

The parliamentary candidate as persuader: Evidence from randomized candidate-voter interactions

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Abstract

Despite a renewed focus on electoral persuasion and principal-agent problems in ground campaigns, the role of parliamentary candidates in persuading voters has received little attention. Candidates should be effective persuaders because they can control the message, and persuasion is a key skill required in being selected as a candidate. Nevertheless, robust causal evidence on parliamentary candidates' abilities to influence opinion formation is rare. Drawing on two randomized field experiments, a telephone survey, and an extensive panel dataset of individual voting intentions collected by the UK Labour Party, I show that introduction letters and personal meetings with a parliamentary candidate affected voting intentions. Initially, one in ten voters switched their voting preferences in the desired direction after interacting with the candidate. Effects persisted for up to six months, but decayed over time. This study provides new insights into the short- and long-term effects of candidate-voter interactions during a general election campaign.

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Introduction

Despite a renewed focus on electoral persuasion (Kalla and Broockman, 2018) and principal-agent problems in ground campaigns (Enos and Hersh, 2015), the role of parliamentary candidates in persuading voters has received little attention beyond low salience races (Arceneaux, 2007; Cantoni and Pons, 2017; Jäger, 2018; Kendall, Nannicini and Trebi, 2015; Potter and Gray, 2008), and inter-party primaries (Loewen and Rubenson, 2011; Shaw, Green, Gimpel, and Gerber, 2012). This is despite the fact that in several countries parliamentary candidates can directly interact with a potentially decisive share of the local electorate. For example, in the 2017 UK general election, 32 parliamentary seats were decided within less than 500 votes, and 10 were decided within less than 100 votes (Parliament, 2017). In this paper I lay out the theoretical argument for why candidates should be effective persuaders, and I provide empirical evidence based on two randomized field experiments, showing that a parliamentary candidate in a major Western democracy, the United Kingdom, was able to change voting intentions, that these changes lasted for several months, and decayed over time.

Previous field experiments and natural experiments show that canvassing involving local candidates in low-salience elections is effective at building support (Arceneaux, 2007; Cantoni and Pons, 2017; Jäger, 2018; Kendall et al., 2015; Potter and Gray, 2008), and that, between elections, legislators and public officials engage in persuasive communication with their constituents, sometimes effectively (Butler and Broockman, 2017; Minozzi, Neblo, Esterling and Lazer, 2015), and at other times ineffectively (Butler and Hassell, 2018). However, candidate-voter persuasion should be more difficult during high salience elections due to the abundance of partisan cues and two-sided messaging (Kalla and Broockman, 2018). As Kalla and Broockman (2018, 148) summarize, “a systematic meta-analysis of 40 field experiments estimates an average effect of zero in general elections”. At the same time, Kalla and Broockman (2018, 162) explicitly mention that an “exception may be cases in which the candidate herself does the outreach and persuasion”. In this study I argue that parliamentary candidates should be more effective communicators because good communicators are more likely to be selected as candidates in selection meetings or primaries. Moreover, candidates have an important personal incentive, election to

parliament, which should positively affect the effort they employ to persuade constituents. Finally, candidates are not subject to the principal-agent problem outlined by Enos and Hersh (2015) since they directly control the message that they want to deliver.

I combine two randomized field experiments conducted in collaboration with a first-time parliamentary candidate, a telephone survey, and a unique panel dataset of individual voting intentions collected by party canvassers between 2002 and May 2015 to show that personalised interactions between a local parliamentary candidate and voters affected voting intentions during a general election campaign. Labour parliamentary hopeful Rowenna Davis contacted a sample of voters with hand-written introduction letters 12 month prior, and another sample with introduction letters or on the door-step 10 months before election day. The latter effort was also replicated by campaign volunteers. I measure voting intentions repeatedly and unintrusively using canvassing interviews, a new means of leveraging the existing data collection routines of ongoing election campaigns for the scientific study of political persuasion. To validate and supplement these data, I use a non-party affiliated telephone survey administered on the same sample. The unusually long time series of recorded individual-level voting preferences allows me to identify the long-term effects of persuasion efforts on voting intentions throughout the entire general election campaign leading up to election day.

I show that the candidate was initially successful at influencing voters, both via letter and in-person. Effects on voting intentions amount to around 10 percentage-points, and lasted for several months, while campaign volunteers were unsuccessful at persuading voters. However, consistent with earlier studies of political persuasion in high-stakes elections, persuasion effects decayed over time. This paper contributes to our theoretical and empirical understanding of the candidate's role as a political persuader while running for office, and illustrates both the promises and constraints of this role.

The candidate as persuader

It is no surprise that candidates in battleground seats believe that “In a really marginal seat like this - a one to one conversation could make all the difference” (Modell, 2017). As former Conservative MP and British Prime Minister Theresa May's chief of staff Gavin

Barwell confirms, “If I was going to maximize my personal vote [...] I needed as many of my constituents as possible to get to know me as a person” (Barwell, 2016). But can candidates interact with a large enough number of voters in high salience elections to potentially affect election outcomes, or are these interactions ultimately inconsequential to the outcome of a general election? In majoritarian systems, elections are decided in a number of marginal seats or swing districts. In marginal seats, candidates directly interact with a potentially decisive share of the local electorate. In the 2017 UK General Election, 32 parliamentary seats were decided within less than 500 votes, and 10 were decided within less than 100 votes (Parliament, 2017). Given that the Conservative Party fell short of a majority by 10 seats, in some countries, candidate-voter interactions can really make a difference between a party’s chances of winning or losing control of government. Moreover, if interactions are consequential, they are likely to have important network effects, not only reaching the individuals the candidate speaks to directly, but also their household members and friends (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1966; Rolfe, 2012; Sinclair, 2012).

A focus on candidates reflects the “personalisation of politics” in majoritarian systems such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1984; Zittel, 2015). Personal interactions may both be able to increase the “personal vote” for the candidate (Cain et al., 1984; Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1987), and serve to promote the party the candidate is affiliated with (Karlsen and Skogerbø, 2015). Research also suggests that local incumbents matter in mixed systems such as Germany (Hainmueller and Kern, 2008) and New Zealand (Karp, 2009). Based on the results of an online survey experiment, where they manipulate the characteristics of Canadian candidates, Roy and Alcantara (2015, 196) argue that “ a strong local candidate can yield, on average, a 10-percentage point bump at the polls”. A strong candidate is defined as well-educated, with a strong professional background, and prior political experience, for instance at the local level (Galasso and Nannicini, 2011; Roy and Alcantara, 2015). Roy and Alcantara (2015) add involvement in the community as a desirable attribute.

Persuasion based on candidate qualities

Persuasion is a “change in political attitude or preference that can be causally attributed to the intentional, but non-coercive, effort of a political actor” (McGraw and Hubbard,

1996; Mutz, Schniderman and Brody, 1996; Perloff, 2003).¹ It therefore “involves the transmission of a message” (Perloff, 2003, 11). Political persuasion is hence based on an interaction between the candidate and the voter, and reasons for why persuasive messages are effective can be related to the candidate, her skill and message, and to how voters receive, perceive and internalise the message (Cain et al., 1987). In what follows I will address both sides to this interaction between candidate and voter.

When attempting to persuade voters, candidates can choose policy-based appeals, valence-based messages, or a combination of both (Green and Jennings, 2017). Persuasion attempts based on valence usually focus on candidate quality, effort, and services that a candidate can provide to voters (Cain et al., 1984; Green and Jennings, 2017). Candidates should be more likely to emphasize valence-based appeals in marginal seats since policy-differences between candidates are smaller (Buttice and Milazzo, 2011). Moreover, when trying to persuade supporters of rival parties, focusing on positional issues might backfire because the candidate might hold positions that differ from voters’ positions (Kendall et al., 2015). Loewen and Rubenson (2011) show that, even in party primaries, policy positions outside the mainstream can have negative effects. Moreover, studies have shown that vague messages are more effective at appealing to voters than unambiguous, policy-based messages (Enos and Hersh, 2015; Tomz and Houweling, 2009). Hence, when pitching to voters of rival parties, candidates should emphasize valence-based qualities. Consistent with this reasoning, Kendall et al. (2015) show that valence-based messages were effective at influencing vote intentions in an Italian mayoral election, while ideology-based messages were not.

Candidates are better persuaders

There are good theoretical reasons to assume that candidates should be effective at persuading voters, even in the challenging circumstances of a general election. First, Enos and Hersh (2015) argue that candidates have problems controlling the delivery of a message via party activists and campaign volunteers, resulting in a principal - agent problem. Campaign volunteers might stray from the desired message and talk about pet-issues. Moreover, they have a strong preference for homophily (Nall, Schneer and

¹The message neither needs to be sophisticated, nor reasonable (Perloff, 2003).

Carpenter, 2017), which complicates reaching out to persuadable voters. Hence, cutting out the intermediary should allow candidates to deliver the message, which they think is ideally suited to winning over voters, to the audience of their choice (Enos and Hersh, 2015).

Second, candidates of major political parties are office-seeking and have larger private incentives to persuade voters than party members and campaign volunteers (Aldrich, 2006). There is increasing empirical evidence that activists are actually not particularly motivated to canvass voters. They take inefficient paths between houses (Nall et al., 2017), and are prone to free-ride on the effort of others (Hensel, Hermle, Rink and Roth, 2018). Since they have a personal stake in the outcome of the election, and invested personal time and often money, candidates should put more effort into ensuring that a message is delivered properly, care more about persuasion outcomes, and therefore about the quality of a conversation than a campaign worker or party volunteer. Moreover, also when it comes to quantity, they should put more effort into meeting their conversation targets than campaign volunteers.

Finally, persuading others is a key skill required for becoming a candidate in the first place. As Allen and Cutts (2018) show, MPs are more politically ambitious than party members, and political ambition is correlated with personality traits such as extraversion and openness to experience, characteristics, which should be beneficial for persuasion. This is definitely the case for candidates in the United Kingdom who have to canvass support among local party members and win a competitive selection meeting in order to run for parliament. We know that candidates in marginal seats are of particularly high quality compared to candidates in safe seats (Galasso and Nannicini, 2011). We should hence see a selection of good persuaders into the role of parliamentary candidates, and particularly into marginal seats. All these reasons suggest that parliamentary candidates should be effective persuaders.

Evidence from local elections shows that this confidence is warranted. Cantoni and Pons (2017) find that candidates in Italian local elections are able to increase their vote shares, although mostly at the expense of co-partisans. Moreover, Jäger (2018) uses a unique quasi-experiment in Northern Germany to show that in an ideal context, a one-sided campaign in special election, persuasion effects can last for years. Arceneaux (2007) finds that door-to-door canvassing had strong effects on voting preference in a Democratic

primary for a county commissioner seat. Finally, Barton, Castillo and Petrie (2014) provide evidence that in a US county election, candidate door-to-door visits had positive effects on voting intentions. All of these studies emphasize the “low-salience nature of the electoral environment” (Arceneaux, 2007, 48), which should be beneficial for large effects to materialise, and to endure (Jäger, 2018). Moreover, a second type of evidence comes from candidate appearances at campaign rallies. Studies show that randomly assigned appearances by national or state-wide candidates can affect voting intentions (Fujiwara and Wantchekon, 2013; Shaw and Gimpel, 2012; Wantchekon, 2003).

Voters’ role in interacting with candidates

Candidate-voter interactions can provide new, useful information to voters, particularly about candidate quality (Cain et al., 1987; Gerber and Green, 1998). This information can either be transmitted via verbal content or via non-verbal heuristics and signals (Perloff, 2003; Potter and Gray, 2008). As Enos and Hersh (2015) argue, candidates are well aware that voters use decision-heuristics to form voting decision. One such heuristic is signalling effort, for instance by investing the time to personally reach out to voters (Potter and Gray, 2008). Voters might feel flattered that the candidate makes an effort to speak to them, and perceive that they are important to the candidate.

