Electoral Studies 95 (2025) 102932

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Electoral Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/electstud

How does rurality affect campaigning?

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A B S T R A C T

In the UK, some constituencies are physically small and take in parts of densely populated cities, while others span huge geographic areas and may contain islands or hard to reach communities. These size variations have been shown to have important implications for the nature of electoral representation, but their impact on election campaigning is less discussed. In this paper we examine this relationship, using a mixed method approach to consider whether and how rurality affects campaign activity. First, conducting interviews with Scottish National Party campaigners and elected representatives from rural and urban constituencies, we identify a number of perceived challenges associated with rural campaigning. We then evaluate some of these perceptions at recent British general elections using data from the BES panel survey and from constituency election results. The perception that campaigns in rural constituencies take more time and effort, cost more to undertake, have different contact styles and are less effective in rural than in urban areas seems to be partly true for campaign contacts, but less so for campaign spending (a wider measure of campaign effort) or for campaign effectiveness. Campaigners' perceptions of a rural disadvantage does not appear to be fully borne out in reality.

1. Introduction

Rurality has implications for democratic politics. Previous work has, for example, examined the impact of rurality on representation (Ward, 2002), voting behaviour (Lin and Lunz Trujillo, 2023) and as a focus of political discourse (Cruickshank et al., 2009). A smaller body of work has interrogated its impact on campaigning in non-electoral contexts (Stephens, 2016). Little has, however, been written about the way political parties campaign in more or less rural constituencies. Given previous research showing the importance of campaigning to electoral success (Denver et al., 2004; Strohmeier, 2013), the lack of research into the impact of rurality on campaign outcomes and practice is somewhat surprising. There is a renewed interest in many parties in building and supporting campaigns, but it is not entirely clear if rural campaigns require different kinds of support because of unique challenges they may face. In this paper, we adopt a mixed method approach to interrogate the impact of rurality on campaign practices and electoral outcomes. We interviewed Scottish National Party campaigners and party representatives in rural and urban constituencies to generate new insight into their perceptions of the challenges faced by campaigns in different types of constituencies. We then quantitatively examine these challenges in British general election campaigns using survey data, campaign spending returns, and election results. By doing this we explore whether election campaigns in rural constituencies need special support. The article poses two questions: first, how do campaigners perceive the impact of rurality on campaigning? And second, what are the actual impacts of rurality on electoral campaigns and their outcomes? Through this analysis, we build up a richer understanding of the relationship between rurality and election campaigning.

We find that rural campaigners identify particular challenges associated with the nature of their constituency that affect their ability to campaign in varying ways. However, our analysis of constituency campaign activity finds mixed evidence of a 'rural disadvantage' in campaign contact. For some parties in some parts of the country, campaign activity declines as seats become more rural – though the impact is generally small. Yet this effect is not true for all parties and is not limited only to forms of campaign contact (such as door-to-door canvassing) which are most vulnerable to 'friction of distance' effects. It is also observed in 'friction-free' forms of campaign contact, such as contacts via social media. These findings are significant not only academically, but also for those campaigning in more or less rural constituencies. Specifically, our findings suggest that while campaigners perceive there to be greater challenges when campaigning in rural constituencies, in practice the picture is more nuanced. And, finally, when we examine the electoral effect of constituency campaigning in terms of its returns to parties in the form of votes we find few significant, systematic or substantive difference between rural and urban constituencies.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102932
Received 1 July 2024; Received in revised form 20 March 2025; Accepted 27 March 2025
Available online 2 April 2025

1.1. Literature review

Parties' capacity to campaign is not uniform. Local campaign practice often varies considerably within single parties (Dommett et al., 2021), and in the UK resourcing of local party campaigning is not in good health (Pattie and Johnston, 2016). Campaigns are therefore unlikely to look the same in different locations or produce the same outcomes (see Fisher et al., 2018; Johnston and Pattie, 2006), with campaigning said to be more difficult in large rural constituencies where votes are scattered over a wide area (Whiteley and Seyd, 1994).

Previous research has shown campaigning affects electoral outcomes. The more intensive a campaign, the better the candidate's performance, with most of the effect coming from mobilising existing supporters and ensuring they vote, rather than from persuading otherwise sceptical voters to switch to the party (Fisher et al., 2016; Johnston and Pattie, 2014, 2018, p. 251; Pattie et al., 2015; Núñez, 2021). Parties tend to campaign harder in seats which are highly marginal for them than in seats which they either hold with large majorities or where they are very unpopular. Similarly, where parties are the local incumbents and are defending a seat, their campaign efforts tend to benefit them less than their efforts in seats where they are challengers (Pattie et al., 2017). And parties' campaigning efforts pay greater dividends in closer contests (both nationally and locally) than in contests where the result is more certain from the outset (Fieldhouse et al., 2019). Other studies have shown that different forms of campaigning have different effects. Experiments in the US have suggested that door-knocking is generally effective at increasing mobilisation, whereas telephone canvassing is not (Gerber and Green, 2000; Green et al., 2003). Survey analysis in the UK supports this pattern (Pattie and Johnston, 2003a). Nuancing the picture, however, Nickerson (2006) suggests more positive results for telephone canvassing when conducted by volunteers and not professionals. A more recent field experiment in the UK, meanwhile, suggests doorstep canvassing has only a minimal effect, whereas leafleting provides a much stronger boost to party support (Townsley, 2025). But other aspects of the geography of election campaigning are less explored. In particular, even highly detailed studies that emphasise 'on the ground' experiences of campaigners have tended not to draw overt attention to rurality (Kefford, 2021; Nielsen, 2012).

Some research has focused on political interests and the transient nature of the electorate. Rural constituencies are generally more homogeneous in their political interests and MPs from rural areas can also rely on being better known to their constituents due to a slower turnover in the electorate (Auel and Umit, 2018). In contrast, changes in the electorate in urban constituencies happen more quickly, meaning that MPs need to make themselves known and win over prospective voters continuously. In general, urban constituencies are more heterogeneous in their interests, therefore representatives need to cater to more varied groups of voters (Auel and Umit, 2018).

While the nature of 'rurality' is widely contested (Woods, 2016; Shucksmith and Brown, 2016; Martin et al., 2000; Hoggart, 1990), as touched on below, these conceptual debates are not our primary focus. Our emphasis is on exploring campaigner's perceived difficulties of campaigning in rural spaces before quantitatively evaluating these using longstanding measures of rurality (see methods). Voters are said to be more responsive to face-to-face canvassing (Karp and Banducci, 2000; Gerber and Green, 2000, 2001; Pattie and Johnston, 2003a; Green and Gerber, 2004), which can increase turnout and/or vote share. While MPs may be better known in rural constituencies (Auel and Umit, 2018), the ability to canvass or door-knock appears to be crucial for effective election campaigning. Therefore, insofar as face-to-face contact seems more efficacious for campaigners than other forms of contact, we might reasonably ask whether rural campaigners are at a relative disadvantage as it may be harder to meet many voters in person in widely dispersed rural communities than in closely packed urban ones. This focus stems from how little research has analysed whether rurality affects how campaigns operate and in turn whether campaigners, candidates and representatives perceive the characteristics of their rural locality to affect their campaign practice. The most proximate area of study is arguably that on voter turnout but here any links to campaigning can only be made obliquely; rurality (or usually its inverse, urbanization) is generally assessed only as a control in statistical models, and meta-analyses have found an inconsistent relationship with turnout (see Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023; Cancela and Geys, 2016: though see Pattie et al., 2025).

The lack of research on the relationship between rurality and campaigning is even more surprising given the attention that has been paid elsewhere to the significance of electoral geography and place-based identities. Previous research by García del Horno et al. (2023), for example, has shown that rural voters across Europe exhibit lower external efficacy than their urban counterparts. Another pan-European study similarly finds that, compared to urban voters, voters in rural areas tend to be 'more likely to have anti-immigration and anti-EU views, to be conservative in their orientation, dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country, and less likely to trust the political system, even if they are strikingly more likely to participate in it through voting' (Kenny and Luca, 2021, p.578). Analyses of support for right-wing populism in high-income countries have framed rurality through notions of 'left-behind' spaces where people have been isolated from globalisation and turned to anti-establishment politics in response (García del Horno et al., 2023; Berlet and Sunshine, 2019; Mamonova and Franquesa, 2020). In contrast, in low-income countries, democratic processes have generally been found to be supportive of pro-rural development (Harding, 2020; Bratton, 2008). But none of these studies looks specifically at how rurality might affect party electioneering.

1.2. Case study context

The UK, and Scotland in particular, offers an excellent opportunity to address this gap in campaign studies. Constituency campaigning is a core part of electioneering in First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral systems and might be expected to interact with the characteristics of the constituency. Since a key characteristic of a constituency is whether it is marginal or not, Scotland provides a highly interesting case, with numerous previously 'safe' seats overturned by the SNP in the 2015 General Election. In addition, at recent Scottish elections, many constituencies, including very rural seats, have been quite marginal and the link between population density and marginality has been almost non-existent. That is in contrast to elsewhere in Britain, where very rural constituencies tend to be safe Conservative seats. This matters, as a constituency's marginality affects the incentives for parties to campaign there: the safer the seat, the lower the incentive to campaign actively, irrespective of how rural the seat is. Scottish seats at recent elections therefore give us an insight in the effects of rurality on campaigning, without the complicating effects of seat marginality.

Within the UK, Scotland also has the biggest degree of geographical difference between rural and urban constituencies, allowing for a wide range of contexts to be compared. For instance, the largest Scottish constituency in terms of area is around 750 times bigger than the smallest, compared to 425 times the difference in England (and only 179 times and 50 times in Wales and Northern Ireland, respectively). The inter-quartile range between constituency areas in Scotland is six times larger than that of constituencies in England. The differences in population density patterns are similar, but largely because the most rural constituencies in Scotland cover much larger areas than their counterparts elsewhere in the UK: the urban population densities in Scotland's largest cities – Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen – are comparable to England's cities, excluding London. Therefore, a Scottish focus allows us to explore dynamics across degrees of rurality, including its outer reaches, but without losing connection with general patterns we might see across the UK. Furthermore, our quantitative analyses extend the picture from Scotland to Great Britain.

The SNP is our initial focus for a number of reasons. Founded in the 1930s, its first major breakthrough came in the 1974 General Elections, taking between 20 % and 30 % of the Scottish vote, and winning several constituencies. Even so, apart from the 2007 Scottish Parliament election (when it came narrowly ahead of Labour, with 31 % of the regional vote to Labour's 29 %), it remained substantially behind Labour, the dominant party in Scottish politics for much of the post-war period, until the 2011 Scottish Parliament election.[1] At that contest, it substantially eclipsed Labour (with 44 % of the regional vote to Labour's 26 %), becoming the most popular party in Scotland and forming the core of the Scottish government. It maintained this position at subsequent Scottish and UK elections for the next 14 years, winning almost all of Scotland's Westminster seats at the 2015, 2017 and 2019 General Elections, and emerging as comfortably the largest party at each Scottish Parliament election between 2007 and 2021. The party's position slipped dramatically at the 2024 UK General Election, however, when it came second to Labour, with only 30 % of the vote and returned just 9 of Scotland's 57 MPs.

Campaigning only in Scotland, and centred on issues of national self-determination, the party therefore seeks to campaign across all constituencies. Its recent General Election success also means that its long history of seeking to gain seats changed after the 2015 contest to *defending* a majority of seats, across both urban and rural areas, which might be expected to bring a multifaceted campaign experience. Building on existing research contacts with the party, we were able to obtain interviews with a number of SNP campaigners, candidates, and representatives, across a range of different urban and rural areas in Scotland. We did not interview similarly-placed figures in the other major Scottish and British parties, but we consider their campaign activities in the quantitative analyses.

If there are indeed extra burdens for campaigners in rural areas, rural campaigns may require different forms of support to campaign than in more urban constituencies. In the rural constituencies of the Scottish Highlands especially, the distances and travel times involved in moving from one part of a seat to another can be considerable, and several orders of magnitude greater than those faced by parties campaigning in small, well-networked urban seats, potentially creating extra demands on campaigners. The extra costs of campaigning in more rural areas have long been recognised in British electoral law. Ever since the passage of the 1883 *Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act*, legal limits have been placed on the amount candidates can spend on their election campaigns. In any given seat, that limit is a function of two things: the number of electors registered in the constituency, and whether the constituency is designated as a Borough/Burgh[2] (urban) or County (i.e. including relatively large rural areas) seat: candidates are permitted to spend slightly more per elector in the latter than in the former.[3] At the 2019 UK General Election, candidates' 'short campaign' spending in seats with the average British constituency electorate (73,218 voters) was limited to £13,093 in urban seats, but to £15,290 in rural ones. But whether this ability to spend more in more rural than in urban seats adequately compensates for the difficulties incumbent in campaigning in the former is a moot question.

Even so, it is not yet clear whether rural campaigns really *do* confront such problems, or (if they do) what might be done about it. In the remainder of the paper, therefore, we take preliminary steps towards addressing this question. We generate insight into the dynamics of rural campaigns and, in doing so, help to develop understanding of campaign specificity and the types of support rural campaigns may require.

2. Methods

We adopt a mixed-method approach, with interviews followed by analysis of survey and election data. One key challenge is choosing a measure of rurality. The Boundary Commissions' distinction between County and Borough seats, discussed above, provides an initial framework for our interview sample: County seats tend on the whole to be more rural than Borough seats. In the 2005 redistricting of Scotland's Westminster seats, 41 of the 59 constituencies (69 %) were designated County constituencies because they had a 'significant non-urban electorate' (Boundary Commission for Scotland, 2004). Among Scotland's 'County' constituencies are some of the most remote and sparsely populated rural areas in the United Kingdom. Scotland also has a high number of County constituencies relative to England. As of 2010, England had only 180 parliamentary constituencies classified as 'County' seats (34 %), while the remaining 355 were classified as Borough (i.e. primarily urban) constituencies (UK Government, 2011).

