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Why The Right? Evaluating Vote Choice in Rural America

Abstract

Why the Right? Evaluating Vote Choice in Rural America focuses on explaining the seemingly “counter-intuitive” vote choices of many poor, white, rural Americans. Theoretically, one would anticipate that those with low incomes would have a vested interest in redistributive policies. In reality, however, many of these Americans do not vote for these policies or the political party that champions them, The Democrats. This idea that these residents vote against their interests is growing increasingly popular and it is often referenced in explanation of the results of the 2016 US Presidential Election. Using data from the American National Election Study and a series of 30 interviews with residents of the rural village of Arthur, Illinois, this study seeks to determine what does motivate vote choice in rural America. This study finds that attitudinal factors, such as feelings of alienation and resentment are contributors to vote choice, and that the vote choices of rural citizens do align with their expressed interests. If this is the case then, despite popular rhetoric, the vote choices of rural Americans are not in fact, counter intuitive.

Introduction

For decades, political scientists have contended that citizens will vote in a way that reflects their personal economic interests (Erikson and Tedin 2011). This model of pocketbook voting is no longer a good explanatory mechanism of vote choice for all citizens, and, indeed, we often perceive that the vote choices of some individuals do not reflect their economic interests (Gelman et al. 2008). This study seeks specifically to explain seemingly counter intuitive vote choice in the context of poor white rural Americans. In the United States, unprecedented levels of economic inequality are characteristic of the contemporary moment, yet in the face of this, politicians who oppose economic redistribution continue to find electoral success among large swaths of Middle America and the South (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Bartels 2004). G.W. Bush’s campaigns in 2000 and 2004 were both run with promises of tax cuts that favored the already rich, and similar policy positions were present again in the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump. In the 2000 election cycle, George W. Bush won the 15 poorest

states, and in 2004 he won the poorest 10 (Gelman et al. 2008). Theoretically, the poorest of a nation's citizenry should be supportive of economic redistribution and welfare programming, as these kinds of programs serve their economic interest, yet in some rural areas we see that these voters actively support the candidates who overtly oppose these interests. This phenomenon is not news, though in recent years it has gained increased attention as scholars, columnists, and regular citizens have tried to account for the Republican vote choice of rural America (Vance 2016; Hochschild 2017; Frank 2004; Bartels 2004; Friedman 2015; Younge 2012; Gelman et al. 2008). Existing studies offer a variety of explanations for the vote choice of these communities, some suggesting that Americans simply don't know what is in their own best interests. Some argue that a lack of political knowledge means that Americans don't connect policy to consequences; others suggest that economics just isn't the most important factor in determining vote choice, but rather that cultural and religious issues are paramount (Bartels 2004; Frank 2004; Burke 2015; Hochschild 2016). Finally, there is a popular discourse suggesting that feelings of resentment and 'left behind-ness' have a strong influence on the vote choices of American citizens, particularly poor whites living in rural areas.

A common thread in much of the literature about the vote choice of America's rural communities is the emphasis that is placed on these groups being poor, uneducated, and white. As a society, when we think of rural America, the image of a poor white person (often male) comes to mind, particularly following the election of Donald Trump who was heralded as the candidate of the "average Joe." The language, messages, and emotional appeals that the Trump campaign used did nothing to pander to the sophisticated, highly educated, or elite. It is important to understand that despite a popular association of rural communities with poverty, a lack of education, and television programs such as "Duck Dynasty," "Alaskan Bush People," and

“Here Comes Honey Boo Boo;” in reality, rural people are just as diverse as other people, and these stereotypes are misleading. This research, however, does focus on the politics of low income, white, rural communities, a topic which has gained a lot of attention recently from both pop-culture and academia. Memoirs such as *Hillbilly Elegy* and academic studies such as *Strangers in Their Own Land* seek to understand just what it is about ‘those peculiar rural folk.’ While it is an established fact that rural Americans lean Republican, are “Republican America” and “rural America” synonymous – are these communities actually the way that society thinks of them?

Through a statistical analysis of the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES) data and a series of in-depth interviews of citizens of Arthur, Illinois, this research seeks to identify both how rural Americans actually construct their vote choice, and the role that rural living plays in their vote choice calculus. Does vote choice come down to political knowledge? Are economic issues less important to voters in the modern day than they were in decades past? Is there something inherent to rural residency that leads to Republican vote choice? There are a variety of potential explanations for the vote choice of rural Americans, though some provide a more positive outlook for the state of American politics than others. As such, the question of how these citizens construct their vote choices is an interesting one.

Literature Review

Politics and Polarization in America Today

The contemporary moment in American politics is characterized by unprecedented levels of polarization, and the political playing field has changed significantly since the mid-20th century. As Andrew Gelman et al. emphasize in *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State*:

Why Americans Vote the Way They Do (2008), parties are more cohesive and oppositional today than they have been in decades, and, increasingly since the 1970s, voters of each party have begun to view the opposition in an increasingly negative way. Economic inequality is at a high, enabling the rich to become richer while those who have not are continuing without (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006). The social lives of Americans are also likely to be quite polarized, both online and in-person. People are likely to know more people who share their political ideas than people who do not, and online social media and “narrowcasting” allow for a high level of self-selection regarding exposure to news and political content (Tolchin 1996; Gelman et al. 2008). As a developed nation in the post-material age, cultural issues such as equality, rights and liberty, and the environment have become increasingly important in the United States (Smith and Tatalovich 2002; Gelman et al. 2008). These issues that are some of the most polarizing and drive the ‘new’ political ideas which have helped to deepen America’s cultural cleavage. These cultural and political differences are visible in many areas of civic life, for example, in the increasingly secular climate of America. Those who do remain religious, however, are more likely to reside in a red state than a blue one (Tolchin 1996; Gelman et al. 2008; Burke 2015). Traditional, fundamentalist religious beliefs are also sometimes “seen in the eyes of a wider, more secular world as signs of a poor education;” this serves to deepen the division between the religious and secular by transforming belief into a hierarchical judgement (Hochschild 2016). Accompanying this shift in religious life is the alignment of the religious with the Republican right, a partnership that scholars suggest centers on contentious cultural issues such as abortion and homosexual rights (Gelman et. al 2008). Other demographic characteristics are also indicative of division, with ‘blue’ Democratic coasts and ‘red’ Republican heartland states. Generally speaking, the Southern, rural, and lower income states can be labelled as Republican

states, while the “richer” states vote for Democrats (Gelman et al. 2008). The association of the South with the Republican Party is yet another development of the 1900’s, and now the South is a consistently Republican region (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006).

These economic, social, and cultural factors have come to form a political system of stacked cleavages where once they cross-cut. This has led to the idea that there is a cultural “war” in America, and some believe that it has become “impossible for opposing sides to have a reasoned discussion or even agree on a common set of underlying facts about the world” (Tolchin 1996; Smith and Tatovich 2002; Gelman et al. 2008; Erikson and Tedin 2011; Packer 2013; Fitzgerald 2017). In such a polarized system, a seeming disparity between vote choice and political interests is worth investigating.

Political Knowledge

In *Citizen Politics*, Russel J. Dalton (2014) discusses the importance of a politically sophisticated electorate in the maintenance of democracy; these “super citizens” have a high level of understanding and knowledge of the political system and processes. In the American case, however, it is widely accepted that the American citizenry is not, in fact, super: “For most people, political interest and involvement barely extended beyond casting a vote in national or local elections ... It was not clear that people based their voting decisions on rational evaluations of candidates and their issue positions. Instead, voting was conditioned by group loyalties and personalistic considerations” (Smith 1989; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Dalton 2004; Hochschild and Einstein 2015). In “Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind,” Larry Bartels (2004) reinforces the concept of the under-informed American voter and suggests that in many cases Americans have serious difficulty in recognizing the ways in which government policies affect their lives. Bartels (2004) found that the attitudes that

individuals held about social and political issues often did not correlate with expressed vote. This pattern, however, was not present in cases where individuals had high levels of political knowledge. Other studies also support the claim that many voters do not, or cannot, mentally link ideology to political opinions; most people, according to Eric R.A.N. Smith (1989), have, “a seemingly incoherent mixture of liberal, moderate, and conservative” political stances (Hochschild and Einstein 2015). A lack of political savvy plays out in many different ways in American politics, and it may well be the reason that rural Americans are no longer pocketbook voting.

