

UNDERSTANDING RURAL RED COMMUNITIES: SOCIALIST HISTORY AND  
STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF CONTEMPORARY IDEOLOGIES IN NORTH DAKOTA

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**Title**

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State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rural-urban divide is discussed between scholars (Pew Research Center, 2018), politicians (Siegler, 2020), and everyday Americans (Badger, 2019). Those in urban blue states (majority voting Democrat) blame those in rural red states (majority voting Republican) for being racist, sexist, and homophobic and rural red states blame urban blue states for being bleeding hearts, lazy, and elitist (Hochschild, 2016, p. 227). This research brings a nuanced perspective to common perceptions of rural red communities. Through historical research of the socialist movement in North Dakota and interviews of rural North Dakotans, I analyze the broader reasons for a Republican majority. I discuss how North Dakotans reconcile this history with the current Republican majority by using a capitalist lens. Additionally, I discuss how the structural conditions of the economy, religion, and race in North Dakota result in an ideological fear of outsiders and reinforce a shared rural identity and cultural conservatism.

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## DEDICATION

To the people.

‘Revolutionary love’ is the choice to enter into wonder and labor for *others*, for our *opponents*, and for *ourselves* in order to transform the world around us. It is not a formal code or prescription but an orientation to life that is personal and political and rooted in joy. Loving only ourselves is escapism; loving only our opponents is self-loathing; loving only others is ineffective. All three practices together make love revolutionary, and revolutionary love can only be practiced in community.

-Valarie Kaur, *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*

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## INTRODUCTION

### *The Value of Emotion and Narrative in Rural Scholarship*

In Arlie Hochschild's (2016) ethnographic book on Tea Party voters in Louisiana, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, she notes the importance of seeing the realities of rural red communities through their own eyes, words, and narratives (Hochschild, p. 5). The scholarship on the divide between rural and urban life has largely focused on access and resources whether it be the digital divide (Dickes et al., 2010), the spatial stratification and poverty (Greenberg, 2016), or the outmigration of human capital (Young, 2013). We can begin to understand the inequalities of the rural-urban divide through quantitative data about lack of rural internet access, which rural counties are the poorest, and numbered patterns of highly skilled and educated youth leaving their rural communities for the urban sprawl. However, what stories do rural people have to tell about their communities? How do they feel about the common negative connotations associated with rural Republican communities? I argue that a qualitative research approach is necessary to bring emotions and personal realities to the forefront in order to help supplement the current quantitative scholarship on this subject. Additionally, I argue this research will also be a catalyst for bridging the perceived divide that rural communities and urban communities have towards each other.

Katherine Cramer's book *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (2016) also explores the emotional aspect of the divide between rural red states and urban blue states. There are two main takeaways from Cramer's ethnographic study of rural voters that she discusses in the introduction: one is that the rural-urban divide is far greater and far more severe than many think and secondly that rural voters heavily resent urban folks. Cramer further defines this resentment as a politics of resentment in which "people

intertwine economic considerations with social and cultural considerations in the interpretations of the world they make with one another” (p.7). Similar to Hochschild’s work, my research is a qualitative study set in a Republican majority rural community that puts an emphasis on emotions when studying the political landscape of their respective regions. Cramer’s study gives another reason to connect emotional driven personal narratives with some of the quantitative understandings of the political landscape of rural communities. This research enriches the scholarship that is already out there with a deeper, more personal, understanding of how people living in these communities define them in their own words. It fills the gap in academia that exists when it comes to qualitative based rural voices but it will give anyone who might use this research (activists, politicians, everyday community members) a more nuanced perception straight from the experiences of North Dakotans on the reasoning and emotions behind a more conservative leaning ideology in the state. This research finds that there is a heavy influence of the structural conditions of the economy, religion, and race on the ideologies of rural North Dakotans. These structures work to create an Ideological Other that is mainly concerned with a fear of all outsiders that fall outside a shared rural identity. This shared rural identity draws lines between the “safe” members inside the community and the “unsafe” members outside, which pushes them towards a divisive kind of rural cultural conservatism based on fear rather than towards a political alignment outside of the two-party binary.