However, the County/Borough distinction lacks nuance. In some 'County' constituencies, although they may contain substantial rural areas, most of the population lives in large urban areas. For instance, the East Dunbartonshire constituency, as drawn up in 2005, was designated a County seat, and a substantial proportion of its geographical area was indeed countryside. But most of its population lived in large commuter towns like Milngavie, Bearsden, Bishopbriggs, Kirkintilloch and Lenzie, several of which are part of the greater Glasgow built-up area, with no intervening green belt between them and the city proper. By any reasonable standards, this is not a particularly 'rural' seat.

Furthermore, not only are many 'County' seats predominantly urban in nature, but some have higher population densities than some Borough seats (we return to population density below). To illustrate the point, the 2020 population densities of the 40 Scottish constituencies designated as County seats in the 2005 Review ranged from 0.05 people per hectare in Ross, Skye and Lochaber to 9.87 per ha. in East Dunbartonshire. While the former seat is heavily rural and remote, the latter, as noted above, is primarily comprised of commuter towns and Glasgow suburbs. Among the 19 'Burgh' constituencies, meanwhile, 2020 population densities ranged from 5.68 people per ha. in Dundee East (which includes parts of the city of Dundee and commuter towns like Broughty Ferry and Carnoustie, as well as some of the city's rural hinterland) to 54.77 in highly urban Edinburgh North and Leith. There is then a clear overlap in population densities between the two groups: some County seats are more densely populated (and to that extent more urban) than some Burgh ones. That said, the overlap is not extensive: only five of Scotland's County seats had higher population densities than the least densely-packed Burgh seat, and only three Burgh seats had lower densities than the most densely populated County seat.

The County/Borough distinction is therefore an unsatisfactory foundation for classifying constituencies as urban or rural. Not only is there considerable variation in rurality within each category (especially within the County seats) and some overlap between them, the boundary between County and Borough is arbitrary. We therefore make use of a different measure in the analyses below. Whilst there is no accepted standard quantitative measure of rurality, population density is the most commonly used proxy (Cohen and Greaney, 2023, p.2), and as a continuous variable has the advantage that there is no need for arbitrary threshold decisions.

Population density is not a perfect choice. As a univariate measure, it can lack sensitivity to patterns of rural-urban spatial clustering or issues of peripherality and remoteness. In large, rural constituencies with low

[1] At the 2010 UK General Election, Labour's support in Scotland easily surpassed the SNP's. The former was the most popular party, with 42 % of the Scottish vote, while the latter came third, with only 20 % of the vote.

[2] 'Borough' is the term designated in the legislation for such constituencies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland: in Scotland, they are referred to as 'Burghs'. In the paper, we refer to such seats as 'Borough' constituencies if we are discussing all such seats in Britain, but as Burgh seats if discussing only Scottish constituencies.

[3] At the 2019 UK General Election, each candidate's expenditure during the official 'short' campaign – essentially from the date the election is called until polling day itself – was limited to £8,700 plus either 9 pence per elector in County constituencies, or 6 pence per elector in Borough/Burgh seats.

population densities, populations are not evenly spread across the constituency. Although many residents live in remote farms and houses, more live in small towns and villages at higher densities than the constituency average.

However, while this may mitigate some of the issues faced by campaigners (it is easier to reach people in small towns than in remote farms), it does not entirely remove their problems, as the distances between individual settlements in such constituencies can be large, and the populations of the settlement themselves small. There is still likely to be more effort involved in getting round such seats than would be the case in a tightly-packed urban constituency. To take one example, Fort William, Dingwall and Portree are among the largest towns in the old Ross, Skye and Lochaber constituency. Together, their 2020 population was around 13,000, only a fraction of the constituency's overall population of around 69,000. And these three settlements were all considerable distances from each other: by road, Dingwall is 73 miles from Fort William, while Portree is 102 miles from Dingwall and 108 from Fort William. Admittedly, this is an extreme case (Ross, Skye and Lochaber had the lowest population density of any of the constituencies in this study), but the wider point remains: population clustering in small towns and villages only partially alleviates campaigners' difficulties in such seats.

Population density therefore captures something important about such seats, even though it cannot fully reflect the internal distribution of population there. What is more, the measure plays a core role in proposed multivariate rurality indexes (Cohen and Greaney, 2023). Furthermore, from a practical perspective, population density is available for constituencies and so maps onto the data we use in the rest of our models. More complex measures (for instance, geographical distance to the nearest urban centre) will cross these boundaries, rendering us unable to link this to our data.

To navigate these complexities, our interview sample draws across a range of County constituencies and complements these with a smaller number of Burgh constituencies (Table 1), the choice of which was informed by population density generally but tailored by author knowledge to develop a well-rounded sample.

Our first empirical section examines campaigners' perceptions of the impact of rurality on campaigning. Rather than starting with hypotheses to be examined through both qualitative and quantitative sections, we are interested in whether campaigners in rural and urban constituencies voice the same concerns or whether ideas varied across campaigners. We conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with SNP campaigners and/or party representatives, speaking to MPs, candidates, councillors, and branch organisers in 19 rural and urban constituencies. Interviews were conducted between October 2023 and February 2024. Each constituency had one interviewee, with the exception of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross which had two. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed: where recording was not possible extensive notes were taken and written up straight after the interview. These two types of documents were combined into a corpus and analysed. Firstly, each interview was read thoroughly and several themes were identified in relation to the questions asked. The initial themes identified were refined further by comparing them across the interviews to identify recurring themes about campaigners' perception of rurality and the effect this has on campaigning. For further information about the interviews see Appendix A.

We then developed our thematic findings into hypotheses to quantitatively test to what extent these concerns about campaigning in rural areas matched measures of campaign intensity and effectiveness. Our quantitative analyses employ constituency-level data (described in more detail in a later section) on rurality, campaign activity and election results.

Table 1
Constituencies in which interviews were conducted.

County constituencies	Population density	Burgh constituencies	Population density
Ross, Skye and Lochaber	0.05	Glasgow North	47.23
Caithness, Sutherland and East Ross	0.07	Edinburgh East	41.60
Na h-Eileanan an Iar	0.08	Glasgow South	33.23
Orkney and Shetland	0.16	Glasgow East	24.87
Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey	0.21	Aberdeen North	17.88
Dumfries and Galloway	0.23		
Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk	0.25		
Perth and North Perthshire	0.25		
Moray	0.42		
Angus	0.43		
Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock	0.56		
Midlothian	2.62		
Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East	4.61		
East Renfrewshire	5.51		

2.1. Perceived challenges of rural campaigning

Most of our interviewees believed that campaigners in rural constituencies faced several challenges associated with their seat's rural characteristics. These included the time and effort involved in campaigning, and specifically impacts on activism, expenditure, and contact style/medium.

Distance was a key component of the difficulties for campaigning identified by interviewees in rural seats. Most highlighted the extensive distances that one has to travel between each town or amenity. As one interviewee stressed, it is *'harder to get the vote out because of distance'* (Interviewee 4). Some interviewees argued that campaigners in urban constituencies *'can get around people'* (Interviewee 14, also raised by interviewees 2, 3, 5, 10, 19 and 20), and another remarked that it was an '*easier organisational task to have an urban constituency'* (Interviewee 17). As a different interviewee pointed out, it was easier to canvass when there are *'terraced houses and not long driveways'* (Interviewee 14, also mentioned by interviewees 16 and 18). Rural constituencies, from the interviewees' perspectives, are characterised by '*2-mile driveways'*, '*villages*', '*farms*', '*hamlets'* and '*townships*'. These geographic characteristics were seen to pose particular logistical challenges for those engaged in rural campaigning.

These logistical challenges fed into the time and effort it takes to travel around a rural constituency as there are *'no easy routes to get around'* (Interviewee 6). As a result of this, interviewees acknowledged that some areas are neglected when it comes to canvassing or collecting voter ID information. As one interviewee explained, they focused on canvassing the towns, with the *'rural areas getting less attention'* (Interviewee 12, also mentioned by interviewee 5). A similar sentiment was echoed by another interviewee who stressed that they ended up *'doing the same place a lot'* (Interviewee 5, also mentioned by interviewee 12). Another simply noted that they *'don't spend a lot of time in the rural areas'* (Interviewee 11). Given the logistical challenges of getting around the rural constituencies, one remarked that they *'are not able to cover everywhere'* and therefore must be *'smarter in time spent'* (Interviewee 6). It was stressed that it was *'hard work to get around rural areas'* (Interviewee 7; also mentioned by interviewee 2), with comparisons made to urban areas where *'you can be present at more events'* (Interviewee 3). Another interviewee noted that while they *'try to go to as much rural fun days/fairs'* (Interviewee 12), most events tend to be in the larger towns. Our interviewees in more urban contexts did not raise the same concerns. Indeed, some noted that they can do *'two campaign sessions in a day at opposite ends of the constituency'* (Interviewee 19, also mentioned by interviewee 20). Such a scenario was simply not possible for many campaigners in very rural seats.

Interviewees also told us about challenges faced by rural campaigns around activism levels. Many of the concerns raised were, however, by

no means unique to rural constituencies. Interviewees lamented that it is *'hard to get people to canvass'* (Interviewee 4; also mentioned by interviewees 5 and 8) and it was felt to be '*easier to find people to do leafleting'* (Interviewee 5) rather than canvassing. This was explained by one interviewee as a product of calling it 'canvassing', which led activists to *'think they are persuading'*, which raises anxiety (Interviewee 8, also mentioned by interviewee 10). To avoid this, the interviewee suggested, the activity should be called Voter ID rather than canvassing. Whilst this dilemma is not unique to rural constituencies and indeed was observed in our interviews in a range of different (often more urban) constituencies (Bale et al., 2019, report similar concerns among party members), there were some specific dynamics affecting activists' willingness to engage in rural areas. As one interviewee reflected, rurality would limit activity because *'people won't travel but will do [leaflet] their own area'* (Interviewee 1). This, they felt, meant that people were less active than those in urban areas because the sparse nature of the populace meant there were often fewer houses that could be called 'local'. It was also felt that compared to more urban constituencies, there were simply fewer activists. Indeed, one interviewee suggested that *'manpower was what rural constituencies suffer with' (*Interviewee 15), and another highlighted that there was a *'small number of activists'* (Interviewee 11, also mentioned by Interviewees 4, 7, 12 and 15) and that they were not very mobile.

Rurality was felt by interviewees to increase parties' campaign costs. One interviewee noted the extra costs in relation to *'travelling'* and *'direct-mail'* (Interviewee 3, also discussed by interviewee 10). Another wanted the ability to *'direct-mail'*[4] to communicate directly with the *'really rural parts'* (Interviewee 3, also mentioned by interviewee 9), while another wanted the *'ability to have the money to deliver leaflets'* (Interviewee 12). While campaign spending rules allow candidates in rural constituencies to spend more per elector on their campaigns than their colleagues in urban seats, it was commonly felt that this was not enough.

Furthermore, rural campaigning was seen to require a different contact style to campaigns in more densely populated constituencies, involving less use of face-to-face campaigning and more 'remote' tools like online and direct mail. Considering the issues faced with representing and campaigning in a rural constituency, interviewees stressed that these areas need to be *'treated differently'* and that there needs to be *'different strategies'* compared to those in urban constituencies (Interviewee 7, also mentioned by interviewee 13). One interviewee suggested that telephone canvassing was *'very effective'* in rural areas (Interviewee 1). Interestingly, however, this technique was not uniformly used, with others reporting that *'there was little experience of telephone canvassing'* (Interviewee 6) whilst another suggested *'diminishing returns'* because changing phone usage (i.e. the decline of landlines and increased caution about taking unsolicited calls) made it hard to reach people (Interviewee 6, also mentioned by interviewees 12 and 16). For others, social media was regarded as a solution to *'overcome rurality'* (Interviewee 5, also mentioned by interviewee 3) because it allows parties to make contact with voters without the physical need to travel long distances; as another interviewee suggested, '*social media was helpful as a sitting MP for constituents to see what you are doing'* (Interview 11). However, some interviewees feared that social media is *'only going to reach those who are already listening'* (Interviewee 5, also mentioned by interviewees 2 and 11).

Such reflections suggest that the particular type and mix of campaign tools deployed in rural constituencies may differ from urban seats, with rural seats more reliant on digital communication technologies and somewhat newer modes of contact (i.e. social media and to some extent telephone canvassing) than other seats where more traditional techniques such as leafleting and doorstep canvassing are more viable. In urban constituencies, for instance, interviewees told us that telephone canvassing was *'redundant'* and that it was not as *'efficient as door knocking'* (Interviewee 17).

We should note that interviewees in both rural and urban constituencies occasionally pointed out that the issues they face might not be all that different: *'where you have large towns [in rural constituencies], [you have the] same issues as in urban [seats]'* (Interviewee 18, also mentioned by interviewees 7, 9 and 19). Accessibility is an issue across both rural and urban constituencies but manifests differently; whilst rural campaigners can struggle with large distances, urban campaigners are frequently unable to access certain types of buildings, such as blocks of flats with locked external doors. Mobilising activists is also suggested to be an issue for both types of constituencies, although it was felt there are typically more activists in urban areas. And, whilst this all suggests that rural seats see fewer face-to-face forms of campaigning compared to more urban seats, it was also remarked by another interviewee that voters in rural areas are *'happy to see canvassers'* and are *'surprised that they made an effort'* (Interviewee 9). As another noted there was an '*expectation you will do more campaigning*' in an urban constituency but that there was *'no expectation in a rural [constituency] to see candidates'* (Interviewee 19).

So far, our analysis of the impact of rurality on election campaigning has drawn on the perceptions of party activists involved in the grassroots campaign. Their insights are revealing and cumulatively suggest that rurality is felt to have negative impacts upon campaigns, and that they therefore faced something of a 'rural disadvantage'. But campaigners are also often close to the front line, heavily involved in activity in their own constituency, and potentially unaware of the wider dynamics at play across the national campaign and different parties. To provide further perspective, in the next section we analyse alternative data on rurality and campaigning. In particular, we reformulated these interview findings into hypotheses to explore using survey and electoral data:

H1. **Contacting Rural Voters:** Rural voters are less likely to report being contacted by campaigns compared to urban voters.

