Specifications on Partisan Differentiation (Chapter 3 Models)**




For one final check, I reproduced the District Roots Index at the wider state level to capture whether the localness of the district community itself is what matters, or if voter and legislator attachment is more relevant to the state itself. While state size and other factors likely create important differences in the effect, it does appear that the estimates for more precise district-level roots are more substantively powerful, and also more statistically certain.

**Figure A1.6: Predicted Effects of District vs. State Roots on Partisan Differentiation (Chapter 3 Models)**



## Appendix B: Full Regression Results for All Models Referenced in Main Text

**Table A4.1**

**Effects on House General Election Outcomes (Complete Results), 2002-2018**

| Dependent Variable | Incumbent GE Margin | Incumbent GE Margin (Competitive Races) |
|---|---|---|
| District Roots Index † | 1.76*** | 0.86** |
| | (0.44) | (0.39) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -1.07 | -0.02 |
| | (2.35) | (2.15) |
| Racial Alignment with District | 1.35** | 0.03 |
| | (0.63) | (0.67) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 1.20*** | 0.57*** |
| | (0.04) | (0.06) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 1.37*** | 0.73*** |
| | (0.04) | (0.10) |
| Primary Opposition | -0.30 | 0.17 |
| | (0.42) | (0.58) |
| Chamber Leadership | -0.41 | 1.17 |
| | (0.77) | (1.15) |
| Terms Served in Congress | 0.34*** | 0.05 |
| | (0.07) | (0.08) |
| Quality Challenger | -4.99*** | -3.90*** |
| | (0.61) | (0.64) |
| Election Year 2004 | -2.34*** | -0.35 |
| | (0.66) | (1.50) |
| Election Year 2006 | -10.87*** | -3.96*** |
| | (0.84) | (1.42) |
| Election Year 2008 | -9.80*** | -3.08** |
| | (0.88) | (1.49) |
| Election Year 2010 | -12.80*** | -5.45*** |
| | (0.85) | (1.31) |
| Election Year 2012 | -14.25*** | -5.19*** |
| | (0.95) | (1.23) |
| Election Year 2014 | -14.05*** | -6.64*** |
| | (1.00) | (1.37) |
| Election Year 2016 | -13.30*** | -2.43* |
| | (0.93) | (1.26) |
| Election Year 2018 | -18.98*** | -6.56*** |
| | (0.95) | (1.23) |
| Constant | -26.94*** | -12.00*** |
| | (1.32) | (1.50) |
| R-Squared (Between-effects) | .70 | .32 |
| N | 2973 | 856 |

*Results found using random-effects generalized least squares regression*

*Standard errors (in parentheses) clustered by incumbent*

† = *Weighted by % of constituents born in-state*

*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

**Table A4.2**
**Effects on Likelihood of Primary Opposition, 2002-2018**

| Dependent Variable | Likelihood of Incumbent Primary Opposition |
|---|---|
| District Roots Index † | -0.16* |
| | (0.08) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -1.23*** |
| | (0.44) |
| Racial Alignment With District | 0.03 |
| | (0.12) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 0.02*** |
| | (0.10) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 0.00 |
| | (0.01) |
| Closed Primary | -0.83*** |
| | (0.16) |
| Jungle Primary | 0.94*** |
| | (0.18) |
| Chamber Leadership | -0.01 |
| | (0.17) |
| Terms Served in Congress | 0.05*** |
| | (0.01) |
| Election Year 2004 | -0.15 |
| | (0.19) |
| Election Year 2006 | 0.17 |
| | (0.19) |
| Election Year 2008 | -0.08 |
| | (0.20) |
| Election Year 2010 | 0.64*** |
| | (0.19) |
| Election Year 2012 | 1.45*** |
| | (0.20) |
| Election Year 2014 | 1.07*** |
| | (0.20) |
| Election Year 2016 | 1.34*** |
| | (0.20) |
| Election Year 2018 | 1.38*** |
| | (0.20) |
| Constant | -1.03*** |
| | (0.27) |
| Wald Chi-2 | 287.35 |
| N | 3460 |