These ideas of political disinterest, ignorance, and confusion in rural America are also addressed in Thomas Frank’s *What’s the Matter With Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, a 2004 book that suggests that poor Americans vote against their own interests because of this lack of political savvy, and are actually being “tricked.” Other analyses, though not as recent as Frank’s work, support the idea that the public can be duped and will ultimately become the toys of the media and the political machine (Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

There are, however, various arguments that suggest that a perfectly informed electorate is not necessary for a fully functioning democracy (Popkin 1993; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). “Information shortcuts” are ways of thinking about issues by associating topics with bigger picture information, and they compensate for the problem of the uneducated populous. For Lupia and McCubbins (1998), information shortcuts are important and useful since the regular person is not what they refer to as an “ambulatory encyclopedia.” In fact, they hold that for many individuals, full or perfect information is not ideal because the time and work necessary to gain perfect information is too impractical for the regular working person. In terms of politics, use of

these shortcuts is reasonable since “Presidents, party organizations, and policy outcomes have strong and consistent historical associations” (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). People can use categorizations such as president and party organization to make decisions that won’t undermine their interests (Popkin 1993). In the current political climate of heightened polarization, information shortcuts could be considered as being *more* reliable as party positions are becoming more aligned.

If information shortcuts are a useful and effective tool for discerning vote choice, then a lack of political knowledge does not hold as a potential explanation for the vote choice of America’s poor rural whites. If information shortcuts work, voters *do* know more or less what they are doing and believe that they *are* voting in line with their interests. This suggests that voters understand their choices and their economic situation, and yet still support parties that do not represent those interests. From this, the conversation turns to seeking to understand *what* issue or issues have taken the place of economics in the minds of the voters in question. If they are able to vote in-line with their interests despite low levels of political knowledge, then what issues are then so salient that economics is no longer the pivotal factor in vote choice?

Social Issues, Political Resentment, and “The Left Behind”

Recently, two books have sought to address the culture and values explanation for Republican vote choice. *Hillbilly Elegy* by J.D. Vance is a memoir of life in ‘dying’ America. It was met with an outpouring public support and found a place as a #1 *New York Times* Best Seller. Vance’s discussion of the struggles many poor, rural, Americans face, and the ways in which they are looked down upon by people on the Left resonated with many (Dreher, 2016). Later in 2016, Arlie Russel Hochschild, former professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, published *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on The*

American Right, an academic sociological study of Lake Charles, Louisiana, and the surrounding area. In *Strangers in Their Own Land*, Hochschild looks at instances of vote choices that are antithetical to the interests of individuals through the lens of environmental concerns, and finds that Republican vote choice among America's poor *does* involve the conception of a tradeoff, and that voters are not necessarily uninformed about their interests (Hochschild, 2016). Though they approach the issue of white, rural resentment from different perspectives, both *Hillbilly Elegy* and *Strangers in Their Own Land* speak of feelings of dissatisfaction and being "left-behind" that persist in rural communities.

The idea that poor, rural, lesser-educated religious Americans have no idea what's good for them has become so popular that it is now the cliché way of thinking about the ideological right (Dreher 2016; Hochschild 2016; Vance 2016). Many rural whites think of themselves, to some extent, as being societally subordinate to the rest of the country, and this is compounded by the fact that so many others have also come to think of the inhabitants of rural areas this way as well (Smith and Tatalovich 2002; Hochschild 2016). This feeling of being unheard, ineffective, and disrespected in politics can foster feelings of resentment and anti-elite backlash, as groups that feel as though they are constantly "the butt of the joke" are likely to feel betrayed and distanced from their politicians and news media (Hochschild 2016). Many people believe that "liberals think that Bible-believing Southerners are ignorant, backward, rednecks, losers. They think we're racist, sexist, homophobic and maybe fat," The Republican right, however, offers working class whites a different way to think about themselves and their place in society (Frank 2004; Burke 2015; Hochschild 2016). "Most Red Americans can't deconstruct post-modern literature, give proper orders to a nanny, pick out a cabernet with aftertones of licorice, or quote prices from the Abercrombie and Fitch catalog. But we can raise great children, wire our own

houses, make beautiful and delicious creations with our own two hands, talk casually and comfortably about God, repair a small engine, recognize a good maple sugar tree, tell you the histories of our towns and the hopes of our neighbors, shoot a gun and run a chainsaw without fear, calculate the bearing load of a roof, grow our own asparagus” (Frank 2004). From the double entendre of “Raised Right,” to the internalization of “the yeoman farmer,” the social conservatives give poor, rural, Republican voters a feeling of legitimacy and pride (Wooton 2003; Frank 2004; Burke 2015; Hochschild 2016; Vance 2016).

As Smith and Tatalovich (2002) explain in *Cultures at War: Moral Conflicts in Western Democracies*, “rising incomes, social mobility, and mass consumption have the effect of not so much eliminating social and political tensions, as shifting them more and more to issues of lifestyle and culture.” We would then anticipate that, in general, the population sectors that feel the most left behind would be majority racial males with low skills and employment prospects, and who hold traditional values (Hofstadter 1965; Tolchin 1996; Dalton 2004;2014; Mudde 2007; Hochschild 2016; Gidron and Hall 2017; van der Meer and Hahkverdian 2017).

Theoretically, a shifting world has left people on the margins: new politics have lead previously successful populations to feel threatened; racial and gender equality sets men against women and feminism, and puts the majority racial group against minorities. Equal rights for the LGBTQA+ community stands to elicit negative reactions from the very religious and traditional conservatives. Additionally, the less educated may feel left behind because of an increase in tertiary education in developed post-industrial societies and the resulting loss of status for secondary education alone (Gidron and Hall 2017). The rural or urban division comes into play due to the movement of the economic and cultural hubs to cities; “There is some evidence that these growing regional disparities have inspired a sense of social marginalization among people

living outside large urban centers, tantamount to a cultural shock after years in which people in small towns or the countryside were celebrated as quintessential Americans or the epitome of *la France profonde*” (Gidron and Hall 2017). Those who now face unemployment or underemployment due to brain drain or outsourcing will view themselves as the opposition to the elites and politicians who make the economic and cultural decisions. These feelings and changes culminate in a sense of distance and distrust between the American “heartland” and the cultural elite. The left behind are those who had a social standing and status to protect that has been threatened by new cultural and economic trends, and who no longer see themselves as respected in mainstream culture.

These ‘left behind’ populations see themselves as protecting their way of life, and as the “*real*” Americans (Smith and Tatovich 2002; Burke 2015). Despite a 2006 study in which 66% of respondents answered that the Democratic Party represents the interests of the “average” American, many still see the Democratic Party as belonging to the elites (Gelman et al. 2008). The left behind view the Democratic Party as a bastion of liberal idiocy, loose morals, oversensitivity, excess and waste, a narrative that has grown to be quite popular and wide-spread (Hochschild 2017). In this context, a Republican vote choice may make sense from a cultural angle, as it is the political left who are perceived to have brought about the changes the left behind feel vulnerable to. America’s left-right cultural cleavage has become central to vote choice; it is a decision that is framed as being a defense of lifestyle and morals just as much as it is a vote on the political issues of the day. In “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” Richard Hofstadter (1964) discusses this moralistic political motivation: “a spokesman of the paranoid style finds it [the hostile threat] directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others. Insofar as he does not see himself singled out as

the individual victim of a personal conspiracy, he is somewhat more rational and much more disinterested. His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far to intensify his feelings of righteousness and his moral indignation.” Though written in the 1960’s, Hofstadter’s ideas in “The Paranoid Style” are still relevant today and various people have echoed Hofstadter in response to the 2016 election cycle (Edsall 2016; Hochschild 2016).

Ultimately, scholars suggest that there is a deep-seated sense of resentment among many poor, white, and rural voters (Burke 2015; Hochschild 2016; Vance 2016). Hochschild discusses this resentment in terms of what she calls “the deep story.” The deep story is a scenario in which everyone is in a long line stretching up a hill towards the American Dream. You work hard and advance in the line but the hand of the government, which is supposed to protect the people in the line and reinforce the principles of the line, is pushing the poor, the ethnic minorities, the women, and the illegal immigrants in front of you in the line (Hochschild 2017). Throughout her interviews, Hochschild finds that the line in the deep story is how many of her participants felt about the government and liberal social policy. In this model, the government provides for people the things that they ought to provide for themselves and advanced the undeserving in “line” at the expense of the hardworking, everyday American (Hochschild 2017). In reality, people perceive this relationship of support between voters and government can be seen taking many forms, from food stamp programs to DACA and ‘reverse racism.’

A Republican vote allows poor whites to be proud of who they are and where they come from. Republican voters see themselves as upholding the moral fiber and traditions that make America what it is. Republican voters help protect the country from the elitism, betrayal, and moral decay that the Democrats advocate. A Republican vote allows the voter to reinforce their place in the game. These voters are choosing the politicians and platforms that haven’t left them

out (Frank 2004; Hochschild 2017). In many ways, the left behind model is one of relative deprivation, and while the aggregate threat of issues such as immigrants “taking” jobs is contested, as Dr. Mark Blyth explained in his talk titled “Why People Vote for Those Who Work Against Their Best Interests,” no one lives in an average, and for many people these are rational concerns (2018). If this is the case, it indicates that voters think about their vote choice and what that choice means; it is not simply a decision made along partisan lines or out of ignorance. In this instance, social and cultural issues play a role, and a Republican vote choice *does* represent those interests.

