



LETTER

# Does (Non-)Localness Affect MPs' Levels of Responsiveness? Evidence from a UK Field Experiment

Diane Bolet<sup>1</sup>  and Rosie Campbell<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Government, University of Essex, Colchester, UK and <sup>2</sup>King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership, King's College London, London, UK

**Corresponding author:** Diane Bolet; Email: [diane.bolet@essex.ac.uk](mailto:diane.bolet@essex.ac.uk)

(Received 27 March 2023; revised 21 December 2023; accepted 3 February 2024)

## Abstract

Does an MP's localness affect their behaviour towards constituents? Existing research has shown biases in MPs' responsiveness to citizens based on citizens' sociodemographic and political traits and voters' tendency to prefer 'local' MPs. Yet, we know little about whether MPs' localness affects their responsiveness to constituents. MPs' localness may influence their behaviour for strategic reasons and/or because of homophily. To explore this relationship, we conducted a field experiment in the United Kingdom where we asked legislators about their policy priorities regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. We found that local MPs do not differentiate in their responsiveness to constituents. However, non-local MPs are motivated by party affiliation and gender in their responsiveness to constituents, with ethnicity and class playing insignificant roles. Non-local MPs respond more to co-partisans than non-partisans and women non-local MPs are more responsive to women constituents. This experiment underscores the impact of (non-)localness on MPs' interactions with constituents.

**Keywords:** Legislative politics; localness; MPs' responsiveness; audit experiments; British politics

## MPs' Localness

Multiple studies have shown bias in MPs' responsiveness to citizens based on citizens' socio-demographic backgrounds (Butler 2014; Butler and Broockman 2011; Costa 2017; Dinesen, Dahl, and Schiøler 2021; Grohs, Adam, and Knill 2016; Habel and Birch 2019) and political traits (Butler and Broockman 2011; Gell-Redman et al. 2018; Rhinehart 2020). For example, elected officials in several polities have been found to be less responsive to working-class and ethnic minority constituents and more responsive to 'co-partisans'. Furthermore, a 'friends and neighbours' effect has long been observed in multiple democracies where voters prefer 'local' politicians – those born in the constituency they represent<sup>1</sup> (Arzheimer and Evans 2012; Blais et al. 2003; Gallagher 1980; Górecki and Marsh 2012; Key 1949; Lewis-Beck and Rice 1983).

The electoral advantage enjoyed by local MPs can be partially explained by behavioural localism; for example, the expectation that MPs with strong local connections will be more likely to prioritize the interests of the local area above those of the party or the nation (Campbell et al. 2019; Schulte-Cloos and Bauer 2023). Voters' preference towards local MPs may also reflect citizens' desires to express their place-based identity based on homophily (the tendency for individuals to connect with similar others) (Campbell et al. 2019; Schulte-Cloos and Bauer 2023).

<sup>1</sup>We understand localism in this paper as politicians who are born in the constituency they represent.

Extant research provides some evidence that the extent to which politicians attempt to signal their constituency focus is strategically targeted. MPs representing more marginal constituencies prioritise their constituency duties more than those in safer seats (Campbell and Lovenduski 2015; Sällberg and Hansen 2020). While there is extensive research in the literature on legislators' attempts to cultivate a 'personal vote' by signalling their commitment to the interests of the area they represent (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987; Zittel 2017), less attention has been paid to the role localism plays in mediated MPs' direct relationship with their constituents.

Transitioning from voters' preference for politicians with local connections, this letter explores how MPs' localness shapes their responsiveness to their constituents. Research has demonstrated that legislator responsiveness is influenced by the strategic incentives set by the electoral system; responsiveness is higher in majoritarian than in proportional representation systems (Breunig, Grossman, and Hänni 2022), where there are greater opportunities to cultivate a personal vote (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987). MPs' localness may influence their behaviour for strategic reasons to maximize their chances of re-election, from a psychological perspective or as a result of homophily, or both. From the perspective of homophily, we might expect MPs with strong local connections to be motivated by a sense of connection with their community and be more responsive than other MPs. However, we have seen that an electoral preference for local politicians is so well established that it is 'bordering on banality' (Pedersen, Kjaer, and Eliassen 2007). Here, we speculate that, from a strategic perspective, perhaps the local advantage is so profound that MPs with strong local connections can better afford to shift their attention away from constituency work to promote their parliamentary career. Local MPs may be less responsive overall because they estimate that the electoral benefit their localism provides reduces the potential gains from responsiveness. Thus, our expectations could run in either direction. From the perspective of homophily, we may expect local MPs to be more responsive. Still, from a strategic approach, we may expect lower levels of responsiveness from local MPs, all else being equal. Alternatively, local MPs may not be less responsive overall, but they make no distinction between constituents from different backgrounds based on homophily, feeling that they share a local place-based identity with all their constituents and thus responding to all equally.