*Note: Results found using random-effects logistic regression*
† = *Weighted by % of constituents born in-state*
*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

**Table A4.3**

**Effects on Primary Election Margin of Victory, 2002-2018**

| Dependent Variable | Incumbent Primary Election Margin | |
|---|---|---|
| District Roots Index ✝ | 2.50** | 1.92* |
| | (1.21) | (1.07) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -18.97*** | -17.16*** |
| | (7.07) | (6.34) |
| Racial Alignment With District | 0.96 | 0.67 |
| | (1.83) | (1.75) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 0.23** | 0.27*** |
| | (0.11) | (0.10) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 0.20 | 0.22 |
| | (0.17) | (0.16) |
| Total Challenger Fundraising | N/A | **-1.58*** (0.13)** |
| Closed Primary | -6.58** | -4.26* |
| | (2.57) | (2.35) |
| Jungle Primary | -23.82*** | -27.65*** |
| | (2.47) | (2.38) |
| Chamber Leadership | 4.90** | 3.02 |
| | (1.97) | (1.88) |
| Terms Served in Congress | -0.15 | -0.04 |
| | (0.21) | (0.19) |
| Election Year 2004 | -2.41 | 0.71 |
| | (2.84) | (2.76) |
| Election Year 2006 | -10.76*** | -9.45*** |
| | (2.74) | (2.86) |
| Election Year 2008 | -11.58*** | -8.17** |
| | (3.45) | (3.20) |
| Election Year 2010 | -15.62*** | -10.88*** |
| | (3.00) | (2.94) |
| Election Year 2012 | -21.16*** | -16.30*** |
| | (2.93) | (2.96) |
| Election Year 2014 | -21.17*** | -17.49*** |
| | (2.90) | (2.90) |
| Election Year 2016 | -21.50*** | -18.06*** |
| | (2.90) | (2.91) |
| Election Year 2018 | -17.75*** | -13.99*** |
| | (3.01) | (3.04) |
| Constant | 72.76*** | 79.28*** |
| | (4.35) | (4.02) |
| R-Squared (Between-Effects) | .18 | .32 |
| N | 1278 | 1278 |

*Note: Results found using random-effects logistic regression*

✝ *= Weighted by % of constituents born in-state*

*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01

**Table A5.1**

Effects on Local Legislator Campaign Spending, 2004-2016

| **Dependent Variable** | **% of Spending In-District** |
|---|---|
| District Roots Index† | 2.17*** |
| | (0.73) |
| Locally-Rooted Constituency | -0.34 |
| | (4.07) |
| Racial Alignment With District | -1.02 |
| | (0.99) |
| Partisan Advantage - District | 0.30*** |
| | (0.07) |
| Partisan Advantage - National | 0.19** |
| | (0.09) |
| Chamber Leadership | -2.58* |
| | (1.46) |
| Terms Served in Congress | 0.66*** |
| | (0.16) |
| Urban District | -5.70** |
| | (2.88) |
| District Business Density | 0.21 |
| | (0.18) |
| Election Year 2006 | -17.95*** |
| | (1.39) |
| Election Year 2008 | -21.93*** |
| | (1.22) |
| Election Year 2010 | -12.06*** |
| | (1.19) |
| Election Year 2012 | -13.27*** |
| | (1.42) |
| Election Year 2014 | -14.59*** |
| | (1.46) |
| Election Year 2016 | -16.83*** |
| | (1.49) |
| Constant | 28.65 |
| | (3.78) |
| R-Squared (Between-effects) | .14 |
| N | 2243 |

*Results found using random-effects generalized least squares regression*

*Standard errors clustered by legislator*

† = *Weighted by % of constituents born in-state; *p < .1, **p < .05, ***p <.01*

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