#### *Missing Links Between Rural and Urban Communities*

According to Pew Research Center 58% of those in rural communities say that those in urban communities have values that are very or somewhat different from their own and 53% of those in urban communities say that those in rural communities have values that are very similar or somewhat different than their own (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 39). Both of these communities feel misunderstood by their counterparts, especially politically. Hochschild (2016)

discusses how personal these political misunderstandings can feel to rural Republican residents. Madonna Massey, one of the participants in her study, explains how liberals call southerners “ignorant, backward, rednecks, losers. They think we’re racist, sexist, homophobic, and maybe fat” (cited in Hochschild, p. 23). If rural folks assume that the urban liberal perspective broadly labels their region with these negative connotations how can empathy build between these two groups? Yet again, emotions and politics are intertwined when discussing the differences between these two communities.

There are fundamental disconnects between urban Democrat and rural Republican folks regarding politics that fuel the polarization of these two communities. Several news articles after the 2016 election of Donald Trump attempted to understand and signify the importance of the political divide between the urban and rural (Badger et al., 2016; Carey, 2016; Kurtzleben, 2016; Quirk, 2017). Pew Research Center illustrates some of these disconnects with a couple statistics: 78% of rural Republicans say the growing number of newcomers threatens traditional American customs and values while 75% of urban Democrats say number of newcomers strengthen American customs and values, 71% of rural Republicans say the legalization of same-sex marriage is a bad thing for the U.S while 71% of urban Democrats say the legalization of same-sex marriage is a good thing for the U.S., and 57% of rural Republicans say society is better off when people prioritize marriage and kids compared to 73% of urban Democrats say society is just as well off if people do not prioritize marriage and kids (Pew Research Center, 2018, pp. 32-34). These key social issues that demonstrate a big political fracturing between urban liberals and rural Republicans all relating in some way to the concept of fairness and which groups deserve what. According to results the Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation survey:

alongside a strong rural social identity, the survey shows that disagreements between rural and urban America ultimately center on fairness: Who wins and loses in the new

American economy, who deserves the most help in society and whether the federal government shows preferential treatment to certain types of people (DelReal and Clement, 2017).

This difference is a topic that also comes up in Hochschild's work. She uses the metaphor of line cutters to further explore this topic:

Blacks, women, immigrants, refugees, brown pelicans-all have cut ahead of you in line. But it's people like *you* who have made this country great. You feel uneasy. It has to be said: the line cutters irritate you. They are violating the rules of fairness. You resent them (Hochschild, 2016, p. 139).

Rural Republican folks feel as if nobody is appealing to their idea of fairness in regards to who deserves what and this is causing a distinct polarization between the two communities.

With this overall understanding of the intersections of fairness, emotions, and politics we begin to see the fundamental disconnects between the two communities. Utilizing the findings in this research, we can start to engage in productive and nuanced conversations that reach across the divide instead of further polarizing. Eliasoph (2017) pleads with sociologists by stating:

if we do start offering a vision of a good society and a place to talk about it, we can all develop a structure of feeling: for feeling indignant about the tree graveyard and rubberized horse, for thinking about what is wrong instead of just heroically adjusting, and for fixing it instead of blaming, fearing and scorning each other (p. 62).

Eliasoph stresses the importance of the role sociologists have in bridging the missing links between the political landscapes of rural Republican communities and urban liberal communities so that there is a basis for change to occur rather than the same cycles of blame.

#### *Rationale for a North Dakotan Case Study*

The Pew Center Religious Landscape Study (2014) shows that 50% of adults in North Dakota are Republican/lean Republican. However, the political history is more nuanced than this statistic. Across my initial research the history of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota

captures the nuance that needs to be explored when thinking critically about this statistic. The Nonpartisan League (NPL) was established in 1915 in reaction to the lack of state-run agricultural programs, but the increasing restlessness and exploitation of farmers were a catalyst to the success the NPL had during its run (Huntington, 1950, p. 613). The State Historical Society of North Dakota states that the NPL “united progressives, reformers, and radicals behind a platform that called for many progressive reforms, ranging from improved state services and full suffrage for women to state ownership of banks, mills and elevators, and insurances” (Summary of North Dakota History - Nonpartisan League, n.d.). Despite infighting between more radical socialists and reformists, the NPL was able to establish groundbreaking history with state-run agricultural programs like the Bank of North Dakota and the North Dakota Mill and Elevator both of which are still operational today and are still the only state-owned bank and milling facility in the entire United States (Pratt, 1992, p. 44).