Regarding non-local MPs, strategically motivated ones may be responsive to all constituents, irrespective of their backgrounds, to signal behavioural localism. However, being hyper-responsive to constituents to convey behavioural localism might only partially remedy their disadvantage, as research demonstrates that there are gains for local connections beyond those delivered by assumed behavioural localism. Hence, given the wealth of evidence that local MPs have an electoral advantage, it is probable that non-local MPs will 'play up' other traits (André, Depauw, and Deschouwer 2014, 905) to foster alternative mechanisms for securing voters' loyalty. In the absence of place-based identity, we consider whether non-local MPs may utilize other aspects of social identity to ensure a connection with voters. Fostering relationships driven by homophily, beyond place-based identity, may provide non-local MPs with an opportunity to develop and maintain support and build an incumbency advantage among specific sub-groups of voters. Thus, we explore whether non-local MPs are more responsive to constituents with whom they share non-local attributes than those with strong local connections.

There is a vast literature investigating the substantive representation of women, demonstrating that women legislators are more likely to attempt to substantively represent the interests of women voters (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005). We hypothesize that women MPs may be more likely to seek the votes of women voters when they do not benefit from the electoral advantage of a local connection. There is also some research that MPs may be more responsive to their co-partisans; again, a sense of shared identity (homophily) or a strategic incentive to mobilize the base could be motivational factors (Schakel et al. 2024). For example, non-local women MPs may be more likely to respond to women constituents, and non-local MPs may be more likely to respond to co-partisans.

## Research Design

We used original data from an audit experiment conducted in the United Kingdom from 2 November 2020 to 18 December 2020.<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the ethical implications of conducting audit studies of MPs, see Zittel et al. 2023. As previously noted, studies have shown the importance localness plays in electoral politics. This is especially true in the UK, where perceived candidate localness is either the most important or the second most important feature voters find desirable in their MPs (Johnson and Rosenblatt 2007). The United Kingdom is an excellent base to explore the relationship between MP's localness and responsiveness. The electoral system (single-member majoritarian) encourages strong linkages between representatives and constituencies. The issue of candidate localness has grown in political significance, and there has been an increase in MPs with a direct constituency connection across the major parties (Cowley, Gandy, and Foster 2022). As local orientation is such a critical aspect of British politics, we should expect the localness of British MPs to influence their behaviour towards constituents. Thus, the UK is a likely case to explore the inverse of the traditional 'friends and neighbours' effect and see if MPs' behaviour towards their constituents is shaped by their localness.

The audit experiment<sup>3</sup> involved sending policy queries to legislators via emails where fictitious constituents varied according to ethnicity, gender, class, status, and partisanship. This experimental design enabled us to observe whether local and non-local MPs respond differently depending on the constituents' socio-demographics and political identities and whether their response level is contingent on how similar the constituents are to themselves. One significant limitation of our design, common in audit experiments with MPs, is that responses to our emails may have been managed by staff rather than the MPs themselves, making it empirically challenging to distinguish between these responses (staff may sign off documents using MPs' names). Using MPs' official email addresses suggests that staff responded on behalf of their MPs, considering their MPs' characteristics.<sup>4</sup> The emails (see Supplementary Material A) asked how legislators and their parties would respond to the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We chose this issue because it was relevant and salient to all MPs and parties at the time of the study. For ethical reasons, we kept the email concise, with an open-ended question to avoid sending signals to MPs that could sway their reply.<sup>5</sup>

We used a  $2 \times 4$  factorial design that simultaneously manipulated these socio-demographic and political features.<sup>6</sup> This allowed us to test how various constituents' characteristics affect local versus non-local MPs' response rates without reducing statistical power or requiring more emails to be sent to MPs. To increase the power of the study, the emails were sent out in two waves, meaning legislators received two short emails with a random combination of socio-demographic and political treatments. We minimized the risk of detection by waiting at least two weeks before submitting the second email for each MP and by having two versions of the email that differed in wording but not in substance.

<sup>2</sup>This experiment is part of a multi-country project where similar field experiments were also conducted in Germany and the Netherlands. We only use data from the UK in this paper because Dutch MPs do not represent constituencies and German MPs are not all representing a single constituency due to its mixed-member proportional representation.

<sup>3</sup>This experiment was pre-registered as an exploratory analysis of the main analysis (see Schakel et al., 2024) at <https://osf.io/b7rz9>.