In this framework, America may well be on the way to the dissolution of democracy through mass disaffection with politics in general. If the left behind theory holds true, and poor rural Americans are voting against their economic interests because they feel they need to protect their culture, then the politics of resentment is well under way. Anger in politics “should be regarded as a signal that we are in the midst of an era of major changes and not, as many would have us believe, merely experiencing an isolated social fluke ... anger should be treated as a serious sign that important needs are not being met; that they deserve immediate attention; and that ignoring them will lead to serious consequences” (Tolchin 1996 30). Various scholars have linked the left-behind framework to populist politics, which are recognized as having negative effects on political systems at large (Tolchin 1996; Dalton 2004). Populist politics rely on the distrust of elites and the use of charged rhetoric that positions regular, “pure,” people against the corrupt and wicked elite class (Mudde 2007; Dalton 2004; Betz and Johnson 2004). “Central to the contemporary radical right’s politics of resentment is the charge that in liberal capitalist democracies power has been usurped by a self-serving political and cultural elite that pursues its own narrow agenda without concern for the legitimate concerns and interests of ordinary

citizens” (Betz and Johnson 2004). Russel Dalton (2004) argues that “citizens must be supportive of the political system if it is to endure,” but large swaths of “left behind” and resentful citizenry pose a threat to the existing political structure. Due to the gravity of the consequences of an ineffectual political system, questions about the motivations behind the vote choice of the poor American voter should not be ignored. It is important to understand why vote choice is not constrained by economic self-interest alone, and to identify just what it is about the Right that continually attracts the vote of the rural, white, American.

Implicit in the left behind framework laid out by Hochschild is that the left behind are rural. The description of the left behind is fitting for many rural Americans who are typified as being traditionalist and “backwards.” That being said, the left behind model does provide a variety of other contributing factors to “left behind-ness” that could be more important than the rural-urban consideration. It is important to fully understand the role that rural living plays in vote choice, not only to better understand vote choice, but also because there could be a flaw in the conventional wisdom, and perhaps there needs to be a reconceptualization of rural communities.

Indicators of Vote Choice and Ideology

In the literature, there are a variety of indicators that influence vote choice and political attitudes (Erikson and Tedin 2011). These include a variety of demographic and attitudinal markers, and while economic standing is one of these indicators, other aspects of identity are also considered to play a role. It is important to note that in the main, these indicators do not have to “stack” and that they can cross-cut. As such, the strength of influence of each indicator debated. That said, the literature does suggest that the following are all considerations for vote choice.

Party ID. Party identification is often cited as the most reliable indicator of vote choice (Erikson and Tedin 2011).

Early Socialization. The ways in which children are socialized to conceptualize social, political, and economic citizenship have implications for adult democratic participation and political attitudes, and it is the case that “party choices of parents and their offspring are correlated all over the world.” (Erikson and Tedin 2011).

Education. Studies suggest that individuals become more ideologically liberal with additional education, and consequently, we would anticipate that the more educated a person becomes, the more likely they are to vote Democrat, and that those with less education will be more likely to vote Republican (Erikson and Tedin 2011).

Age. Age plays a role in vote choice through life-cycle effects; for example, it is commonly accepted that people become more conservative as they grow older (Erikson and Tedin 2011). As such, we would anticipate that younger participants will express more liberal attitudes than older participants.

Race. In general, white Americans are more likely to identify as Republicans. According to Erikson and Tedin (2011), every large ethnic minority in the USA (Asian, Black, and Latinx) are more likely to vote Democrat than whites. (Erikson and Tedin 2011).

Religion. Jews, Catholics and religious congregations that also have a racial minority aspect (i.e. Hispanic Catholics) are more likely to vote Democrat, and it is accepted that Evangelical Protestants are most likely to identify as Republican (Dalton 2014; Erikson and Tedin 2011; Green 2010).

Geographic Location. In the context of the US, the South is often considered to be conservative and Republican, the North and East are liberal and Democratic. The West and Midwest are somewhere in the middle (Dalton 2014; Erikson and Tedin 2011). Similarly, those who live rurally are more conservative, where as those who live in Urban areas are more likely to identify as Democrats (Erikson and Tedin 2011).

Gender. Today there is a recognized gender gap in political preferences. Women are more likely to lean Left than men, though this trend is often dependent on issues of socioeconomic status, race, and education (Dalton 2014; Denvir 2016; Erikson and Tedin 2011; Sanbonmatsu 2010).

Arthur, Illinois

In Illinois, 47 miles Southwest of Champaign-Urbana, and 32 miles Southeast of Decatur (of Arthur-Daniel-Midlands fame), is a sign in a school yard that says “Welcome to Arthur. You are a stranger only once.” As a village with 2,288 people, Arthur is so small that annual information is not even included in the United States Census Bureau’s website and there are no stop lights (United; American). Arthur measures 1.28 square-miles, with a population that is 97.9% white, 99% of whom are American citizens who would characterize the surrounding community as “wholesome,” “safe,” and “connected” (American; Arthur).

Arthur was settled in the 1870’s as a stop along the railroad tracks that ran between the Illinois settlements of Paris and Decatur; Arthur, originally called “Glasgow” was renamed in 1873 after the brother of Mr. Robert Hervey, the owner of the railroad tracks (Brief). The Amish settles in the area in the 1860’s, and as such, pre-date the establishment of the village (Brief). With approximately 4,000 members, the Arthur area is also home to the largest Amish population in Illinois, and the 8th largest in the country (Brief; 12 2017; Arthur Once). Despite

stereotypes suggesting that the Amish are isolated, in actual fact, the Amish play a large role in the cultural and economic life of Arthur. Amish businesses line the main street, Amish children regularly attend Arthur Schools until the 8th grade, and the Old Order Amish are a large draw for tourism to the area.

Arthur experiences a low crime rate, is home to nine churches, three bars, and six restaurants, only two of which open on Sundays. Vine Street, Arthur's main business street, features an insurance broker, a law office, two banks, a veterinarian, a hairdresser and a barber shop, in addition to Amish owned businesses like the "Country Cheese and More," and the "Stitch and Sew." Though the closest supermarket is 35 miles away, Arthur does have a manufacturing sector and is the home of two large factories, Masterbrand Cabinets and CHI Overhead Doors; approximately 26% of Arthur's workforce is employed in manufacturing (Arthur). Knights Athletics, generally, are winning, and Coach Dale Schuring has been named Coach of the Year multiple times (Coach 2012; Track 2011; IBCA 2015; Football 2011). In the local area, Arthur is known for Amish businesses and the annual festivals, including the Freedom Celebration in June that draws upwards of 30,000 tourists annually (Arthur's). In fact, people all over the country may have heard of Arthur since The Great Pumpkin Patch has been featured on Martha Stewart, and they have provided pumpkin arrangements for The White House and Wrigley Field in Chicago (Hockenberry 2017). Unlike many small, rural towns, Arthur does not *appear* to be "dying," store fronts rarely go unfilled, and the last two years have brought several small businesses to town.

Once you head towards the residential areas of the village, however, you see that Arthur is very much like other small towns across rural America. You begin to see furniture on lawns, boarded windows, and faded siding. According to results from the American Community

Survey, Arthur follows many of the trends that are typical of rural American villages and towns. The 2017 Illinois Report Card indicated that in the Arthur-Lovington-Atwood-Hammond High School District, 1.5% of students are homeless, 16.2% of students have Individualized Education Plans (IEP), 41.2% of students come from low-income homes, and students taking the ACT Assessment underperformed in all exam areas when compared to averages for the state of Illinois (Illinois 2017). The median family income in Arthur is approximately \$54,200, which is \$6,000 lower than the state median, and Arthur straddles the county line between Moultrie and Douglas counties, with poverty rates of 11.8% and 10%, respectively (Arthur; Moultrie; Douglas). Despite these social and economic issues, 70% of people in Arthur voted for Donald Trump in 2016, 68% voted Romney in 2012, 60% for McCain in 2008, and 67% for Bush in 2004 (Arthur).

Arthur serves as a case of counter-intuitive vote choice, or what Hochschild (2016) refers to as “The Great Paradox;” the majority of Arthur’s voting population is voting for the Right, despite a demonstrated need for social assistance programming - “the need for help and the principled refusal of it.” As such, the village of Arthur is the case that will be involved in this study; hopefully, being able to understand the vote choice motivations of citizens in Arthur will allow for better understanding of the social, political, and cultural attitudes of the rest of rural America.

Research Model

This study employed two complementary stages of research to better understand vote choice in America and the importance of the rural-urban division. Stage one used statistical analysis of American National Election Study data to establish national trends. Responses to the 2016 American National Election Study Time Series questionnaire were used to find potential

influences on vote choice at the national level, and to look at regional and demographic trends in vote choice and attitude clusters. Stage two was designed to offer depth to the breadth provided by the national level data, and so interviews were used to investigate the motivations behind vote choice among voters in rural America. Speaking to key informants in Arthur, Illinois, revealed a deeper and more personal understanding of vote choice and political attitudes among rural Americans.

