

# Place or Partisanship? The Conditional Role of Identities on Candidate Support

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## Abstract

Recent work on the influence of social identities reveals that place-based attachments serve as a powerful heuristic when making political assessments. When a politician makes a place-based appeal—such as cuing rural origins—individuals who share that identity more strongly support the candidate. Yet, other important identities—namely, partisanship—are strongly related to place. Here, we attempt to disentangle the unique influence of a place-based identity (and the strength thereof) on candidate support. Additionally, we ask whether shared place can compel supportive behavior, rather than merely increase expressive support. Using a unique survey experiment, we find that those who strongly identify with a place are more willing to donate to the campaign of a shared-place candidate, relative to weaker place identification, but only among co-partisans. We find little evidence that place attachment influences supportive behavior beyond the role of partisanship. Disparate identities—here, place and partisanship—that create cross-pressures can operate in tandem.

## Keywords

social identity, place, rural and urban, candidate support

“Everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things”—*W.R. Tobler*

In recent election cycles, a great deal of ink has been spilled on “Why Republicans Don’t Even Try to Win Cities Anymore” (Badger & Bui, 2016) and “How Democrats Can Win Back Rural Voters” (Dudzinsky & Robinson, 2019). Implicit in these statements is that, despite a well-established link between rural (urban) voters and support for Republican (Democratic) candidates (Scala & Johnson, 2017), geography is not a stand-in for partisanship; Democrats can find support among the rural, and Republicans among the urban. Partisanship and place—though commonly related (Martin & Webster, 2018; McKee, 2008)—are distinct social identities. Just as partisan attachments shape political attitudes and behaviors, so too can place-based attachments. Indeed, place is an important heuristic in evaluations of candidates. As Jacobs and Munis (2018) show, rural voters, for instance, are more supportive of candidates they suspect to be rural based on campaign mailer imagery.

Heretofore, much of the scholarship on the politics of place has focused largely on the role of place-based identification with minor consideration of the strength of identification, or of the identity in a broader set of competing social identities. More specifically, although existing research offers helpful insights into the role of place-based identity (e.g., Jacobs & Munis, 2018), we believe it is important to more fully incorporate place and partisan identities.<sup>1</sup> To be clear, other studies do not entirely ignore partisanship—many include the identification as a control variable. In this

paper, we expand on work like that of Jacobs and Munis and explicitly ask what happens when two important social identities—place and partisanship—create cross-pressures on political evaluations and behavior. Do the positive effects of shared place persist among counter-partisans? Do co-partisans punish candidates with whom they do not share a place? Finally, inasmuch as identities can produce both expressive “cheap talk” (e.g., Lelkes & Westwood, 2017) and more substantive behavioral effects (e.g., Green et al., 2002), we consider whether place-based attachments have behavioral implications.

Based on this research, as well as open questions about the (un)conditional role of place (Jacobs & Munis, 2018; Panagopoulos & Bailey, 2019), we ask three primary questions. First, does the unique role of place persist when considering a behavioral measure of political support? More specifically, will place compel donations to a candidate? Second, does the role of place persist when conditioned by partisanship? Are counter-partisans who share place still willing to support the candidate? Existing research suggests they would. Third, does the *strength* of attachment to a place (as opposed to mere residency) help explain the role of place? Can the forceful influence of partisanship be diminished by strong place attachment?

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As for the final question, the strength of various identities often proves influential beyond the identity itself (see Huddy et al., 2015). This is sensible; as attachments—to a place, a party, or anything—grow, so too should the resulting attitudes and orientations. Furthermore, much of the literature on the politics of place is not particularly interested in physical location, but how place binds us (even if only implicitly; e.g., Scala & Johnson, 2017; Wong, 2010). For instance, even though the American South is frequently treated as monolithic in studies of voting behavior (i.e., researchers often use a dummy variable to denote residence in the South; e.g., see Enders & Armaly, 2019), the reality is far more nuanced. Indeed, geographically nonadjacent subdivisions of the South (e.g., “the Deep South” vs. “the Peripheral South”) prove useful in explaining voting behavior (McKee & Springer, 2015). Inasmuch as we are concerned with place as an identity, it is necessary to consider adherence or devotion to this identity.

We present the results of a unique survey experiment designed to answer these three questions and measure the effects of (the strength of) place-based attachment and partisanship on candidate support. Using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform, we create a behavioral measure of support where survey respondents were led to believe they were donating a portion of their earnings to a fictional candidate running for statewide office. We find that the role of partisanship operates as expected; Republican voters are unwilling to financially support Democratic candidates, and vice versa. Shared place appears to play only a weak role beyond partisanship, especially in the context of a behavioral measure. If shared place mattered beyond partisanship, we would expect both co- and counter-partisans to be more willing to donate to a candidate when they shared a place, relative to not sharing a place. This is not what we find. When conditioning place by partisanship, we see small differences, but not enough to determine that place matters above and beyond partisanship. Specifically, counter-partisans who share place are about as willing to donate as co-partisans who share place (supporting the notion that place matters). However, co-partisans who *do not* share a place are more likely than counter-partisans who share a place to donate, suggesting that partisanship outpaces place in terms of influence.

When moving to the strength of place identification, co-partisans who strongly identify with their place are more willing to donate to a shared-place candidate, relative to those less strongly identified with their place. Thus, there is some evidence that place-attachment matters. However, we also find that the role of partisanship is stronger than of place—co-partisans in both shared and unshared places are about equally as willing to support a candidate, regardless of how strongly they identify. All in all, we find that place identity does relate to candidate support. However, its role should be considered in the context of partisanship.