<sup>4</sup>Through explicit instruction or osmosis, a staff member of an MP (the agent), may, to some extent, respond differently whether their MP (the principal) is local or not. It is, for instance, plausible that staff working for non-local MPs might prioritise constituents who share similar traits with the MP, such as partisanship, gender, ethnicity, and class, over local considerations. It is also plausible that staff working for local MPs might not rely on such traits when responding to constituents.

<sup>5</sup>More details about the ethical considerations in Supplementary Material B.

<sup>6</sup>We used block random assignment within each country based on the seat share and government-opposition status of political parties to guarantee that all treatment conditions are balanced.

## Data and Method

### Variables

The main outcome variable for our analysis records whether an MP sent a reply to our constituent (coded 1) or not (coded 0). Automated replies not personalized to the sender were coded as non-response (coded 0). Given that we did not provide any address and there is a protocol that MPs respond only to their constituents,<sup>7</sup> we considered emails that asked for contact details – an address or phone number – as a response (coded 1).<sup>8</sup> The response rate of 77.66 per cent<sup>9</sup> is high compared to audit experiments set in other European countries (Bol et al. 2021; Breunig, Grossman, and Hänni 2022; Magni and Ponce de Leon 2021), but it is somewhat lower than the 91 per cent from the UK study by Habel and Birch (2019).<sup>10</sup> Among those MPs who responded, a majority asked for contact details (76.67 per cent), and 23.33 per cent of the MPs provided a substantive reply addressing the issue raised.<sup>11</sup> To ensure that those who replied with an address did not bias the results,<sup>12</sup> we also used an ordinal measure of responsiveness that accounts for each type of response in a series of multinomial regressions (Supplemental Material F).

We use birthplace as the indicator to define MPs' localness because it is an important aspect of belonging to a local area. Existing studies used birthplace as the primary indicator of localness (cf. Campbell et al. 2019, Childs and Cowley 2011). This information is easily accessible<sup>13</sup> and is available to almost all MPs, unlike other variables of localness (for example, place of residence, length of domicile, parents' birthplace, and the university town where the MP studied). Given the changing geographic boundaries and names of constituencies across time, we rely on a continuous variable to accurately measure localness in our main analysis. We measure the (log) geodesic distance (in km) between the geographic centroid of MPs' birthplace and their constituency using geographic coordinates of these locations (longitudes and latitudes). We test the robustness of our findings by employing binary indicators that distinguish local MPs (coded as 0) from non-local MPs (coded as 1) to represent varying levels of 'localness', with 'local' MPs defined as those residing within 50 to 75 km of their constituency (see Supplemental Material F).

Each email, which is randomly allocated to the MP, varies regarding the signalled ethnicity, gender, social class, and partisanship of the constituent. The ethnic background and gender treatments are signalled by the name of the sender and are selected because they are the most common first names and surnames given to men and women born between 1950 and 1990 for each ethnic group (See the list of names in Supplemental Material A). We chose 'cleaner' and 'lawyer' as the two occupations from the working and upper occupational class categories because they are close to either end of the status scale according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO).<sup>14</sup> Partisanship is manipulated by either mentioning that the sender supports the MP's party or not mentioning their partisanship. Emails from ethnic minority constituents, women constituents, working-class constituents, or co-partisan constituents were coded as 1,

<sup>7</sup>We explain the detailed reasons why we did not include postcodes in our email in Supplemental Material B.

<sup>8</sup>We did not send any follow-up emails in response.

<sup>9</sup>The response rate is comparable between the two waves, with 72.07 per cent for the first wave and 75.77 per cent for the second. There is indeed no difference in means between the two waves ( $p$ -value=0.19).

<sup>10</sup>The differences may be due to the different contents of the emails. While our study asked MPs about policy regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, Habel and Birch's study involved a service request and it was shown that MPs prefer talking about service than policy with their constituents (Butler, Karpowitz and Pope 2012).

<sup>11</sup>The low number of genuine emails prevents us from using other measures of responsiveness (i.e. speed, length, and responsiveness of the response), unlike in the main comparative paper (see Schakel et al., 2024).

<sup>12</sup>We conducted a robustness check to distinguish between MPs who replied requesting a postal address and those who genuinely replied (see Table F1 in Supplemental Material F). Our results remain unchanged, albeit with some small exceptions.

<sup>13</sup>We find birthplace's information on the MPs' official websites or on Wikipedia.

<sup>14</sup>It registers occupations based on income, education and job prestige, (see more in Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman, 1992).

whereas those written by ethnic majority constituents, male constituents, upper-middle-class constituents, or non-partisan constituents were coded as 0.