Stage One Design and Methodology

Responses from the American National Election Study 2016 Time Series Survey were used to analyze national trends in political attitudes. Identified influences such as gender, age, geographic location, attitude toward the economy, attitude toward the government, and political knowledge were treated as independent variables, and initially, vote choice was treated as the dependent variable. Using SPSS Statistical Analysis Software, bivariate correlations and Ordinary Least Squares Regression were conducted to identify correlates of vote choice at the national level. For full operationalization of the independent variables, please see Appendix A.

Stage One Findings

Table 1 indicates the bivariate correlations for each variable, and generally there is statistical significance across the board, however, that is common to large N statistical research. Here, we see that almost everything correlates with vote choice in the anticipated direction. The most robust indicators are 2016 Presidential vote (Pearson's $r=.722^{**}$), and political ideology (Pearson's $r=.708^{**}$). Everything correlates in the anticipated direction with the rural/urban indicator, and it is interesting to note that rural living is positively correlated with low levels of political knowledge, though this correlation is not robust.

Moving on from the bivariate correlation matrix, I ran a multiple regression model with party ID as the dependent variable. I first chose party ID to be the independent variable because of the strength of its correlation with vote choice and because the literature suggests that it is often the strongest indicator of vote choice. Table 2 shows this regression model, and it is important to note that in this model many variables fall out as insignificant – specifically rural/urban. Only ideology, presidential vote choice in 2016, gender, being white, and political knowledge remain statistically significant.

Table 2: Multivariate Regression Model – Dependent Variable: Party ID

| Variable | Unstd. B | Std Error | Beta | Sig. |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|------|
| Anti-Muslim Sentiment | -.012 | .021 | -.025 | .562 |
| Social Trust | .035 | .039 | .036 | .377 |
| Class | .061 | .049 | .051 | .219 |
| Religiosity | .047 | .088 | .021 | .595 |
| Education | .033 | .025 | .058 | .187 |
| Political Interest | -.036 | .030 | -.049 | .225 |
| Ideology | .109 | .028 | .216 | .000 |
| Presidential Vote Choice | 1.019 | .098 | .607 | .000 |
| Gender | .128 | .067 | .076 | .057 |
| White | .170 | .093 | .079 | .068 |
| Political Knowledge | -.077 | .045 | -.078 | .088 |
| Economic Mobility | -.008 | .033 | -.009 | .818 |
| Rural/Urban | .001 | .074 | .000 | .993 |
| State of Economy | .050 | .039 | .061 | .207 |

Adjusted R²:.681

Table 1: Bivariate Correlation Matrix of ANES Data

| Variable | Rural Urban | Presidential Vote Choice | Party ID | White | Political Knowledge | Economic Mobility | Social Trust | Class | Religiosity | Education | Political Interest | Ideology | Anti-Muslim Sentiment | Gender |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|----------|---------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-----------------------|--------|
| 1.Rural/Urban | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2.Presidential Vote Choice | .234** | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3.Party ID | .104** | .722** | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4.White | .178** | .307** | .257** | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5.Political Knowledge | -.096** | -.080** | -.021 | .077** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.Economic Mobility | -.105** | .056** | .085** | -.009 | .081** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 7.Social Trust | -.108** | -.036 | .033* | .171** | .104** | .116** | - | | | | | | | |
| 8.Class | -.104* | .006 | .107** | .123** | .084** | .239** | .215** | - | | | | | | |
| 9.Religiosity | .088** | .242** | .186** | -.107** | -.048** | .103** | -.002 | .014 | - | | | | | |
| 10.Education | -.229** | -.132** | -.004 | .091** | .169** | .089** | .251** | .399** | -.040** | - | | | | |
| 11.Political Interest | -.066* | -.015 | .020 | .082** | .095** | .097** | .171** | .180** | .025 | .227** | - | | | |
| 12.Ideology | .171** | .708** | .651** | .099** | -.064** | .129** | -.069** | .033 | .358** | -.133** | .024** | - | | |
| 13.Anti-Muslim Sentiment | .186** | .422** | .275** | .108** | -.136** | -.073** | -.150** | -.063** | .131** | -.132** | -.061** | .355** | - | |
| 14.Gender | .023 | .090** | .096** | .015 | .035* | .059** | .036* | .027 | -.090** | -.004 | .126** | .093** | .089** | - |
| 15.State of Economy | .119** | .506** | .368** | -.124** | -.121** | -.122** | -.122** | -.107** | .131** | -.147** | -.050** | .425** | .304** | -.023 |

I had anticipated rural living playing a larger role, and so I ran two more regression models with 2016 Presidential vote choice and political ideology as the dependent variables to ensure that it remained insignificant for each dependent variable. In these models, ideology was selected as the dependent variable because of the correlational strength between it and vote choice, and then 2016 vote choice was selected as the dependent variable because vote choice is what this research seeks to explain. In both new models, however, rural or urban dwelling remained insignificant.

Finally, using case selection, two more regression models were created. Rural and urban living emerged as insignificant in all three previous regression models, and consequently Tables 3 and 4 were created to investigate whether independent variables work differently in rural and urban communities. Table 3 shows the multi-variate regression model for only urban cases with a dependent variable of party ID. Here, social trust, gender, political knowledge, ideology and vote choice are significant. Table 4 illustrates the multi-variate regression model for only rural respondents, where *only* presidential vote choice is significant. From these tables, it can be concluded that there are differences in rural and urban communities, but these are not inherent to geographical location, and are likely due to other factors.

Stage One Discussion

Tables 1, 3, and 4, do indicate that there is a difference in the way that vote choice is constructed in rural and urban areas, though at the national level it is clear that being rural is not *the* important issue. It seems, contrary to popular dialogue, that something else is going on in these communities. The bivariate correlations suggest that many of the anticipated relationships between variables do exist and are significantly correlated. Party ID, rural-urban living, being white, low political knowledge, perceptions of economic mobility, religiosity, low education,

political ideology, high anti-Muslim sentiment, gender, and perceptions about the state of the economy were all significantly correlated with 2016 vote choice in the anticipated direction. While class does not seem to be indicative of vote choice in this model, that is unsurprising because among the very wealthy, people do choose to vote for both Democrats and Republicans, and the premise this very research is based on is that poor people do not always vote for Democrats. In the multi-variate regression models, however, many of the indicators that were significant in the bivariate fell away, including rural living. This means that other variables in the regression model wash out the influence of rural living on vote choice, but it also suggests that there may be a need to reevaluate our ideas of what being rural actually means. Tables 3 and 4 work together to indicate that there is a difference in the ways that rural and urban populations vote, and which variables influence these voting choices. These differences in party ID, ideology, and vote choice between the rural and urban populations of the United States may be due to a higher concentration of certain attitudinal profiles in different areas. For example, there may simply be more people who have conservative, traditional attitudes in rural areas. Due to the strength and direction of the bivariate correlations in Table 1, and the results of Tables 3 and 4, it can be concluded that attitudinal measures and other demographic indicators seem to be playing a large role in Republican vote choice. These indicators include perceptions of the economy, belief about economic mobility, religiosity, and race. The fact that rural/urban fell out as insignificant is interesting and has two potential explanations, and calls into question stereotypes and conventional wisdom surrounding rural Americans and their political attitudes. It suggests that the popular use of “rural” to characterize the attitude cluster may be an inaccurate information shortcut for conservative, religious, white men. Additionally, this result may be due to the fact that this research model did not include any control for region of the country. It is

accepted that there are cultural differences between the North, South, coasts, and Midwest; as such, it is plausible that rural communities in each of these areas exhibit different political behavior.

Table 3: Multivariate Regression Model if Urban – Dependent Variable: Party ID

| Variable | Unstd. B | Std Error | Beta | Sig. |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|------|
| Anti-Muslim Sentiment | -.013 | .023 | -.028 | .567 |
| Social Trust | .092 | .045 | .096 | .045 |
| Class | .038 | .059 | .032 | .518 |
| Religiosity | .042 | .098 | .020 | .671 |
| Education | .026 | .030 | .045 | .389 |
| Political Interest | -.037 | .033 | -.049 | .275 |
| Gender | .143 | .077 | .085 | .067 |
| White | .105 | .107 | .049 | .326 |
| Political Knowledge | -.110 | .052 | -.110 | .034 |
| Economic Mobility | -.027 | .041 | .030 | .511 |
| State of Economy | .045 | .046 | .053 | .355 |
| Ideology | .136 | .033 | .264 | .000 |
| Presidential Vote Choice | 1.017 | .112 | .595 | .000 |

Adjusted R²:.692

Table 4: Multivariate Regression Model if Rural – Dependent Variable: Party ID

| Variable | Unstd. B | Std Error | Beta | Sig. |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|------|
| Anti-Muslim Sentiment | .007 | .053 | -.014 | .894 |
| Social Trust | -.095 | .084 | -.105 | .266 |
| Class | .160 | .109 | .139 | .148 |
| Religiosity | -.106 | .230 | -.042 | .646 |
| Education | .075 | .054 | .138 | .171 |
| Political Interest | -.059 | .074 | -.086 | .428 |
| Gender | .050 | .151 | .031 | .744 |
| White | .322 | .218 | .155 | .146 |
| Political Knowledge | -.047 | .108 | -.049 | .667 |
| Economic Mobility | -.005 | .069 | -.006 | .941 |
| State of Economy | .030 | .088 | .040 | .733 |
| Ideology | .046 | .058 | .093 | .428 |
| Presidential Vote Choice | 1.105 | .224 | .683 | .000 |

Adjusted R²:.605

Stage Two Design and Methodology

The ANES data revealed that living in a rural area is not a significant indicator of vote choice, though the bivariate correlations in Table 1 indicate that there is a correlation between

rural living and GOP vote choice. As such, in order to better understand what really influences rural vote choice, I turned to the rural community of Arthur, Illinois.