In order for voters to process new information, they need to perceive this information in the first place. There is disagreement about the extent to which partisan cues increase individuals’ resistance to new information. One literature argues that, in high-salience elections, partisans should resist campaign communication if it is associated with a rival party (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes., 1960; Iyengar and Simon, 2002; Zaller, 1992). If this was the case, supporters of rival parties should not update their priors in response to interactions with the candidate.

Others maintain that the “perceptual screen” is incomplete (Fiorina, 1981), and are “sceptical of the notion that partisans ignore or reinterpret discordant information” (Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2002, 7). Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen (2012) show that a significant share of partisans like candidates from other parties. The fact that party and candidate preferences do not always align has both been documented in the case of US Presidential candidates (Lavine et al., 2012) and for local constituency candidates

(Blais and Daoust, 2017). Indeed, there is mixed evidence on whether partisans refuse to receive, and update their candidate evaluations, and to what extent these evaluations are traded-off against other important considerations and identities, such as long-standing partisan attachments. As Gerber and Green (1998) show, subjects can both hold strong partisan preferences, and update these preferences if they receive new, useful information. More recently, Coppock (forthcoming) and Coppock, Leeper and Mullinix (2018) have shown that there is little systematic heterogeneity in how subjects respond to persuasive messages in survey experiments. In specific relation to candidates, Roy and Alcantara (2015) finds that “partisanship is a strong, albeit not impenetrable, deterrent to candidate effects” in survey experiments.

A typical first time candidate in a marginal seat

By studying the dynamics of candidate-voter interactions in detail within the geographical boundaries of a specific locality, this study applies a similar research strategy as some of the best-known classics of the opinion formation literature (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954*a*; Holbrook and McClurg, 2005; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). The study took place in the Southampton Itchen parliamentary constituency, a Labour-Conservative marginal seat in the South of England. Southampton Itchen is one of two constituencies located in the port city. Until the 2015 general election, Southampton Itchen was represented by retiring former Labour cabinet minister John Denham. In 2010 Labour won the seat by 192 votes, while the Conservatives won in 2017 by a mere 31 votes. In the 2015 general election, Southampton Itchen was a key target seat for the Conservative Party, which they won on an unexpected national swing against Labour, by a margin of 5.2 percentage points. It is therefore no overstatement to say that candidate-voter interactions can really have an effect on the outcome of the election in ultra marginal seats such as Southampton Itchen.

The randomly assigned candidate-voter interactions took place one year before the election in April and May 2014. In the United Kingdom, general election campaigns are officially divided into two periods, the “long-campaign”, and the “short-campaign”, which starts when the Prime Minister calls the election and during which Parliament is suspended. While the Prime Minister and Ministers dedicate themselves full-time to campaigning only during the short campaign, local campaigns in constituencies start early, often more

than one year before the election (Cutts, Johnston, Pattie and Fisher, 2012). Nominating candidates as early as two years before the election is a more recent phenomenon, but the belief that early campaigning is an effective strategy, is older. As Johnston and Stuart (2002, 9) write in their report on the 2001 UK General Election “part of Labour’s strategy for winning a second full term of government at the 2001 general election in the UK involved encouraging its MPs, especially those holding marginal seats, to spend considerable time in their constituencies in the preceding years, contacting voters and promoting the party’s cause.”

Davis was a typical first time Labour parliamentary candidate. 33% of Labour candidates, and 41% of newly elected Labour MPs were, like Davis, younger than 40 years (Lamprinakou, Morucci, Campbell and van Heerde-Hudson, 2017). 52% of Labour candidates in marginal seats were women (van Heerde-Hudson, 2015). Moreover, like Davis, a large majority of candidates and MPs of all parties were university educated, and a large share had a background in a politics-related field, journalism in Davis’ case (Lamprinakou et al., 2017). Overall, Labour candidate Davis, a former journalist and councillor, was seen as a strong candidate to succeed Denham and was tied or leading in constituency polls throughout most of the campaign (Ashcroft, 2014).

Using canvassing data for in-cycle experimentation

Researchers face specific challenges when attempting to identify the effects of campaign contact on voting intentions in real-world elections. Persuasion is more difficult to study than mobilization (Nickerson, Friedrichs and King, 2006). While turnout records are public and easily accessible in the United States and in Britain, vote choice, of course, is secret. This poses multiple challenges to campaigns and researchers alike. First, they either need to rely on self-reports or aggregate data. When relying on individual-level data, researchers struggle with the twin challenges of low response rates to post-treatment surveys and the high costs of conducting such surveys. It is well-known that response rates to telephone surveys are in decline. Online panel surveys in this regard provide some help. They are a more cost-effective means of studying persuasion at the individual level (Broockman, Kalla and Sekhon, forthcoming), but equally prone to generalizability

challenges. Aggregate data potentially allow researchers to measure vote shares without non-response bias (Pons, forthcoming), but also have an important drawback when studying the duration of persuasion effects. Measuring vote shares at the polling station level naturally limits the application of this approach because it only allows for outcome measurement once during the same election cycle. This limitation is also of importance to campaigns that would like to use experiments to adjust their campaign tactics during the election cycle (Loewen, Rubenson and Wantchekon, 2010).

By introducing and validating a voting intention measure based on canvassing interviews, this paper demonstrates that ‘embedded’ persuasion experiments can be conducted at low cost and during the election cycle. Canvassing data is self-reported voting intention data collected by party volunteers in door-to-door visits or phone conversations, mainly for the purpose of targeted GOTV. While canvassing data has been used in field experiments as a pre-treatment covariate (Foos and de Rooij, 2017; Foos and John, 2018), this paper is the first to employ it as an outcome variable. In addition to its low monetary costs to the researcher, the unobtrusive nature of the data generation process has unique advantages: In marginal constituencies, canvassing data is available for a large share of constituents, and is updated every time a campaign succeeds at contacting a constituent. British voters are used to volunteering their voting intentions to canvassers affiliated with political parties. It is widely known that political parties in the UK use canvassing data to target their GOTV efforts (Anstead, 2017). As Barwell writes, “Canvassing may look like door-to-door selling, but in fact it’s opinion research. We don’t knock on people’s doors to persuade them to vote Conservative. We do it to get accurate information about how people are likely to vote” (Barwell, 2016, chapter 6). Thanks to standardized reporting procedures coordinated by party headquarters, the data is comparable across constituencies within parties, and to a lesser extent across parties that follow similar reporting procedures, such as the UK Labour Party and the UK Conservative Party. Canvassing data is usually stored in the party’s targeting database that is updated whenever a volunteer contacts a specific household. In competitive marginal seats such as Southampton Itchen, contact rates with eligible voters are high, and voting intentions are available for a large proportion of the local electorate, often for multiple election cycles.

I rely on a unique dataset of time-stamped voting intentions collected by canvassers in

the Southampton Itchen parliamentary constituency between May 2002 and 7 May 2015, the day of the 2015 UK General Election. The complete, anonymised dataset includes 135'203 records of individuals' voting intentions during this period. The data is best described as an unbalanced panel, meaning that some individuals are observed repeatedly, while others drop in and out of the panel, for instance because they move away, or they become eligible to vote. The data on voting intentions is supplemented with official turnout records from the public register, for the period between 2010 and 2013. Finally, I match these data to treatment assignment via a unique person and household number.

Table 1: Correlation between Labour vote intention in year t (*rows*) and Labour vote intention in year $t+n$ (*columns*)

t	$t+n$				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
2009	.75 (723)	.74 (717)	.71 (889)	.69 (294)	.64 (555)
2010		.76 (3723)	.77 (4649)	.71 (1364)	.69 (3046)
2011			.81 (4651)	.81 (1407)	.73 (2962)
2012				.86 (2362)	.80 (4594)
2013					.82 (1730)

Note: polychoric correlation coefficients. All results are significant with $p < 0.001$. N in parentheses.

Table 1 assesses the reliability of the data by looking at the polychoric correlations between reported Labour voting intentions as measured in year t and Labour voting intentions in successive years at $t+n$. As shown in Table 1 correlations between successive election cycles are strong, ranging from .75 between 2009 and 2010, to .86 between 2012 and 2013. As one would expect, correlations get weaker with time, but remain strong throughout. The correlation between Labour voting intentions in 2009 and Labour voting intentions in 2014 is .64.

Table 2 compares respondents and non-respondents to Labour canvassing and to a non-affiliated telephone survey on pre-treatment voting intentions and turnout in the years pre-dating the experiment. Since the experimental sample targeted mainly supporters of rival parties, registered Labour voting intentions in both the telephone and the canvassing samples are relatively low. As Table 2 shows, canvassing interviews are more likely to sample subjects who, in previous election cycles, were more sympathetic to the Labour Party. The difference to non-respondents, on average, is around 15 percentage-points.

Table 2: Attributes of Respondents and Non-Respondents

	Telephone Survey		Canvassing Interviews	
	Respondents	Non-Respondents	Respondents	Non-Respondents
Labour 2014	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	0.8%
Labour 2013	0.9%	1.2%	4.5%	1.0%
Labour 2012	5.5%	4.3%	11.6%	3.6%
Labour 2011	5.5%	5.3%	13.8%	4.1%
Labour 2010	7.3%	8.0%	13.2%	4.9%
Turnout 2013 LE	25.5%	18.7%	24.2%	11.8%
Turnout 2012 LE	33.6%	30.8%	36.8%	21.4%
Turnout 2010 GE	80.9%	74.1%	85.1%	53.8%
N	110	487	818	617

Note: LE = Local Election, GE = General Election. Experimental sample excludes Labour voters. Canvassing sample includes household members.

This is not the case with the telephone survey, where respondents are equally likely to have supported Labour in the past as non-respondents. These numbers suggest that, unsurprisingly, campaigns behave strategically in relation to who they interview. Both Labour canvassers and telephone interviewers were more likely to collect outcome data from subjects who are more politically engaged. Based on turnout in prior local and national elections, respondents to the canvassing survey were between 12 (2013 local election) and 31 percentage-points (2010 General Election) more likely to vote than non-respondents. The same pattern can be observed in the telephone survey, however, differences are not as large.

Compared to online panels, canvassing data is more likely to oversample subjects who are unrepresentative of the larger electorate in relation to their voting intentions, and they are equally likely to oversample subjects who are more politically engaged (Broockman et al., forthcoming, 46).² While relying on canvassing interviews therefore comes with limitations in relation to the generalizability of the results to the entire population of eligible voters, the internal validity of the experiment remains unaffected. Following Bailey, Hopkins and Rogers (2016), differential attrition tests using randomization inference (Gerber and Green, 2012) show that in both experiments, treatment assignment does not significantly predict whether voting intention data will be observed or unobserved following treatment.³

²For comparison, the method proposed by Broockman et al. (forthcoming) resulted in an experimental sample, where turnout was 20 percentage-points higher among respondents than among non-respondents in the 2014 US midterm election, and 11 percentage-points higher in the 2012 US Presidential election.

³See Figures A.5 and A.6 in the Supporting Information.

Finally, I compare post-treatment voting intentions as recorded by party canvassers to post-treatment voting intentions as recorded in the non-party affiliated telephone survey. Overlapping canvassing and telephone data is available for a total of 100 subjects that were part of the first experiment. Out of 100 subjects, 80% were classified as belonging to the same category (Labour or not Labour) using these two different methods of outcome data collection. Importantly, there is no differential misclassification. 81% of subjects were classified as belonging to the same category in the treatment group, and 79% of subjects were classified as belonging to the same category in the control group. This difference is substantively small, and not statistically significant. Assuming that respondents had no incentive to answer untruthfully to non-partisan interviewers, after having been contacted, subjects in the treatment group were no more likely than subjects in the control group to misstate their voting intentions. Differential misreporting as a function of treatment is therefore very unlikely.