Several control variables were introduced in the models. Since MPs could respond differently depending on their socio-demographics, we included MPs' personal features; for example, their party (coded 0 Conservative Party, 1 Labour Party, and 2 other parties), their sex, their ethnicity, their education levels, and whether they were an incumbent MP (that is whether they were already an MP before the 2019 general election). We also control for constituency variables that could influence MPs' behaviour toward their constituents. We include a measure of electoral marginality, the electorate's share, and the constituency's size (in square kilometres) to control for the volume of casework/policy queries. All variables are summarized in the descriptive statistics (see Table D1).

### Empirical Strategy

We pool observations across waves, which leads to an overall number of 944 observations.<sup>15</sup> Our effects are first estimated with a standard regression with the various measures of localness in the following equation:

$$Y_i = \alpha_i + \beta \text{Localness}_i + \text{Constituents' Cues}_i + Z_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

We then estimated our two-way interactions between the localness variable and the treatment factors in the following equation:

$$Y = \alpha_i + \beta \text{Localness}_i + \beta \text{Localness}_i \times \text{Constituents' Cues}_i + Z_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where  $Y$  is the outcome variable mentioned above. We use logistic regressions for the response rate with standard errors that are clustered by MPs.  $\alpha$  is the constant and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term.  $Z$  represents the various covariates, which include the wave, version and names of constituents, MPs' personal features and the contextual variables. In Supplemental Material F, we test different operationalisations of the dependent and independent variables and various modelling strategies to bolster the robustness of our findings.

### Results

Table 1 displays the findings of the effect of localness on MPs' levels of responsiveness without any interaction in Model 1 and with each treatment condition that interacts with MPs' level of localness in Models 2, 3, 4, and 5; that is, ethnicity, class, partisanship, and gender. The models include all covariates, but the results hold without various covariates (see all models in Supplemental Material E). We did not find any significant effect of localness in

We do not find any significant effect of localness on MPs' response rate while holding constant the cues of the constituents. Thus, our findings show that local MPs exhibit equal levels of responsiveness to all constituents, irrespective of their backgrounds. Regardless of the constituents' traits, being local does not affect whether an MP responds to a constituent's email.

When we interact localness with the ethnicity or class condition of the sender, we find an insignificant effect.<sup>16</sup> MPs' localness does not seem to affect how they respond to constituents based on ethnicity or class. However, when we interact localness with the partisanship condition

<sup>15</sup>We have 487 UK MPs in total ( $N = 974$ ) but we are missing 30 observations of localness. We have 487 MPs instead of 650 MPs because two MPs could not be contacted by email, and 161 MPs opted out of the study following the debrief form. There is no attribution bias with this reduced sample size, as shown in Appendix C.

<sup>16</sup>The lack of main effects of ethnicity or class on MPs' response rate from the main paper have lowered the probability to find any interaction effects (see Schakel et al., 2024).

**Table 1.** Linear regressions of responsiveness by localness and cues

	1	2	3	4	5
	MPs' Response rate				
Log (Distance)	−0.016 [0.047]	−0.031 [0.058]	−0.054 [0.064]	−0.083 [0.061]	−0.087 [0.056]
Ethnic minority cue	−0.089 [0.149]	−0.211 [0.324]	−0.094 [0.149]	−0.098 [0.150]	−0.082 [0.150]
Log (Distance) × Ethnic minority cue		0.030 [0.071]			
Working class cue	−0.126 [0.153]	−0.128 [0.153]	−0.422 [0.354]	−0.133 [0.154]	−0.131 [0.154]
Log (Distance) × Working class cue			0.074 [0.080]		
Co-Partisan cue	0.205 [0.159]	0.204 [0.159]	0.201 [0.159]	−0.392 [0.356]	0.206 [0.159]
Log (Distance) × Co-Partisan cue				0.150* [0.084]	
Female cue	0.117 [0.156]	0.118 [0.156]	−0.485 [0.353]	0.119 [0.156]	0.115 [0.157]
Log (Distance) × Female cue					0.151** [0.075]
Constant	1.399 [1.187]	1.466 [1.192]	1.564 [1.223]	1.784 [1.207]	1.741 [1.192]
Covariates	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	920	920	920	920	920

Standard errors are clustered by MP.