H2. **Contact Type:** Rural voters are more likely than urban voters to be contacted with 'remote' contact tools.

H3. **Campaign Expenditure:** Campaigns in rural areas incur higher expenditures than those in urban areas.

H4. **Campaign Effectiveness:** Campaigns in rural constituencies are less effective at mobilising party support and votes compared to campaigns in urban constituencies.

2.2. The impact of rurality on election campaigning

Our quantitative analyses test these hypotheses using a constituency-level data set which pools data from the 2010, 2015, 2017, and 2019 British General Elections. Each constituency therefore appears four times in the dataset, once for each election year.[5]

For each constituency in each election year, we have data on the election results in the seat at that election and at the previous contest. Rurality is measured using the seat's population density per hectare in 2020, obtained from the Office of National Statistics. Although this measure comes from the end of the period we study here, the basic geography of population density in Britain is highly stable over the entire period analysed (the correlation between constituency population

[4] Under UK election law, all candidates are allowed one free direct mailing to each elector, paid for by the state.

[5] Constituencies where the Speaker of the House of Commons stands are excluded as, by convention, the major parties do not campaign there. We also exclude all Northern Irish constituencies, as the party system there is very different to that in the rest of the UK.

density in 2020, and the equivalent measure from the 2011 Census, at the start of the study period, is 0.993).[6]

We also have data on campaign activity in each seat at each election. The campaign activity measures are taken from two different sources. The first is the British Election Study Internet Panel (BESIP) survey, which interviewed large numbers of voters across Britain between 2014 and 2023 (Fieldhouse et al., 2024). In each wave of the survey, respondents were asked if they recalled being contacted by any political party over the preceding four weeks and, if they did, which parties had contacted them and how they had been contacted: had they received a leaflet, had they been contacted at home or in the street, had they been telephoned, received an email or a social media contact. We look at what respondents reported about being contacted by parties in the three waves immediately after the 2015, 2017 and 2019 General Elections (waves 6, 13, and 19), when they would be recalling contact during the election campaign itself, and aggregate their responses to the constituency level (using weights supplied with the BESIP data to take into account factors such as panel attrition). This provides us with estimates of the percentage of electors in each constituency who reported being contacted in various ways and by various parties at each of the three general elections.

The second source comprises the party candidates' declared spending on their 'short campaigns', as a percentage of the legal maximum in the seat (a well-established proxy for campaign effort: Johnston and Pattie, 2014). As our interviews reflect the SNP's experience of rural campaigning, we add further context by comparing the results for Scottish seats with those for all British seats.

2.3. Rurality and campaign contact

Building on what our interviewees told us; our first analyses draw on the BESIP estimates of voters' reported campaign contacts in each constituency to test H1 (that rural voters are less likely to report being contacted by campaigns) and H2 (that rural voters are more likely to be contacted with 'remote' contact technologies). Two of the modes of campaign contact captured in the BESIP data require face-to-face encounters which might be harder in more rural than more urban areas: contacting voters at home and in the street. Three represent more at-a-distance forms of contact which we might expect would be equally easy (or difficult) to achieve in rural and urban settings: contact via telephone, e-mail, or social media. And a final form of campaign contact, leafleting, is an intermediate form: while much leafleting is done by volunteers delivering leaflets door-to-door (and hence might be harder in more rural than in more urban seats), all candidates are entitled to one free mail delivery during their campaign, which should mean rurality will not affect whether respondents see at least one leaflet.

Depending on the election, between two-fifths and two-thirds of voters reported being contacted by at least one party during election campaigns, both in Scotland and Great Britain as a whole (Table 2). Unsurprisingly, leaflets were the most commonly experienced form of campaign contact, reported by between a third and a half of respondents. Other forms of contact were less commonly reported. Between 10 % and 20 % reported being contacted by a party at home during an election campaign, and around the same proportion reported being emailed (though this may be somewhat exaggerated, as BESIP is an internet survey and hence likely biased towards those most comfortable with electronic communications). Telephone canvassing, meanwhile, was relatively uncommon (generally reported by less than 5 % of respondents, and declining over time) and most other forms of contact (including via social media and on the street) were also only rarely reported.

Were respondents' chances of reporting being contacted during an election campaign affected by how rural their constituency was (H1)? To find out, we ran a series of regression models on the pooled constituency data for 2015, 2017, and 2019, with each form of campaign contact in each election as a Y variable.[7] Rurality was measured by the constituency population density in 2020. Previous research has shown that party's campaign harder in more marginal seats, and that other things being equal, they tend to spend more in seats they are defending than in seats where they are the challenger (Pattie and Johnston, 2003b). Hence our models also control for how marginal each constituency was at the previous election and, in the models for spending by individual parties, whether the party was the defending incumbent in the seat at the time of the election. In the models examining total campaign contact, we use the winning party's % lead over the party in second place at the previous election as our measure of constituency marginality. In the models for contact by each individual party, we use a measure of how marginal the seat was for that party in particular: where the party was the incumbent, this is the same as the winning party's percentage lead at the previous election over the second-placed party in the seat, but where the party did not win the seat at the previous election, its marginality score is the winning party's share of the vote at that contest minus the share won by the party whose spending we are analysing.[8] Hence the marginality measure is always positive: smaller values indicate more marginal seats, larger values safer ones.

In the following discussion, we focus only on population density's effect on the percentage of respondents in each constituency reporting being contacted in various ways during a general election campaign by all parties, and by each party individually. To ease comparison, the population density b-coefficients and associated 95 % confidence intervals for the models focusing on campaign contact are presented graphically in Fig. 1 for Scottish constituencies and in Fig. 2 for all British constituencies (the full models are reported in Appendix B, Tables B1 and B2). The first panel in each figure shows the population density effects for models predicting contact by any party, and the remaining panels show them for the models looking at contact each individual party. In each panel, the b-coefficient value forms the X-axis, and the form of party contact which is the dependent variable in the relevant model is shown on the Y axis. A red vertical line in each panel indicates b values of zero (implying no effect): confidence intervals crossing this line indicate statistically insignificant effects. To the right of the line, the effect of population density on the percentage being contacted by each means is positive, indicating higher contact rates in

[6] As the population density measure is very skewed, we also looked at this measure in a logged form, as a robustness check on our results (the results of these robustness checks, which confirm our main findings, are reported in appendix C: Tables C1 – C6).

[7] We have conducted similar individual-level analyses predicting whether individual BESIP respondents' chances of reporting being contacted were affected by how rural their home constituency was (details available from the authors). The key results are much the same as in the aggregate analyses reported here.

[8] To illustrate, imagine a seat contested by three parties, A, B and C. At the previous election, A won the seat, B came second, and C third. Their respective vote shares then were 44 %, 40 % and 16 %. Our marginality score for party A in this seat is 4 % points (the absolute difference between its vote share, and that of the 2nd-placed party). Party B's marginality score is also 4 % points (as it did not win the seat, it's score is the absolute difference between its share and that of the winning party, and as this is the gap between the first and second parties in the seat, it has to be the same as that for party A). This shows that, from the perspectives of A and B, this seat is highly, and equally, marginal: only a small swing from A to B is required for the former to lose and the later to win. But party C's marginality score in the constituency is much larger, 28 % points (the absolute difference between its vote share and that of the winning party). It would take a substantial swing of support from A to C for the latter to unseat the former, and hence the seat is not a marginal from party C's perspective. Our measure therefore allows us to assess how marginal each seat is from the point of view of each party individually, an essential requirement in a multi-party world.

Table 2
Proportion reporting being contacted by any party's election campaign, 2015–2019 (all estimates from post-election BESIP waves W6, W13 and W19).

	Scotland			Great Britain		
	2015	2017	2019	2015	2017	2019
	% reporting contact	% reporting contact	% reporting contact	% reporting contact	% reporting contact	% reporting contact
Any party contact	66.0	44.1	43.3	57.9	41.8	43.1
Contacted by telephone	10.8	4.6	3.6	6.5	3.1	2.5
Contacted by leaflet	59.4	33.9	39.0	49.1	36.2	37.4
Contacts at home	23.7	10.3	9.8	17.6	9.9	10.9
Contacted in street	13.9	5.0	3.6	4.9	3.1	2.7
Contacted by email	20.3	11.8	8.9	18.0	10.4	8.3
Contacted on social media	5.0	6.5	6.8	2.3	5.2	4.9
Contacted by other means	10.8	4.6	3.6	6.5	3.1	2.5

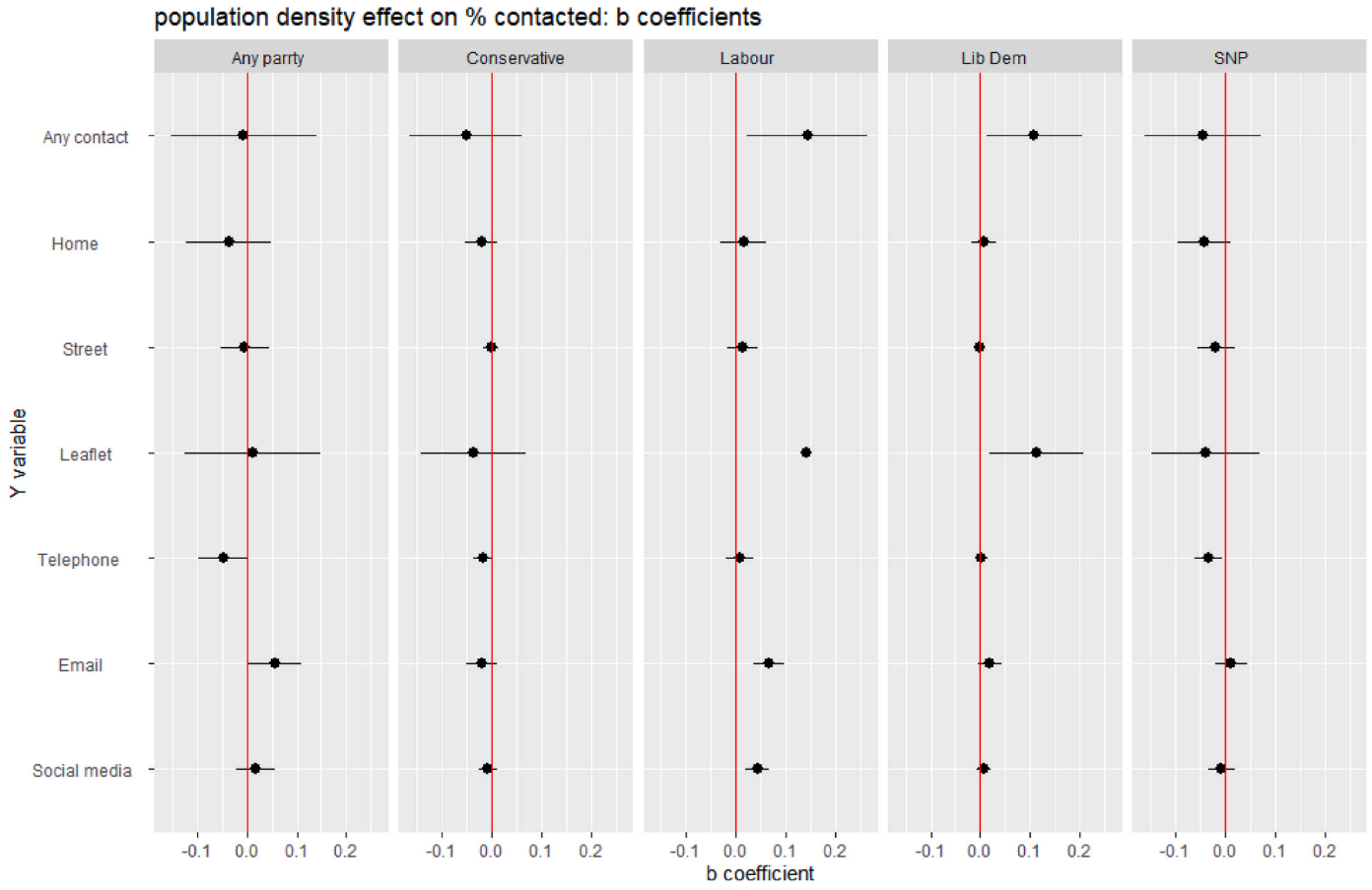

Fig. 1. Population density and the percent reporting being contacted by party general election campaigns in Scottish constituencies, 2015–2019 (source: 2015–2019 pooled data: full regression models reported in Table B1).

more urban than in more rural areas. Effects to the left of the red vertical line indicate negative b-coefficients, which indicate that contact rates rise as population density declines, and as the area becomes more rural.