Experimental Design

The aim of both experiments was to test whether the parliamentary candidate, Rowenna Davis, was able to persuade voters who supported parties other than Labour (experiment 1) as well as undecided voters (experiment 2) using letters and face-to-face contact.⁴ The target samples for both experiments were determined in collaboration with the candidate and her campaign team.

Experiment 1: Hand-written letters

The first experiment aimed at persuading voters of the major rival party, the UK Conservative Party, and voters of smaller parties, particularly of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), the Liberal Democrats (LibDem), and the Green Party to switch their support to Labour. The original experimental design had two stages. In the first stage subjects who were on record to support a party other than Labour were randomly assigned to receive a hand-written letter from the Labour candidate introducing herself and offering to meet the constituent for tea, or to control (no letter). The letter was accompanied by a business

⁴The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Sociology at the University of Oxford (DREC) under Reference Number 2014_03_03_R1_C1A.

card with her contact information. The second stage consisted of a meeting between the candidate and the constituent. Since only three subjects met Davis for tea, it is impossible for the estimated effects to have occurred mainly from personal meetings.

The experimental sample included 597 households. There were three conditions that needed to be satisfied for a household to be included in the experimental sample. First, the sample was restricted to households that had an available landline number. This restriction was important because subjects were interviewed by telephone in the month following the treatment. Second, all households that included a Labour voter or where no data on past voting intentions was available were excluded from the experimental sample. This information was based on the local party’s canvassing of constituents over the past years. I then randomly chose one person per household to be the experimental subject. The letter would be personally addressed to this subject. Experimental subjects and their household members were then grouped by the experimental subject’s voting intention into seven distinct experimental blocks: Conservative supporters, Liberal Democrats, Green Party supporters, UKIP supporters, voters that volunteered that they were ‘against Labour’, and those who were undecided, or refused to volunteer their party support, but were on record to have supported parties other than Labour in the past. Table A.1 in the Supporting Information displays the breakdown of party preferences in the experimental sample.

Treatment

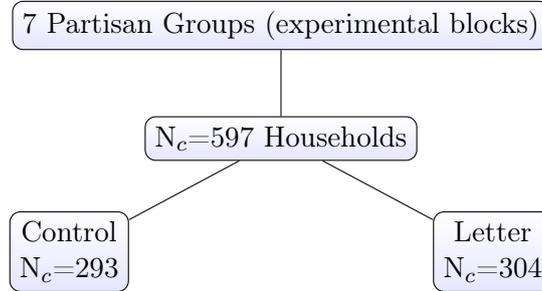
Within these seven partisan blocks, I randomly assigned subjects with a probability of .5⁵ to either receive the hand-written letter accompanied by a business card or to receive nothing. The letters were hand-written by the candidate to display effort on her behalf. The content of the letter emphasized that the candidate lived locally, and that she was interested in getting to know the voter and hearing about what voters expect from their new MP. Her pitch was hence entirely focused on candidate quality, and had no ideological content.

The random assignment is displayed in Figure 1 and the letters and business cards that

⁵Probabilities of assignment can be slightly unequal because the N in each partisan group can be odd or even. I account for this in the analysis using inverse-probability-weights.

were sent to respondents are shown in Figures A.1 and A.2 in the Supporting Information.⁶

Figure 1: Experiment 1 – Block and Cluster Random Assignment



Collection of Outcomes

I use two types of outcome data to measure post-treatment voting intentions: voting intentions based on a telephone survey that was not associated with the Labour Party, and voting intentions as recorded by Labour canvassers who were unaware of treatment assignment. The telephone survey was fielded three weeks after the introduction letters were sent on 15 April 2014, and was completed on 20 May 2014. 21% (120 subjects) agreed to take part in the survey. 110 subjects answered the voting intention question for the general election (58 in the control group, and 52 in the treatment group). This response rate is comparable to other telephone surveys (Barton et al., 2014). In contrast to Bailey et al. (2016), the difference in response rates between treatment and control group is not statistically significant (p-value of .38).

Experiment 2: Personal visits and letters

The second randomized field experiment took place in April and May 2014. The goal was to test whether Davis was effective at convincing undecided voters to support her candidacy, and whether she was more effective in doing so than party volunteers, or a letter, which made the case for her candidacy. Another explicit aim of the candidate’s doorstep visits and letters was to build support for Labour candidates in the 2014 Southampton City Council

⁶Subjects who were assigned to treatment were then reassigned using a 2x2 factorial design. Factor 1 slightly varied one sentence in the letter and factor 2 varied if the business card included a photograph of the candidate, or not. The random assignment therefore resulted in 5 experimental conditions: control, and 4 combinations of letters and business cards. Since the factorial analysis would be underpowered, I restrict the analysis to the simple treatment versus control comparison.

Election, which took place on 22 May 2014. Before the candidate and party volunteers started canvassing for 200 hours, I block- and cluster-randomly assigned 3'376 households located in 6 electoral wards to one of four experimental conditions: a personal campaign visit by the candidate (+letter), a personal visit by a campaign volunteer (+letter), the same letter without a personal visit, or nothing (control).⁷ In both door-to-door treatments, campaign contact consisted of the candidate introducing herself or being introduced by the volunteer, and of an ensuing unscripted conversation centered around any issues raised by the voter. The candidate describes her canvassing experience in the Supporting Information in Figure A.11. The scripts included a strong focus on service provision with the candidate or volunteer saying “We’re just calling around to see if you had any issues or concerns you might like to raise in the community?” and “If there’s anything else we can do for you, please do get in touch. My [Rowenna’s] details are on the letter.” The script is displayed below:

“RD: Good morning/afternoon, sorry to trouble you! My name’s Rowenna and I’m your Labour parliamentary candidate for the elections next year. We’re just calling around to see if you had any issues or concerns you might like to raise in the community?”

(If answers yes, pursue, if answers no, continue)

Yes, it does seem like a lovely area!

Do you know your MP John Denham at all?

(they almost always do)

Well he’s retiring next year after 23 years service, so I’m "the new John Denham"!

It’s just nice to say hello.

Also, do you know you have local elections coming up in May? Your candidate is XY.

He’s/she’s a lovely man/woman who works very hard.

If there’s anything else we can do for you, please do get in touch. My details are on the letter.

Thanks so much for your time. Have a lovely day!"

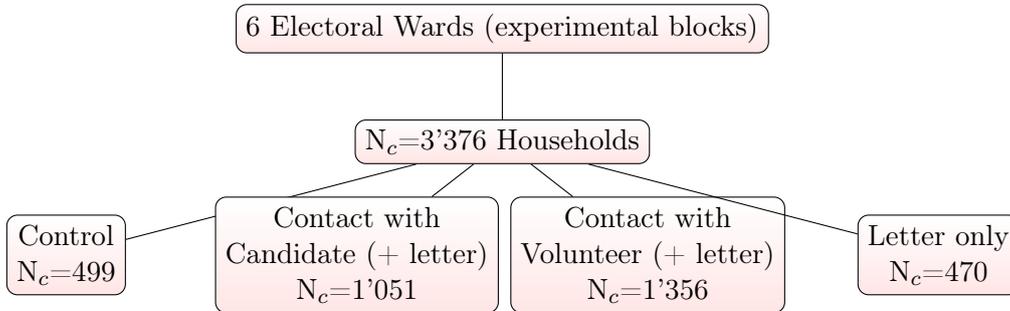
⁷The initial design of this experiment was a three-group design (there was no letter condition), and the random assignment was changed in the last minute by assigning both a control and letter group to account for the wish of the candidate to also hand out letters to voters. The size of the control and letter groups are hence around half the size of the candidate and volunteer treatment groups. With hindsight, it would have been better to reduce the size of the volunteer treatment group, or to assign equally sized experimental groups. However, I did not anticipate the low contact rate in the volunteer group.

A group of experienced party volunteers was asked to canvass the second set of addresses. Although enough volunteers signed up, they were unable to come to all canvassing sessions, and those who came, did on average manage to talk to fewer households than the candidate. The letter, which was signed by Davis and included her photo, provided information about the candidate and her motivations for running for Parliament. It is displayed in Figure A.3 in the Supporting Information, and again emphasised the effort that she was putting into speaking to voters. The key sentence reads:

“There is a lot of disappointment with politicians out there. That’s why I am spending 200 hours over the next month knocking on doors listening to what you and your neighbours have to say. I’m pretty tired, but I’m still going!”

Treatment assignment is displayed in Figure 2 below. It is important to emphasize that post-treatment outcome data were collected by Labour canvassers as part of the campaign’s routine voter identification operation. Canvassers involved in outcome data collection were unaware of treatment assignment, and did not know that the experiment had taken place.

Figure 2: Experiment 2 – Block and Cluster Random Assignment



Balance checks

Detailed balance tables for both experiments are displayed in Tables A.2 and A.3 in the Supporting Information. In order to check formally for balance on pre-treatment covariates, I follow the standard randomization inference procedure outlined at length in Gerber and Green (2012) and Aronow and Samii (2012). I test whether any existing covariate imbalances between the experimental groups in the telephone survey and the canvassing interview based outcome samples are likely to have occurred due to random sampling

variability. Figures A.7 and A.8 in the Supporting Information show that treatment assignment in both field experiments is not significantly related to pre-treatment covariates. The pre-treatment covariates used in both balance checks are turnout in the 2010 General Election, and the 2011, 2012, and 2013 local elections. Moreover, in the first experiment, I use available covariate data on gender, age, and electoral ward. For the second experiment, which was blocked on electoral ward, and for which age and gender data are not available, I use pre-treatment voting intentions based on canvassing interviews from 2002-2014.⁸ I include dummies for experimental blocks in both analyses. To conduct the balance checks I use linear regression to regress treatment assignment on all available pre-treatment covariates, and estimate the f-statistic. Next, I compare the f-statistics to the mean of the f-statistics that I obtain after re-assigning subjects to treatment or control group 10'000 times. The p-value of the balance check is the share of random assignments that results in a f-statistic that is larger than the one that I obtain from my assignment.

Results

Experiment 1

Table 3 reports the effects of the hand-written letters on voting intentions collected by non-partisan telephone interviewers, and Table 4 shows the effects estimated using post-treatment canvassing interviews. Figure 4 displays the effects of the door-to-door visits and the letters from the second experiment on subsequent Labour voting intentions as recorded during canvassing interviews.

Since it was impossible to know whether subjects opened the letter, all effects displayed in Table 3 are Intent-to-Treat (ITT) estimates. Column 1 presents the manipulation check administered in the post-treatment telephone survey. Subjects were asked whether they had been contacted in the previous month by the Labour parliamentary candidate. No reference was made to letters, or to the field experiment. This manipulation check is hence a conservative test of whether the letter from the Labour candidate left an impression with subjects. Table 3 shows that subjects in the treatment group were 15 percentage-points

⁸I cannot use voting intention data for the first experiment because random assignment was blocked on the subjects' most recent recorded voting intention.

Table 3: Telephone survey – Effects on recall, candidate evaluations & voting intentions

	Recall contact from Davis	Eval. Davis (LAB) positiv.	Eval. Smith (CON) positiv.	LAB voting int. LE	LAB voting int. GE
Control	29.3%	16.4%	58.3%	4.9%	5.5%
Letter	44.0%	27.6%	56.5%	9.8%	13.6%
ITT	15.2*	11.1	-1.7	4.9	8.2
95% CI	[-2.6, 32.9]	[-4.3, 26.9]	[-18.5, 15.2]	[-6.3, 14.5]	[-2.6, 19.6]
Cov-adj ITT	19.7*	7.8	-1.8	10.1*	9.9
95% CI	[0.9, 39.2]	[-8.5, 24.2]	[-20.7, 15.1]	[-0.7, 21.1]	[-1.9, 22.8]
N	115	116	115	102	110

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (based on one-tailed hypothesis tests using randomization inference), accounts for block random assignment. LE = Local Election May 2014, GE = General Election May 2015.

more likely to recall contact by the Labour candidate, compared to subjects in the control group. When adjusting for pre-treatment covariates, the ITT estimate amounts to 20 percentage-points.⁹ Both estimates are significantly different from zero, with $p=0.04$ and $p=0.03$, using a one-tailed test. This result shows that the intervention was memorable, at least in the short-term.