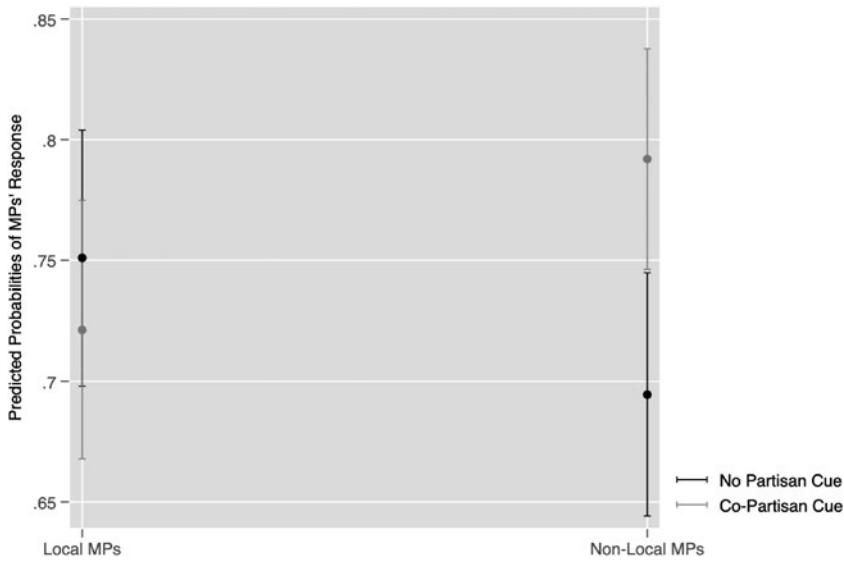
\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

of the sender, we find a positive and significant effect, albeit with an effect at the 0.1 significance level.<sup>17</sup> We find more statistically significant effects with alternative binary variables of localness (see Table F4). MPs are more inclined to respond to emails from co-partisan constituents than non-partisan constituents as the (log) distance between their birthplace and constituency increases. This effect is notably strong. The probability of MPs responding to co-partisan constituents, in contrast to non-co-partisan constituents, increases by approximately 13 percentage points as their localness decreases from the highest to the lowest levels (for example, 69 per cent for local MPs compared to 82 per cent for not-so-local MPs). Consequently, non-local MPs are more likely to reply to co-partisan constituents than local MPs, as illustrated in Table F4.

For clarity, we illustrate our results with figures using the binary localism variable, which designates MPs as local if born within 50 km of their constituency's centroid. Figure 1, displaying the predicted probability of responses from local and non-local MPs to co-partisans or non-co-partisans, confirms that non-local MPs are more inclined to respond to co-partisan constituents than local MPs.

As with the partisanship cue, we find a positive and highly significant effect of localness and female cues on MPs' response rates (see Model 5 of Table 1). MPs demonstrate a greater tendency to respond to women constituents, with an increase of approximately 13.8 percentage points, as the (log) distance between their birthplace and constituency ranges from its minimum to maximum value. This effect is comparable to the one observed with the partisanship cue. The effects are unchanged and similar when we use alternative measures of localness (except for a few binary variables, as shown in Table F4). Figure 2 confirms that non-local MPs exhibit greater responsiveness to female senders than male senders, although the effects fall short of significance. Among local MPs, there is no discernible difference in responsiveness based on the sender's gender.

<sup>17</sup>This goes beyond the conventional acceptance of statistical significance but remains nonetheless indicative of a pattern given the relatively small sample size of the dataset.



**Figure 1.** Predicted probability of MPs' response for local and non-local MPs conditional on the partisanship of the constituent (with 90 per cent confidence intervals).

*Note:* The localism binary variable is measured considering local MPs born within 50 km of their constituency's centroid.



**Figure 2.** Predicted probability of MPs' response for local and non-local MPs conditional on the constituent's gender (with 90 per cent confidence intervals).

*Note:* The localism binary variable is measured considering local MPs born within 50 km of their constituency's centroid.

To better understand these findings, [Table 2](#) presents the response rate of MPs' emails for men and women constituents by gender. While men and women MPs reply more to women, the difference in response rates, conditional on the constituent's gender, is larger for women MPs (difference = 7.41 points, p-value = 0.125). [Table 3](#), which displays the interaction effects of constituents' gender and localness on MPs' response rates for men and women MPs,<sup>18</sup> corroborates

<sup>18</sup>We cannot use three-way-interactions due to lack of power.