There are several important implications to our findings. First, previous work finds support for the notion that there are meaningful implications of place-based identity. That is, the effect of place is not merely associative “cheap talk.” Our results do not support such claims. When it comes to behavioral measures, we find a limited unique role of place above and beyond the role of partisanship.

Second, we find that in a world of complex, often connected social identities, the unique role of place-based identity is still open for debate. Individuals possess a multitude of social identities that bear on their attitudes and behavior; increasingly, these disparate identities coalesce in the political realm (Mason & Wronski, 2018). There are still occasions where these competing identities can create cross-pressures that influence political behavior, but one may exacerbate or attenuate the role of the other. This offers scholars interested in social identity—particularly of the place-based variant—insight into how the connections between several social phenomena interact to yield particular attitudes, orientations, and behaviors. Ultimately, we argue that questions of place-based identity must consider the conditioning effects of partisanship.

## The Politics of Place

Generally speaking, place structures how individuals behave (Pred, 1990). Politically, place can connect “the personal to the political” (Conover, 1984), and serves as a contextual and integral aspect to the political process, as many political discussions and behaviors take place in the context of an individual’s neighborhood or community (Berelson & McPhee, 1954; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Lippie & Marschall, 2018). As such, place influences the political decisions individuals make in terms of choosing to participate in politics and choosing to support certain candidates. For example, Key (1946) identifies that residency and proximity are primary factors when individuals determine which candidate to support in an upcoming election. Lewis-Beck and Rice (1983) demonstrate that an individual’s support for a particular candidate is related to how her friends and neighbors vote. Likewise, individuals are likelier to turnout and support a candidate who is from their home county (Panagopoulos et al., 2017).

However, the aforementioned studies pertain primarily to geographic proximity, and presume the effects of psychological attachment to place. We are not interested in geographic proximity, but in how the concept of place—and, in particular, one’s level of psychological attachment to that place—structures and influences political attitudes and behaviors. The construct of place serves as a social identity, wherein people have a “sense of place” or a belonging to a particular place or region (Agnew, 1987). Indeed, one generally has some level of affinity or attachment to her location (Conover, 1984; Elazar, 1966), and this attachment can foster a particular culture, way of life, or set of values and traditions that bear considerable influence over the lives of

the people who live there. Importantly, various features of the political world—such as policies that influence one’s shared geographic community—“activate” this identity (Williams et al., 2010) on which individuals rely when forming political attitudes (Cramer, 2016; Walsh, 2012). More concisely, attachment to a particular place creates an “in-group” and “out-group,” both a prerequisite for and consequence of social identification (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Like all group-based identities, place can provide valuable information for individuals seeking to make political decisions. Just as partisanship—a social identity itself—serves as a useful heuristic in gathering political information (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Green et al., 2002), so too can place.

### Place-Based Identity and Political Behavior

Recent scholarship has explicitly considered the influence of place identity. Jacobs and Munis (2018) show that place-based identity offers valuable information in learning about a political candidate. Individuals from urban and rural areas perceive candidates differently based on which geographic appeals were made in a fictitious political advertisement. Respondents were exposed to a hypothetical political candidate’s ad which features either a city-scape or a rural landscape from the respondent’s state. The candidate stands in front of one of the geographic images with the same language used in both types of the advertisement. Jacobs and Munis find that rural respondents evaluated the “urban candidate” less favorably and found him less able to understand the needs and issues of individuals from rural localities. Generally speaking, Jacobs and Munis demonstrate that place is able to bind voters beyond geographic proximity. While states are large, and like areas may be separated by great distances (i.e., two cities may be far apart), sharing community influences candidate support (Jacobs & Munis, 2018). While Philadelphians and Pittsburghers, for instance, may harbor resentment toward the residents of the opposing city, shared urbanity can indicate to an undecided voter that the candidate shares his values, and thereby influence support. The same is true of shared, but non-adjacent, rurality.

While Jacobs and Munis (2018) reveal that place-based identities—even those that are assumed based on campaign ad imagery—impact political evaluations, one major question persists: Can we disentangle the effects of place from the effects of perceptions of political predispositions *based* on place. Do individuals make assessments based on a candidate’s rurality, or do they merely assume rural candidates are conservative/Republican? As Ahler and Sood (2018) demonstrate, individuals perceptually link place and partisanship. Indeed, pollsters and academics alike have inextricably linked place and politics for decades. One pollster describes mass politics as “two massive colliding forces. One is

*rural*. . . [The other] is. . . *living in New England and the Pacific coast*” (emphasis added; quoted in Fiorina et al., 2005, p. 6).

In light of the perceptual nexus between place and partisanship, individuals may simply perceive a candidate in front of a rural landscape, for instance, to be Republican/conservative, particularly in the absence of any partisan cue. While this perception, in turn, can reasonably yield the effects uncovered in previous research, it leaves open the possibility that place merely alters perceptions of ideology or partisanship, but does not influence evaluations in its own regard. Because the role of partisan attachments on political evaluations is fairly strong (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), considering dueling attachments is necessary to rule out a potentially spurious influence of place, and determine its unique role in generating political evaluations and candidate support. As Panagopoulos and Bailey (2019) demonstrate, preexisting support for a candidate (driven largely by political predispositions) is an important condition for the influence of “localism” on mobilization. Thus, there is specific precedent for the idea that place should be considered only within the context of broader identities. Generally speaking, the robust literature on intersectionality indicates that the constellation of several identities often plays a more critical role in political choices than do those identities, individually (e.g., Hancock, 2007).