Columns 2 and 3 reports the ITT effects of the letter on candidate evaluations as recorded in the telephone survey. Positive evaluations of Davis are 11 percentage-points higher in the treatment group than in the control group. The ITT effects are substantially large, but not significantly different from zero using conventional standards. Evaluations of Smith, the Conservative candidate, remained unaffected by the treatment. Finally, as displayed in columns 4 and 5, the letter appears to have positively affected Labour Party voting intentions for the local and the general election by around 10 percentage-points (covariate-adjusted). These results should be treated as suggestive given the relatively small effective sample size of the telephone survey. Their main purpose is to serve as benchmarks against which to compare results based on canvassing interviews.

Table 4 shows the effects of the candidate’s hand-written letters on Labour voting intentions as recorded during post-treatment canvassing interviews between the day the letters were posted, and the day of the general election, 13 month later. All voting intentions were recorded by Labour canvassers who were entirely unaware of subjects’ treatment status. To estimate the short- and long-term effects of the treatment, I use

⁹I use the same pre-treatment covariates in the analysis as specified in the balance section.

the mean number of the days between the treatment and the 2015 general election, to split the sample into two time periods. The voting intentions in Table 4 column 1 were collected between April 2014 and October 2014, and the voting intentions in columns 2 and 3 were measured between November 2014 and May 2015. While column 2 in Table 4 includes all interviews conducted between November 2014 and May 2015, column 3 limits the sample to those individuals already interviewed in period 1. In column 2 I hence report the results for the unbalanced panel, and in column 3 the results for the balanced panel. This distinction is important since the composition of the sample changes between the two time periods because data collection moves along with the direction of the election campaign.

Table 4: Experiment 1 – effects of letter on Labour voting intentions (canvassing interviews)

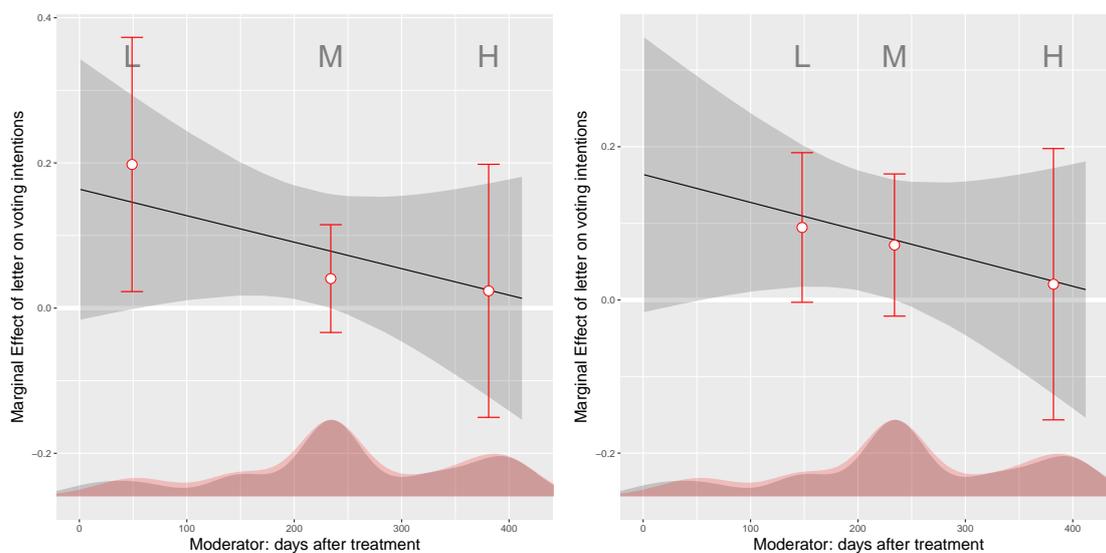
	April - Oct 2014	Nov 2014 - May 2015 all voters contacted (unbalanced panel)	April 2014 - May 2015 re-interviewed voters (balanced panel)
Labour Control	12.0%	20.3%	23.6%
Labour Letter	25.9%	23.9%	29.2%
ITT	13.8*	3.7	5.4
95% CI	[1.7, 25.8]	[-7.6, 14.9]	[-11.2, 22.1]
Cov-adj ITT	17.1**	6.0	10.7
95% CI	[3.4, 30.7]	[-4.9, 16.8]	[-7.6, 29.0]
N	207	611	177

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (based on one-tailed hypothesis tests using randomization inference), accounts for block and cluster random assignment.

In period 1, the canvassing-based measure results in an unadjusted ITT estimate of 14 percentage-points. Covariate-adjustment moves the point estimate of the ITT slightly upwards. Both estimates are significantly different from zero with $p = 0.02$ (unadjusted) and $p < 0.01$ (covariate-adjusted). In period 2, the point estimates are smaller than in period 1, both using all interviews conducted in the second period, and re-interviewing period 1 respondents. Unadjusted and covariate-adjusted treatment effects decline by around 7-10 percentage-points compared to the first period, and are no longer distinguishable from zero in statistical terms.

Figure 3 plots the marginal changes in predicted Labour voting intentions between April 2014 and May 2015, based on the binning method introduced in Hainmueller, Mummolo and Xu (forthcoming). The plots show both the predicted marginal effects from the linear

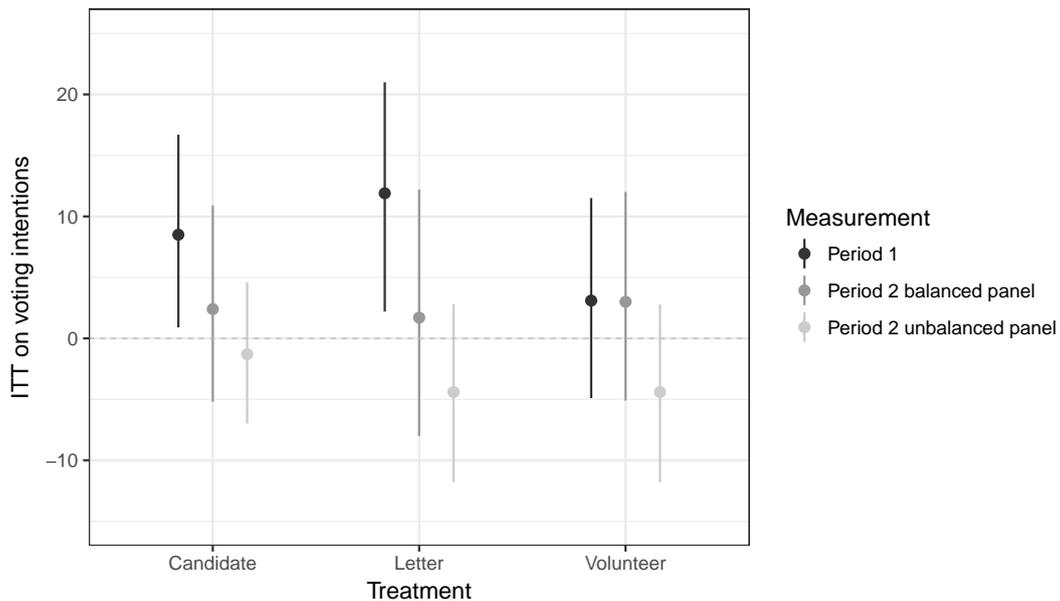
Figure 3: Letter experiment – duration of persuasion effects



Note: 95% confidence intervals, covariate-adjusted.

multiplicative interaction model between treatment and days-after-treatment, and the treatment effects estimated within different time bins. All estimates include dummies for experimental blocks, the full set of pre-treatment covariates, and inverse-probability weights which account for unequal probabilities of assignment to treatment and control groups within partisan subgroups. Standard errors are clustered at the level of treatment assignment, the household. While Figure 3 a) divides the sample to obtain bins that contain an equal number of days, Figure 3 b) discretizes the moderator variable into three bins based on an equal number of observations in each bin. Figure A.9 in the Supporting Information plots the results of the interaction model using the kernel smoothing estimator of the marginal effect. The kernel smoothing estimator allows for estimating the functional form of the marginal effect flexibly by estimating a series of local effects with a kernel reweighting scheme (Hainmueller et al., forthcoming). Figures 3 and A.9 confirm that the treatment effect of the letter on voting intentions is large and statistically significant, and that it decreases over time. It becomes statistically insignificant after around 220 days, and it approaches zero after 400 days.

Figure 4: Effects of canvassing and letters on voting intentions



Note: 95% confidence intervals, covariate-adjusted.

Experiment 2

Figure 4 and Tables A.4 and A.5 in the Supporting Information¹⁰ report the results of the second experiment using introduction letters, and door-to-door visits by the candidate and by party volunteers. Again, the first period of outcome measurement spans the six months from May 2014, when the treatments were administered, to November 2015, and the second period includes the six months between December 2014 and 7 May 2015, the day of the 2015 UK general election. Results for the 2nd time period are reported once for the unbalanced panel (including all interviews conducted between December and May), and once for the balanced panel, only including interviews with subjects who also responded in period 1. The results of the canvassing and letter experiment are substantively similar to the results of the letter experiment reported in Table 4. Between May and December 2014, Labour voting intentions were significantly higher among subjects contacted by the candidate personally, and among subjects who received the letter introducing the candidate, than among subjects in the control group that were not contacted.

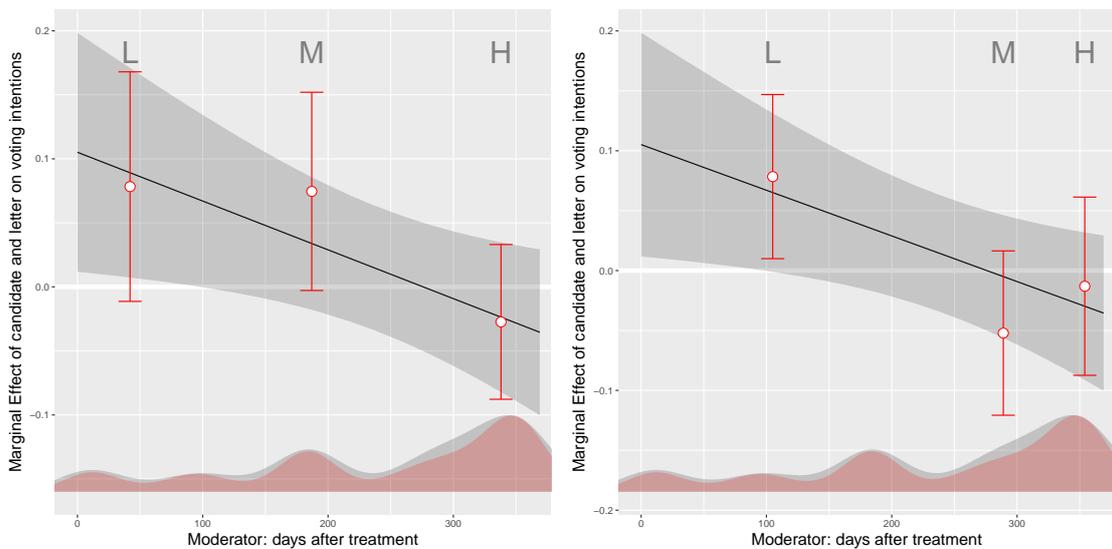
As Figure 4 shows, in the first six months following treatment, ITT estimates range from 9 percentage-points for the candidate’s door-to-door visit, to 12 percentage-points

¹⁰These tables report both unadjusted and covariate-adjusted ITT and CACE estimates for time period 1, and for time period 2 based on the balanced and unbalanced panels.

for the letter. While the magnitude of the ITT effect of the letters is slightly larger than the ITT of the door-to-door visits, the effects are not significantly different from each other. The magnitude of the letter effect may at first appear surprising. However, it is important to recall that letters were designed to be as personal as possible, and that only 42% of assigned households could be contacted personally by the candidate. If we look at compliers, households that were successfully contacted when assigned to be canvassed by the candidate (see Supporting Information Table A.4 and A.5), a conversation with the candidate resulted in a CACE of 17 percentage-points (unadjusted) or 22 percentage-points (covariate-adjusted). That means that 2 in 10 subjects who had a conversation with Davis initially changed their voting intention to Labour.