Between January and March of 2018, a series of 30, 30-60 minute interviews were conducted with members of the Arthur community. To be considered eligible for participation in the study, a person must have been an adult who grew up in, or is regularly resident in, the village of Arthur. Interviews were conducted in a variety of public venues in Arthur, and no formal compensation was offered for participation in the study. Each interview was followed by a ten-item questionnaire to gather demographic information such as age, race, gender, employment sector, education, and voting behavior. A copy of the questionnaire used can be found in Appendix B. The purpose of the interview portion was to gain a holistic understanding of how the participants think about politics, culture, and their position in both. Questions addressed topics such as how participants decide who to vote for, conspiracy thinking, trust in politicians and American political institutions, impressions of economic inequality, and the role of religion in the political realm. The “deep story” used by Hochschild (2016), and the questions for measuring political knowledge in *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters* (1996) were both incorporated into the interview process. For a full list of interview questions, please see Appendix C. Participation in this study was voluntary and any question could be skipped over, those answers then being entered as missing data. All potential participants were identified through their occupation, position in local politics or social life, and via the snowball method of recruitment.

Many answers were coded and used as quantitative data, and questionnaire answers and other information from the interviews were treated as independent variables, with vote choice treated as the dependent variable. The operationalization of independent variables can be found

in Appendix D. Additionally, using data from other national level surveys such as a CNN/ORC Poll from September of 2015, and a CBS News and *New York Times* poll from March of 2016, responses from Arthur residents were compared with rural and urban populations nationally; this comparison allowed for data from the Arthur case to be generalized to the national level, serving to illustrate the gaps between rural and urban attitudes. This will be useful considering the role of rural living in the multivariate analysis, and it will allow for a comparison of the Arthur community to other rural communities in the United States. Urban responses will be used as a proxy for having interviewed urban residents.

Stage 2 Findings

The analysis of Arthur, Illinois, as a case study proved to be a useful way to better understand the motivations and vote choices of rural Americans. I found that Arthur is generalizable to the rest of rural America and was able to further evidence attitude gaps between rural and urban dwellers. Through the interviews, I was able to gain more deep and contextual information for answering the question of “why the Right?” and while some questions, such as “What do you believe is the most important political issue in America today” received a range of answers, generally people said the same kinds of things. Namely, I found that the general attitude of Arthur residents supports the typical profile of Republican voters that was identified in the regression modelling; those that exhibited the strongest conservative, small-government attitudes were typically middle aged to elderly, white men. That said, respondents indicated feeling conflicted about many of the issues that were addressed during the interview and appeared to think seriously about their responses. In many ways, the conclusions that can be drawn from the responses of Arthur residents are not surprising; 100% of respondents indicated that they

distrusted politicians, Hochschild's deep story resonated with many people, and almost every single participant who voted in the 2016 general election, voted for President Trump.

In the interview process, I tried to speak with a variety of residents who held different roles in the community, and summarized questionnaire responses can be found in Table 5. There are important insights to be gained from the questionnaire answers. For example, a majority of people indicated that they believe themselves to be in "the middle class," irrespective of the fact that one-third of people interviewed reported a household income of less than \$49,000 a year. A majority of people indicated that they believe that they vote the way their parents would. Finally, only women voted for a candidate other than Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential election, and the general level of political knowledge was low for the Arthur data sample.

A bivariate correlation table of responses is included here for the purpose of illustrating attitude consistency, although, since 30 cases is so small an N, statistical regression was not used. Instead, Arthur responses were compared to national samples from the ANES Time Series, CNN/ORC Poll from September of 2015, and the CBS News and *New York Times* poll from March of 2016.

Table 6 indicates the bivariate correlations of quantitative data from Arthur respondents. Generally, very few things return as statistically significant. Notably, age is correlated in the anticipated direction with Republican vote choice, with older people choosing Republican candidates. Also, vote choices from 2008, 2012, and 2018 are all correlated with each other; which indicates a consistency of opinion and strong partisan tendencies. Class and income are not significantly correlated, suggesting that there is a disconnect between individuals and their ability to recognize their own position relative to the positions of others. Finally, political

knowledge is significant and positively correlated with levels of education, which was to be anticipated.

Table 7 shows the comparisons between the Arthur and the national samples for Rural and Urban populations. It indicates that Arthur respondents are, generally, more like other rural community members than like urban dwellers. This is particularly clear when looking at “white,” “conservative,” “government does too much,” and “political trust.” For almost every indicator, the percentage of rural respondents is closer to the percentage of Arthur respondents than Urban respondents, except for the number who have post-graduate education and favorable perceptions of the economy. When looking at the Republican vote choice indicator for 2016, the rural sample almost exactly mirrors that of Arthur at 63%. This is a useful analysis because it indicates that Arthur was a good case selection to illustrate the attitudes of rural America in general. The differences between the urban and Arthur responses further suggest that there is something different about rural voters in the US, which is particularly interesting considering that in the regression modeling, rural living did not flag as important.

Table 5: Summary of Questionnaire Responses

| Question | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------|
| Gender | Male:18 | Female:12 | | | | | |
| Age | 18-25: 5 | 25-35: 4 | 35-44:3 | 45-55:11 | 55-64:2 | 65+: 5 | |
| Race | White:30 | | | | | | |
| Education | HS/GED: 2 | Some College, no degree:7 | Associate:6 | Bachelor:9 | Graduate/Professional:6 | | |
| Work Type | Manufacturing:4 | Retail:5 | Government:2 | Agriculture:4 | Education:6 | Other not specified: 9 | |
| Registered to vote | Yes:29 | No:1 | | | | | |
| Party ID | Republican:28 | Democrat: 2 | | | | | |
| Vote '08: | Yes: 19 | No:11 | | | | | |
| Vote '12: | Yes: 23 | No:7 | | | | | |
| Vote'16: | Yes: 24 | No:6 | | | | | |
| Vote Choice '08: | McCain: 13 | Obama: 5 | | | | | |
| Vote Choice '12: | Romney: 16 | Obama: 7 | | | | | |
| Vote Choice '16 | Trump: 19 | Clinton: 2 | Stein: 2 | Johnson: 1 | | | |
| Parent Vote | Yes: 14 | No:12 | | | | | |
| Class | Lower:1 | Lower Middle: 6 | Middle: 15 | Upper middle:7 | | | |
| Income | <25K: 1 | 25-35: 1 | 35-50:8 | 50-75:3 | 75-100:7 | 100-150: 6 | 150k<: 2 |

Table 6: Bivariate Correlations of Arthur Data

| Variable | Age | Gender | Education | Registered Voter | Party ID | Vote Choice 2008 | Vote Choice 2012 | Vote Choice 2016 | Income | Class | Political Interest | Political Knowledge | Religiosity | American Dream | Feeling About Economy. |
|--------------------------|---------|--------|-----------|------------------|----------|------------------|------------------|------------------|--------|-------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------|----------------|------------------------|
| 1.Age | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2.Gender | -.142 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3.Education | .229 | -.112 | - | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4.Registered Voter | -.053 | -.227 | -.101 | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5.Party ID | -.265 | .008 | -.134 | -.226 | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.Vote Choice 2008 | -.640** | .214 | -.063 | -.226 | .127 | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 7.Vote Choice 2012 | -.515** | .288 | -.169 | -.333 | .223 | .534** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 8.Vote Choice 2016 | -.494** | .064 | -.219 | -.358 | .310 | .530** | .568** | - | | | | | | | |
| 10.Income | .487** | -.322 | .171 | .173 | .137 | -.564** | -.508** | -.374* | - | | | | | | |
| 11.Class | .145 | -.258 | .235 | .023 | -.146 | .963 | -.374* | -.299 | .317 | - | | | | | |
| 12.Political interest | .105 | -.277 | -.082 | -.112 | .183 | -.279 | -.160 | .071 | .238 | -.210 | - | | | | |
| 13. Political Knowledge | .205 | -.420* | .525** | .032 | .100 | -.274 | -.168 | -.200 | .359 | -.022 | .501** | - | | | |
| 14.Religiosity | -.174 | .303 | -.021 | .058 | -.072 | .227 | -.026 | -.193 | -.375* | -.010 | -.077 | -.100 | - | | |
| 16.American Dream | -.060 | .166 | .016 | .123 | -.018 | .097 | -.037 | -.147 | -.285 | -.163 | -.281 | -.046 | .269 | - | |
| 17.Feeling about economy | -.129 | .151 | .020 | .069 | .025 | .320 | .120 | .179 | -.331 | -.149 | -.111 | -.158 | .173 | .394* | - |
| 18.Priority Issue | .180 | -.134 | -.115 | .122 | -.190 | -.132 | -.002 | -.053 | -.033 | -.053 | .159 | -.046 | .026 | -.121 | .340 |