**Table 2.** MPs' response rate to male and female constituents by gender

Response rate (in %)	Men MPs	Women MPs
Male constituent	73	71
Female constituent	74	78

**Table 3.** Linear regressions of responsiveness by localness and gender among men and women MPs

	1		2	
	Reply			
	Among men MPs		Among women MPs	
(Log) Distance	-0.102		-0.046	
	[0.075]		[0.093]	
Female cue	-0.137		-0.785	
	[0.436]		[0.603]	
(Log) Distance × Female cue	0.048		0.298**	
	[0.093]		[0.132]	
Co-Partisan cue	0.311		0.124	
	[0.200]		[0.291]	
Ethnic minority cue	-0.160		0.078	
	[0.188]		[0.269]	
Working class cue	-0.015		-0.387	
	[0.190]		[0.270]	
Constant	1.128		4.353**	
	[1.472]		[2.175]	
Covariates	Yes		Yes	
Observations	608		312	

Standard errors are clustered by MP.

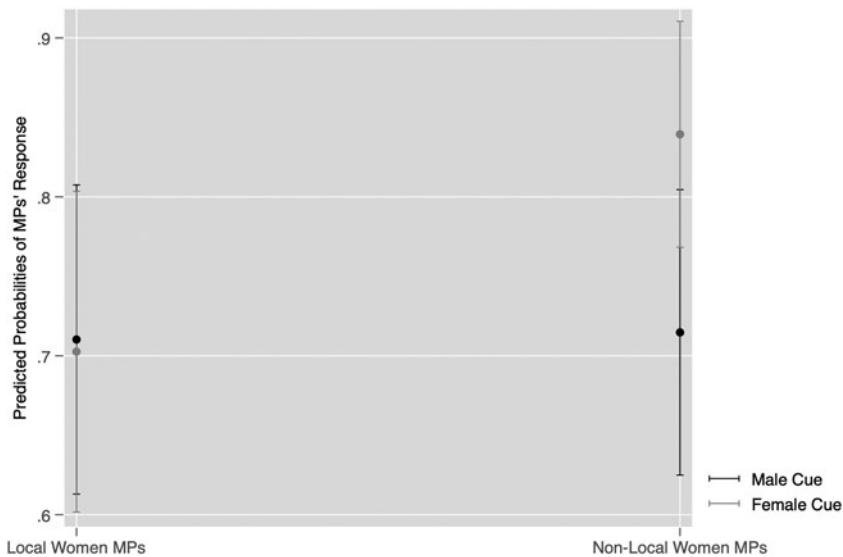
\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ .

these findings. While the effect is positive and significant among women MPs, it is insignificant among men. Non-local women MPs are more likely to respond to female constituents than local women MPs. These findings are in line with Magni and Ponce de Leon's 2021 study: women MPs (and men MPs to a lesser degree) are more responsive to female constituents. Women in office are more supportive of the interests and rights of women and often promote women-related legislation (Bratton 2005; Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008); logically, they are more responsive to female constituents. Non-local women MPs would, therefore, be more prone to rely on these heuristic cues than local women MPs.

Table 3 reveals a significant increase in MPs' responses to women constituents as the distance between women MPs' constituency and birthplace grows from its minimum to its maximum value. This effect is notably strong, with the response rate increasing by 45 percentage points. Figure 3, which shows the predicted probability of responding for local and non-local women MPs, conditional on the gender of the constituent, corroborates this pattern. While local women MPs and non-local women MPs are equally responsive to male constituents, non-local women MPs are more responsive to female constituents than local women MPs, even though the effects fall short of significance due to the smaller sample (we split between men and women MPs). Given the lack of a noticeable difference in the homophily argument between non-local women MPs and local women MPs (that is, there is no apparent reason why non-local women MPs should feel more similar to other women than local women MPs), this finding offers initial evidence in support of the strategic behaviour of non-local women MPs.

Despite the low significance level resulting from the small sample size, our main findings are robust to various operationalizations of the dependent and independent variables, other modelling strategies, and the exclusion of London (Supplemental Material F). They provide evidence suggesting that the impact of localism on MPs' responsiveness is limited to certain characteristics.





**Figure 3.** Predicted probability of MPs' response for local and non-local women MPs conditional on the constituent's gender (with 90 per cent confidence intervals).

*Note:* The localism binary variable is measured considering local MPs born within 50 km of their constituency's centroid.

Specifically, non-local MPs are more responsive to constituents who share their partisanship or gender but not necessarily ethnicity or class. This difference, in effect, could be attributed to a lack of statistical power due to insufficient variation among MPs in terms of their ethnic background and class. There is a smaller representation of minority-background MPs compared to majority-background MPs and a smaller proportion of working-class MPs relative to those from middle/upper-class backgrounds. On the other hand, there is greater diversity among MPs in terms of party affiliation (Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Green) and gender. The higher variation in these factors could explain why the effect of localness is more likely to be observed in relation to partisanship or gender rather than ethnicity or class.