This preliminary historical research shows how complex North Dakota’s political landscape is and opens up many avenues to explore how the common derogatory narratives of rural Republican red states might not be a blanket statement we should accept as true. Delving deeper into North Dakota’s nuanced socialist history would provide a case study that illustrates rural Republican states capacity for political progress and radical politics. North Dakota’s socialist past can both help lessen the misconceptions of rural red states as automatically ignorant, as Madonna Massey in Hochschild’s text feels, as well as be a jumping off point for questioning my participants about the disconnect between the Republican majority and ideology and the socialist past of North Dakota.

Combined with a unique political history, North Dakota also has key structural conditions that allow for a connection between the collection of micro narratives to the larger institutions that exist in North Dakota. While the outlining of socialist history and progressivism in North

Dakota can assist in breaking down some of the misconceptions about rural red communities, the analysis of the influence of structural conditions on individual North Dakotan's ideology can bring about a more nuanced discourse and deeper understanding surrounding these communities and why a Republican majority exists in a state with this unique history.

In order to analyze the influence of structural conditions of North Dakota on ideology, one must also understand the extent of the structural conditions of North Dakota regarding my three key structural conditions of the economy, religion, and race. I decided to focus on the economy, religion, and race due to the massive presence of these institutions in North Dakotan life and culture which I will get into further in the following sections.

Firstly, I want to discuss the role of the economy in North Dakota. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration "In 2019, North Dakota ranked second in the nation, after Texas, in both crude oil production and proved crude oil reserves" (North Dakota State Energy Profile, 2020). North Dakota also has the highest dependence on oil tax revenue than any other state (Reuters, 2019). According to one North Dakotan focused study the researchers discuss their concerns regarding this heavy reliance stating "of particular concern in relation to the boom—bust cycles associated with extractive industries is the vulnerability of communities—frequently rural communities—to long-term decline in relation to economic and other indicators" (Weber et al., 2014, p. 62). One of the findings from this study illustrated a link between the economic conditions and personal political ideology:

a significant portion of the focus group discussion was about an initiative to eliminate property taxes in the state. At that time, anti tax enthusiasts were using North Dakota as a test case and had succeeded in getting an initiative on the ballot—and the oil industry and leaseholders who live outside of the state would have been among the greatest beneficiaries. The directors recognized that this would have taken away local collection and distribution authority. In addition, there was widespread concern about the fact that nearly half of the oil wealth leaves the state (Weber et al., 2014, p. 68).

Those in the study discussed their concerns and worries over several social and environmental challenges that oil brought into North Dakota politics. How do the concerns found in this study result in a Republican majority state with a political landscape that enables increased extraction, less state governmental involvement, and less community benefits of this vital revenue? The agricultural economy is also a vital piece of the North Dakotan economic landscape. North Dakotan farmers personal income increases due to the amount of federal farm subsidies they receive (Rosewicz et al., 2020). How does farmers reconcile the amount of federal funding received that increases their own incomes with a Republican majority that rejects relying on federal funding for personal economic advancement? Now that I have discussed the importance and influence of the structural condition of the economy, the next section moves into the institution of religion in North Dakota.

The institution of religion in rural communities cannot be overstated. In a article analyzing data from the General Social Survey to discuss the influence of religion on political issues the authors find:

Rural Americans are more likely than their metropolitan neighbors to attend church, and in particular, to identify as born-again Christians, and by extension are likely to embrace the traditional views associated with Christian exclusivism. They are also more likely to oppose abortion across a range of diverse circumstances and to oppose same-sex relations (Dillon and Savage, 2016, p. 9).

In another study Hochschild also discusses the role of religion in rural communities as a social pillar in which to connect with other people in the community, an emotional support group, and moral grounding in which to inform their political decisions (Hochschild, 2016, pp. 118-124).

With 77% of North Dakota adults identifying at Christian and 53% saying the importance of religion in one's life is very important it stands to reason that religion is a key institution in navigating the ideologies of individual North Dakotans (Pew Center Religious Landscape Study,

2014). We can already begin to see some of the influence of religion on ideology by looking at some of the data on primarily religious based political views: 36% of North Dakota adults believe humans have always existed in present form and 25% say that humans evolved but due to God's design, 51% believe abortion should be illegal in all/most cases, and 46% oppose/strongly oppose same-sex marriage (Pew Center Religious Landscape Study, 2014). Now that the importance of the economy and religion in North Dakota have been discussed this brings me to my last structural condition of race.