When we analyse only Scottish constituencies, population density rarely had a significant effect on the percentage of voters in each constituency reporting any form of campaign contact: almost all the confidence intervals for the population density effect cross the zero-line (Fig. 1). In the few examples where the effect is significant, it is generally substantively very small. For instance, the effect of population density on the proportion of respondents reporting telephone contact by the SNP is significant and negative, indicating higher contact rates in more rural settings. But the b value is only −0.032. In other words, for every 1-person increase in the number of people per hectare in a constituency, the percentage reporting being telephoned by the SNP drops by just 0.03 % points on average. To put that in context, the vast majority (85 %) of British constituencies have a population density within 20 people either side of the overall average population density. Increasing population density over that 40 people per hectare range, therefore, would decrease the percentage reporting being phoned by the SNP by 40 * 0.032, or just 1.25 percentage points. And where there are larger effects (for instance, the positive effects on the percentage reporting either any contact or leaflet contact from Labour), the b values remain small. For any contact by Labour the b value is 0.143, suggesting a 40-person per hectare increase in population density would produce a 5.7 percentage point increase in the percentage reporting contact (and in Labour's case this bias towards urban areas reflects the party's long-standing relative strength in those places, rather than any clear cut-rural disadvantage). In Scotland, at least, residents in rural areas are generally no more or less likely to report being contacted by a party campaign than are their urban compatriots, contrary to H1. Nor,

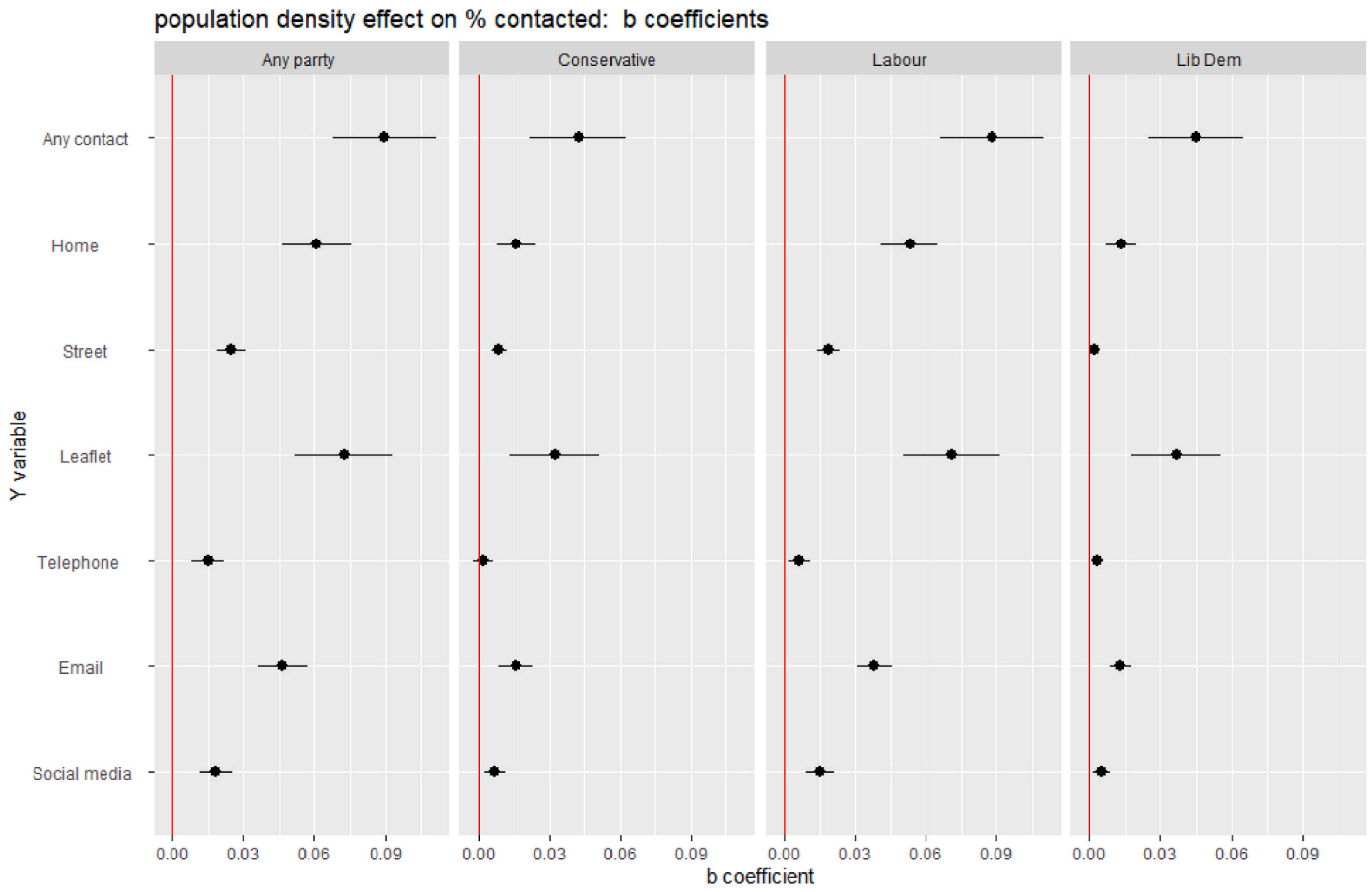

Fig. 2. Population density and the percent reporting being contacted by party general election campaigns in British constituencies, 2015–2019 (source: 2015–2019 pooled data: full regression models reported in Table B2).

contrary to H2, is there much real sign that 'remote' forms of contact were employed to a greater extent in more rural than in more urban settings.

In contrast, in the models for all British constituencies, population density is significantly and positively related to almost all the measures of campaign contact (Fig. 2). This suggests that (other things being equal) the more urban the constituency, the more likely electors living there were to report being contacted in some way by at least one party's election campaign, providing support for H1 and for the argument that campaigning reaches fewer people in rural than in urban areas. However, the effect of population density on the percentage reporting being contacted is in most cases positive for both 'face-to-face' forms of campaigning (such as home and street contacts) and for more remote modes of campaigning (such as telephoning, e-mailing and using social media). There is little support here for H2, or for the idea that rural campaigners are compensating for the physical challenges they face by turning disproportionately to campaign methods which reduce the friction of distance. What is more, the effect sizes for population density (indicated by the relevant b-values) are relatively small. For instance, across Britain as a whole, every 1-person increase in the number of people per hectare in a constituency raises the percentage of BESIP respondents there reporting any party contact by just 0.09 % points. Applying the same 40-person per hectare range which captures the great majority of seats, the model implies an increase of just 3.6 % points (40*0.09) in the percentage of BES respondents reporting being contacted – real but very modest. Seen in that light, the apparent paradox of significant results in Britain as a whole but not in Scotland is less paradoxical. Together, the results imply either no effect or a statistically significant but substantively limited effect.[9] Either way, rurality does not have a major impact on respondents' reported campaign contacts.

The SNP interviewees' concerns about rural campaigning notwithstanding, therefore, there is no sign that Scottish BESIP respondents in more rural areas were any less likely to report being contacted by the various party election campaigns than their more urban counterparts. But across Britain as a whole, there are signs of a (small) 'rural disadvantage' in campaign contact. The more rural the seat, the less likely voters living there are to report being contacted (a disadvantage for the campaigning parties, though whether voters will see it as such is another question!). So we have support for H1, but not consistently so in all parts of the country – and where H1 is supported, the substantive impact of rurality on campaign contact is not large. In neither Scotland nor in Britain as a whole is there much support for H2, however: 'remote' forms of campaigning are not being used to compensate for any rural disadvantage.

[9] Another factor behind the apparently different results in the Scottish and British analyses is the much smaller number of Scottish seats compared to all British seats. This increases the standard errors and hence the confidence intervals associated with the b-values, and hence increases the chances of non-significant findings in the Scottish as opposed to the British analyses.

2.4. Rurality and expenditure

Our interviewees also suggest that rurality raises the costs of campaigning for parties, which must coordinate leafleting, canvassing and other activities over more dispersed communities; scarce resources are therefore stretched further. We now examine how much candidates in each constituency spent on their 'short' election campaign (the short campaign is basically the more-or-less four-week period between an election being called and polling day), as a percentage of the maximum permitted spending in their seat. Following H3, we test whether variations in the permitted maximum spending between urban and rural constituencies (discussed above) notwithstanding, rural campaigns incur higher expenditure than those in urban areas.

Using a series of regression analyses of pooled constituency data for the 2010 to 2019 elections, we look at how rurality affects both the total level of spending by the major parties combined (SNP, Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats in Scotland, dropping the SNP for all British constituencies), and the constituency campaign spending of each party individually. In the models, the dependent variables were total campaign spending, and each party's own spending (all as a % of the legal maximum). As before, separate analyses were conducted for Scotland and for all British constituencies, and all models control for past marginality and incumbency, using the same variables as in the BESIP analyses above.

Focusing first on Scottish constituencies, the effect of rurality on party campaign spending varies from party to party (Fig. 3). As above, the figure shows the b-coefficient and 95 % confidence interval for population density in each model. The Y axis shows the dependent variable in each mode, and the X axis the b-value (the full regression models are reported in Appendix B Table 3). Once we control for incumbency and marginality, population density had no effect on total campaign spending, or on campaign spending by either Liberal Democrat or SNP candidates. Only the effects for Conservative and Labour spending were statistically significant. But while Scottish Labour candidates spent more, on average, as population density went up, Scottish Conservatives candidates spent less (suggesting the latter party spent more on rural than on urban contests). Only the result for the Scottish Conservatives is consistent with H3, therefore.

Across Great Britain as a whole, the more urban a constituency, the greater the total level of campaign spending was on average there (as a percentage of the permitted maximum spend in the seat), and the greater the spending by Labour and Liberal Democrat candidates (Fig. 4: the full models are reported in Table B4). Conservative campaigns, however, were no more or less intense in urban than in rural areas, suggesting that any apparent 'rural deficit' in campaign effort is not inevitable. These results, too, contradict H3 but do suggest that for most parties, less spending is directed towards rural than urban campaigns. Yet this is not necessarily unambiguous evidence of a 'rural disadvantage', as not all parties are equally competitive in rural areas to start with. For instance, it is relevant that Labour's electoral base is largely focused on urban and (former) industrial Britain, not on the countryside, while the Conservatives have long had a strong rural base: the effect of rurality on each party's spending, therefore, to some degree reflects their respective geographies of support.

2.5. Rurality and constituency campaign effects

What about the effect of rurality on turnout and on parties' own campaign efficacy? Some of our SNP interviewees reported greater difficulties in getting out their vote in more rural than in more urban areas.

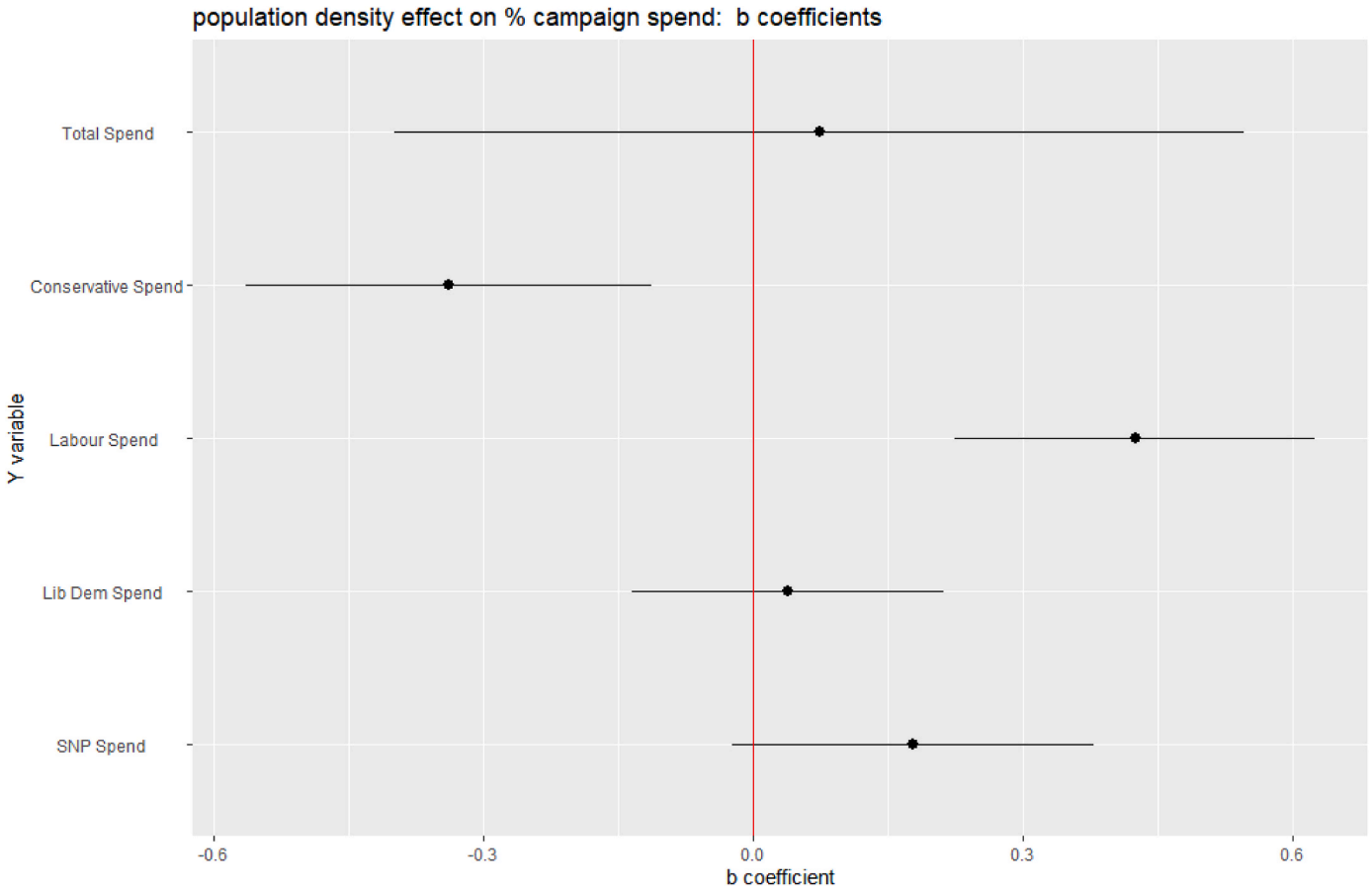

Fig. 3. Population density and constituency campaign spending in Scottish constituencies, 2015–2019 (source: 2010–2019 pooled data: full regression models reported in Table B3).