We believe that place identity must be considered in tandem with other, perhaps more enduring identity-based predispositions (e.g., partisanship). Additionally, we argue that the strength of place identity will also condition the influence of place. We design our study to disentangle the role of the two identities. We expect that place will have a role in certain circumstances (e.g., *within* shared partisanship), but, on balance, will be largely subsumed by partisanship.

Before proceeding, we wish to make clear that we consider two properties that pertain to place: (1) one’s subjective assessment of the place she lives (i.e., whether it is urban, rural, or something else) and (2) the strength of attachment to that place. The former groups like people together; the latter considers whether one *identifies with* or *feels connected to* that place. We refer to this latter characteristic as one’s place identity. Indeed, the attachment *is* the identity. Consider an individual who relocates from a small town to a large city for work; if this “little fish in a big pond” still feels rural at heart, she should deem the place she lives as urban, but feel little connection to that place. If, by contrast, she immediately adapted to and accepted her new surroundings, she might strongly identify with the place she lives. So, if one does not identify with the place she lives, her place identity is weak. Measuring the identity as the strength of attachment allows us to incorporate individuals who have lived in many places, continue to identify with a place they no longer live, or simply do not identify with their present community (such as Reed’s (1983) “lapsed southerners”). Inasmuch as we consider place an *identity*, we believe capturing the *strength* of

attachment to a place (that is, moving beyond mere residency) is the appropriate way to operationalize the concept.

## Data and Methodology

In order to determine how place and partisanship operate jointly to influence candidate support, we require data whereby both identities are primed. To that end, we surveyed 684 American adults using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in July 2019. While MTurk samples are not representative of the national population, they have desirable properties (Berinsky et al., 2012; Clifford et al., 2015) and are especially useful for experimental designs (Horton et al. 2010). Furthermore, the platform has been utilized in research on place-based identity (Jacobs & Munis, 2018).

Respondents were told that a group called "American Electoral Visions" was conducting the survey. The group was purported to do exploratory research for candidates considering running for statewide office. We use this fictional group in an effort to increase experimental realism; we suspect being contacted by a group appears more natural to the average survey respondent than, for instance, a potential candidate conducting his or her own exploratory research via MTurk.<sup>2</sup> Subjects were asked to enter their zip code, and informed that they would be asked questions about a candidate from their area if such a candidate was associated with American Electoral Visions but would be asked general questions if no candidate from their area was associated. Respondent zip codes played no role in random assignment, or any other aspect of the experimental design.

Again, our goal is to determine how partisanship and place-attachment interact to influence citizen engagement in campaign-related behavior. The first step in assessing place identity was asking a series of questions about where respondents live. First, they were asked if they would describe the place they currently lived as very urban (1), somewhat urban (2), more urban than rural (3), about equal (4), more rural than urban (5), somewhat rural (6), or very rural (7). We dichotomize these responses (1–3 are considered urban and 5–7 rural) to determine one's *Place*, or whether an individual identifies her community as rural or urban.

There are a few things to note about the *Place* variable. First, we could have simply utilized zip code information to determine whether one lived in an urban or rural community. But, we believe the subjective nature of the prompt is important. For some individuals, the place beyond the strip-malls but before the farm-houses is assuredly rural; others might perceive it to be closer to urban. Given the superlative nature of the response choices, two individuals who live in the same area might select opposite sides of the neutral position (i.e., one may select somewhat urban and the other may select somewhat rural). We do not wish to discount one of these respondents. Recall that we are interested in the role of place on candidate support. If one lives in an objectively urban

area, but perceives it to be rural, we suspect she would support the rural candidate (per Jacobs and Munis). Thus, we are interested in her rural identity; her subjective understanding of her place is paramount. Indeed, subjective perceptions of the world often underlie and motivate political behaviors more strongly than the true state of affairs (see Enders & Armaly, 2019).

Second, by the nature of dichotomizing the *Place* measure, it may appear, at first glance, that those who live in the suburbs are omitted. While it is the case that those who select the neutral, or equally rural and urban, category are omitted, this does not necessarily equate to the suburbs. Empirically, few select the middle option (11.93%, compared with 31.52% and 56.55% for rural and urban, respectively). And, theoretically, we believe our point above speaks to the question of the suburbs; suburban respondents who perceive their community to be either rural or urban should not be discounted. To assuage concerns regarding the suburbs, we include information in the Supplemental Appendix that relates one's subjective understanding of their place to an objective classification. To be clear, we do not believe this matters a great deal; indeed, we are concerned, as many other studies of place are, exclusively with *subjective* place. Nevertheless, it is important to show that we do not systematically exclude individuals from certain communities. Indeed, fewer "objective" suburbanites are excluded than "objective" ruralites.