Moving now to qualitative data, the interviews that were conducted were particularly interesting, and added a lot of depth to the story of resentment. Every single person exhibited distrust of politicians and the political system, and more than once I was offered the Reagan quote “I’m from the government, I’m here to help you,” to invoke a sense of irony. It did appear that people’s distrust of government came with reasonable defense. Just like in *Strangers in Their Own Land*, when citizens cite confusing and non-sensical government publications and policies regarding the Bayou Corne sinkhole, Arthur residents identified a variety of ways that the government and politicians were actively hindering their quality of life or ‘lying’ to the American public (Hochschild 2016). One example of this came from a local small business owner who identified tax policies that make staffing a problem, and another came from a local government worker who discussed the hypocrisy of government when they claim to care about environmental degradation and then continue the use of road salts in winter. Additionally, there was backlash against the perceived immorality of the government and politicians. Notably, sexual infidelity came up multiple times regarding both President John Kennedy and Bill Clinton. Morality was cited as a qualification of a good political candidate by many respondents, and there was a strong preference for elected officials to share the individual’s religious identity.

There was a sense that not only is government corrupt and untrustworthy, but also that it is inherently bad at what it does. Generally, participants did not identify infrastructure and public services as ways that the government helps their daily lives, though this was less common among adults over 30 and those with higher levels of education. Many respondents expressed that they believe that the government does “too much,” a response that came up in a variety of ways in discussions of SNAP programming, environmental protection, the economy, and the pursuit of the American Dream.

Table 7: Comparisons of Arthur to urban and rural national samples

| Issue | Rural | Urban | Arthur |
|--|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Weekly Church Attendance¹ | 27.7% | 26.2% | 50% |
| Party ID Republican¹ | 39.6% | 20.3% | 50% |
| Favorable Economy¹ | 40% | 59.6% | 66.7% |
| Post-graduate Education¹ | 8.9% | 22.1% | 18.8% |
| White¹ | 91.1% | 74.5% | 100% |
| 2012 Vote Republican² | 34.3% | 26.6% | 53.3% |
| 2016 Vote Republican² | 63.7% | 38.8% | 63.3% |
| Government Does Too Much³ | 61.3% | 44.4% | 86.7% |
| Washington Does What's Right Most of the Time³ | 12.3% | 24.2% | 0% |
| Registered Voter¹ | 80.8% | 71.4% | 96.7% |

In an attempt to tap into feelings of isolation from the rest of society, participants were asked if they believed that the media respects their opinions and culture. Overwhelmingly, the response was negative, suggesting that Arthur residents do hold feelings of ‘left behind-ness,’ and that there are many cases in which people feel as though they are the butt of the joke. One respondent stated that the people of Arthur are “crickets in a bird world” when it comes to politicians and the media. Another claimed that certain media outlets, such as local news and TV

¹ CNN/ORC

² ANES

³ NYT/CBS

stations have respect for rural culture but this is lost at the national level because “small towns aren’t on the radar of 95% of America. It’s sexier to be in a big city where more things are happening. Small town populations are declining and most people are seeing it as a non-event.” Another participant articulated a belief that many people around Arthur feel that the government and media ignores them, but also added that, “in a lot of cases being ignored means being left alone and I think a lot of them are just as happy to be left alone.” These statements speak directly to the idea of declinism, and mirrors an aspect of Hochschild’s theory, which depends on a sense of “your” group getting smaller and losing social footing (2016).

In regard to what people identified as being important to their vote choice, issues such as religious similarity, morality, and political history came up often. Almost every respondent indicated that the political track-record of the candidate was an important factor in their vote choice, though the importance of this trend is unclear. While on one hand it does indicate that issues and the political character of the candidate matters, the idea that a candidate’s prior experience should influence vote choice is a socially desirable answer. Additionally, some individuals identified specific policies that are vital to their vote choice including support for the 2nd amendment and pro-life abortion positions. After the first 5 or so interviews, a specific question set was introduced that asked participants if they would ever vote for a variety of different religions. Responses to Catholics and Jews were almost all positive, but responses to Muslims were mixed, with some people suggesting that it depended on the candidate’s stances, and others stating that they would never vote for a Muslim under any circumstance. On the whole, these responses are generally unsurprising as it is accepted that attitudes are often more telling than demographic information.

Most respondents receive their news from what are often identified as conservative media outlets such as FOX. A handful of respondents did claim that they tried to receive news from a variety of sources on both sides of the aisle in order to form their own opinions. Every respondent indicated that they believe fake news to be a problem, but not everyone was able to identify sources that may be untrustworthy. A common response was that the entire mainstream media was biased and that there is no 100% truthful news source to consult.

Interestingly, social policy opinions were very mixed. No single person suggested that government welfare programming was unacceptable, though a few respondents did state that they believed that social issues such as hunger and unemployment are better dealt with through community support as opposed to big government interventions. A handful of participants acknowledged that social services are a way that the government helps their lives, and a few stated that they personally had used welfare or food stamp programs in the past. Regardless of personal experience with these programs, almost every respondent indicated a belief that social assistance programs were important for today's society, and that some people really do need government assistance. These feelings were tempered, however, with general distrust of social security, free and reduced school lunch programs, unemployment benefit and food stamps. Generally, respondents expressed the belief that these programs are often abused.

Despite the majority of participants asserting that they do pay attention to political current events, overall levels of political knowledge appear to be low, and there is a demonstrated inconsistency of policy positions in the interview portion, although this was much less common in adults with a college degree. More participants were able to speak about current political events ("which political party currently controls the House of Representatives? Which political party currently controls the Senate?") than were able to correctly answer broader

questions about the American political system. Participants who self-identified as independents expressed the most consistent policy preferences, though in at least two notable cases that was due to having no real political opinions.

Despite frequent responses voicing concern over the economy and the national debt, most participants have expressed faith in the idea of the American Dream, and all participants that were asked (60% of the sample) stated that they believed that their children would be able to rise a social class in their lifetime. In response to the question “do you believe that youth around here have the same chance to succeed as youth from the cities?” one participant said that “everyone is only an idea from being rich.” Many people discussed the importance of “trying to help themselves,” and taking opportunities that are presented. In a handful of cases the idea of entitlement came up, and many people suggested that today people do very little to change their situations and “expect” everyone else to pull their load.

One third of participants indicated a belief that currently economic issues are more important than social issues in America, though four additional participants stated that the two are heavily intertwined. Responses to questions regarding economic inequality suggest that there is either little concern for economic inequality, or a misguided belief surrounding relative social status. Most respondents seemed to be firm in their belief that children in the Arthur area have just as much, if not more, opportunity and chance to succeed as children from the suburbs, though this attitude was less common among young people and women. In elaboration, a variety of reasons were offered for this answer, including the lower death rate in rural areas, the lack of gun violence, the sense of familial support in the Arthur community, and not needing very much to be successful in this area. When asked if they believe their children will rise a social class

within their life time, almost everyone claimed that they did believe it, though a handful of people rejected the idea that their children would want to.

Hochschild's deep story resonated with many respondents and seemed particularly important to male respondents and those in the older age brackets. Many men indicated feeling like the new "minority," and a few people discussed being careful about what they say because they would be considered racist. One respondent in particular discussed the role of the black community in taking power away from whites, and another suggested that it was important to form a white ethno-state if America is going to remain a world power. Hand-outs, affirmative action policies, disappointment in the system, and reverse-racism were common themes in responses to the deep story question. This suggests a serious feeling of resentment about relative social standing, and that the Arthur community *does* feel that they are facing disadvantages today.

Stage 2 Discussion

The interview portion of this research indicates that Arthur, Illinois *is* generalizable to rural America as whole. People in Arthur, just like many rural residents across the country, favor small government, feel strongly patriotic, lean Right, hold their religion particularly close, and report minimal interaction with minority groups.