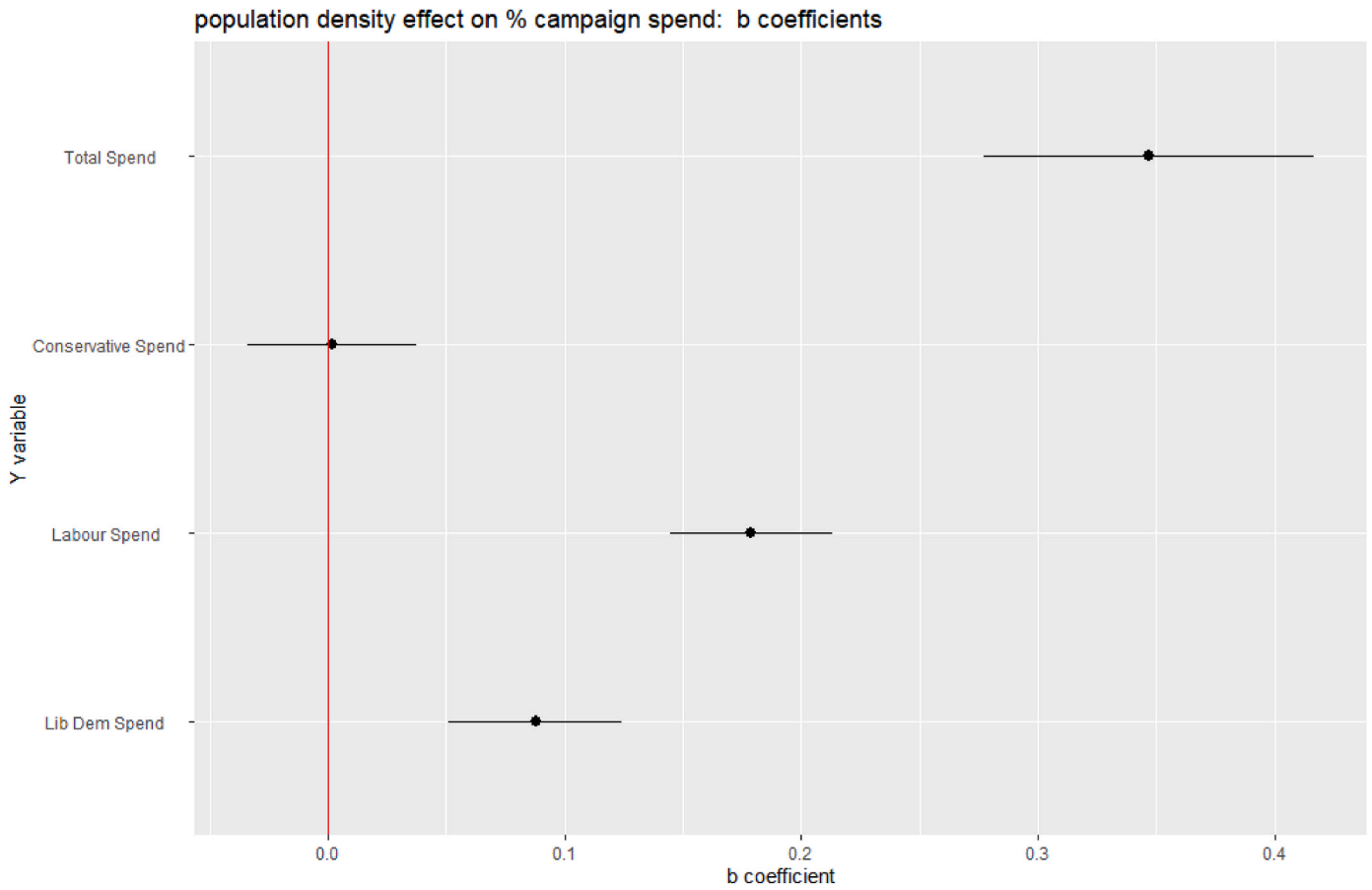

Fig. 4. Population density and constituency campaign spending in British constituencies, 2015–2019 (source: 2010–2019 pooled data: full regression models reported in Table B4).

This claim is evaluated by testing H4: campaigning in rural constituencies is less effective at mobilising voters and achieving electoral results compared to campaigns in urban constituencies. Past research on constituency campaign effects in British (and other constituency-based) elections tends to show fairly consistent results. Other things being equal, in constituencies where a party is challenging the incumbent, the harder it campaigns, the greater the increase in its vote share. Where a party is itself the incumbent it only campaigns hard when it is coming under sustained pressure from a strong challenger – so more campaign effort by incumbents tends to either have no effect on a party's vote, or to have a negative effect (e.g. Pattie et al., 2017). But are rural elections campaigns less effective than urban ones (a corollary of our interviewees' concerns about the difficulties they perceive are presented by rural campaigning)?

To find out, we estimate different regression models for each of the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, and SNP shares of the constituency electorate at each election between 2010 and 2019, using our pooled constituency results dataset. Modelling shares of the electorate rather than simply a share of votes cast is a common practice in the campaign effects literature (see e.g. Denver et al., 2004), as it allows us to take into account the possibility that parties' campaign efforts will not only win over those who might otherwise have voted for another party, but might also have mobilised voters who would otherwise have abstained. We ran separate models for seats where a party was the incumbent at an election and for seats where it was a challenger (we expect weak or even negative campaign effects for incumbent parties, but strong and positive effects for challengers).

In all our models, the dependent variable is a party's share of the electorate at election t. Each model controls for how marginal the seat was for the party at the previous contest, election t-1 (using the same marginality measure as the in the models of campaign intensity discussed above). Rurality is once again measured by the constituency's population density in 2020. Our proxy for the effort the party put into its local campaign is the amount its candidate spent on his or her 'short campaign', as a percentage of the legal maximum permitted in the constituency. The models also include campaign spending by the other major parties (each party is likely to react to how hard its rivals are working on the ground in a constituency, as well as to how marginal the seat is for it). To assess the effect of rurality on campaign effectiveness, we include the interaction between population density and party campaign spending. The full regression models are reported in Appendix B, Table B5.

To aid interpretation of the interaction effects, we graph the trend lines for predicted share of the electorate at rising levels of campaign spending for seats with population densities at the first quartile (2.72 people per hectare – pretty rural: only a quarter of constituencies in Britain have lower population densities) and at the third quartile (31.68 people per hectare – getting more urban: only a quarter of British constituencies have higher population densities).

By and large, the models tell a consistent story. As expected, when a party was the local incumbent going into an election, its constituency campaign effort generally made no difference to its share of the electorate, once we control for previous popularity (Table B5). Most of the coefficients for each party's campaign spending in the model for its share of the electorate in seats where it was the incumbent are not significant. Only in the Labour incumbents model was the party's own campaign spending significant, and there the coefficient was positive: the harder Labour incumbents campaigned in their constituencies, the higher their share of the electorate was.

Other things being equal, Conservative incumbents tended to do less

well, and Labour incumbents better, as the seat's population density went up (and the seat became more urban) – as we might expect, given the two parties' respective support bases. But there was no discernible 'rurality' effect for either Liberal Democrat or SNP incumbents. And (most importantly for this paper's focus) in no case did the interaction between an incumbent's campaign spending and population density prove to have a significant effect on the incumbent's vote share (Fig. 5). In the four interaction graphs for incumbents, the lines for campaign effects at the first and third quartiles of population density are either more or less parallel or have substantially overlapping confidence intervals. In other words, the marginal effect of extra campaign effort on incumbents' shares of the electorate is similar no matter where you are: rurality didn not alter how effective an incumbent's campaign was.

Turning to seats where each party was a challenger (Table B5b), we see (as we'd expect) positive campaign effects across the board. The harder each party campaigned where it was a challenger locally, the higher its share of the electorate.

In most of the 'challenger' models, the direct effect of population density on party vote share proved to be insignificant. Only in the Labour model was there a (weak) significant effect, and there it was positive. The higher the population density (and hence the more urban the seat), the better Labour challengers tended to do, other things being equal. Rurality had no direct effect on Conservative, Liberal Democrat, or SNP challengers' shares of the electorate, however.

But the interaction between challengers' campaign spending and population density had inconsistent effects on challengers' vote shares (Fig. 6). For Labour and (strikingly, given what our interviewees told us) SNP challengers, how rural or urban the seat they were campaigning in was made no difference to how effective their campaign was. Conservative and Liberal Democrat challengers, meanwhile, tended to get higher marginal returns from their campaign efforts in more rural than in more urban seats. But even for them the effect was only modest.

Overall, these results run counter to H4 and the idea that election campaigning is less effective in more rural constituencies. On the contrary, they show that rurality does not really have any consistent effect on campaign effectiveness (and where it did have an effect, it tended to

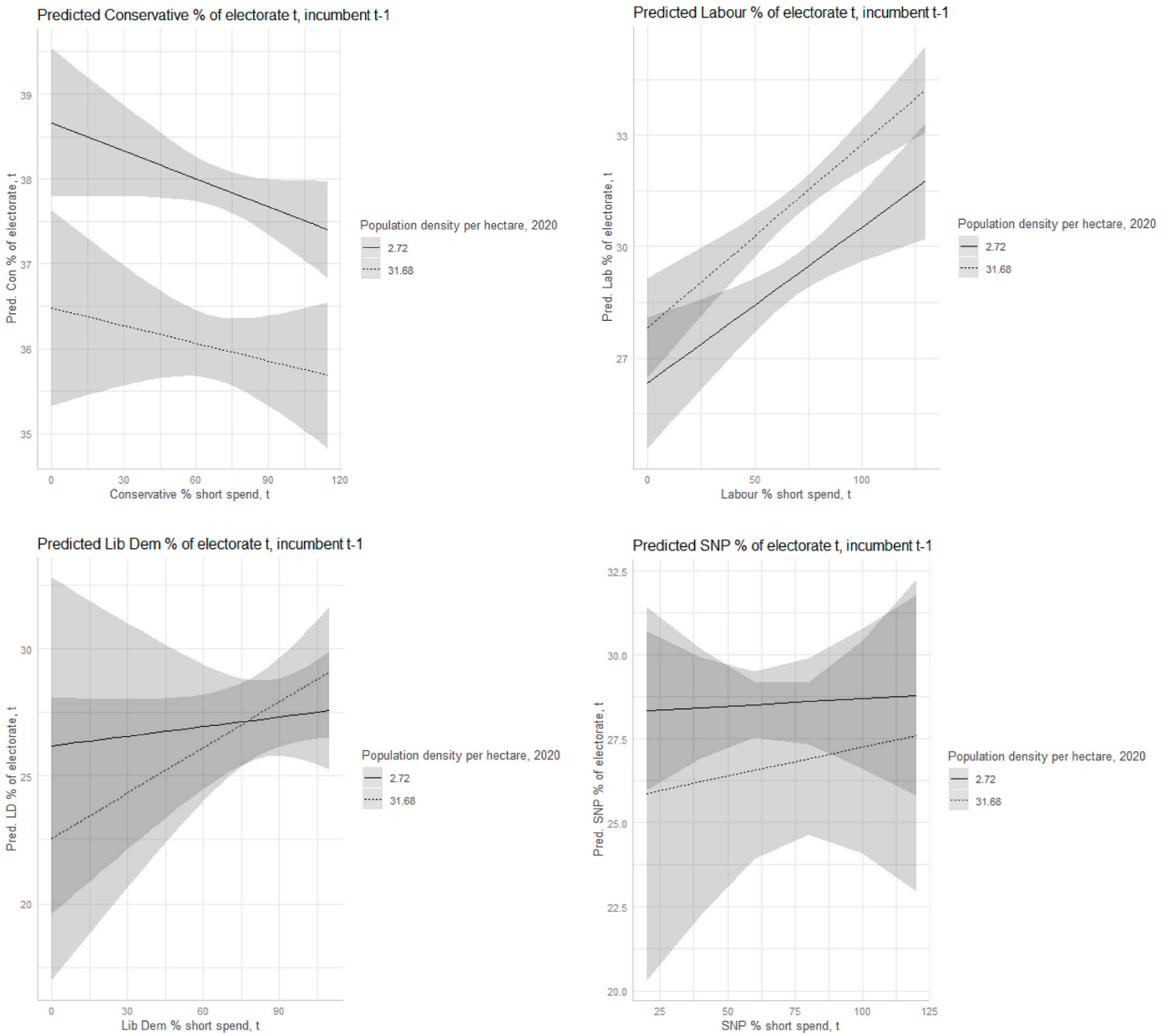

Fig. 5. Visualising the impact on share of the electorate of the rurality*campaign intensity interaction for incumbent candidates.

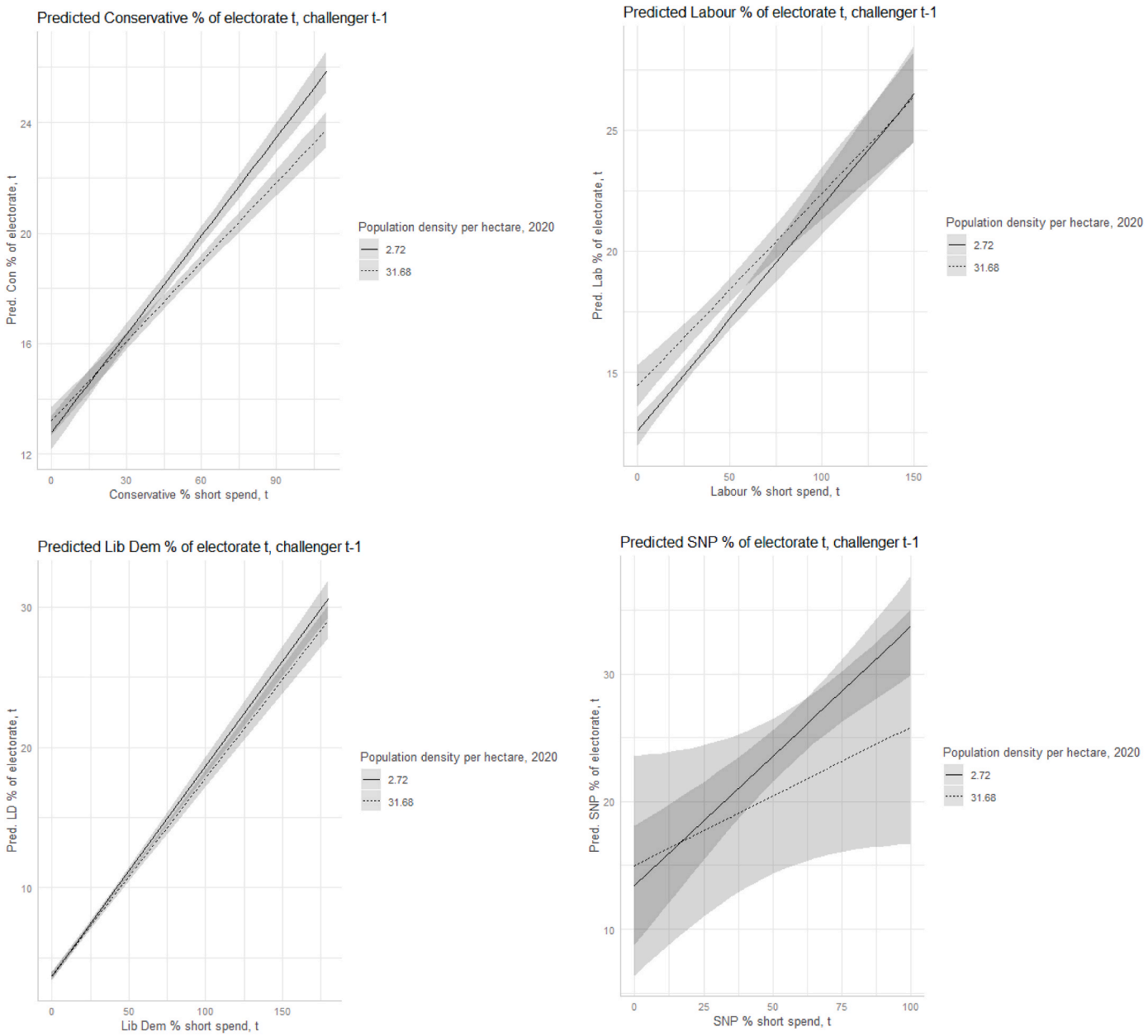

Fig. 6. Visualising the impact on share of the electorate of the rurality*campaign intensity interaction for challenger candidates.

work in a party's favour rather than against it). And this is also true of SNP candidates: contrary to the fears of party campaigners, their campaigns appear no more or less effective in rural than in urban areas.