## Conclusion

Our audit experiment of MPs' responsiveness to constituents in the UK demonstrates the role localness (or non-localness) might play in shaping MPs' behaviour outside the legislature and in their direct communications with constituents. While there is no indication of an overall difference between the responsiveness of MPs with and without local connections, non-local MPs are somewhat more responsive to constituents with whom they share another (non-local) identity, specifically gender and partisanship, albeit with findings at low significance levels. We are cautious about accepting the null hypothesis for the role that ethnicity and class might play in shaping the responsiveness of non-local MPs because, potentially, we have too few ethnic minority and working-class MPs in the sample to achieve statistical significance. Future studies should attempt to test all these demographic traits with more countries to increase the study's variation and power.

The findings, relating to partisanship and gender, are comparable with our expectations from a strategic perspective that MPs without local connections are incentivized to use other aspects of their identity, based on homophily, to build support within their constituencies. Future research should further explore the extent to which there is an interaction between legislators' personal characteristics, identities, and strategic vote-seeking behaviour.

Extant research illustrates the role that local politicians play in shaping voting behaviour, especially in majoritarian electoral systems. From our research, we understand that the impact of localism runs

in both directions, from voter to MP and from MP to voter. As local credentials are of such significant electoral importance, their absence gives non-local MPs an electoral disadvantage, which they will likely attempt to circumnavigate, consciously or not. While we point towards the first evidence of the strategic behaviour of non-local women MPs, future research should attempt to disentangle whether the variation in the behaviour of local and non-local MPs results from strategic attempts to cultivate a personal vote or from psychological affinity driven by homophily, or both.

**Supplementary Material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000115>.

**Data availability statement.** The replication files are available at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VBQSM6> in the Harvard Dataverse MPs were informed that their personal information would be removed from the dataset, implying restrictions on data sharing. We only include the localness variable without any more geographical information nor constituency controls to avoid tracking any information back to an individual MP (the geographical data merged with the demographics of the MPs can allow tracking them back to individual MPs). This means that the findings from the replication file with the restricted data do not exactly match the ones from the paper (but the significance and size of the effects remain similar). We provide information on how the data was constructed and what was removed from the dataset. We also include the do file of how we produced all the results presented in the paper and the supplemental material before restricting the dataset.

**Acknowledgements.** The authors would like to thank other members of this multi-country project, of which this manuscript is a part: Markus Baumann, Tom Louwse, Wouter Schakel, Simon Stückelberger and Thomas Zittel. The authors would also like to thank the 2022 Election, Public Opinion and Parties (EPOP) conference participants and the 2021 and 2022 Castasegna workshops organised by the University of Zurich. Finally, the authors appreciate the editor's and anonymous reviewers' comments and guidance.

**Author contribution statement.** DB came up with the idea for the paper, and DB and RC jointly developed the theory based on the experiment within the main comparative project. DB ran the experiment under RC's mentorship and conducted the statistical analyses. RC wrote the 'MPs' localness (introduction and theory) and 'Conclusion' sections. DB wrote the 'Research Design', 'Data and Methods', and the 'Results' sections, along with the Supplementary Material. DB led the revision process, but DB and RC jointly reviewed and edited the manuscript and Supplementary Material at each stage of the submission process.

**Financial support.** This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of the Open Research Area scheme with the grant number ES/S015728/1 entitled ORA (Round 5) The Nature of Political Representation in Times of Dealignment.

**Competing interest.** None.

**Ethical standards.** The research was conducted in accordance with the protocols approved by the Ethics Committee of King's College London.

## References

- André A, Depauw S, and Deschouwer K** (2014) Legislators' local roots: Disentangling the effect of district magnitude. *Party Politics* **20**(6), 904–17.
- Arzheimer K and Evans J** (2012) Geolocation and voting: Candidate-voter distance effects on party choice in the 2010 general election in England. *Political Geography* **31**(5), 301–10.
- Blais A et al.** (2003) Does the local candidate matter? Candidate effects in the Canadian election of 2000. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* **36**(3), 657–64.
- Bol D et al.** (2021) The importance of personal vote intentions for the responsiveness of legislators: A field experiment. *European Journal of Political Research* **60**(2), 455–73.
- Bolet D and Campbell R** (2024) "Replication Data for: 'Does (Non-)Localness Affect MPs' Levels of Responsiveness? Evidence from a UK Field Experiment". <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VBQSM6>, Harvard Dataverse, V1 (accessed 3 February 2024).
- Bratton K** (2005) Critical mass theory revisited: The behavior and success of token women in state legislatures. *Politics and Gender* **1**(1), 97–125.
- Breunig C, Grossman E, and Hänni M** (2022) Responsiveness and democratic accountability: Observational evidence from an experiment in a mixed-member proportional system. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* **47**(1), 79–94.
- Butler DM** (2014) *Representing the Advantaged: How Politicians Reinforce Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 43–61.