## Measuring Place Identity

Next, we measure place identity, or, more specifically, the strength of attachment to the place identified in the *Place* question above. The strength of various identities is often more influential than the possession or direction of the identities (e.g., Huddy et al., 2015). Mere residency is distinct from attachment; just as one may live in a rural area but not consider the area rural, she may not identify *herself* as particularly rural. To be clear, we are not interested with *which* type of community a particular respondent identifies. We are concerned with the degree to which one identifies with the type of community in which she resides. We believe a strong attachment to a place (i.e., a strong place identity) is more likely to drive behavior than a weak attachment to that identity. But, conversely, if one weakly identifies with her place (or strongly identifies with a different place), we would not expect her to actively support a candidate from her place. The individual who moved to a small rural community from her beloved Brooklyn neighborhood, for instance, is unlikely to immediately support rural candidates as a matter of identity. As such, respondents were asked to indicate how well the following statements described them, on a 5-point scale, from does not describe me to describes me extremely well<sup>3</sup>:

1. I feel emotionally attached to the place I live
2. I feel loyal to the place I live
3. I have loyal obligations to the place I live

4. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave the place I live now

These questions scale nicely (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ; first dimension explains 94% of variance), and the average response to the four items serves as our measure of *Place Identity*. Though some items seem similar, multi-item batteries greatly reduce measurement error (Ansolabehere et al., 2008). The strength of attachment does not appear to vary by place (the average for urban respondents is 2.86 and 2.89 for rural respondents). Republican respondents are slightly more attached than Democratic ones (3.0 and 2.8, respectively), though the difference is substantively minor. There are no differences in attachment across "congruent" versus "incongruent" respondents (e.g., Democrats in urban vs. rural areas). For congruent Democrats, average strength is 2.85 and is 2.81 for "incongruent" respondents (these values are 3.01 and 3.07 for Republicans).

We also note that some survey respondents may have interpreted "place" in different ways. A southerner, for instance, may have had the south in mind when responding instead of considering her city, town, or community more specifically. We do not believe this is problematic in the context of our experiment. As we explain below, we connect individuals' place to the candidate's place. If there was a mismatch (e.g., a respondent considered New England generally instead of a big city, like Boston, specifically) it would merely produce noise biasing results *against* our hypothesized expectations. We further elaborate on this below.

### Experimental Vignette

Upon answering questions about place and partisanship, respondents were randomized into either a control or treatment group. Control group respondents saw no information regarding a candidate (as we were concerned certain demographic characteristics might cue various considerations about partisanship). Treatment group respondents were shown an image of a white male in a suit identified as John Wilson, and told he is considering running for office in their state.<sup>4</sup> We varied two important pieces of information: Wilson's partisanship and where he purportedly grew up. Specifically, respondents read the following vignette, and text in brackets was randomized (or, for the control group, omitted):

John Wilson is [a Democrat/a Republican] considering running for office in your state in the upcoming election.

Mr. Wilson was born and raised [in a small town/large city] in your state and has dedicated his life to serving his community and the people who live there. He supports bringing jobs to the community, policies that create a strong economy, and believes, wholeheartedly, in the American dream.<sup>5</sup>

Describing the candidate as hailing from a "small town" or "large city" may, at first blush, seem incongruent with actual

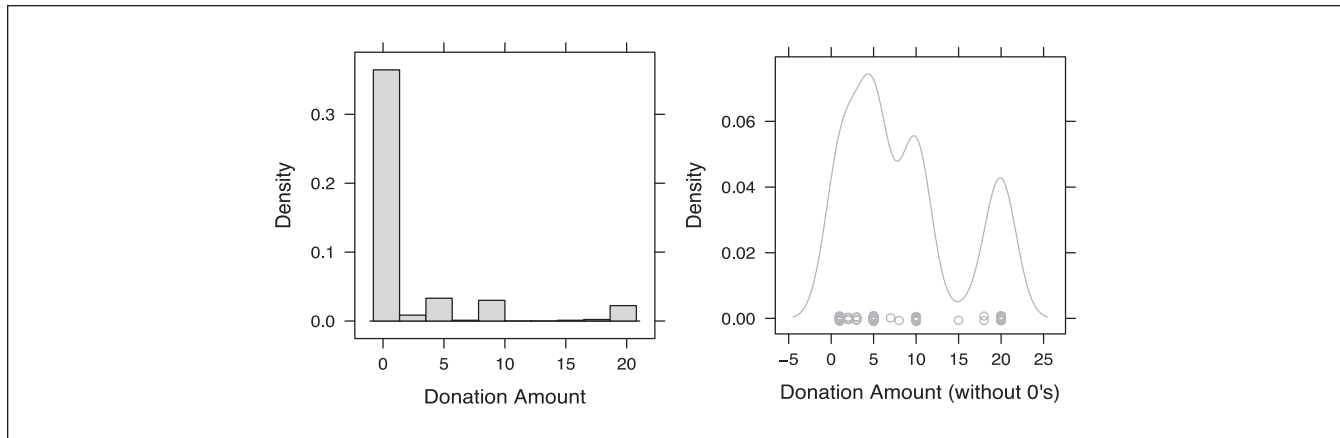
campaign information, where candidates typically identify the name of the town in which they were raised and/or live. Taking such an approach, practically speaking, would be a difficult endeavor for our study, as we had survey respondents from 42 states and a total of over 600 unique zip codes. While we could have selected a large city and small town from each state and referred to them by name in the treatment vignette, we are skeptical that we could accurately estimate the effect of place identity, as there would be nearly 100 separate treatments (each of which would induce some level of error). Furthermore, we believe the "small town/large city" treatment biases results *against* our expectations, offering a conservative test of our hypotheses. If "small town" and "large city" were insufficient to cue the place identity that influences political behavior (see Jacobs & Munis, 2018)—but "Abilene, Texas" and "Houston, Texas," for instance, *could* cue the respective identities—any effect should be attenuated by the more vaguely worded treatment, and we might expect our analyses to yield null results. Additionally, a candidate's rurality/urbanity would typically be less prominent in a larger biography. While this may be true, an individual would likely be exposed to a candidate's place identity repeatedly over the course of a campaign. So, while a longer biography might bury place relative to other information, this would not mimic exposure during actual campaigns. We return to this consideration in the discussion section.