Finally, was the impact of local campaigning on turnout affected by how rural a seat was? To find out, we regress constituency turnout (the number of votes cast as a percentage of the local electorate) on population density, the total amount spent on the campaign by all major parties in each seat as a percentage of the legal maximum there, and on the interaction between the two (to test if rurality alters the impact of campaign effort on turnout). Our model also controls for both turnout and winner's majority in the constituency at the previous election, to take into account the tendency for the geography of turnout to be relatively stable over time and for it to be affected by the closeness of the electoral competition. The full model is reported in Table B6. As before, we focus on the interaction between population density and campaign activity and visualise it graphically by comparing the effect of varying total campaign spending in a seat with population density of 2.72 people per hectare with the same effect in a seat with a population density of 31.68 people per hectare.

Other things being equal, in both more rural and more urban settings, the greater the total campaign effort made in a constituency, the higher the turnout tended to be there (Fig. 7). The slope for the effect of total campaign effort on turnout is steeper in the more urban than in the more rural seat, suggesting that the mobilization effect of campaigning yields greater dividends in towns and cities than in the countryside (as predicted by H4). However, the substantive effect is not large. In both cases, moving from a scenario in which no party campaigned in the seat to one in which party campaigning gets close to the maximum likely level raises turnout from between 65 % and 66 % to around 69–70 % - not a particularly large rise. And the gap between the more rural and the more urban seat, while significant, is very small. Where no party campaigns, turnout would be around 1 % point higher in the more rural than in the more urban seat. And at the opposite end of the campaigning spectrum the effect is a similar size, but switched; where we get close to the maximum total effort being expended, turnout in the more urban constituency would be around 1 % point higher on average than in the

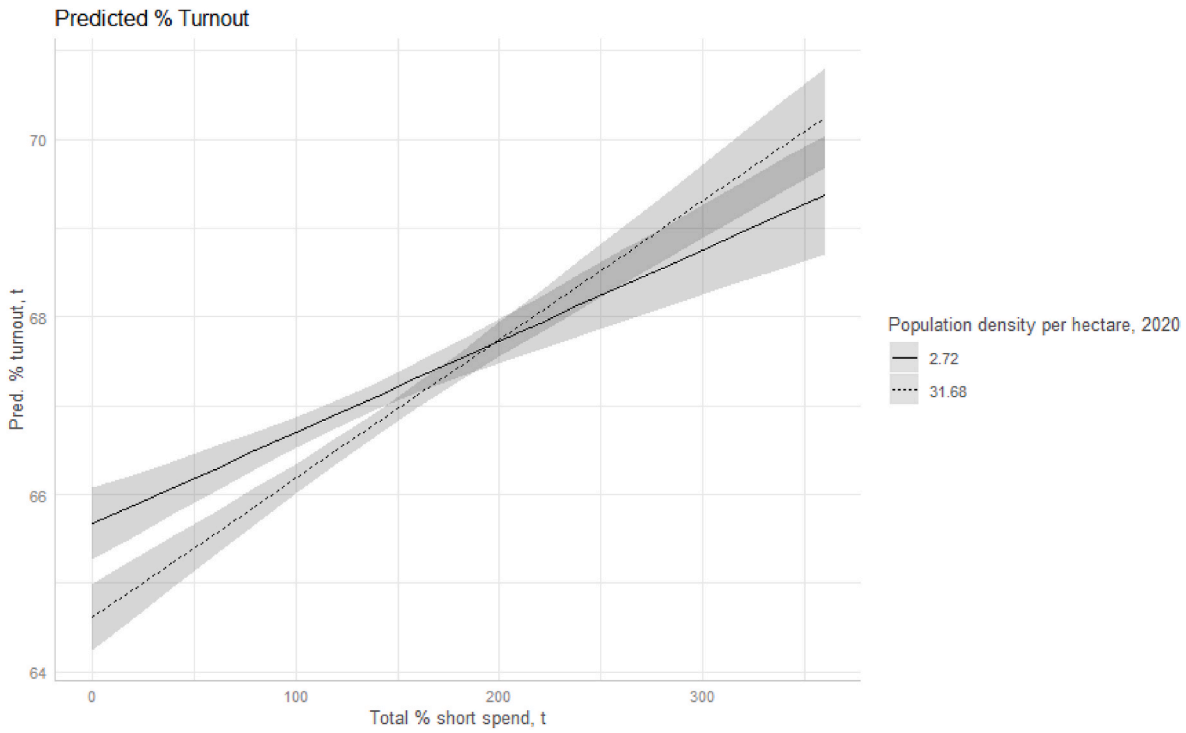

Fig. 7. Visualising the impact on turnout of the rurality*campaign intensity interaction.

more rural one (and the difference is only just significant). Although this supports H4 and does suggest a 'rural disadvantage' in terms of campaigning's ability to mobilise voters, therefore, it also suggests the disadvantage is in reality rather small.

3. Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the impact of rurality on election campaigning through a mixed-methods approach. Campaigners perceive rurality to increase the time, effort, and costs of campaigning, and therefore requires different contact styles compared to more urban constituencies. Party activists engaged in delivering constituency campaigns are concerned about a potential 'rural campaign disadvantage', with implications for both the parties themselves and for voters. For the parties, the implication would be that campaigning in more rural areas requires greater resourcing and is more difficult than campaigning in more urban areas - a real problem when the resources for conducting constituency campaigns are both in short supply (most local parties are dependent on their own efforts for both their resources and their volunteers) and are limited by law. And this also implies that parties will receive less electoral 'bang', in the form of more votes, for their campaign buck in more rural than in more urban areas - a potential problem when they might hope to either defend or win new seats. For voters, meanwhile, the concern might be that the more rural the constituency they live in, the less their views are sought by the parties, the fewer chances they might have to get their point of view across, and the greater the risk that they will not be heard.

Our analysis of voters' experience of campaigning suggests that some of these concerns have a foundation in reality; in Britain as a whole (though less clearly so in Scotland), the more rural the area the less likely voters are to report being contacted, even when we control for things like the closeness of the electoral competition in the constituency. However, this broad summary hides some nuance. This differential was frequently small, and in some cases the divide was not significant. We also found no clear evidence that rural voters were being contacted via different campaign methods compared to their urban counterparts: parties do not seem to have opted for campaign methods relatively free from fiction of distance effects in rural seats to compensate for the increased effort involved in face-to-face campaigning there, relative to urban constituencies.

When analysing campaign expenditure and efficacy the picture is mixed. In terms of campaign funding, we see little consistent sign of more resources being put into more rural seats. Only the Conservatives tended to spend more in more rural seats, other things being equal. The other parties' spending was either unrelated to rurality or was focused in the opposite direction – with spending levels going up as seats became more urban. And despite the greater perceived challenges of rural than urban campaigning, parties' returns to their efforts seem similar in both environments. The rural campaign deficit seems real, but in practice very small, and of little real consequence for parties' vote-getting. Of course, this is perhaps because rural campaigners are (by necessity) more resourceful in how they expend their campaign efforts (in ways we are not entirely picking up with our existing measures of campaigning) than their urban counterparts. For instance, blanket canvassing in a constituency is seldom a good idea for a party, as campaigning in parts of the constituency where one is relatively unpopular risks riling and mobilising voters who oppose the party rather than encouraging those who do support it to turn out. Instead, parties focus their efforts more not just at some constituencies rather than others but also at some parts of those constituencies rather than at other places within the seat (Cutts, 2006). Rural campaigners might just be better than their urban counterparts at picking out where in the seat to focus their efforts for greatest effect, precisely because they are more aware that they will struggle to reach every corner of the constituency. At present, this remains a speculation: future research will tell.

Funding

This research was supported by the University of Sheffield Knowledge Exchange Fund, for the project entitled 'The 2024 General Election: Consolidating Research Impact'.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Stephanie Luke: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Charles Pattie:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Luke Temple:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Katharine Dommett:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks goes to the Scottish National Party campaigners and representatives who participated in this research.

Appendix A. Interviews

Interviews	
Participant Selection	Constituencies were selected on the basis of whether they were least/most densely populated. Emails were sent to 33 potential participants that had experience of campaigning in a constituency that was the least/most densely populated with a total of 20 interviews conducted.
Participants	
Type and Length of Interview	Roughly 20 min. Semi-structured interviews (questions provided below)
Topics in Interview	- Rural/Urban constituency and campaign activity - Campaign strategies - Understanding of Rurality/Urbanity - Representation

Example. of Interview Questions (Same questions were also asked for those in urban constituencies)

1. How would you say working in a rural constituency affects campaign activity?
   - Prompts; Advantages and disadvantages
   - Do rural seats face more challenges in doorknocking/leafleting etc?
   - Are people more reticent about doorknocking their neighbours?
2. What campaign strategies have you developed in regards to campaigning? What activities do you tend to do and why?
3. What do you understand the term rural to mean?
4. Is population density a good proxy for rurality? Or should we focus on something else?
5. How do campaigns in rural seats differ to those in more urban or densely populated areas?
6. Do you get more/less support from the central party/HQ for campaigning?
7. Should there be special allowances for people campaigning in urban areas?
   - Are the additional allowances made for rural constituencies sufficient to allow you to campaign? I.e. higher spending limits
8. Do you think rurality also affects your ability to represent your constituents effectively?
9. Finally, if you could change one thing about your campaign to make it easier, what would it be?

Participants

	Constituency density	Date of Interview
Interviewee 1	Top 10 % of the least densely populated constituencies	October 16, 2023
Interviewee 2		January 5, 2024
Interviewee 3		January 13, 2024
Interviewee 4		October 16, 2023
Interviewee 5		October 16, 2023
Interviewee 6	Top 20 % of the least densely populated constituencies	October 31, 2023
Interviewee 7		November 4, 2023
Interviewee 8		November 4, 2023
Interviewee 9		January 12, 2024
Interviewee 10	Top 30 % of the least densely populated constituencies	January 14, 2024
Interviewee 11		October 19, 2023
Interviewee 12		January 3, 2024
Interviewee 13	Top 50 % of the least densely populated constituencies	February 27, 2024
Interviewee 14	Top 60 % of the least densely populated constituencies	February 27, 2024
Interviewee 15		October 23, 2023
Interviewee 16	Top 10 % of the most densely populated constituencies	October 20, 2023
Interviewee 17		October 17, 2023
Interviewee 18	Top 20 % of the most densely populated constituencies	January 26, 2024
Interviewee 19		January 15, 2024
Interviewee 20		February 8, 2024

Interview analysis

Initial Themes from Interview Questions	Refined Themes after Comparing across Interviewees
Understanding of Rurality/Urbanity	***Geographically difficult***
	- *Mixture of areas- villages/towns/hills etcs. Makes getting around* difficult.
	Structural Aspects
	- *Whether there is street Lights/Paths*
	- *City/town - reasonably high density*
	- *Mix of residential and commercial*
	- *Whether stable population. Transient population*
	Access to Amenities
	- *Services further away*
	- *Things you can't do - Cinema*
Differences between rural and urban	***Distance***
	Canvassing is difficult
	- *Some rural areas can't do Sunday (Religious reasons), or nights as it gets dark quickly.*
	- *Travelling by car or having to get Ferry.*
	- *End up doing certain parts, but not everywhere*
	- *Harder to get the vote out*
	Costs
	- *More expensive to canvass in rural areas*
	Transient nature of electorate
	- *Students moving around (urban)*
	Messaging
	- *Different messages between different demographics (urban)*
	- *Different messages whether it be about local issues or national issues (rural)*
	Telephone Canvassing
	- *Not as useful in urban areas*
Similarities between urban and Rural	***Canvassing***
	- *Difficulty to get activists to canvass (motivation)*
	- *Based on gut instinct (what houses to avoid rather than voter ID knowledge.*
	Leafleting
	- *Most people are happy with leafleting and not doing canvassing*
How to overcome rurality	***Interest in pre-paid leaflets*** *- make it easier to target difficult areas.*
	Telephone Canvass
	Having more activists

Appendix B. Regression models

Table B1
Post-election reported campaign contact and rurality in Scotland - % of BESIP respondents in constituency reporting campaign contact, 2015–2019: regression models (source: 2015–2019 pooled data, Scottish constituencies only).