In contrast, campaign volunteers were ineffective at persuading a significant number of subjects to change their voting intentions. This null result may partially be a function of the low volunteer contact rate (17.1% compared to 42.4% for the candidate). Moreover, treatment effects for all three randomized interactions are substantially small, and indistinguishable from zero during the second period during which outcome data was collected. As Tables A.4 and A.5 demonstrate, this null finding is robust to using all observations based on the unbalanced panel, or only subjects that were previously interviewed in time period 1.

Figure 5: Letter and canvassing experiment – decay of persuasion effects



Note: 95% confidence intervals, covariate-adjusted.

Following the analysis of the previous experiment, Figure 5 plots the marginal changes in predicted probabilities using the `interplot` package (Hainmueller et al., forthcoming) once with equal time bins, and once breaking up bins by the number of observations. As in experiment 1 all models include dummies for experimental blocks, the full set of pre-treatment covariates specified in the balance section, and inverse-probability weights which account for unequal probabilities of assignment to treatment and control groups within wards. Standard errors are clustered at the level of treatment assignment, the household. The decay of the treatment effects plotted in Figure 5 confirm the findings of the first letter-writing experiment. The combined treatment effect of the candidate’s letter and personal contact are initially strong, amounting to around 10 percentage-points, but predicted to decay over time. At around 100 days after the treatment, confidence intervals start to overlap with zero, and the point estimate decays to zero towards the end of the campaign period. Conducted on independent samples, the results of both experiments are therefore consistent, with initial strong persuasion effects, and ensuing decay after six and three months respectively.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper outlines the parliamentary candidate’s role as political persuader during election campaigns. It highlights the potential of candidates to be effective political persuaders, and voters’ potential responsiveness to such personal interactions. Based on causal evidence, this paper shows that candidate-voter interactions during election campaigns can result in short- and mid-term changes to voters’ party preferences. Two field experiments, and a unique dataset of canvassing returns made available by the UK Labour Party support the theoretical assumption that parliamentary candidates can affect voters’ party preferences in the desired direction even in the highly partisan context of a general election campaign. Due to personally interacting with the candidate, either via letter or on the door-step, I estimate that around 1 in 10 voters initially changed their voting intentions. These effects likely lasted for multiple months, up to six months in the first experiment, and up to three months in the second experiment. What do these results mean for the literature on the role of candidates in salient election campaigns, and the possibility of political persuasion

in partisan environments?

First, by cutting out the agent, and interacting with voters either directly or indirectly via letters or in person, some parliamentary candidates can bypass some of the challenge of message control inherent in ground campaigns, as outlined by Enos and Hersh (2015). Other papers have shown that the type of message matters for persuasive efforts (Dewan, Humphreys and Rubenson, 2014), and that valence-based appeals appear more effective than positional appeals at persuading voters (Kendall et al., 2015). This paper shows that candidates can use these valence-based appeals centered on candidate-quality, particularly effort and service, to great effect among voters. At the same time, the results of this experiment support Enos and Hersh (2015)'s hypothesis that party volunteers may be ineffective at persuading voters, either due to lower effort or a lack of message discipline. It appears likely that the weaker results for volunteers paper are in this case mostly a function of the lower contact rate among volunteers. My findings therefore add to a growing literature which questions the ability of party elites and political campaigns to effectively deploy campaign volunteers (Hensel et al., 2018; Nall et al., 2017; Neuenschwander and Foos, 2018).

Second, by measuring the decay of treatment effects over the period of an entire general election campaign, this paper also contributes to our understanding of the temporal dynamics of electoral persuasion. Consistent with Broockman and Kalla (2016), I find that treatment effects initially endure several months, but decay over time (Kalla and Broockman, 2018). This contrasts with studies which focus on one-sided contexts (Jäger, 2018), where treatment effects appear to last for years. The decay of persuasion effects might be related to exposure to additional information in the course of the general election campaign, or to voters giving national or party factors greater weight towards the end of the election campaign. The explanation that partisan considerations receive greater weight as compared to candidate considerations as election day approaches, is consistent with these results (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee, 1954*b*; Henderson, 2015).

An important limitation of this study, as in all other existing field experiments that I am aware of, is that only one randomized contact was attempted with subjects. It is therefore possible that repeated contacts would lead to more durable effects on voting intentions, even in high salience elections. Using the methods introduced in this paper, one could easily

imagine embedded experiments, where candidates contact subjects at randomly-assigned time points, and where a randomly-assigned number of follow-up contacts occur, all while campaigns follows their usual data collection routines independently of the experiment.

While I therefore cannot fully answer the question *why* persuasion effects decay, it is clear that voters did not ignore messages from a candidate who belonged to a party they did not originally support. At least for a period of time, they updated their voting intentions, even when, as in the case of experiment 1, they held clear prior party preferences. The result that letters and door-to-door meetings affected subjects' voting intentions is the more remarkable because all communication included clear partisan cues. Partisanship should hence not be seen as a general constraint to persuasion, which cannot be overcome through personal interaction. Since initial updating happened in a highly partisan and highly competitive electoral environment, this study's findings suggest that results from survey and online experiments which show that individuals update their priors based on new information, and that backlash is rarer than we might think (Coppock, 2016; Coppock et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2012), also hold in real-world campaign contexts. Hence, the question going forward is not whether persuasion per se is possible, but how to make it last.

To what extent are these results likely to generalise to other candidates, and political contexts? The extent to which candidate-voter interactions can be a factor in the outcome of an election depends, of course, on the size of constituencies or districts. In political systems such as the UK, France, and Germany, constituencies are small enough for candidates to make a personal difference. Beyond the question of district size and magnitude, it is important to emphasize that generalisability is always an empirical question (Gerber and Green, 2012; Morton and Williams, 2010), and therefore can only be established by replicating these results with different candidates and in different electoral contexts. Importantly, as this paper shows, canvassing-based voting intention measures can be validated and benchmarked against other measurement instruments such as telephone or online surveys. The value of this paper does therefore not only lie in its empirical findings, but also in introducing and validating a novel measurement instrument for voting intentions, and by enabling future embedded, in-cycle experiments to replicate the findings reported in this paper.

Nationally standardised reporting procedures within parties in the UK should allow

for future comparative research, where organisational and institutional variables can be measured to systematically predict the strength and duration of persuasion effects. From a theoretical perspective, there are many reasons to believe that the candidate and context of this experiment are representative of marginal seats in the United Kingdom. While Davis' background, and my experience observing her canvassing, suggest that she was a high quality candidate, high quality candidates are more likely to stand in marginal seats (Galasso and Nannicini, 2011). The fact that she was a first time candidate in 2015, moreover, indicates that there are few particularities about a specific legislative record, or influence as a frontbencher, which would need to be accounted for. The context of the 2015 UK general election, if at all, makes finding effects for a Labour candidate more difficult since Labour unexpectedly lost the election, and nation-wide trends should hence have worked against the candidate's local efforts. It is not inconceivable that parliamentary candidates may be able to "run in open doors" if the national political context works in their favour.

In conclusion, this paper hence provides newfound theoretical and empirical grounds for optimism about candidates' abilities to persuade voters with a pitch focused on candidate quality and effort. Indeed, changes in voting intentions likely occur daily as a product of candidate - voter interactions during parliamentary election campaigns. While these resulting switches have the potential to be consequential, making persuasion last may require sustained interpersonal interactions over a longer period of time.

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Supporting Information

Figure A.1: Experiment 1 – Letters

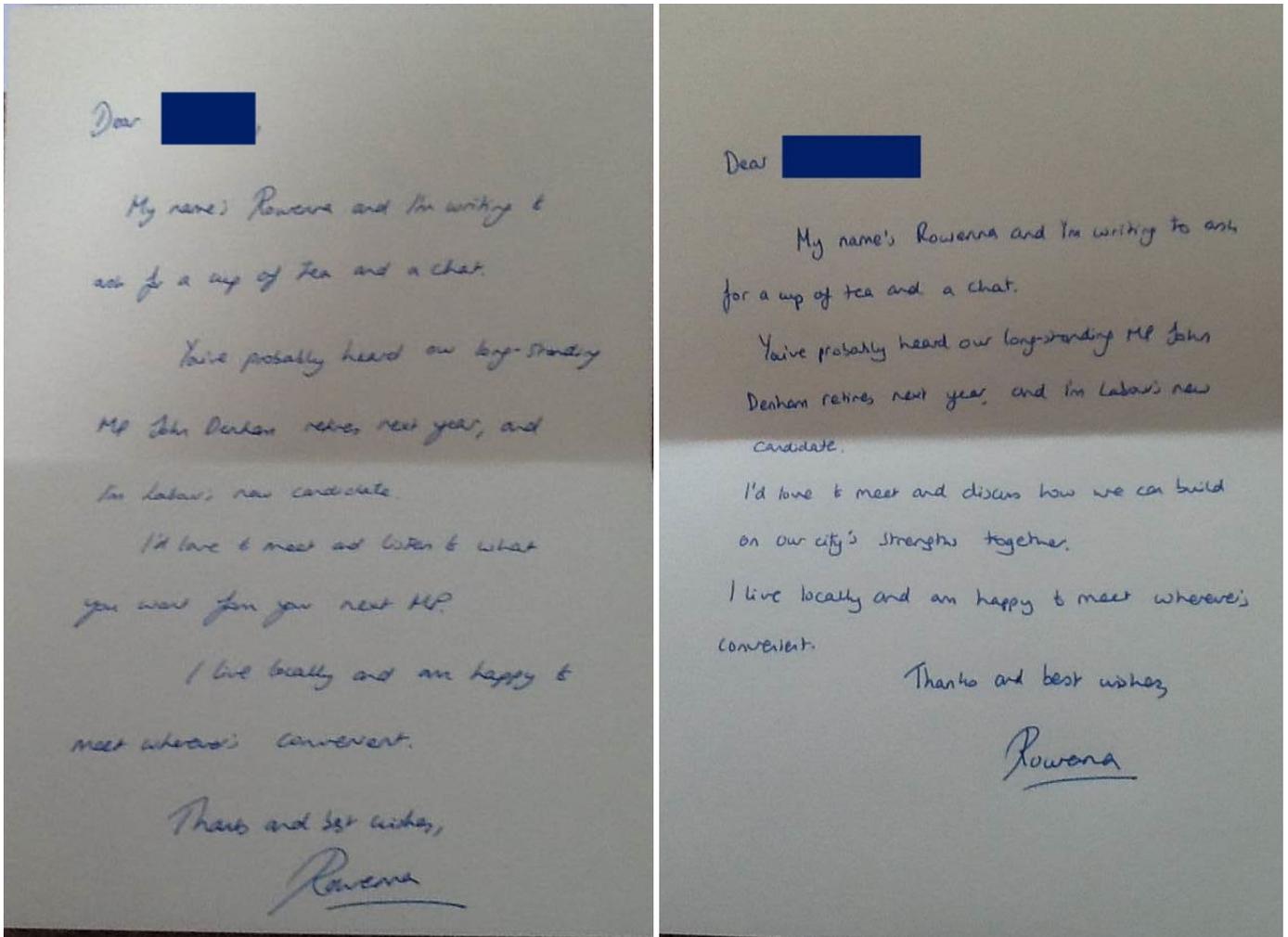


Figure A.2: Experiment 1 – Business cards



Figure A.3: Experiment 2 – Letter handed out to voters



Dear _____

My name's Rowenna, and I'm hoping to be your next Labour MP when John Denham stands down next year.