- Butler DM and Broockman DE** (2011) Do politicians racially discriminate against constituents? A field experiment on state legislators. *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3), 463–77.
- Butler DM, Karpowitz CF, and Pope JC** (2012) A field experiment on legislators' home styles: Service versus policy. *The Journal of Politics* 74(2), 474–86.
- Cain B, Ferejohn J, and Fiorina M** (1987) *The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Campbell R et al.** (2019) Why friends and neighbors? Explaining the electoral appeal of local roots. *The Journal of Politics* 81(3), 937–51.
- Campbell R and Lovenduski J** (2015) What should MPs do? Public and parliamentarians' views compared. *Parliamentary Affairs* 68(4), 690–708.
- Childs S and Cowley P** (2011) The politics of local presence: Is there a case for descriptive representation? *Political Studies* 59(1), 1–19.
- Clayton A, O'Brien DZ, and Piscopo JM** (2019) All male panels? Representation and democratic legitimacy. *American Journal of Political Science* 63(1), 113–29.
- Costa M** (2017) How responsive are political elites? A meta-analysis of experiments on public officials. *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 4(3), 241–54.
- Cowley P, Gandy RJ, and Foster S** (2022) Increasingly local: The regional roots of British members of parliament, 2010–2019. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 1–12.
- Dinesen PT, Dahl M, and Schioler M** (2021) When are legislators responsive to ethnic minorities? Testing the role of electoral incentives and candidate selection for mitigating ethnocentric responsiveness. *American Political Science Review* 115(2), 450–66.
- Franceschet S and Piscopo J** (2008) Gender quotas and women's substantive representation: Lessons from Argentine. *Politics and Gender* 4(3), 393–425.
- Gallagher M** (1980) Candidate selection in Ireland: The impact of localism and the electoral system. *British Journal of Political Science* 10(4), 489–503.
- Ganzeboom HB, De Graaf PM, and Treiman DJ** (1992) A standard international socio-economic index of occupational status. *Social Science Research* 21(1), 1–56.
- Gell-Redman M et al.** (2018) It's all about race: How state legislators respond to immigrant constituents. *Political Research Quarterly* 71(3), 517–31.
- Górecki MA and Marsh M** (2012) Not just 'friends and neighbours': Canvassing, geographic proximity and voter choice. *European Journal of Political Research* 51(5), 563–82.
- Grohs S, Adam C, and Knill C** (2016) Are some citizens more equal than others? Evidence from a field experiment. *Public Administration Review* 76(1), 155–64.
- Habel P and Birch S** (2019) A field experiment on the effects of ethnicity and socioeconomic status on the quality of representation. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 44(3), 389–420.
- Johnson C and Rosenblatt G** (2007) Do MPs have the 'Right stuff'? *Parliamentary Affairs* 60(1), 164–9.
- Key V** (1949) *Southern Politics*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.
- Lewis-Beck M and Rice T** (1983) Localism in presidential elections: The home state advantage. *American Journal of Political Science* 27(3), 548–56.
- Magni G and de Leon ZP** (2021) Women want an answer! Field experiments on elected officials and gender bias. *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 8(3), 273–84.
- Pedersen M, Kjaer U, and Eliassen K** (2007) 'The geographical dimension of parliamentary recruitment – among native sons and parachutists'. In Cotta M and Best H (eds), *Democratic Representation in Europe: Diversity, Change and Convergence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 160–90.
- Rhinehart S** (2020) Mentoring the next generation of women candidates: A field experiment of state legislators. *American Politics Research* 48(4), 492–505.
- Sällberg Y and Hansen ME** (2020) Analysing the importance of localness for MP campaigning and legislative performance. *Representation* 56(2), 215–27.
- Schakel W et al.** (2024) How political and social constituent traits affect the responsiveness of legislators: A comparative field experiment. *European Journal of Political Research*.
- Schulte-Cloos J and Bauer PC** (2023) Local candidates, place-based identities, and electoral success. *Political Behavior* 45, 679–98.
- Schwandt-Bayer L and Mishler W** (2005) An integrated model of women's representation. *The Journal of Politics* 67(2), 407–28.
- Zittel T** (2017) The personal vote. In Arzheimer K, Evans J and Lewis-Beck M (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Electoral Behaviour*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 668–87.
- Zittel T et al.** (2023) Should we conduct correspondence study field experiments with political elites? *International Political Science Review* 01925121211026489