a) % reporting any campaign contact

Y = reported contact by any party:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Constituency % majority t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	44.026	1.961**	−0.006	0.075	0.041	0.088	0.001	177
% Contacted by telephone	5.614	0.650**	−0.047	0.025	0.020	0.029	0.022	177
% Contacted by leaflet	39.027	1.821**	0.012	0.070	0.045	0.082	0.002	177
% Contacted at home	13.894	1.151**	−0.036	0.044	−0.076	0.052	0.017	177
% Contacted in street	4.009	0.651**	−0.004	0.025	0.112	0.029**	0.078	177
% Contacted by email	10.395	0.728**	0.056	0.028*	0.012	0.033	0.024	177
% Contacted by social media	5.898	0.530**	0.018	0.020	−0.066	0.024**	0.046	177

b) % reporting contact by the Conservative campaign

Y = reported contact by Conservatives:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Conservative % marginality t-1		Conservative incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	30.615	1.860**	−0.051	0.058	−0.245	0.056**	12.774	3.119**	0.264	177
% Contacted by telephone	1.853	0.318**	−0.016	0.010	−0.028	0.010**	4.155	0.533**	0.392	177
% Contacted by leaflet	29.138	1.760**	−0.036	0.055	−0.242	0.053**	9.594	2.952**	0.234	177
% Contacted at home	3.401	0.522**	−0.020	0.016	−0.058	0.016**	3.970	0.875**	0.261	177
% Contacted in street	0.795	0.249**	−0.003	0.008	−0.008	0.008	1.409	0.418**	0.098	177

(*continued on next page*)

Table B1 (*continued*)

b) % reporting contact by the Conservative campaign

Y = reported contact by Conservatives:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Conservative % marginality t-1		Conservative incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Contacted by email	3.359	0.496**	−0.020	0.015	−0.018	0.015	1.659	0.832*	0.066	177
% Contacted by social media	1.423	0.298**	−0.007	0.009	−0.019	0.009*	1.746	0.499**	0.143	177

c) % reporting contact by the Labour campaign

Y = reported contact by Labour:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Labour % marginality t-1		Labour incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	23.097	1.916**	0.143	0.061*	0.001	0.068	16.781	1.974**	0.343	177
% Contacted by telephone	0.702	0.455	0.007	0.015	0.006	0.016	3.320	0.469	0.243	177
% Contacted by leaflet	21.229	1.789**	0.140	0.057*	0.001	0.063	15.688	1.843	0.346	177
% Contacted at home	3.557	0.729**	0.016	0.023	−0.072	0.026**	5.521	0.751**	0.269	177
% Contacted in street	1.338	0.474**	0.014	0.015	−0.010	0.017	1.507	0.488	0.066	177
% Contacted by email	1.836	0.492**	0.066	0.016**	0.032	0.017	1.700	0.506**	0.183	177
% Contacted by social media	1.437	0.381**	0.043	0.012**	−0.005	0.013	−0.954	0.393*	0.092	177

d) % reporting contact by the Liberal Democrat campaign

Y = reported contact by Lib Dems:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Lib Dem % marginality t-1		Lib Dem incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	31.747	2.250**	0.108	0.049*	−0.443	0.054**	20.978	2.781**	0.564	177
% Contacted by telephone	1.342	0.281**	0.002	0.006	−0.028	0.007**	3.319	0.348**	0.515	177
% Contacted by leaflet	31.233	2.207**	0.112	0.048*	−0.446	0.053**	18.140	2.729**	0.543	177
% Contacted at home	2.855	0.589**	0.006	0.013	−0.060	0.014**	6.305	0.728**	0.479	177
% Contacted in street	0.485	0.196*	−0.000	0.004	−0.009	0.005	1.523	0.243**	0.283	177
% Contacted by email	2.136	0.559**	0.020	0.012	−0.033	0.013	6.236	0.691	0.437	177
% Contacted by social media	1.367	0.338**	0.008	0.007	−0.024	0.008**	0.988	0.418*	0.132	177

e) % reporting contact by the SNP campaign

Y = reported contact by SNP:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		SNP % marginality t-1		SNP incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	41.235	2.164**	−0.045	0.060	0.045	0.073	−9.818	1.854**	0.173	177
% Contacted by telephone	2.604	0.517**	−0.032	0.014*	0.003	0.017	−0.478	0.443	0.037	177
% Contacted by leaflet	37.744	2.016**	−0.038	0.055	0.048	0.068	−8.932	1.727**	0.168	177
% Contacted at home	10.374	0.979–	−0.041	0.027	−0.029	0.033	−3.842	0.838**	0.126	177
% Contacted in street	3.618	0.702**	−0.019	0.019	0.106	0.024**	−1.903	0.601**	0.213	177
% Contacted by email	4.878	0.577**	0.013	0.016	0.035	0.019	−0.674	0.494	0.049	177
% Contacted by social media	3.801	0.503**	−0.007	0.014	−0.049	0.017**	0.746	0.431	0.092	177

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table B2

Post-election reported campaign contact and rurality in Great Britain - % of BESIP respondents in constituency reporting campaign contact, 2015–2019: regression models (source: 2015–2019 pooled data: all constituencies).

a) % reporting contact by any party campaign

Y = reported contact by any party:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Constituency % majority t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	50.786	0.589**	0.090	0.011**	−0.484	0.022**	0.219	1896
% Contacted by telephone	5.790	0.180**	0.015	0.003**	−0.116	0.007**	0.143	1896
% Contacted by leaflet	44.744	0.568**	0.072	0.011**	−0.433	0.021**	0.192	1896
% Contacted at home	18.400	0.396**	0.061	0.007**	−0.346	0.014**	0.239	1896
% Contacted in street	4.255	0.167**	0.025	0.003**	−0.055	0.006**	0.062	1896
% Contacted by email	12.704	0.280**	0.046	0.005**	−0.128	0.010**	0.098	1896
% Contacted by social media	4.246	0.178**	0.018	0.003**	−0.0275	0.006**	0.022	1896

b) % reporting contact by the Conservative campaign

Y = reported contact by Conservatives:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Conservative % marginality t-1		Conservative incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	36.014	0.652**	0.042	0.010**	−0.485	0.018**	6.183	0.573**	0.314	1889
% Contacted by telephone	2.497	0.131**	0.002	0.002	−0.060	0.004**	0.016	0.115	0.123	1889
% Contacted by leaflet	33.462	0.622**	0.032	0.010**	−0.453	0.018**	5.203	0.547**	0.299	1889
% Contacted at home	5.341	0.259**	0.016	0.004**	−0.125	0.007**	2.416	0.227**	0.187	1889

(*continued on next page*)

Table B2 (*continued*)

b) % reporting contact by the Conservative campaign										
Y = reported contact by Conservatives:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Conservative % marginality t-1		Conservative incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Contacted in street	0.905	0.104**	0.009	0.002**	−0.020	0.003**	0.575	0.092**	0.049	1889
% Contacted by email	5.459	0.238**	0.016	0.004**	−0.102	0.007**	2.179	0.209**	0.160	1889
% Contacted by social media	1.780	0.136**	0.007	0.002**	−0.022	0.004**	0.357	0.119**	0.023	1889
c) % reporting contact by the Labour campaign										
Y = reported contact by Labour:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Labour % marginality t-1		Labour incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	38.412	0.625**	0.088	0.011**	−0.432	0.019**	4.994	0.640**	0.285	1889
% Contacted by telephone	2.610	0.133**	0.006	0.002**	−0.053	0.004**	0.818	0.136**	0.119	1889
% Contacted by leaflet	34.564	0.592**	0.071	0.011**	−0.382	0.018**	3.978	0.605**	0.248	1889
% Contacted at home	11.371	0.346**	0.053	0.006**	−0.262	0.010**	2.016	0.354**	0.302	1889
% Contacted in street	2.362	0.135**	0.019	0.002**	−0.041	0.004**	0.320	0.139*	0.093	1889
% Contacted by email	4.882	0.215**	0.038	0.004**	−0.043	0.007**	1.384	0.219**	0.129	1889
% Contacted by social media	2.464	0.164**	0.015	0.003**	−0.025	0.005**	0.527	0.168**	0.044	1889
d) % reporting contact by the Liberal Democrat campaign										
Y = reported contact by Lib Dems:	Constant		Pop'n Density 2020		Lib Dem % marginality t-1		Lib Dem incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	30.848	0.814**	0.045	0.010**	−0.356	0.019**	26.158	1.525**	0.348	1888
% Contacted by telephone	1.244	0.102**	0.003	0.001*	−0.023	0.003**	4.293	0.191**	0.314	1888
% Contacted by leaflet	29.159	0.788**	0.037	0.010**	−0.335	0.018**	23.683	1.477**	0.326	1888
% Contacted at home	4.425	0.264**	0.013	0.003**	−0.080	0.006**	8.292	0.494**	0.270	1888
% Contacted in street	0.743	0.086**	0.002	0.001*	−0.011	0.002**	2.113	0.161**	0.134	1888
% Contacted by email	3.303	0.185**	0.013	0.002**	−0.046	0.004**	6.728	0.346**	0.284	1888
% Contacted by social media	1.019	0.135**	0.005	0.002**	−0.006	0.003*	1.062	0.253**	0.020	1888

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table B3
Predicting constituency campaign spending, 2010–2019, Scotland: regression models.

	Total % spending		Conservative % spending		Labour % spending		Liberal Democrat % spending		SNP % spending	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Constant	210.124	6.542**	78.481	3.801**	49.786	4.114**	47.416	3.783**	77.661	4.044**
Population density 2020	0.074	0.241	−0.339	0.115**	0.425	0.102**	0.038	0.088	0.178	0.103
Constituency marginality, t-1	−2.189	0.276**								
Party const. marginality, t-1			−1.278	0.114**	−0.940	0.113**	−0.909	0.093**	−0.848	0.130**
Party Incumbent, t-1			24.774	6.841**	38.522	3.057**	51.276	4.346**	−2.054	3.428
R^2	0.337				0.538		0.624		0.182	
N	235		235		236		235		235	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table B4
Predicting constituency campaign spending, 2010–2019, Great Britain: regression models.

	Total % spending		Conservative % spending		Labour % spending		Liberal Democrat % spending	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Constant	172.600	1.903**	77.550	1.131**	56.505	1.011**	45.908	1.444**
Population density 2020	0.347	0.036**	0.002	0.018	0.179	0.017**	0.088	0.019**
Constituency marginality, t-1	−2.041	0.071**						
Party const. marginality, t-1			−1.172	0.033**	−0.969	0.031**	−0.621	0.036**
Party Incumbent, t-1			18.652	1.015**	30.253	0.986**	43.595	2.445**
R^2	0.283		0.425		0.520		0.520	
N	2469		2492		2495		2469	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table B5
Constituency campaign effectiveness and rurality, 2010–2019 pooled data set, vote as share of electorate: regression models.

a) Seats where party was incumbent after previous election:

	Vote as % of electorate, election t							
	Conservative %, t		Labour %, t		LD %, t		SNP %, t	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	32.546	0.575**	20.456	1.003**	26.491	3.434**	38.202	2.249**
Party % marginality, t-1	0.285	0.011**	0.231	0.016**	0.084	0.074	−0.301	0.053**
Conservative % campaign spend, t	−0.011	0.006	0.016	0.010	0.009	0.029	−0.057	0.016**
Labour % campaign spend, t	−0.006	0.005	0.041	0.013**	−0.057	0.034	−0.059	0.021**
Lib Dem % campaign spend, t	0.012	0.004**	−0.017	0.012	0.008	0.039	−0.066	0.023**
SNP % campaign spend, t							0.003	0.0027
Population density per hectare 2020	−0.077	0.018**	0.096	0.018**	−0.092	0.054	−0.177	0.136
Con campaign spend * Pop'n density	0.000	0.000	−0.001	0.000**	−0.000	0.0001	0.000	0.001
Lab campaign spend * Pop'n density	0.0005	0.0002*	0.000	0.0000	−0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
LD campaign spend * Pop'n density	−0.0004	0.0002*	−0.000	0.0000	0.002	0.001	0.002	0.003
SNP campaign spend * Pop'n density							0.000	0.002
R^2	0.567		0.373		0.136		0.352	
N	1138		1075		138		102	

b) Seats where party was challenger after previous election:

	Vote as % of electorate, election t							
	Conservative %, t		Labour %, t		LD %, t		SNP %, t	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	19.518	0.574**	21.323	0.774**	8.560	0.411**	24.133	4.667**
Party % marginality, t-1	−0.234	0.010**	−0.182	0.016**	−0.098	0.007**	−0.043	0.077
Conservative % campaign spend, t	0.121	0.006**	−0.033	0.007**	0.016	0.004**	−0.089	0.034**
Labour % campaign spend, t	−0.007	0.006	0.094	0.009**	−0.043	0.004**	−0.065	0.038
Lib Dem % campaign spend, t	−0.019	0.005**	−0.057	0.006**	0.150	0.004**	−0.086	0.032**
SNP % campaign spend, t							0.213	0.042**
Population density per hectare 2020	−0.004	0.010	0.041	0.19*	−0.004	0.009	0.017	0.242
Con campaign spend * Pop'n density	−0.001	0.000**	0.000	0.000	−0.000	0.000	0.001	0.003
Lab campaign spend * Pop'n density	0.0003	0.0001*	−0.000	0.000	0.0003	0.0001*	0.001	0.003
LD campaign spend * Pop'n density	−0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	−0.0003	0.0001**	−0.001	0.002
SNP campaign spend * Pop'n density							−0.003	0.002
R^2	0.703		0.517		0.578		0.348	
N	1324		1388		2322		133	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table B6
The effect of rurality and campaign effort on constituency turnout, 2010–2019 pooled data set.