Ultimately, the interviews suggested that Frank (2004) may have been correct in his conclusion that these communities tend to vote for Republicans out of their moral and cultural concerns. However, the interviews also suggest that voters *actively* make decisions about their vote choice around these concerns, and that they are not "falling for a long con" (Frank 2004).

Religion and moral issues such as abortion and free-riding were identified as being important, repeated by participants time and time again, which indicates that they are guiding influences in the lives of many people in the community. Generally, people responded that they feel as though they and their community are being “put-down” by the rest of society, and while this does appear to be an irritation, there is also a sense that the citizens of Arthur enjoy the isolation and levels of freedom they experience because of their rural location. Distrust of the government and politicians in general was wide spread; specifically, not a single respondent gave a positive answer to the question regarding trust in politicians. Most people indicated that they feel that the government does too much, and consequently, interferes with the life of the average American too much. While very few people exhibited strong anti-immigrant stances in general, illegal immigration was a concern for many respondents. All of these attitudes align with the Republican party platform.

Respondents were correctly able to link Christianity with Vice President Pence, identify ways in which their taxes changed in the 2018 tax year, discuss government lies and hypocrisy at length, and relate their various political opinions back to the Republican Party and their candidates. This suggests that the vote choice of rural Americans is not just based in partisanship, due to a lack of education, or because they are being “tricked.” The interviews suggest that there are deeply rooted feelings of social and political resentment within rural communities, and that these attitudes do influence vote choice, but in a way that is logical. Rural voters are thinking about the ways that their opinions line up with candidate platforms and policies. As such, these vote choices are not “counter intuitive.”

Conclusion

Initially, this research sought to identify why rural Americans tend to vote for the Republican party, a vote choice often identified as being “counterintuitive.” It found that the importance of individual economic stance may be waning in the face of new politics issues, cultural division, and religious cleavage. Rural Americans may no longer be voting in line with outside perceptions of their economic interests, but they are still voting in line with their other interests. It cannot be said that these votes are irrational or counterintuitive, but rather that the central issues may have shifted.

Hochschild’s deep story resonated strongly with many respondents, and multiple people indicated feelings of cultural declinism, marginalization, and being disrespected. These ideas all align closely with the left-behind hypothesis; those that are poorly prepared to compete in an increasingly globalized world feel left behind by it. This specifically investigates the way that the left-behind hypothesis plays out in rural America and finds that feelings of resentment have a leading role in the vote choices of America’s poor, rural, voters. Additionally, other attitudinal issues emerged as prevalent including ideas about the role of the government, illegal immigration, and the place of religion in contemporary society. These issues all closely mirror the Republican platform and political rhetoric of untrustworthy, over-reaching government that is too lenient and lacks morals. The fact that many rural respondents who hold these ideas would vote for Republicans is completely rational and to be expected, as it reflects their expressed opinions. The policies that, theoretically, these communities “should” support have no appeal to the people in these communities. There is a strong belief that liberal economic endeavors are inefficient programs that hurt more than they help. People aren’t voting for redistributive policies

largely because they do not seem to want redistributive policies, preferring to rely instead on local, community-based support.

Using data from the ANES, this research also found that certain demographic indicators are also telling for Republican vote choice including being ethnically white, low levels of education, and previous vote choices and partisan identities. One of the most interesting findings of this research is that “rural” may not be the most fitting way of thinking about these populations. The statistical portions of this study find that while there are attitudinal differences between rural and urban populations, living rurally is not a fundamental explanation for voting for Republican candidates. In fact, there are other demographic indicators that are much more robust including gender, race, and political knowledge. This suggests that the common idea that rural people are conservative may be an incorrect use of an information shortcut. This research finds that conservative white men vote for Republicans, whether or not they are rural residents.

This study of voter attitudes in Arthur, while able to be generalized to rural America, is not without limitations. Due to the nature of questionnaires and interview techniques, the study is vulnerable to social desirability, “doorstep opinions,” and perceptions of stereotype threat (Erikson and Tedin 2011). Similarly, participation in this study was voluntary, and there is a sampling error, the sample of participants is not directly representative of Arthur. Males, those with incomes over \$100,000, and the college educated are presently overrepresented when compared with Arthur’s census data.

Future research may seek to use an ethnographic approach in a larger participant pool, via either more interviews or through study of a county as opposed to a village. Similarly, further research should seek to account for the role of region or state on vote choice in rural

communities, as well as to investigate social opinions regarding the stereotypes that surround rural communities to find out if the way that people generally think about them is flawed.

Appendix A: Coding and Operationalization of Stage One Variables

Political knowledge:

Political knowledge is an additive composite measure taken from the following questions:

- “For how many years is a senator elected-that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?”
- “On which of the following does the U.S. federal government currently spend the least?”
- “The name is Joe Biden, what job or political office does he now hold?”

For each correct answer, one point was given and this is a scale from 0-3, with 0 being the least political knowledge and 3 being the most political knowledge.

Presidential vote choice:

Presidential vote choice was determined by answers to the question “Who did you vote for?” in the 2016 Presidential election.

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Hillary Clinton | 0 |
| Donald Trump | 1 |

Anti-Muslim Sentiment:

Anti-Muslim sentiment is a composite measure taken from answers to the questions:

- “Where would you rate Muslims in general on this scale?” Patriotic to Unpatriotic
- “Where would you rate Muslims in general on this scale?” Peaceful to Violent

Anti-Muslim sentiment is on a scale from 1-7, with high anti-muslim sentiment at a 7, and low anti-Muslim sentiment at a 1.

Social Trust:

Social Trust is a scale from 1-5, where a 5 indicates high levels of social trust, and a 1 indicates low levels of social trust. It was taken from the question: “Generally can people be trusted?”

Self-Identified Socioeconomic Standing:

Self Identified Socioeconomic Standing is on a scale from “Lower class” to “Upper Class,” taken from the question “How would you describe your social class? Are you in the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class?”

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Lower Class | 1 |
| Working Class | 2 |
| Middle Class | 3 |
| Upper Class | 4 |

Religiosity

Religiosity is a composite measure taken from the questions:

-“Do you consider religion to be an important part of your life, or not?”

-“Lots of things come up that keep people from attending religious services even if they want to. Thinking about your life these days, do you ever attend religious services, apart from occasional weddings, baptisms, or funerals?”

This is a scale from 0-1, where 1 indicates high religiosity, one indicates low.

Education Level:

Education level is taken from the question “What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?”

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Less Than high school | 1 |
| high school graduate or GED Holder | 2 |
| Some College, no Degree | 3 |
| Associate’s Degree | 4 |
| Bachelor’s Degree | 5 |
| Graduate or Professional Degree | 6 |

Gender:

Gender is assessed by the answer to the question: “What is you gender?”

| | |
|--------|---|
| Female | 0 |
| Male | 1 |

Political Interest:

Political Interest is operationalized through the answer to the question “How often do you pay attention to what’s going on in government and politics?” It is measured on a scale of 1-5, where 5 indicates high political interest and 1 indicates low political interest.

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Never | 1 |
| Some of the time | 2 |
| About half the time | 3 |
| Most of the time | 4 |
| Always | 5 |

Economic Mobility

Economic Mobility is taken from the answer to the question: “How much opportunity is there in America Today for the average person to get ahead?” This is on a five point scale, where a 5 indicates high mobility, and a 1 indicates no mobility

State of Economy

State of economy is taken from the answer to the question: “would you say that over the past twelve months, the state of the economy in the United States has (gotten much better, gotten somewhat better, stayed about the same, gotten somewhat worse, or gotten much worse)?” This is on a 5 point scale where 1 is better, and 5 is worse.

Ideological Self-Identification

Ideological Self-Identification is operationalized through the question “Where would you place yourself on this scale...”

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Extremely Liberal | 1 |
| Liberal | 2 |
| Slightly Liberal | 3 |
| Moderate | 4 |
| Slightly Conservative | 5 |
| Conservative | 6 |
| Extremely Conservative | 7 |

Party ID

Party Identification is operationalized through the question “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?”

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Democrat | 0 |
| Independent | 1 |
| Republican | 2 |

Rural/Urban

Rural or Urban residence is operationalized through the interviewer indication of the block

| | |
|-------|---|
| Urban | 0 |
| Rural | 1 |

White Race

White Respondent is taken from responses to the self-identified race question

| | |
|-------|---|
| White | 1 |
| Other | 0 |

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. Age:

- 18 to 24 years
- 25 to 34 years
- 35 to 44 years
- 45 to 54 years
- 55 to 64 years
- Age 65 or older

2. Gender:

- Male • Female • Other

3. Race:

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Other race

4. Highest level of education:

- Less than high school
- High school graduate (includes equivalency, or GED)
- Some college, no degree
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree

5. Which best describes the type of organization you work for:

- Manufacturing
- Non-profit (religious, arts, social assistance, etc.)
- Retail
- Government
- Agriculture
- Health Care
- Education
- Other

6. Are you a registered voter in the state of Illinois:

- Yes • No

6a. If no, do you identify more strongly with a specific political party?