Understanding the structural condition of race relations in North Dakota is the last keyhole into the ideologies of North Dakotans. Concepts of racial divide and tension are found in Hochschild's book but her state of interest, Louisiana, is 62.8% white with the second highest racial population being Black or African American at 32.8%. In contrast, North Dakota is 86.9% white with the second highest racial population being American Indian or Alaskan Native at 5.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Therefore in order to capture conditions of race relations in North Dakota there needs to be a focus on white and Indigenous relations. In 2016 North Dakota made national news regarding the contentious relation it has with its non-white residents with the Dakota Access Pipeline controversy. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is a 1,172 mile pipeline created to transport oil from North Dakota to Illinois with some of the construction going through the Dakota and Lakota peoples sacred lands and waters that is both culturally significant and important for their general health and wellbeing (Whyte, 2017, p. 155). The DAPL protests in Standing Rock, North Dakota led to a conversation about North Dakota's, and by extension the federal government's, exploitation of Indigenous land and health for oil profits (Wehelie, 2016). In response to DAPL, white rural community members near the area seemed uncomfortable with the situation unfolding before them. One rancher, Jack Schaaf, about 10 miles from the protests voiced his concerns over the DAPL protest stating "you get 2,000, 3,000



Natives together — is it safe?” (as cited in Healy, 2016). As Jack Schaaf’s concerns show, individual ideologies and views toward political issues in North Dakota seem to be a product of the structural conditions of race in North Dakota.

### Research Questions

“Four-in-ten rural residents say they know all or most of their neighbors, compared with 24% in urban and 28% in suburban areas” (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 64). Over the course of my years in North Dakota and having conversations with many friends, peers, and activists about North Dakota politics a couple questions kept arising in my mind. I saw people stop their cars in negative degree weather to help someone get their car unstuck, I attended numerous community events with a large attendance, I heard people constantly say the unofficial slogan of the state “North Dakota Nice”. However, 67% of adults in North Dakota would rather see a smaller government with fewer services (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Before I get into my first research question, I want to discuss socialism here so that it is understood in the context of this research. Merriam-Webster defines socialism as “any of various economic and political theories advocating collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods” (“Socialism”, n.d.). Essentially, socialism would be taking away the hold that private individuals and companies have on what should be public goods and redistributing them in an equitable way (ideally). This would mean more government involvement in the distribution of public goods and more social services for those in need. A poll by Gallup in 2018 asked Americans how they felt about the term socialism and 23% said they understood it as equality, 17% understood it as government control of business and economy, and 6% understood it as talking to people and being social (Newport, 2020). A reason for the confusion of what necessarily defines socialist could be that there are various definitions of socialism in politics and policy ranging from Bernie Sanders

listing off socialist programs like Social Security and bank-deposit insurance to Cold War ideas about authoritarianism (Slevin, 2019). Dionne and Galston also note that:

In 2018, the Public Religion Research Institute offered respondents two definitions of socialism. One described it as “a system of government that provides citizens with health insurance, retirement support, and access to free higher education.” The other characterized it as “a system where the government controls key parts of the economy, such as utilities, transportation and communications industries” (Dionne and Galston, 2019).

These definitions contextualize my first research question regarding the socialist past of North Dakota. As I discussed briefly in the previous sections North Dakota has two state-run agricultural programs and unique political history of radicalism that directly conflicts with the current majority view of governmental involvement which leads into my first research question: *what is the extent of North Dakota’s history of socialist programs and policies and how do rural North Dakotans reconcile this history with the state’s anti-big government Republican politics?*