All in all, there is one control group and four treatment groups. Respondents in the control group ( $n = 136$ ) saw no information about Wilson's partisanship or where he grew up (i.e., all text in brackets was omitted). Other respondents were told Wilson is either an urban Democrat, a rural Democrat, an urban Republican, or a rural Republican ( $n = 136, 137, 138,$  and  $137$ , respectively). Below, we compare both across control/treatments, as well as within treatment groups, to thoroughly understand the intersection of place and partisanship.

We are not presently concerned with partisan asymmetries in the degree to which place influences candidate support (though we believe it is an interesting avenue for future research). As such, we combine similarly situated respondents into categories, regardless of partisanship. In total, we consider five categories of respondents: (1) those in the control group, who are given no information about a candidate; (2) those who are co-partisans with Wilson, but do not share a place; (3) co-partisans who share a place; (4) counter-partisans who do not share a place; and (5) counter-partisans who share a place. This indicator variable is termed *Partisan Place*. By the nature of matching a respondent's partisanship with Wilson's, pure Independent respondents ( $n = 86$ ) are omitted from the analysis.

### Measuring Behavioral Support

Finally, subjects are asked how much they would be willing to donate to Wilson's exploratory campaign. Problematically,



**Figure 1.** Donation amount.

simply asking survey respondents how much they are willing to donate to a candidate—be it time, money, or any other resource—is fairly unrealistic, in terms of generalizability. For starters, many citizens do not participate in politics, let alone donate to campaigns (Brady et al., 1995). Moreover, respondents can easily—and greatly—exaggerate their willingness to participate in politics on surveys; indeed, voting is often wildly over-reported on surveys (DeBell et al., 2018). As such, responses to such a survey item may reflect more symbolic attitudes than genuine ones.

In order to secure more genuine responses, we utilized MTurk’s unique Human Intelligence Task (HIT) platform to record a behavioral measure of willingness to donate to a candidate. Before beginning the survey, respondents were told they would receive \$0.20 upon completion of the task. The survey item we use to capture our dependent variable reads:

As you may know, running for public office in this day and age is expensive. Today, we are hoping you can pledge any amount to help Wilson’s exploratory campaign.

For this MTurk HIT, you are receiving \$0.20. We are asking you to donate some of this total to Wilson’s campaign.

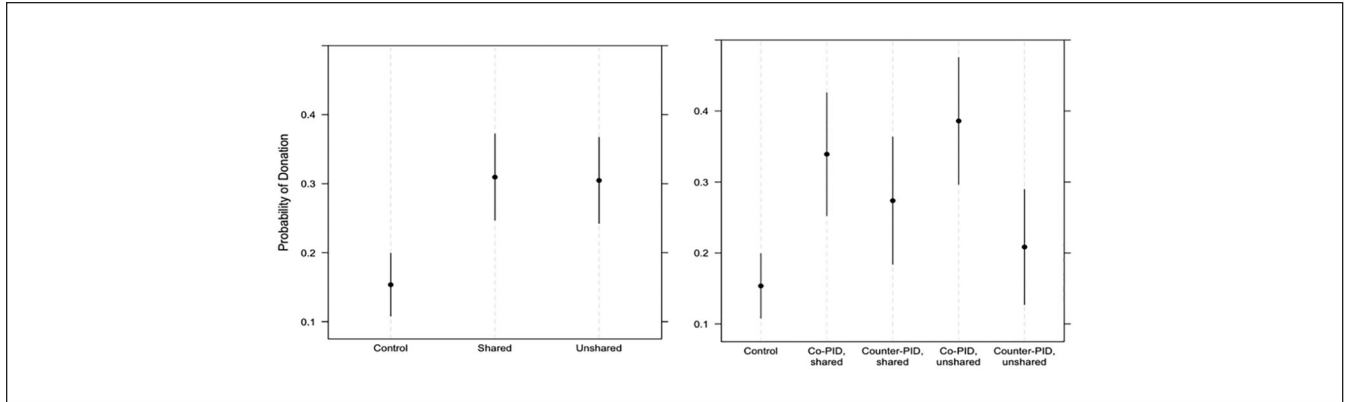
Please enter your pledge amount:

Respondents were then able to enter the amount they wished to pledge.<sup>6</sup> Individuals in the control group—who were not exposed to any candidate information at all—were similarly asked how much they would donate to a political campaign in their area.<sup>7</sup> To be clear, there was some minor deception involved. Respondents believed the amount they entered would be deducted from their overall HIT compensation.<sup>8</sup> Previous research has utilized similar tactics as a behavioral test (Gerber et al., 2016), and “costly” responses are more externally valid than those that are “costless” (DeSante, 2013). Upon completion of the survey, respondents were

informed they would receive the full promised HIT amount. We believe this approach greatly increases the generalizability of our measure; while it is still that case that most citizens are not interested in donating to political campaigns, we designed the request to mimic what an actual request from a politician might look like. That is, the choice (to donate or not) was genuine, and the consequences were (perceived to be) real.

Figure 1 displays the distribution of responses to the donation item. As is to be expected, the modal (and median) donation was 0, or \$0.00. Because this creates difficulties in visually inspecting the data presented in Figure 1, we display the distribution both with, and without, zeros included. The large number of zeros is encouraging, as it seems to offer an actual choice, as opposed to “cheap” response. In other words, concern over the survey item creating a demand effect is mitigated by behavior that would be expected in a real donation situation; thus, we are comfortable treating our survey instrument as reflective of real-life considerations made when donating. Nearly 25% of respondents agreed to donate, and the mean donation amount is 2.06, or just over 2 cents. Respondents seem to cluster around certain intervals; 6.6% of respondents “donated” both 5 and 10 cents, and 4.3% chose 20 cents.