I knocked on your door today to listen to what you want for the future of Southampton.

There's a lot of anger and disappointment with politicians out there.

That's why I'm spending 200 hours over the next month knocking on doors listening to what you and your neighbours have to say.

I'm pretty tired, but I'm still going!

I've been asked what we stand for. Labour stands for well paid jobs, compassion for those genuinely in need and pride in our community and country.

But working at the foodbank near my home in Bitterne Park I've seen first hand how far we are from those goals. I want to work with you to change that.

The national election isn't until next year, but as I'm sure you know, the local elections are very close – on Thursday 22nd May.

Your Labour candidate for the local elections is _____ and would be happy to hear from you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Best wishes,

P.S. I'm only too happy to come back and see you when you have time. Just let me know.



Printed by Kopykat Ltd, 76C
Rivington St, London EC2A 3AY,
and promoted by Lisa Mitchell
on behalf of Rowenna Davis
and the Labour candidates,
all at 20-22 Southampton St,
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@RowennaDavis
facebook.com: [redacted]
20-22 Southampton Street,
Southampton, SO15 2ED

Rowenna Davis

Figure A.4: Canvassing interviews – post-treatment distributions

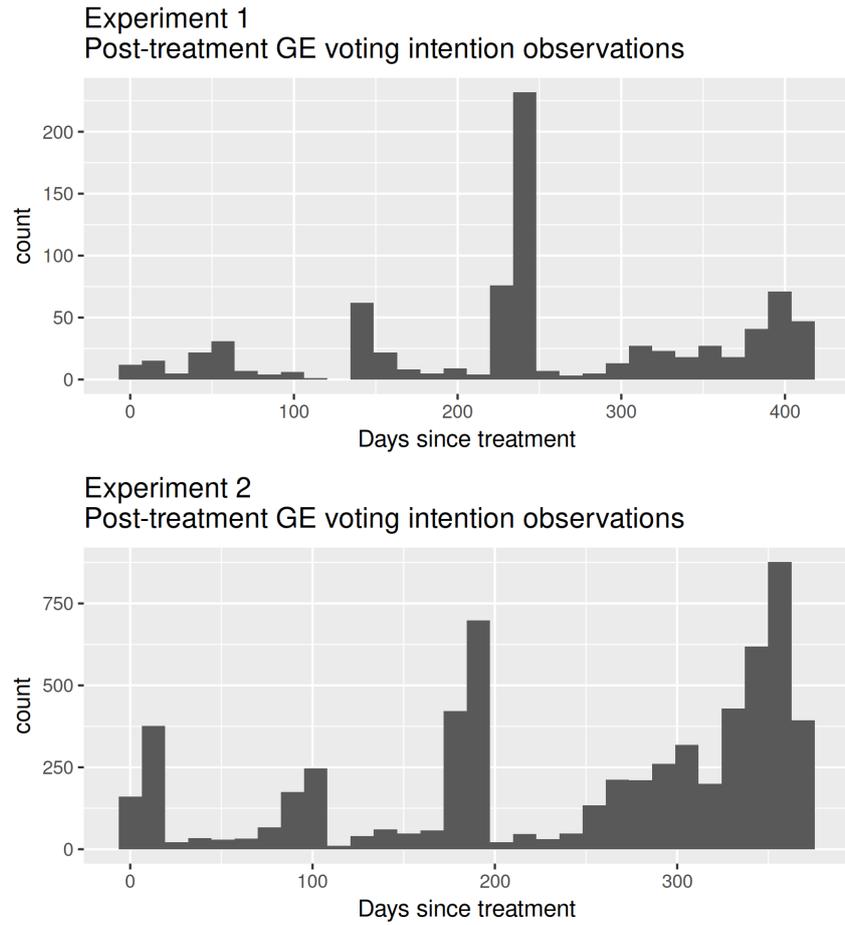
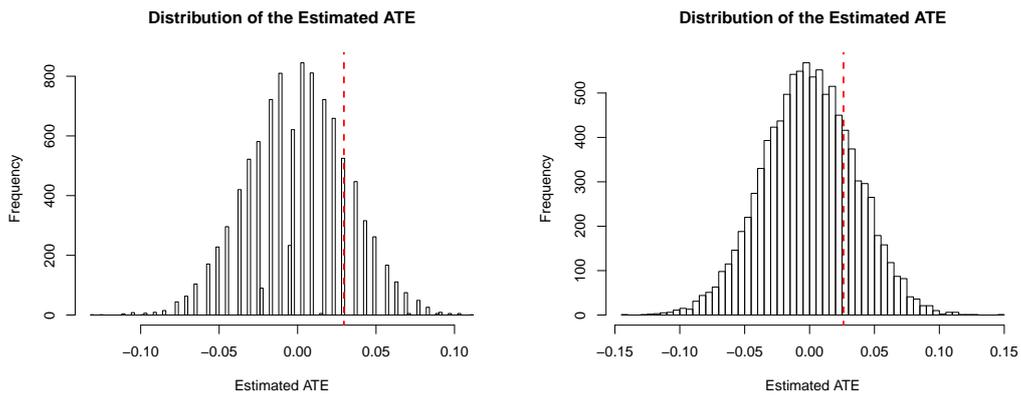
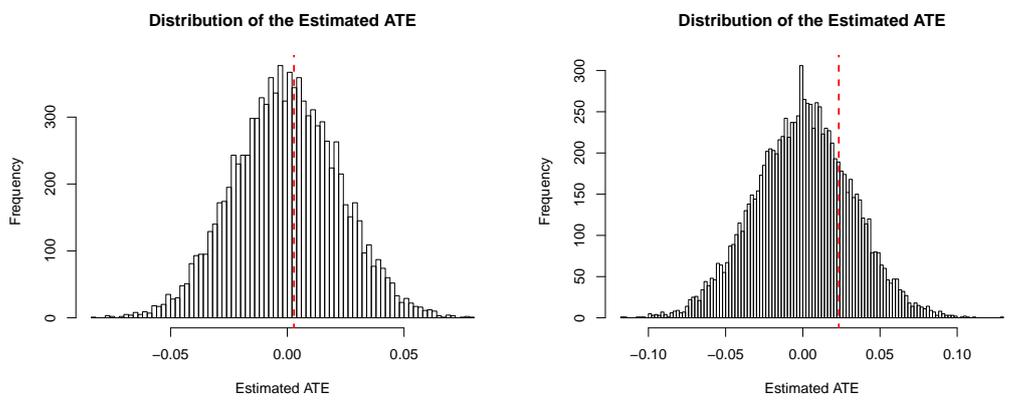


Figure A.5: Attrition checks experiment 1 –treatment assignment on missingness



a) Telephone survey: ATE=0.03, p=0.38

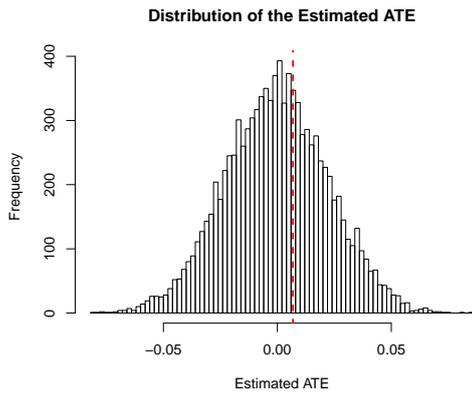
Canvassing interviews: ATE=0.03, p=0.46



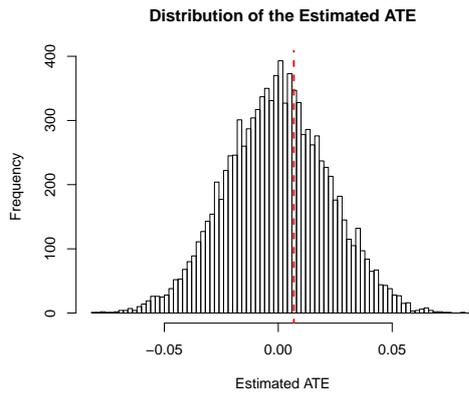
c) Canvassing period 1: ATE=0.00, p=0.90

d) Canvassing period 2: ATE=0.02, p=0.46

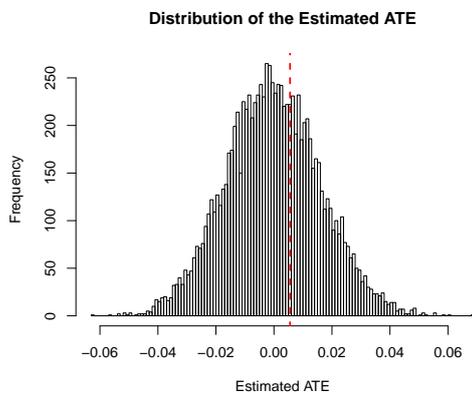
Figure A.6: Attrition checks experiment 2 –treatment versus control on missingness