I was born and raised in the state of California, a state known for its progressive ideals and diversity. I moved to Fargo, North Dakota in 2014 for college and it is now 2020 and I am still living, working, and studying here. Before I moved to North Dakota, and before I had studied the social sciences, I had what might be considered a stereotypical liberal urban view of North Dakota. It was a view that was ignorant of the work of many progressive activists in the area and the radical history of the state. Over the past years I have personally experienced the dramatic shift from what my perception of North Dakota was to the more nuanced reality through my everyday interactions as well as making friends and connections with those who have lived in North Dakota their entire lives. The cause for this shift in my thinking was the development of my sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), linking the micro (my interactions with those who have lived in North Dakota their entire lives) to the macro (the structural

conditions that exist in North Dakota). I had previously failed to account for the ways in which the structural conditions like the economy, religion, and race relations might influence the ideologies of those living in rural Republican majority states. I personally experienced the breaking down of some of the popular misconceptions and missing links that I've shown exist between those in blue urban states and those in rural red states. Through micro narratives and building empathy with the issues and stories of rural North Dakotan I gained a more nuanced understanding of these communities and, most importantly, the best way to bridge the gap of understanding so that change can take place and the chasm of the rural-urban divide does not prevent progress. This experience has led me to my second research question: *how do rural North Dakotans articulate their political views (specifically on the economy, religion, and race) and how can we use these narratives to repair the missing links between the urban and the rural?*

In the following chapters, I will discuss the how I achieved answers to my research questions and discuss the implications of these findings. First, I will outline the theoretical framework driving the analysis of my research. Second, I will illustrate the methodological approach in obtaining and analyzing the research data. Lastly, I will then synthesize and discuss my research findings.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the following sections, I map out the conceptual frameworks that will guide my approach to this research. As discussed in the previous chapter the economy, religion, and race relations are highly influential structures in North Dakota. Using Marx, Althusser, and Veracini for theoretical grounding, I focus on how each of these structures play a key role in shaping the dominant ideology of the state.

### Economy and Ideology

I discussed in the introduction the structural economic conditions in which North Dakotans live. However, this research aims to connect the structures and the micro narratives through ideology so a discussion on the ideology surrounding the three key structural conditions is necessary. Karl Marx wrote a lot about how economic conditions shape ideology. In *The German Ideology* he writes “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life” (Marx, 1964). This can be understood as Marx’s concept of historical materialism. A fundamental aspect of historical materialism posits that material and economic conditions (the base) shapes and maintains the ideology of individuals (the superstructure). Essentially, cultural institutions like education and family and the ideologies they embrace and internalize are shaped by the economy. This functions as a cyclical pattern that reinforces the reproduction of production that keeps the power concentrated at the top. Marx writes “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (Marx, 1964). If ideology is shaped by the economy that ideology will be molded in the interest of keeping the economy thriving above all else, even at the expense of the larger working class under capitalism. This ruling intellectual force will be in the interest of the goal of the ruling class which is to keep their power, therefore

even those outside the ruling class will internalize and perpetuate an ideology that does not benefit them. This theoretical framework on understanding the influence ideology, and specifically what influences that ideology, helps me develop my research on residents of rural North Dakota especially in communities that are largely working class. Using this Marxist lens, I can begin to understand the material conditions in which those I interview live under in rural North Dakota and therefore look for how that shapes their personal views of socialism and capitalism. I can begin to see the ways in which their ideology has been influenced by their personal economic situations and the larger economic structure of North Dakota.

### Religion and Ideology

Marxist social theorist Louis Althusser also offers some insight as to the importance and influence of ideology. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* he explains that ideological state apparatuses (ISA's) are highly influential structures that shape and maintain the ideologies of those within those structures. Essentially, the ruling class uses ISA's like religion and education to indoctrinate its members and maintain economic and social power (Althusser, 1971). The State is largely interested in reproducing groups of people to work in the factories and indoctrinate them in a way that keeps them from unionizing against unfair or unsafe working conditions. However, as stated previously, religion is a huge ISA influencing those in rural North Dakota and this framework will be used to analyze primarily religiously influenced political statements. With 77% of North Dakota adults identifying as Christian and 53% saying the importance of religion in one's life is very important I expect to find a particularly heavy influence of religion on ideology and in turn political viewpoints (Pew Center Religious Landscape Study, 2014). If North Dakotans put a high emphasis on religion in their lives then their ideological values will most likely not contradict their common religious teachings. Therefore, I can look at religion through Althusser's lens, as a structure that is less a moral

compass that strives for equality and more an institution dominated by the ruling class with its own motivations of preserving power rather than equality. A structure with its own goals to keep those who follow the religion satiated with their place outside of the ruling class and doing the work themselves to keep others outside as well (as we can see in trends I stated previously with views on abortion and same-sex marriage). Using this conceptual framework I can analyze the value and influence religion has on the ideology of individual rural North Dakotans.