- Republican Party
- Democratic Party
- Independent
- Other

7. Are you registered to a party in the state of Illinois:

- Yes • No

7a. If yes, which party?

- Republican Party
- Democratic Party
- Independent
- Other

8a. Did you vote in the 2008 Presidential Election:

- Yes • No

8b. Did you vote in the 2012 Presidential Election:

- Yes • No

8c. Did you vote in the 2016 Presidential Election:

- Yes • No

8d. Who did you vote for in the following elections (Please circle the name of the candidate, or other)

| 2008 | 2012 | 2016 |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| John McCain (R) | Barack Obama (D) | Donald Trump (R) |
| Barack Obama (D) | Mitt Romney (R) | Hillary Clinton (D) |
| Ralph Nader (I) | Jill Stein (Green) | Jill Stein (Green) |
| Bob Barr (Libt) | Gary Johnson (Libt) | Gary Johnson (Libt) |
| Other | Other | Other |

9. Please indicate the number of people that live in your household:

- Number of adults: _____
- Number of children (under 18): _____

6. Do you believe that you vote the way your parents would vote:

- Yes • No

Appendix C: Interview Questions

- Can you think of any ways that the government helps you in your life?
- Can you think of any ways that the government hurts you in your life?
- What do you think of when I say “environmental protection?”
- Do you believe that it is the job of the government to protect the environment?
- Do you believe that human activities are the biggest factor in climate change?
- Do you consider yourself to have faith in God?
- How do you think that your religious beliefs effect your political opinions?
- Do you expect your politicians to share your faith?
- Do you attend church?
- Would you vote for a Muslim?
- How do you feel about the economy right now?
- Generally speaking, do you think economic or social issues are more important in American society?
- What do you think the most important political issue is today?
- When you vote, what kinds of things help you decide who to vote for?
- The last time you voted, why did you choose the candidate you chose?
- Generally speaking, do you trust politicians?
- Generally speaking, do you think that politicians care about, and listen to what people like you think?
- Do you think that the 2016 presidential candidates were accurate representations of their political parties?

- When you're old enough to use it, do you think social security will still exist and be well-functioning?
- Do you believe that we have problems with voter fraud in America?
- Do you believe that we have problems with food stamp abuse in America?
- Do you believe that we have problems with the way we train our police in America?
- Can you tell me about how you feel about Universities and how they affect American society?
- Was it important to you to raise your children to respect authority?
- Was it important to you to raise your children to vote?
- Was it important to you to raise your children with religion?
- Where do you typically get your news?
- Do you believe that some news sources are more trustworthy than others? Can you identify some trustworthy and untrustworthy sources for me?
- To what extent do you think that the media respects your opinions and culture?
- Generally, do you believe that if a person works hard and follows the rules they can be successful in America?
- How do you think about The American Dream?
- Do you believe that your children will be able to rise a social class in their lifetime?
- Do you believe that children around here have the same chance to be successful as children from cities and suburbs?
- Is there anything about this community that makes you proud to live in Arthur?
- Under what circumstances do you think that it is wrong to ask for government help?

- Online do you interact with people who have different religious beliefs to you?
- Online do you interact with people who have different political opinions to you?- Can you tell me how you would feel about having a person of a different race as a neighbor? Negative, neutral, or positive?
- Can you tell me how you would feel about having a homosexual as a neighbor? Negative, neutral, or positive?
- Can you tell me how you would feel about having an immigrant as a neighbor? Negative, neutral, or positive?
- Some people think that the government spends too many resources helping immigrants find their place here, and not enough time helping working class Americans. Other people think that immigrants add a lot to the economic and cultural life of America. Can you tell me how you feel about immigration?
- I'm going to tell you a short story, and afterwards I'd like you to tell me your thoughts about it: In America, everyone is in a long line, and at the end of the line is the American dream. You are told that if you work hard you move up the line, but the government keeps coming along and putting the refugees in front of me, the immigrants in front of me, the black people in front of me, and the welfare users in front of me. I don't think that this is fair.
- Can you tell me what you think about the recent tax bill?
- Do you believe that the Holocaust happened?
- Do you believe in evolution?
- Do you believe that George Bush played a role in 9/11?
- Do you believe that we have been to the moon?
- Do you believe Hillary Clinton ever kept children in a pizza shop for sex trafficking?

- Do you believe that vaccines are dangerous?
- Which political party currently controls the House of Representatives?
- Which political party currently controls the Senate?
- Can you define judicial review?
- What is the Bill of Rights?
- What percentage is necessary in Congress to override the veto of the President?
- Who nominates federal judges?

Appendix D: Coding and Operationalization of Stage Two Variables

All missing data is coded as an 8

Age:

| | |
|-------|---|
| 18-24 | 0 |
| 25-34 | 1 |
| 35-44 | 2 |
| 45-54 | 3 |
| 55-64 | 4 |
| 65+ | 5 |

Gender:

| | |
|--------|---|
| Male | 1 |
| Female | 2 |
| Other | 0 |

Race:

| | |
|--|---|
| White | 1 |
| Black or African American | 2 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 3 |
| Asian | 4 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 5 |
| Other | 6 |

Education:

| | |
|---|---|
| Less than high school | 0 |
| High school graduate (Includes equivalency, or GED) | 1 |
| Some college, no degree | 2 |
| Associate's degree | 3 |
| Bachelor's degree | 4 |
| Graduate or professional degree | 5 |

Registered Voter Illinois:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Work Type:

| | |
|--|---|
| Manufacturing | 1 |
| Non-profit (religious, arts, social assistance etc.) | 2 |
| Retail | 3 |
| Government | 4 |
| Agriculture | 5 |
| Health Care | 6 |
| Education | 7 |
| Other | 0 |

Party ID:

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Republican | 1 |
| Independent | 2 |
| Democrat | 3 |
| Other | 0 |

Party Registration:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Party Registration ID:

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Republican | 1 |
| Independent | 2 |
| Democrat | 3 |
| Other | 4 |

Vote '08:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Vote '12:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Vote '16:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

'08 Choice:

| | |
|--------------|---|
| John McCain | 1 |
| Barack Obama | 2 |
| Ralph Nader | 3 |
| Bob Barr | 4 |
| Other | 0 |

'12 Choice:

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Mitt Romney | 1 |
| Barack Obama | 2 |
| Jill Stein | 3 |
| Gary Johnson | 4 |
| Other | 0 |

'16 Choice:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Donald Trump | 1 |
| Hillary Clinton | 2 |
| Jill Stein | 3 |
| Gary Johnson | 4 |
| Other | 0 |

Parent Vote:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Household Income:

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Less than \$25,000 | 0 |
| \$25,000-\$34,999 | 1 |
| \$35,000-\$49,000 | 2 |
| \$50,000-\$74,999 | 3 |
| \$75,000-\$99,999 | 4 |
| \$100,000-\$149,999 | 5 |
| \$150,000 or more | 6 |

Social Class:

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Lower Class | 0 |
| Lower Middle Class | 1 |
| Middle Class | 2 |
| Upper Middle Class | 3 |
| Upper Class | 4 |

Political Interest:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Trust Politicians:

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Belief in the American Dream?

| | |
|-----|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 0 |

Attitude towards economy:

| | |
|----------|---|
| Positive | 1 |
| Negative | 0 |

Economic/social priority:

Economic/social priority is taken from the question “do you believe that economic issues or social issues are more important in America today?”

| | |
|----------|---|
| Economic | 1 |
| Social | 0 |

Political Knowledge:

Political knowledge is a composite score from 0-6 based on the answers to the following questions:

- “Which political party currently controls the House of Representatives?”
- “Which political party currently controls the Senate?”
- “Can you define judicial review?”
- “What is the Bill of Rights?”
- “What percentage is necessary in Congress to override the veto of the President?”
- “Who nominates federal judges?”

One point is given for each correct answer, and as such, 0 indicates low knowledge, and a 6 indicates high knowledge.

Religiosity:

Religiosity is a composite measure from 0-3 based on the answers to the following questions:

- “Do you consider yourself to have faith in ‘God’?”
- “Do you attend Church?”
- “Do you expect politicians to share your faith?”

For each ‘yes’ or positive answer, a point is given. As such a 0 indicates low religiosity, and a three indicates high religiosity.

Conspiracy Thinking:

Conspiracy thinking is a composite measure between 0 and 6 based on the answers to the following questions:

- “Do you believe that the Holocaust happened?”
- “Do you believe in evolution?”
- “Do you believe that George Bush played a role in 9/11?”
- “Do you believe that we have been to the moon?”
- “Do you believe Hillary Clinton ever kept children in a pizza shop for sex trafficking?”
- “Do you believe that vaccines are dangerous?”

For each positive answer, a point is given, as such, a 0 indicates low conspiracy thinking, and a 6 indicates high levels of conspiracy thinking.

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