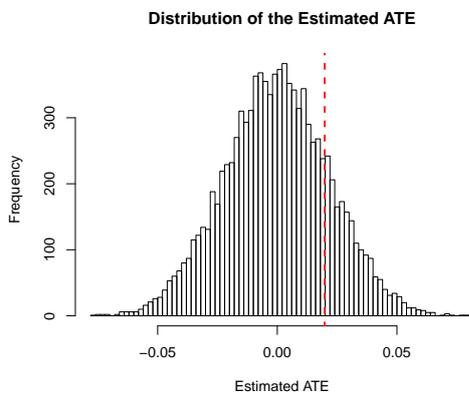
a) Candidate period 1: ATE=0.01, p=0.61



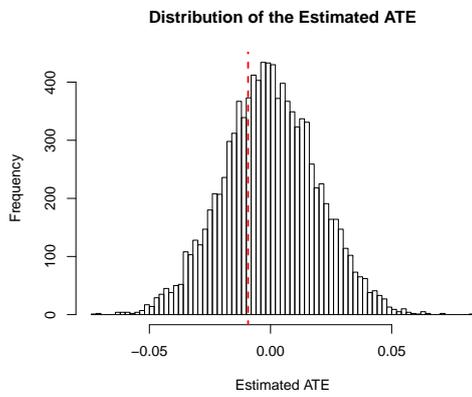
b) Candidate period 2: ATE=0.01, p=0.76



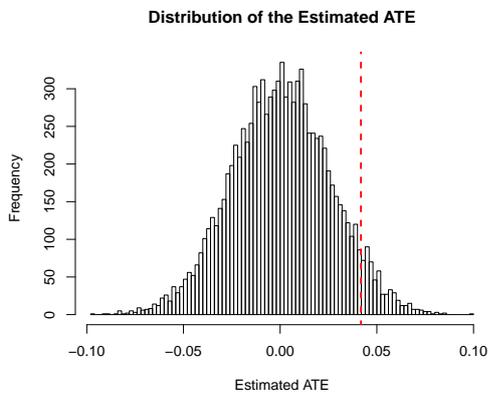
b) Volunteer period 1: ATE=0.01, p=0.73



c) Volunteer period 2: ATE=0.02, p=0.37



d) Letter period 1: ATE=-0.01, p=0.63



e) Letter period 2: ATE=0.04, p=0.10

Figure A.7: Balance checks experiment 1 –treatment assignment on missingness

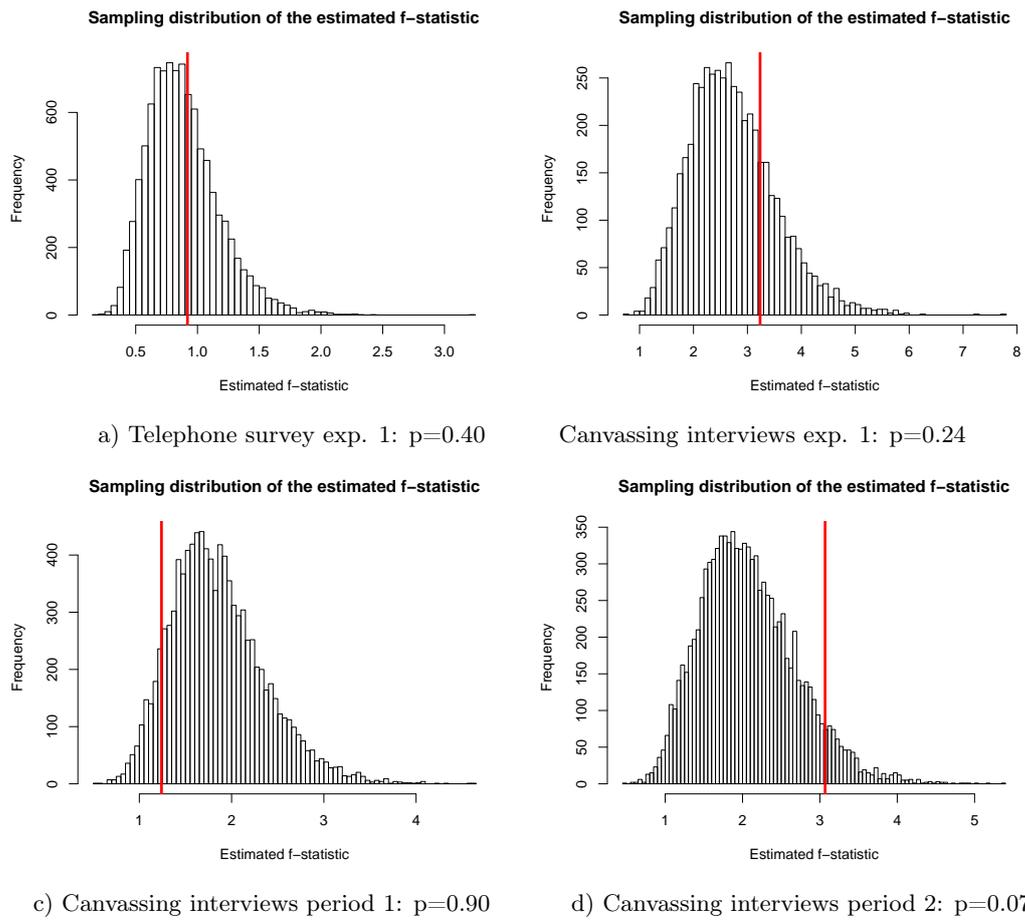
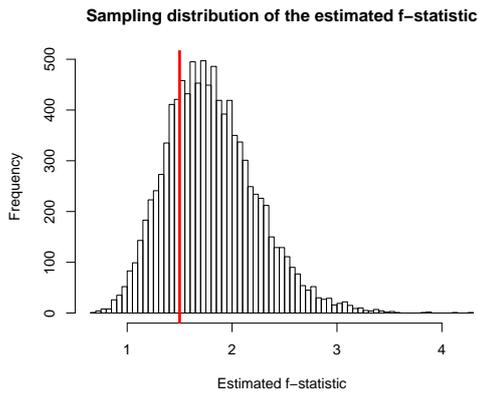
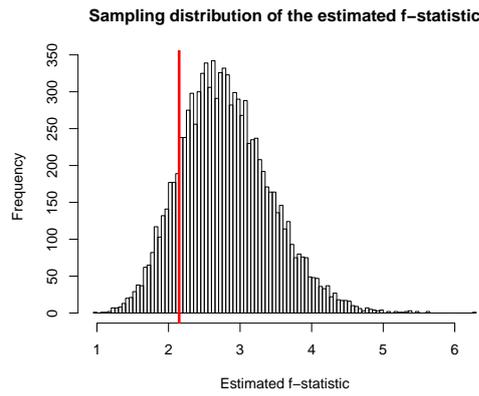


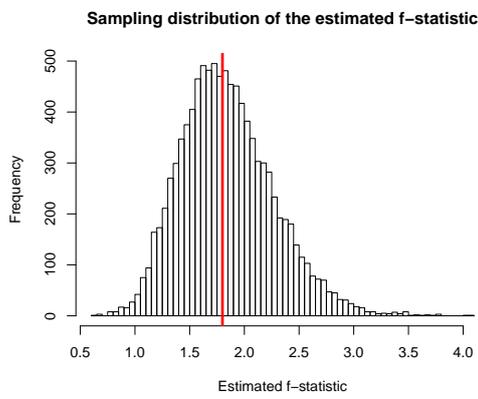
Figure A.8: Balance checks experiment 2 –treatment assignment on missingness



