Summary

For many of us, the place we live is an indispensable piece of our identity. It contours our home, and often working, lives, our social environment and personal health. It is something into which our sense of self, positioning within society and outlook upon the world so often are tightly bound. It is also something intimately connected to many other identities we hold: to our class, our wealth, our age, our ethnicity. Place functions both as a social category itself and a marker denoting group membership. Where we live is not just a collection of people who consider themselves members of the social group which is that place, but a complex cross-cutting assembly of identities. On an aggregate level, place, and particularly, type of place, is a useful shorthand for so many other social categories, strata and life stages which concern us across the social sciences. Cities, for instance, are associated with the young; social housing developments with the less well-off.

All this might seem strange. We so often imagine ourselves, and our politics, as moving above these atavistic influences: the pull of fundamental social categories, of

communitarian identity, and small social networks. As Claude Fischer remarked in his study of personal networks in 1970s Californian neighbourhoods, 'few ideas saturate Western thought as does the conviction that modern life has destroyed "community"' (1982, page 1). Though where we live is hugely influential on nearly all our lives, most who read this—as urban professionals and intellectuals who have moved great distances to study or work—will probably be unaware of the extent to which geographic rootedness defines the lives of so many. It is overwhelmingly the norm, even in developed democracies. Only a third of Americans own a valid passport (Yougov 2021); nearly two-thirds live in the state in which they were born (US Census Bureau 2019). In Europe, though the Schengen Area has existed for three decades, 190 million people—37 per cent of the population of the Area or of those due to join—have never been abroad (EU 2014). Nearly 60 per cent of people born in the UK live within 20 miles of where they lived when they were 14 (ISER, NatCen, and Kantar 2021). Almost a quarter live within two miles.

Rootedness is, then, extremely salient to a large majority of people. Many developed democracies are experiencing political upheavals—right-wing nationalism, the immigration backlash, and cultural polarisation—which can be partly attributed to an assertion or re-assertion of a politics strongly rooted in this sort of attachment to place. This question of 'place-based social identity' has been the subject of great

study, directly or indirectly, within political science, such as from Cramer (2012; 2016), Fitzgerald (2018), Enos (2017) and Rodden (2019), among others. Others have also linked this to specific political effects, in particular radical right voting (Bolet 2021; Cramer 2016; Fitzgerald 2018; Ziblatt, Hilbig, and Bischof 2020), and preferences for local candidates (Arzheimer and Evans 2014; Evans et al. 2017; Kal Munis 2021; Schulte-Cloos and Bauer 2021). Often, it is a Manichean politics which comes out of this: with the 'true' locally attached citizens cast against 'placeless' elites.

While we have therefore not neglected to study this vital identity, we have missed key elements. We still do not have a good understanding of what causes it, nor a cohesive theoretical grounding on which we might being to build our analysis. Studies typically have four flaws. Firstly, many focus on the macro-level, neglecting variation on small units. This is curious, because we might reasonably expect highly-localised variation to play a key role in identity formation. Secondly, studies often study this identity obliquely, using proxies such as distance from birthplace, variation in regional dialects or residency (Jacobs and Munis 2019; Schulte-Cloos and Bauer 2021). Thirdly, particularly in Europe, research tends to focus on far right voting or parochialism when studying effects. Finally, studies which look at this identity directly and in any depth are often qualitative (Cramer 2012; Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016). Those which look at it quantitatively often use less causally robust methods.

Research objectives

This work sets out to correct all three shortcomings: modelling on neighbourhoods of only a few thousand people, using more robust methods and proposing a new question phrasing for asking people about their attachment to where they live, grounded in extensive theory in social psychology, sociology and political geography. In studying the effect of this identity, I focus on three areas over the whole thesis: political participation, focusing on conventional participation; attitudes towards partisan-ingroups; and preferences for descriptive localism in candidates. To study these, I use a range of data: panel studies, census data, novel observational surveys, and a survey experiment.

In seeking to answer what the role of place-based social identity is in the politics of modern democracies, I am answering four sub-questions:

Q_1 How can we conceptualise attachment to place as a social identity and how do we define 'local'?

Q_2 What predicts this identity on an individual, household and contextual level?

Q_3 What are its effects on political participation?

Q_4 What are its effects on attitudes towards partisan in and out-groups?

Q_5 What are its effects on preferences for descriptive localism in candidates?