	% Turnout, t	
	B	SE
Constant	19.496	0.735**
% Turnout, t-1	0.705	0.011**
% Majority, t-1	0.013	0.005**
Total % campaign spend, t	0.010	0.002**
Population density per hectare 2020	−0.036	0.005**
Total % campaign spend * Pop'n density	0.0002	0.0000**
R^2	0.699	
N	2469	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Appendix C. Robustness tests: regression models with logged population density

Table C1
Post-election reported campaign contact and rurality in Scotland - % of BESIP respondents in constituency reporting campaign contact, 2015–2019 (logged population density): regression models (source: 2015–2019 pooled data: Scottish respondents).

a) % reporting contact by any party campaign

Y = reported contact by any party:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Constituency % majority t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	44.402	1.873**	−1.427	1.321	0.053	0.088	0.008	177
% Contacted by telephone	5.437	0.623**	−0.837	0.440	0.025	0.029	0.022	177
% Contacted by leaflet	39.246	1.745**	−0.378	1.231	0.049	0.082	0.002	177
% Contacted at home	13.838	1.100**	−0.919	0.776	−0.070	0.052	0.021	177
% Contacted in street	3.990	0.624**	−0.066	0.440	0.113	0.029**	0.078	177
% Contacted by email	10.840	0.705**	0.238	0.498	0.014	0.033	0.003	177
% Contacted by social media	6.062	0.509**	0.0010	0.359	−0.065	0.024	0.041	177

b) % reporting contact by Conservative campaign

Y = reported contact by Conservatives:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Conservative % marginality t-1		Conservative incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	30.525	1.820**	−2.194	1.039*	−0.223	0.057**	11.981	3.112**	0.280	177
% Contacted by telephone	1.800	0.313**	−0.331	0.179	−0.027	0.010**	4.079	0.536**	0.395	177
% Contacted by leaflet	29.095	1.725**	−1.837	0985	−0.222	0.054**	8.893	2.950**	0.247	177
% Contacted at home	3.355	0.509**	−0.714	0.291*	−0.052	0.016**	3.731	0.871**	0.280	177
% Contacted in street	0.791	0.246**	−0.161	0.140	−0.006	0.008	1.348	0.420**	0.104	177
% Contacted by email	3.295	0.489**	−0.466	0.279	−0.015	0.015	1.540	0.836	0.072	177
% Contacted by social media	1.398	0.294**	−0.125	0.168	−0.019	0.009*	1.722	0.503**	0.143	177

c) % reporting contact by Labour campaign

Y = reported contact by Labour:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Labour % marginality t-1		Labour incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	36.726	0.723**	3.191	0.489**	−0.410	0.019**	5.077	0.662**	0.277	177
% Contacted by telephone	0.506	0.450	0.419	0.270	0.012	0.017	3.112	0.485**	0.252	177
% Contacted by leaflet	21.795	1.793**	1.902	1.078	0.005	0.066	15.466	1.935**	0.335	177
% Contacted at home	3.667	0.726**	0.144	0.437	−0.073	0.027**	5.537	0.027**	0.268	177
% Contacted in street	1.510	0.472**	0.020	0.284	−0.013	0.017	1.587	0.509**	0.062	177
% Contacted by email	2.220	0.505**	0.735	0.303*	0.031	0.019	1.695	0.544**	0.129	177
% Contacted by social media	1.589	0.385**	0.617	0.231**	−0.004	0.014	−1.042	0.415*	0.064	177

d) % reporting contact by Liberal Democrat campaign

Y = reported contact by Lib Dems:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Lib Dem % marginality t-1		Lib Dem incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	32.563	2.218**	1.503	0.908	−0.454	0.055**	21.071	2.825**	0.559	177
% Contacted by telephone	1.349	0.275**	0.093	0.113	−0.029	0.007**	3.359	0.351**	0.517	177
% Contacted by leaflet	32.079	2.178**	1.552	0.891	−0.457	0.054**	18.121	2.774**	0.537	177
% Contacted at home	2.817	0.562**	0.704	0.230**	−0.067	0.014**	6.680	0.716**	0.505	177
% Contacted in street	0.468	0.191*	0.114	0.078	−0.010	0.005*	1.592	0.244**	0.291	177
% Contacted by email	2.258	0.545**	0.461	0.223*	−0.037	0.014**	6.3365	0.694**	0.442	177
% Contacted by social media	1.410	0.330**	0.217	0.135	−0.026	0.008**	1.060	0.420*	0.139	177

e) % reporting contact by SNP campaign

Y = reported contact by SNP:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		SNP % marginality t-1		SNP incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	41.069	2.129**	−0.998	1.054	0.050	0.073	−9.731	1.858**	0.174	177
% Contacted by telephone	2.453	0.511**	−0.458	0.253	0.004	0.018	−0.461	0.446	0.028	177
% Contacted by leaflet	37.557	1.986**	−0.525	0.983	0.049	0.068	−8.918	1.733**	0.167	177
% Contacted at home	10.223	0.960**	−0.915	0.475	−0.023	0.033	−3.762	0.838**	0.133	177
% Contacted in street	3.448	0.693**	0.004	0.343	0.103	0.024**	−1.944	0.604**	0.209	177
% Contacted by email	4.941	0.569**	0.179	0.282	0.035	0.020	−0.679	0.496	0.047	177
% Contacted by social media	3.771	0.495**	−0.107	0.245	−0.048	0.017**	0.752	0.432	0.092	177

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table C2
Post-election reported campaign contact and rurality - % of BESIP respondents in constituency reporting campaign contact, 2015–2019 (logged population density): regression models (source: 2015–2019 pooled data).

a) % reporting contact by any party campaign

Y = reported contact by any party:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Constituency % majority t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	49.553	0.702**	2.610	0.469**	−0.466	0.022**	0.205	1896
% Contacted by telephone	5.775	0.213**	0.272	0.143	−0.113	0.007**	0.136	1896
% Contacted by leaflet	43.948	0.675**	2.154	0.452**	−0.418	0.021**	0.182	1896
% Contacted at home	17.438	0.471**	2.144	0.315**	−0.335	0.014**	0.231	1896
% Contacted in street	4.079	0.199**	0.623	0.133**	−0.050	0.006**	0.043	1896
% Contacted by email	12.279	0.335**	1.282	0.224**	−0.119	0.010**	0.078	1896
% Contacted by social media	4.109	0.211**	0.471	0.141**	−0.024	0.006**	0.012	1896

b) % reporting contact by Conservative campaign

Y = reported contact by Conservatives:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Conservative % marginality t-1		Conservative incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	36.245	0.773**	0.728	0.431**	−0.476	0.018**	5.708	0.574**	0.309	1889
% Contacted by telephone	2.671	0.155**	−0.112	0.087	−0.059	0.004**	−0.073	0.115	0.124	1889
% Contacted by leaflet	33.687	0.767**	0.513	0.411	−0.446	0.017**	4.820	0.548**	0.296	1889
% Contacted at home	4.968	0.306**	0.688	0.171**	−0.122	0.007**	2.421	0.227*	0.187	1889
% Contacted in street	0.768	0.123**	0.311	0.069**	−0.019	0.003**	0.552	0.092**	0.045	1889
% Contacted by email	5.244	0.281**	0.541	0.157**	−0.099	0.007**	2.123	0.209**	0.158	1889
% Contacted by social media	1.689	0.160**	0.233	0.089**	−0.020	0.004**	0.332	0.119**	0.021	1889

c) % reporting contact by Labour campaign

Y = reported contact by Labour:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Labour % marginality t-1		Labour incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	36.726	0.723**	3.191	0.489**	−0.410	0.019**	5.077	0.662**	0.277	1889
% Contacted by telephone	2.361	0.153**	0.400	0.103**	−0.051	0.004**	0.719	0.140**	0.122	1889
% Contacted by leaflet	33.118	0.682**	2.689	0.461**	−0.365	0.018**	3.971	0.625**	0.244	1889
% Contacted at home	10.210	0.399**	2.120	0.270**	−0.248	0.011**	1.952	0.366**	0.297	1889
% Contacted in street	2.110	0.157**	0.537	0.106**	−0.037	0.004**	0.429	0.144**	0.077	1889
% Contacted by email	4.170	0.249**	1.361	0.168**	−0.034	0.007**	1.441	0.228**	0.113	1889
% Contacted by social media	2.200	0.189**	0.517	0.128**	−0.021	0.005**	0.568	0.174**	0.038	1889

d) % reporting contact by Liberal Democrat campaign

Y = reported contact by Lib Dems:	Constant		Logged pop'n Density t-1		Lib Dem % marginality t-1		Lib Dem incumbent, t-1		R^2	N
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
% Any party contact	31.068	0.867**	0.444	0.431	−0.348	0.019**	26.411	1.532	0.341	1888
% Contacted by telephone	1.240	0.108**	0.059	0.054	−0.023	0.002**	4.313	0.191**	0.312	1888
% Contacted by leaflet	29.357	0.838**	0.336	0.417	−0.328	0.019**	23.888	1.482**	0.322	1888
% Contacted at home	4.317	0.280**	0.369	0.140**	−0.079	0.006**	8.389	0.495**	0.266	1888
% Contacted in street	0.752	0.091**	0.024	0.045	−0.011	0.002**	2.125	0.162**	0.132	1888
% Contacted by email	3.202	0.197**	0.356	0.098**	−0.045	0.004**	6.823	0.348**	0.277	1888
% Contacted by social media	0.994	0.143**	0.119	0.071	−0.006	0.003	1.098	0.253**	0.017	1888

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table C3
Predicting constituency campaign spending, 2010–2019 in Scotland (logged population density): regression models.

	Total % spending		Conservative % spending		Labour % spending		Liberal Democrat % spending		SNP % spending	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Constant	213.128	6.209**	77.067	3.625**	50.358	3.111**	43.136	3.674**	78.910	4.016**
Logged pop'n density 2020	−8.893	4.253*	−10.394	2.018**	8.663	1.891**	−0.820	1.627	−0.121	1.846
Constituency marginality, t-1	−2.093	0.276**								
Party const. marginality, t-1			−1.179	0.113**	0.900	0.113**	−0.905	0.940**	−0.823	0.132**
Party Incumbent, t-1			21.719	6.642**	35.823	3.203**	50.291	4.452**	−1.785	3.454
R^2	0.228		0.530		0.545				0.172	
N	235		235		236		235		235	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table C4
Predicting constituency campaign spending, 2010–2019 (logged population density): regression models.

	Total % spending		Conservative % spending		Labour % spending		Liberal Democrat % spending	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Constant	168.969	2.253**	80.349	1.326**	51.310	1.129**	47.824	1.556**
Logged pop'n density 2020	10.704	1.515**	−2.550	0.759**	9.489	0.755**	−0.701	0.798
Constituency marginality, t-1	−1.994	0.072**						
Party const. marginality, t-1			−1.165	0.033**	−0.930	0.031**	−0.604	0.036**
Party Incumbent, t-1			17.510	1.015**	28.362	1.012**	43.554	2.460**
R^2	0.246		0.427		0.529		0.279	
N	2469		2492		2495		2469	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table C5
Constituency campaign effectiveness and rurality, 2010–2019 pooled data set, vote as share of electorate: regression models, logged population density (highlighted values are significant at p < 0.05).

a) Seats where party was incumbent after previous election:

	Vote as % of electorate, election t							
	Conservative %, t		Labour %, t		LD %, t		SNP %, t	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	33.693	0.729**	16.835	1.749**	26.355	3.780**	39.009	2.228**
Party % marginality, t-1	0.284	0.011**	0.235	0.017**	0.074	0.078	−0.306	0.052**
Conservative % campaign spend, t	−0.032	0.009**	0.077	0.017**	−0.012	0.028	−0.069	0.016**
Labour % campaign spend, t	0.006	0.008	0.022	0.024	−0.054	0.048	−0.057	0.022*
Lib Dem % campaign spend, t	0.021	0.006**	−0.060	0.026*	−0.054	0.048	−0.073	0.022**
SNP % campaign spend, t							0.002	0.026
Log population density per hectare 2020	−2.575	0.686**	5.300	1.229**	−3.285	2.333	−3.559	2.148
Con campaign spend * log pop'n density	0.031	0.010**	−0.089	0.012**	0.026	0.023	0.020	0.019
Lab campaign spend * log pop'n density	−0.010	0.007	0.021	0.018	−0.018	0.038	0.028	0.021
LD campaign spend * log pop'n density	−0.023	0.006**	0.030	0.016	0.029	0.030	0.006	0.025
SNP campaign spend * log pop'n density							−0.001	0.029
R^2	0.556		0.360		0.133		0.385	
N	1138		1075		138		102	

b) Seats where party was challenger after previous election:

	Vote as % of electorate, election t							
	Conservative %, t		Labour %, t		LD %, t		SNP %, t	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Constant	17.720	0.756**	20.746	0.854**	7.973	0.538**	22.657	4.811**
Party % marginality, t-1	−0.241	0.010**	−0.182	0.015**	−0.098	0.007**	−0.049	0.078
Conservative % campaign spend, t	0.135	0.007**	−0.032	0.008**	0.018	0.006**	−0.090	0.033**
Labour % campaign spend, t	0.009	0.008	0.090	0.011**	−0.038	0.006**	−0.032	0.041
Lib Dem % campaign spend, t	−0.015	0.007*	−0.053	0.006**	0.151	0.006**	−0.087	0.033**
SNP % campaign spend, t							0.218	0.39**
Log population density per hectare 2020	1.779	0.495**	1.673	0.645**	0.723	0.402	3.843	4.456
Con campaign spend * log pop'n density	−0.032	0.005**	0.004	0.008	−0.004	0.005	0.038	0.040
Lab campaign spend * log pop'n density	−0.008	0.006	−0.008	0.008	−0.002	0.005	−0.054	0.042
LD campaign spend * log pop'n density	−0.006	0.005	−0.000	0.006	−0.008	0.005	−0.028	0.035
SNP campaign spend * log pop'n density							−0.060	0.040
R^2	0.698		0.524		0.575		0.351	
N	1324		1388		2322		133	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Table C6
The effect of rurality and campaign effort on constituency turnout, 2010–2019 pooled data set, logged population density.

	% Turnout, t	
	B	SE
Constant	22.416	0.804**
% Turnout, t-1	0.676	0.011**
% Majority, t-1	0.015	0.005**
Total % campaign spend, t	0.006	0.002**

(*continued on next page*)

Table C6 (*continued*)

	% Turnout, t	
	B	SE
Log population density per hectare 2020	−2.137	0.252**
Total % campaign spend * log pop'n density	0.009	0.002**
R^2	0.706	
N	2469	

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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