To construct our dependent variable, *Donation*, we dichotomize responses to the donation item, where 0 indicates no donation and 1 indicates a donation of any amount. We operationalize the dependent variable this way for a few reasons. Empirically, the data are, strictly speaking, not continuous. Indeed, donation amount is both left- and right-censored (at 0 and 20, respectively). And, in observation, the data are zero-inflated, but are not counts. So, for the ease of interpretation, we use the more common logistic regression in lieu of a censored regression; nevertheless, estimates from a Tobit regression (which appear in the Supplemental Appendix) provide nearly identical statistical and substantive results.



**Figure 2.** Probability of donation across shared place (left panel) and shared place and partisanship (right panel).

### Specific Expectations

Before proceeding, we believe it is worthwhile to explicitly state the expectations derived from existing literature in the context of our variables of interest. In a sense, our study is exploratory in that we are considering two identities with separate literatures that reveal disparate attitudinal and behavioral consequences. Still, these literatures do support some expectations in certain circumstances. In our first set of analyses, we are considering two factors: partisanship and place. In the absence of any information about candidate partisanship or ideology, place should influence political attitudes and behaviors (Jacobs & Munis, 2018). As such, previous research leads us to believe that place will influence the political choices individuals make. Thus, those who share a place with the candidate will be more willing to donate than those who do not. But, we also argue there is an interaction between these two factors. Thus, we expect there to be heterogeneity across partisanship; partisanship will attenuate the role of place.

In our second set of analyses, we consider a third factor: the strength of an individual's place attachments (i.e., actual identification with their place). We generally expect that the relationship between partisanship and place will depend on the *strength* of attachment to a place. Comparing across the range of place identity, the most attached will behave differently than those who are not so attached. However, to find evidence for an entirely unique role for place (i.e., beyond partisanship), we must ask, for instance, whether the positive effect of shared place persists among counter-partisans. We doubt it will. Thus, we expect that we will find that strength of attachment will matter for similarly situated individuals (e.g., among co-partisans), but will not for individuals in different place-partisanship circumstances.

### Empirical Results

We begin by considering the results of two additive models, one that considers *Donation* across shared and unshared

place, and another that incorporates partisanship. The first is a “naïve” model, where it is assumed that partisanship does not influence the probability of donating. The second assumes there is heterogeneity in the probability of donating across shared partisanship. These results can be found in Figure 2, where closed circles represent the predicted probability of donating and vertical lines are 95% confidence intervals around those estimates.

Beginning with the naïve model in the left panel, we are able to test whether the influence of place uncovered in previous research (e.g., Jacobs & Munis, 2018) persists on behavioral measures of support. We see that both respondents who share a place and those who do not are more likely to donate to Wilson's campaign than those in the control group. And, unshared place respondents are equally as probable to donate as shared place respondents. This, we argue, is because there are many individuals who would still support the candidate due to party. That is, there are rural Democrats who support urban Democrats. Thus, our finding is *inconsistent* with a unique, unconditional effect of place for behavioral measures. Again, we theorize the effect of place is conditional. Indeed, previous studies have not revealed a universal effect of place; Jacobs and Munis (2018) find only rural respondents are influenced by place-based appeals. We wish to uncover what underlies this heterogeneity.

Moving next to the right panel, we consider both partisanship and place to answer our second question: whether the role of place is conditioned by partisanship. We do find the expected heterogeneity across partisanship, and find partial support for the assertion that place uniquely matters. For starters, co-partisans and counter-partisans who share a place behave similarly, which lends some support to the idea that place matters. Indeed, we would expect counter-partisans to donate far less than co-partisans under normal circumstances, but we observe that they donate at about the same probability when they share a place. Only the counter-partisan, unshared place respondents are no more likely than the control group to donate.

However, when comparing co-partisans *across* shared place (i.e., when comparing the second and fourth estimates in the right panel of Figure 2), we see no *additional* effect of place. Co-partisans are always willing to donate more than the control group, and shared and unshared place respondents who are co-partisans are equally as likely to donate. For counter-partisans across shared place (i.e., the third and fifth estimates), the additional effect of place is more nuanced. On the one hand, counter-partisan, shared place respondents are more likely to donate than the control group. On the other hand, such individuals do not seem to donate more than counter-partisan, unshared place respondents (for whom the donation probability is not statistically distinct from the control). Thus, it appears that place does have a unique effect, though its conditionality with partisanship should be considered further.