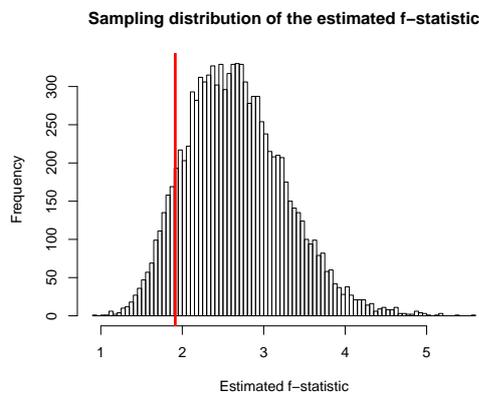
a) Candidate period 1: $p=0.75$



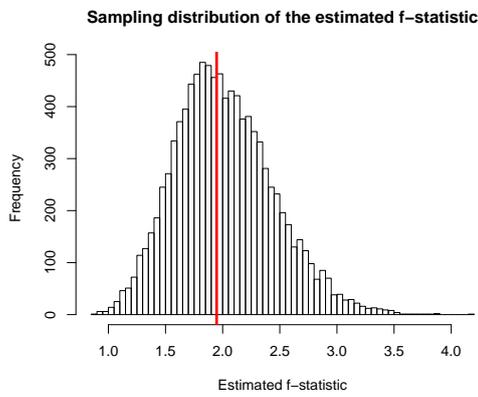
b) Candidate period 2: $p=0.86$



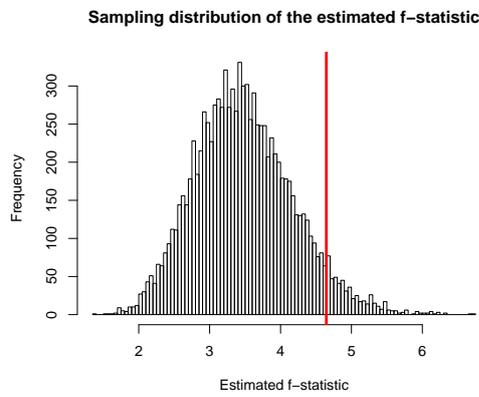
c) Volunteer period 1: $p=0.51$



d) Volunteer period 2: $p=0.90$



e) Letter period 1: $p=0.53$



f) Letter period 2: $p=0.06$

Figure A.9: Experiment 1 – Decay of persuasion effects, kernel estimation

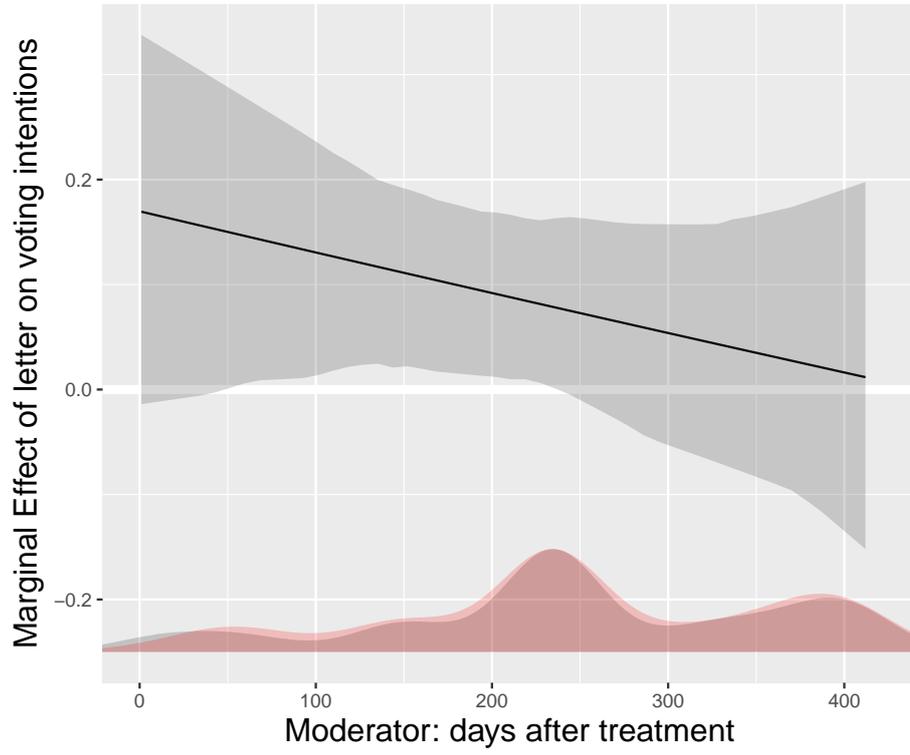


Figure A.10: Experiment 2 – Decay of persuasion effects, kernel estimation

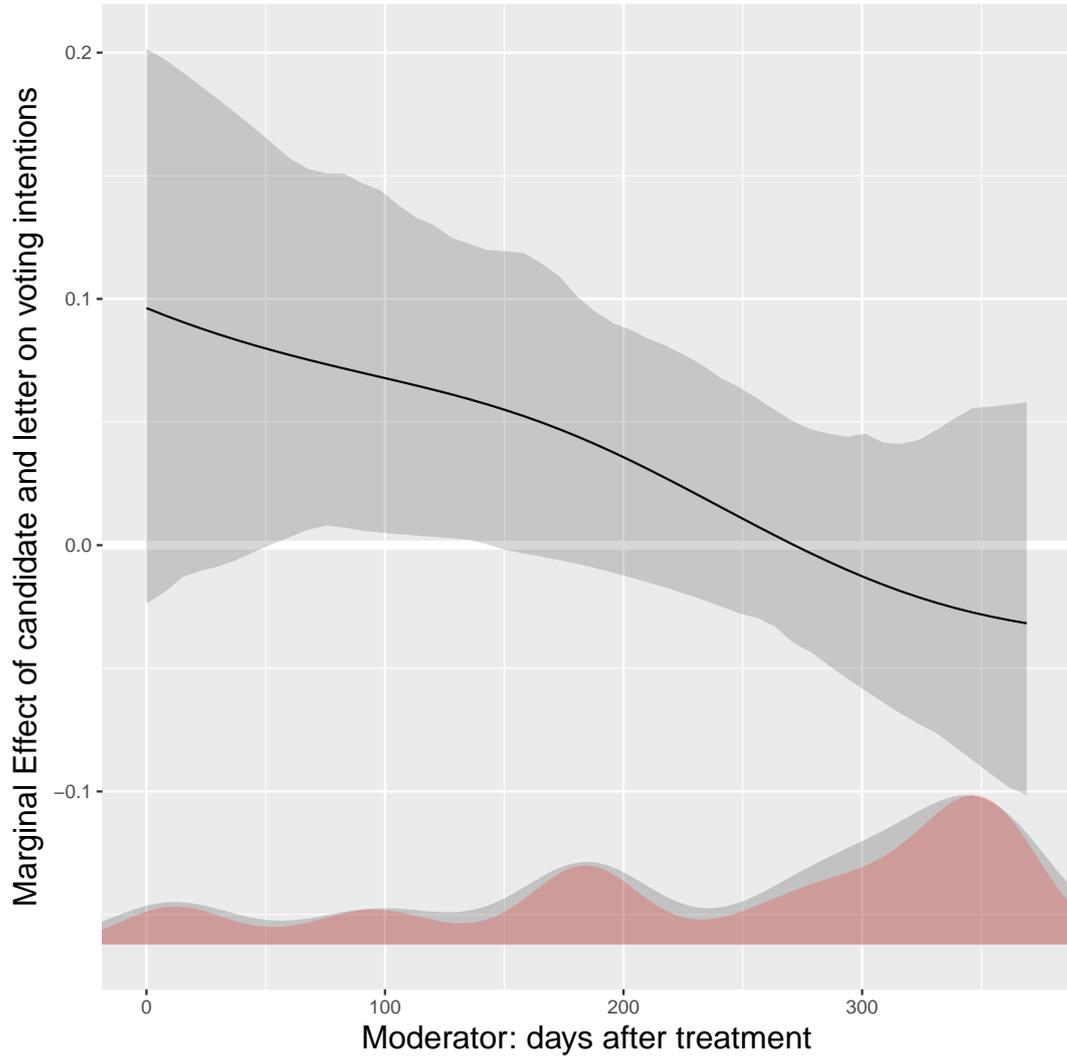


Table A.1: Latest recorded pre-treatment voting intention of experimental subject

Recorded voting intention	Share of experimental sample
Conservative	49.9%
Against Labour	17.8%
Liberal Democrat	9.9%
United Kingdom Independence Party	9.5%
Undecided (previously Con, LibDem, Green, UKIP, Against)	7.8%
Refused (previously Con, LibDem, Green, UKIP, Against)	3.9%
Green Party	1.3%
N	597

Table A.2: Experiment 1 - Pre-treatment covariates

	Period 1		Period 2	
	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment
Ward 1	13.6	16.6	7.3	7.1
Ward 2	4.9	7.3	7.8	16.8
Ward 3	7.3	7.8	15.7	14.7
Ward 4	21.8	16.6	17.8	17.1
Ward 5	19.9	13.7	18.1	9.0
Ward 6	19.4	15.1	16.5	13.6
Ward 7	13.1	22.9	16.7	21.7
Voted 2013 observed	31.2	29.8	32.1	22.8
Voted 2013	28.4	22.9	27.7	19.7
Voted 2012 observed	63.9	67.6	62.6	69.5
Voted 2012	31.7	40.2	29.1	44.7
Voted 2011 observed	89.4	89.3	88.2	85.2
Voted 2011	89.4	89.3	87.9	84.9
Voted 2010 observed	96.2	93.6	93.0	94.4
Voted 2010	86.5	85.4	86.0	82.9
Male	57.2	42.0	49.6	41.7
Age group 2	26.4	24.4	17.0	23.9
Age group 3	12.5	19.1	17.6	9.0
Age group 4	35.6	40.5	44.0	43.3
N	106	101	319	292

Table A.3: Experiment 2 - Pre-treatment covariates

	Period 1				Period 2			
	Control	Candidate	Volunteer	Letter	Control	Candidate	Volunteer	Letter
Voted 2013 obs	31.9	31.9	38.2	34.9	26.2	32.2	31.7	30.2
Voted 2013	29.0	27.2	33.5	32.2	22.0	26.8	27.7	28.0
Voted 2012 obs	68.1	65.0	59.3	62.2	70.4	65.6	67.6	69.8
Voted 2012	40.8	39.2	32.4	36.7	37.2	36.8	38.7	46.9
Voted 2011 obs	89.3	86.3	87.8	90.2	86.1	87.1	86.2	88.4
Voted 2011	89.3	86.3	87.5	90.2	85.8	86.8	86.2	88.3
Voted 2010 obs	94.7	91.2	92.2	94.8	92.7	90.8	93.1	93.2
Voted 2010	84.1	81.0	83.0	86.5	80.4	80.7	81.9	84.9
Labour 2014	43.3	36.9	34.7	37.8	29.7	28.1	28.5	31.0
Labour 2013	18.5	17.2	18.5	24.0	15.4	17.4	13.3	19.9
Labour 2012	60.3	60.7	56.7	67.8	58.4	54.8	57.3	62.5
Labour 2011	42.5	41.0	41.0	38.3	36.3	38.6	39.1	38.6
Labour 2010	41.5	37.1	35.7	39.7	37.3	33.3	34.6	33.8
Labour 2009	10.3	8.8	5.3	3.7	6.6	6.0	6.2	4.8
Labour 2008	9.6	10.0	7.5	10.1	7.3	5.9	6.3	4.7
Labour 2007	5.0	7.0	7.6	7.5	4.4	4.8	5.4	6.3
Labour 2006	17.0	25.8	17.6	17.3	14.6	21.8	13.4	13.1
Labour 2005	5.3	3.5	4.9	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.5
Labour 2004	3.2	7.8	5.0	6.0	2.2	3.5	4.0	4.1
Labour 2003	1.7	6.3	5.3	1.4	2.8	2.9	3.5	1.5
Labour 2002	13.1	15.1	13.7	14.2	8.2	8.1	9.5	8.8
N	282	536	697	267	721	1412	1763	603

Table A.4: Experiment 2 – Effect of canvassing and letters on labour voting intentions, balanced panel

	Candidate t+1	Candidate t+2	Volunteer t+1	Volunteer t+2	Letter t+1	Letter t+2
Control mean	61.3%	75.9%	60.9%	75.4%	61.5%	75.6%
Contact rate	37.7%	48.7%	13.8%	18.7%		
ITT unadjusted	6.3 [-2.2, 15.1]	2.1 [-6.0, 10.9]	-0.2 [-8.9, 8.7]	-0.3 [-8.8, 8.5]	9.8* [-0.2, 19.4]	-0.7 [-10.3, 9.1]
CACE unadjusted	16.7 [-8.0, 41.4]	4.4 [-14.0, 22.7]	-1.4 [-67.6, 64.8]	-1.7 [-48.3, 45.0]		
ITT covariate-adj.	8.5* [0.9, 16.7]	2.4 [-5.2, 10.9]	3.1 [-4.9, 11.5]	3.0 [-5.1, 12.0]	11.9** [2.2, 21.0]	1.7 [-8.0, 12.2]
CACE covariate-adj.	22.4* [0.2, 44.6]	4.8 [-12.9, 22.5]	21.6 [-37.9, 81.2]	15.9 [-30.9, 62.7]		
N	818	708	979	818	549	508

Note: **p<0.01, *p<0.05, (based on one-tailed hypothesis tests), accounts for block and cluster random assignment. 95% confidence intervals in brackets.

Table A.5: Experiment 2 – Effect of canvassing and letters on labour voting intentions, unbalanced panel

	Candidate t+1	Candidate t+2	Volunteer t+1	Volunteer t+2	Letter t+1	Letter t+2
Control mean	61.3%	69.9%	60.9%	69.7%	61.5%	69.9%
Contact rate	37.7%	43.7%	13.8%	18.5%		
ITT unadjusted	6.3 [-2.2, 15.1]	-1.1 [-7.1, 5.1]	-0.2 [-8.9, 8.7]	-5.2 [-10.8, 0.9]	9.8* [-0.2, 19.4]	-3.2 [-10.7, 4.0]
CACE unadjusted	16.7 [-8.0, 41.4]	-2.6 [-17.1, 11.9]	-1.4 [-67.6, 64.8]	-28.0 [-62.3, 6.3]		
ITT covariate-adj.	8.5* [0.9, 16.7]	-1.3 [-7.0, 4.6]	3.1 [-4.9, 11.5]	-3.5 [-9.0, 2.6]	11.9** [2.2, 21.0]	-4.4 [-11.8, 2.8]
CACE covariate-adj.	22.4* [0.2, 44.6]	-3.1 [-17.2, 10.9]	21.6 [-37.9, 81.2]	-28.6 [-61.6, 4.4]		
N	818	2133	979	2484	549	1324

Note: **p<0.01, *p<0.05, (based on one-tailed hypothesis tests), accounts for block and cluster random assignment. 95% confidence intervals in brackets.

Rowenna Davis' canvassing experience

Figure A.11: As reported by the candidate after 90 hours of canvassing

"I've now been on the road for ninety hours. That means I'm almost half way through my promise to spend 200 hours knocking on doors in Southampton in the run up to the local elections. So what keeps me going? It's the people. Knocking on a door and asking about politics leads to all kinds of conversations. They can be moving, frightening and funny. There was the woman who opened the door and explained she had dedicated her life to community work, and now has a terminal illness. Obviously a strong woman, she was still moved to tears to talk about how she can't continue her work, and hopes I can work with others in her place. Then there were the mums at the school gates who were angry about dog poo and pot holes. Or the older lady last night, a life long Labour supporter scared she was losing agency with her disability, who was thrilled to find that we could give her a lift to the polls so she can still exercise her right to vote. Then there was the guy who was recovering from being a drug addict. He had been clean for two months and said if he could make it another year, he wanted to work with Labour and local young people to make sure they didn't make the same mistakes. You never know what you're going to get when you reach a door. But even when there's hate or sadness, you feel it's worth it to reconnect. You can't fix everything, but you can listen and learn."

Question Wording Telephone Survey

In case you decide to vote in the council election, which party would you vote for?

INTERVIEWER: DO NOT PROMPT

- 0 None/Will (probably) not vote
- 1 Labour
- 2 Conservative
- 3 LibDem
- 4 UKIP
- 5 Green Party
- 6 BNP
- 7 SNP
- 8 Plaid Cymru
- 9 Other (WRITE IN)
- 10 Undecided
- 11 Don't know
- 12 Refused

If you decide to vote in the General Election next May, which candidate will you vote for? I am now going to read out a list of the candidates in your seat:

- 1 Rowenna Davis for the Labour Party
- 2 Royston Smith for the Conservative Party
- 3 David Goodall for the Liberal Democrats^a
- 4 Alan Kebell for the UK Independence Party^b
- 96 Other (INTERVIEWER: DO NOT NAME OPTION, WRITE IN):
- 97 Undecided (INTERVIEWER: DO NOT NAME OPTION)
- 98 Don't know (INTERVIEWER: DO NOT NAME OPTION)
- 99 Refused (INTERVIEWER: DO NOT NAME OPTION)

^aThere was no declared LibDem candidate in the seat at that point. The 2010 LibDem candidate was named instead.

^bThere was no declared UKIP candidate in the seat at that point. The 2010 UKIP candidate was named instead.

Now, I would like to ask you how you view the two major General Election candidates. On 4 points-scale ranging from strongly positive to strongly negative, how do you evaluate the Labour Candidate Rowenna Davis?

- 1 Strongly positive
- 2 Somewhat positive
- 3 Somewhat negative
- 4 Strongly negative
- 98 Don't know
- 99 Refused

On the same 4 points-scale ranging from strongly positive to strongly negative, how do you evaluate the Conservative Candidate Royston Smith?

- 1 Strongly positive
- 2 Somewhat positive
- 3 Somewhat negative
- 4 Strongly negative
- 98 Don't know
- 99 Refused

Have you already been contacted by any of the candidates running in the General Election?

- a) Rowenna Davis

- 1. yes

- 2. no

b) Royston Smith

- 1. yes

- 2. no