This entails four aims:

A_1 Defining and quantifying local attachment on an individual, household and neighbourhood level.

A_2 Studying the effect of local attachment on politics beyond far right voting or parochialism.

A_3 Taking a quantitative and more robust causally approach to studying the effect of this identity.

A_4 Looking at geographic attachment across more granular geographic units, rather than to higher-order ones.

This work also makes further methodological innovations. In my survey work, I make frequent use of hierarchical models, in which respondents are grouped within their neighbourhoods using real addresses, allowing more accurate estimation of effects. I offer solutions to some of the problems such model specifications propose,

when modelling on small units. Finally, I plan to embed a vignette designed to prime attachment to place in a conjoint survey experiment to test the effect of local attachment on individuals' preferences for different localism cues in political candidates. This contains two innovations: the combining of the prime and conjoint, which allows me to study the manipulation of the identity, rather than variation on it, and the vignette itself: priming attachment to immediate social environment, which has not been attempted before.

This submission is organised into three sections. First, I broadly outline the chapters, those which are a part of this submission and not. The summary for the empirical chapter remaining to be completed—Chapter 5—is much longer than for the others. Following that, I outline a timeframe to complete the work. Finally, I provide drafts of two empirical chapters: Chapter 4, on political participation, and Chapter 6, on candidate evaluations.

Chapter outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

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Chapter 2: Local attachment as a social identity *

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework for the thesis, and discusses the literature. It centres this around an understanding of local attachment principally as a social identity. I draw from a wide literature, primarily social identity theory (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1981), but incorporating perspectives from sociology, political geography, social, and environmental psychology. The term 'local attachment' I use is an attempt to capture these diverse approaches. One factor which has constrained previous research into place-based identity is a cohesive approach to theory, or a consistent application of it in research design, and so I set out how I will address this. I also attempt to establish attachment to neighbourhood as an identity distinct from other important social identities—many of which may be linked to place—such as national identity, race and class. Unusually in quantitative studies of geographic social identity, I focus on the concept of the 'neighbourhood' as my primary geographic unit of study. In the chapter, I also propose a measurement approach and question phrasing to measure this identity, based on the concept of 'belonging' to a place.

Chapter 3: The sources of local attachment *

This chapter studies the causes of local attachment, focusing on three areas—distance, residence and mobility, social ties, and congruence—building on the theory established in Chapter 2. I study this first using Wave 4 (2008) of the European Values Study (EVS), then three waves of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), from 2011 to 2017. I study these using hierarchical and dynamic panel models.

Chapter 4: Political participation

Having established what local attachment is and what causes it, the rest of the thesis is concerned with the potential political effects of this identity. We know that attachment to neighbourhood is an identity more widely held than attachment to country, and that it is strongly driven by some of fundamental ways we relate to each other and to our environment. It seems likely then that, far from being on the periphery of politics, or incidental to political behaviour, this identity plays an integral role to how we engage in politics in democratic societies. Chapter 4 begins by studying political participation.

Chapter 5: Group perceptions

How do those who who are locally attached perceive different social groups? We know that group identity is a robust predictor of political behaviour. We also know that our affective bond to to social groups—such as our class, age, gender or ethnicity—influences how we evaluate partisans (Conover 1984; Cramer 2016; Huddy 2013; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Miller et al. 1981). Studies on the effect of place-based social identity have focused on several behaviours, typically far right voting (Cramer 2012; Cramer 2016; Fitzgerald 2018) and discrimination towards migrants or other geographic out-groups (Lyons and Utych 2021; Munis 2022). It has also been studied in the context of Brexit identity (Chan and Kawalerowicz 2021), and attitudes towards the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2005). In all of these cases, there is an underlying assumption—rather than our behaviour towards or regarding these groups, but our attitudes towards them. Chapter 5 will attempt to do this, studying the relationship of attachment to neighbourhood on our attitudes towards partisan in and out-groups. — FINISH

Chapter 6: Candidate preferences

Previous experimental studies of voters' preferences for descriptive localism in candidates have omitted to evaluate the effect of a potentially decisive factor: voters' own place-based identities. In Chapter 6, I address this, embedding a short vignette designed to prime voters' attachment to their neighbourhood in a conjoint asking participants to evaluate political candidates. I also address a second shortcoming in the experimental candidate evaluation literature: the conflating of some candidate localism cues, and a lack of variation in cues. I have secured funding to field the experiment, which I plan on doing so in early 2025.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

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