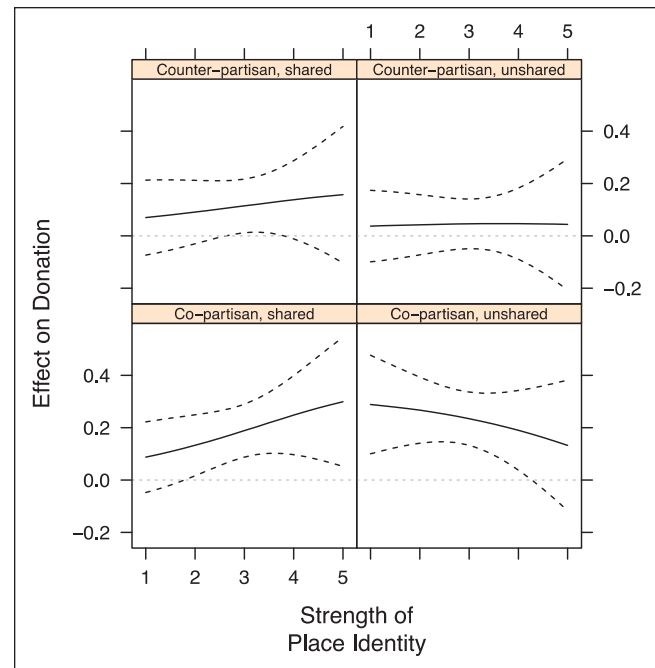
Our results indicate a few important things. First, the unique role of place gets tangled with partisanship. While individuals seem to report greater support for shared place candidates (per extant research), they may fail to put their money where their mouth is if they do not share partisanship as well. We, of course, note that our study is subject to limitations; we do not go as far as to say our results reveal that place plays no role whatsoever. We consider this further in the discussion section. As a result of these findings, we argue that it is crucial to consider the two identities in tandem. We see that party identity and place identity interact to influence behaviors that support a candidate. That is, we do observe variation across partisanship/place.

### The Strength of Place Identity

We suspect that heterogeneity across the *strength* of place-based attachment further conditions the relationship between donation and shared (or unshared) place, when controlling for partisanship. The estimates in Figure 2 only consider individuals whose perceived place matches the candidates' place. They do not account for the attachment an individual feels to her place. So, while we find mixed evidence for the intersection of (un)shared place and party, we think the level of attachment to place may either exacerbate or attenuate these relationships. As such, we move to interactive models to investigate this possibility.

To test our third motivating question—whether strength of place identity matters beyond place identity, alone—*Donation* is regressed onto *Partisan Place*, *Place Identity*, and an interaction thereof.<sup>9</sup> Estimated conditional effects appear in Figure 3.<sup>10</sup> Each panel displays the estimated effect of shared and unshared partisanship and shared and unshared place on likelihood of donation, across the strength of place identity, which ranges from 1 to 5.<sup>11</sup> Dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals around those estimates.

We are interested in two comparisons in Figure 3: *within* each panel and *across* panels. The former can answer how strength of place matters at the individual-level, and for whom place identity matters the most. The latter can answer



**Figure 3.** Effect of partisanship and place on donation, across strength of place identity.

how place matters once partisanship is accounted for. We begin by considering the effect across the range of strength of place identity (i.e., *within* each panel). That is, does the slope increase, decrease, or not change when moving from the weakly identified to the strongly identified?

If the most strongly identified are the most supportive, we should see increased donation willingness across place attachment for shared place. For counter-partisans, in the top two panels, we see no change in the effect of shared place identity on donation. One entirely unattached to place is equally as likely to donate as one very attached, irrespective of whether they share that place with the candidate. If place was a stronger identity than partisanship, we might see a positive slope for counter-partisan, shared place individuals such that a rural Republican may still support a rural Democrat because of their shared place (and the subjects' attachment to it). This is not what we see. Thus, in the context of counter-partisans, strength of identity does not seem to have an effect.

Moving to the bottom two panels, where we display the conditional effects for co-partisans, we observe countervailing effects across the range of strength identity. For those who share place (left panel), the influence of place identity is not significant for those who weakly identify. For instance, a rural Democrat who is not particularly attached to her rural place does not seem to care if the Democratic candidate is rural or urban; that information does not factor into her decision to support the candidate. An individual who strongly identifies as rural, however, would be more likely to donate to a co-partisan candidate who shares their place identity. That is, the effect of shared place and partisanship on donation is the strongest for those who are most attached.



The opposite is true among those who did not share a place with candidate Wilson. In the lower right panel, we see that the weakly identified are likely to donate to a candidate who does not share their place; this effect decreases across strength of identity, such that the partisanship/place (mis)match does not have an effect on donation. We do not view this as evidence that a weakly urban Democrat, for example, is the most supportive of a rural Democratic candidate or would fail to support an urban Democratic candidate. Indeed, evidence presented in Figure 2 above refutes that. Instead, we argue this merely suggests the weakly urban individual does not seem to care about the candidate's urbanity/rurality; indeed, as they are only weakly identified, they likely do not consider their own urbanity/rurality to a great degree. Thus, we do possess evidence that place, conditioned by strength of attachment, does impact behavioral support (among co-partisans).

However, this paints an incomplete picture of the relationship between these variables. Because we see some evidence that the most strongly place-attached individuals behave differently than their less attached counterparts, we must ask whether these individuals are so strongly attached to place as to have a role above and beyond partisanship. If not among the most strongly identified, for whom, then, would place matter above partisanship? To answer this question, we consider when place is shared, but partisanship varies. That is, we compare the upper left panel to the lower left panel.

If we possessed evidence for a unique role of place, we would expect identical patterns in both of the leftmost panels. That is, a strongly rural Republican would be willing to support both rural Republicans and rural Democrats; she would behave just the same as a strongly rural Democrat. This is not what Figure 3 shows. Instead, as the upper left panel indicates, even the strongly rural Republican is not willing to support the rural Democrat. Their shared rurality holds no sway on support (again, even for the most strongly rural individuals).

Thus, place does not appear to matter above and beyond partisanship. We do find that the strength of place matters *within* partisanship. Those who strongly identify with their place are the most supportive of co-partisan candidates with whom they share a place. However, this is hardly a ringing endorsement for the power of place identity.

