

Distributive Politics as Behavioral Localism

Local Ties as Heuristics for Public Goods Allocation and
Bureaucratic Oversight

by

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Declaration

I, the undersigned Dániel Kovarek, candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Central European University Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy and International Relations, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of work of others, and no part the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, November 23, 2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'K' followed by a series of loops and a final upward stroke, all written above a horizontal line.

Signature

Abstract

Recent literature on friends-and-neighbors voting focused on explaining citizens' motives behind disproportionately supporting local candidates. This dissertation advances the literature by studying whether voters use politicians' local ties to make inferences about receiving tangible benefits. This speaks to the growing body of scholarship positing a cue-based explanation of how descriptive localism informs the electorate. It is composed of three independent studies that leverage original data collected via survey experiments and observational data capturing bureaucrat-citizen interactions in Hungary.

The first paper draws on an online survey experiment (N=2076) and tests whether pork barrel politics and clientelism are manifestations of behavioral localism using a vignette study. Respondents in the treatment and the control group were shown the same candidate profile of a fictive politician, differing only in their local roots. Results demonstrate that respondents who were told that the candidate was born and living in their hometown were more likely to believe that the politician will 'bring home the bacon' as opposed to those confronted with a randomly selected Hungarian settlement as the candidate's birthplace and residence. To better understand how preferences regarding distributive linkages shape expectations about local candidates, a choice-based conjoint experiment was also fielded. Promises of pork delivery increased, whereas clientelistic exchanges decreased the likelihood of selecting a particular candidate profile (with programmatic linkages set as baseline).

The second paper tests whether voters formulate expectations about politicians' future behavior concerning hiring decisions with respect to municipal and state jobs based on the local roots these candidates' possess. Using a nationally representative, probability sample (N=1000), the study utilizes vignettes to investigate whether respondents find it more likely that job-seekers who possess shared local roots with incumbents will be able to obtain jobs in the public sector. Furthermore, a conjoint demonstrates that respondents themselves are more willing to fire non-local employees, and they believe their decisions reflect the behavior of real-world top bureaucrats.

The third paper shows how civil servants use incumbents' local ties as proxies for monitoring. The literature suggests bureaucrats shirk when political oversight is limited or inefficient. When civil servants engage in multitasking, elected office holders have neither the capacity, nor the incentives to monitor bureaucrat-citizen interactions. I argue that under such circumstances, public servants prioritize responding to local anomalies which are located in the immediate vicinity of politicians' domiciles. Using a novel dataset on geolocated problem reports (N=25,733), matched to mayors' addresses, I find that proximity to mayors' domiciles is associated with more prompt responses from authorities. Results suggest local politicians generate positive externalities for their neighbors, as bureaucrats put reports that are invisible to their principals on the back burner. Moreover, response speed is positively associated with incumbent mayors' re-election chances. The findings refine our understanding of voters' expectations about elected politicians' non-programmatic behavior, political oversight of bureaucrats, political business cycles and representation in civil service.

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Table of Contents

1 Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Methodology	4
1.2 Theoretical and methodological contributions	6
2 Chapter 2: Localness as a Heuristic for Pork Barrel and Clientelism	9
2.1 Local roots as heuristics for distributive politics	11
2.2 Candidate preferences in Hungary	12
2.3 Methodology	19
2.4 Hypotheses and Models	22
2.5 Analysis	23
2.6 Conclusion	32
3 Chapter 3: Patronage as Behavioral Localism	35
3.1 Patronage as a mechanism of behavioral localism	37
3.2 Data and methods	43
3.3 Hypotheses	50
3.4 Analysis and Discussion	54
3.5 Conclusion	64
4 Chapter 4: Neighbors with Benefits	67
4.1 Externalities of limited bureaucratic oversight	68
4.2 Data and Methods	75
4.3 Results	80
4.4 Conclusion	89
5 Chapter 5: Conclusion	93
A Appendix: Descriptives and Robustness Checks	98