## Discussion

When it comes to examining identities in American politics, scholars and pundits alike often discuss partisan, ideological, racial, religious, and other identities and their influence on political behavior. In this paper, we set out to understand the role place-based attachments play in the broader context of sociopolitical identities. We find that citizens who have a strong sense of place identity seem to be more willing to donate to a political campaign when they share a geographic background with the candidate, but only when they also share partisanship. This is consistent with other work showing that

the effect of place is conditional upon preexisting evaluations (Panagopoulos & Bailey, 2019).

We add two key components to the discussion of geography and political behavior. First, while we are far from the first to consider place an identity (e.g., Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Jacobs & Munis, 2018; Wong, 2010), we explicitly consider it in the context of other, more prominent identities. Often, the identities that prove important in shaping political choices—like partisanship, ideology, race, and religion—tend to point in the same direction: vote for Candidate A over Candidate B, for instance. In a political landscape where identities are increasingly aligned (Levendusky, 2010), fewer identities will conflict with one another. As the evidence here suggests, this may be true for place. Overall, our findings indicate that geographic identities are a factor in evaluations of political candidates, but (a) may be less influential in terms of behavior, rather than attitudes and (b) are attenuated by partisanship.

Second, we also consider the strength of place identity. Identifying a place as urban or rural is not the same as identifying *with* an urban or rural place. There are myriad reasons one may live in a particular location—employment, school, family considerations, or staying close to home—that may not covary with attachments to that place. We find that the strength of the identity may be useful to consider, and may (partially) shape candidate support.

Our findings leave one pressing question open: To which candidates do our results apply? On the one hand, the very nature of geographic representation means most candidates for political office will be “local,” or at least perceived to be. Some candidates—like for president—certainly are not local. So, our results may generalize only to certain types of candidates. Still, this leaves room for a broad swath of offices and candidates (e.g., those running for statewide office or candidates for the House of Representatives in areas that combine rural and urban communities). Nevertheless, it is the *perceived* connection between a candidate and identity that is paramount. So, on the other hand, our results may generalize beyond these types of candidates.

Our research does come with a few limitations. One, noted in more detail above, is that we ask respondents to donate to a political campaign, an understandably uncommon action for the mass public. Nevertheless, we feel that survey item is able to directly assess the influence of the respondent's geographic identity in their assessments and support of political candidates. Moreover, we display the results of an experiment where all treatment subjects were exposed to campaign information. This, of course, is unlikely. As such, it is unclear the extent to which individuals would actually reach conclusions about how rural or urban a particular candidate is. Still, we believe we provide useful information on how individuals will utilize that information, should they receive it.

Finally, we recognize that our study is insufficiently powered to investigate all relationships that are potentially interesting when it comes to the intersection of partisanship and

place identity. We cannot, for instance, determine if there are differences between ruralites and urbanites, even among the strongly identified, in willingness to support candidates. Likewise, we cannot accurately assess partisan asymmetries in the use of place as an identity, should they exist. Nor can we determine if individuals who are “incongruent” in their identities (e.g., an urban Republican or rural Democrat) behave differently than “congruent” respondents. We believe these are areas that may be fruitful for future research.

### Author’s Note

Daniel Fudge is now affiliated with Tulsa Community College Tulsa, OK, USA.

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### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### Notes

1. Due to the “ideological innocence” of many Americans (Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017), we focus exclusively on partisanship as the conditioning identity in this paper.
2. “Turkers” often see two sets of survey descriptions, one on the MTurk platform when they select the task, and another on whatever external survey platform (e.g., Qualtrics) the surveyor utilizes. Often, researchers will reveal the survey is academic in nature in the MTurk descriptions. We purposely use vague language on MTurk in an effort to increase the belief among subjects that they are actually taking a survey for a group conducting exploratory research. Specifically, we recruit subjects by stating, “We are conducting a survey about politics and campaigns.”
3. These questions were adapted from Hildreth and Anderson (2018).
4. The photograph appears in the Supplemental Appendix.
5. There is a slight incongruence between the way we measure place and the cue given in the treatment vignette. We measure place using a very urban-very rural scale, but suggest Wilson is from a small town or large city. First and foremost, information in the Supplemental Appendix shows that the results are substantively similar when using the urban-rural operationalization of place or an alternate version that asks about whether one’s place is best described as open country, small city, large city, etc. Still, we believe the small town/large city distinction sufficiently cues the identity associated with the place recorded using the very urban-very rural scale. There

are two additional reasons for this choice. First, we record place in keeping with the norms of research on place-based identity (e.g., Jacobs & Munis, 2018). Second, we feel a treatment vignette that suggested Wilson was from a rural or urban community would appear unnatural. We elaborate on additional reasons for our choice in the Supplemental Appendix.

6. Responses above \$0.20—a total of six respondents—were excluded from the analysis.
7. We are confident that differences between survey items for the treatment groups and control group do not alone contribute to the differences in donation amount we demonstrate below. Members of both groups donate in similar amounts, such that a difference in means test yields null results ( $p = .119$ ) between the two groups. As such, we are certain the effects demonstrated below are a product of connection with place and partisanship.
8. We did not reveal the mechanism by which this would occur (indeed, we are uncertain if this would be possible using MTurk). Nevertheless, respondents were led to believe the choice to donate was genuine until debriefing.
9. A table containing logistic regression estimates appears in the Supplemental Appendix. To be clear, this model does not contain a triple interaction; *Partisan Place* is an indicator variable that combines partisanship and place.
10. The distributions of *Place Identity* for each value of *Partisan Place* are not statistically different, per Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. See Supplemental Appendix for figure showing distributions.
11. More specifically, estimates represent the discrete change relative to sharing neither partisanship nor place (i.e., relative to the control).

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