### *Race and Ideology*

According to the United States Census Bureau (2019) North Dakota is 86.9% white with the second highest racial population being 5.6% American Indian or Alaskan Native. As discussed previously, the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) in 2016 created a discourse surrounding white rural community members treatment of Indigenous peoples. Whyte states “as an Indigenous supporter of #NoDAPL, the larger story concerns how DAPL is an injustice against the tribe. The type of injustice is one that many other Indigenous peoples can identify with—U.S. settler colonialism” (Whyte, 2017, p. 158). Analyzing the influence of the structural conditions of race in North Dakota on ideology requires a theoretical lens of settler colonialism. Lorenzo Veracini (2015) discusses settler colonialism as a theory stating “settler colonialism is premised on and necessitates a sovereign displacement and perhaps out of a disposition born out of the necessities of navigating the distance between ‘here’ and ‘there’, and between an old ‘home’ and a new one, settlers are inclined to think contextually and to define negatively” (p. 2). Settlers, as defined by Hurwitz and Bourque (2014), are “anyone not Indigenous, living in a settler colonial situation is a settler. Therefore all non-Indigenous people living in what is today called the ‘U.S.’ are settlers living on stolen land” (Who is a Settler? section, para. 1). Therefore, according to Veracini, the legacy of settler colonialism has present day negative implications for the settlers (the overwhelming majority of the population in North Dakota) and their ideology

surrounding their relationship with Indigenous people. Veracini stresses that “we need to learn to ‘read’ a settler colonial world where we simply see a ‘normal one’” ( p. 8). Using this framework to understand the ideologies of rural North Dakotans surrounding Indigenous issues like the Dakota Access Pipeline protests will give a deeper insight to the influence of the legacy of settler colonialism in the structures regarding race relations in North Dakota.

This chapter focused on the importance of using these various theoretical frameworks to analyze the influence of the structural conditions of the economy, religion, and race on personal ideology. This conceptual framework allows for me to work through a fuller understanding of the reasons for the Republican majority in North Dakota and analyze the influence the structural conditions have on ideology. It will give a more contextual understanding of the perceived negative connotations of rural Republican communities as simply racist, sexist, and homophobic (Hochschild, 2016, p. 23) and work through some of the structural reasons for these differences. This nuanced analysis and discussion of rural Republican communities’ politics will break down misconceptions about rural Republicans and give space for connection rather than missing links.

## METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological framework that guided my research for evidence in which to draw conclusions from. Specifically, I will be discussing the incorporation of aspects of historical sociology, personal narratives and Hochschild's deep story, and how I linked personal narratives to the structural conditions of the economy, religion, and race through Smith's standpoint theory and institutional ethnography. I also discuss my methodology and the use of both archival and interview data for this research.

### *Synthesis of History and Sociology*

I used an historical approach in this research to provide context and depth the interviews I collected. Charles Tilly (2001) writes "the idea of a distinct enterprise called historical sociology only formed during the twentieth, as sociologists sought to connect the two through serious investigation of other settings than the ones they lived in" (p. 6753). Historical sociology is defined by Komlik (2015) as "the study of changes in societies over time, the historical events and contingencies that allowed for those changes, and the trajectories for further societal development that those changes create" (para. 2). While this project only encapsulates a sliver of what historical sociology projects attempt to do, the synthesis of sociology and history by using history as a contextual grounding point is an important component of this project.

In a chapter of *Sociological Research Methods* sociologist John Goldthorpe (1984) discusses two common arguments about the clear distinctions between sociology and history.

Firstly, abstraction versus detail:

it has been held that in his quest for general propositions about society the sociologist has necessarily to develop extensive conceptual schemes by means of which he may analyse and reduce to order the manifold diversities of man's social existence: the historian on the other hand, concerned as he is with individuals and events in all their idiosyncratic detail, is said to have little use for such general concepts but to be interested rather in developing ever more reliable and penetrating methods of ascertaining historical fact (p. 163).



Secondly, time:

The historian, it is argued, is typically engaged in tracing a chronological sequence of past events and with showing how certain events led on to others; time is thus a major dimension of his work. In contrast to this the sociologist is seen as being centrally concerned with the functional relationships which exist between the analytically separable elements in societies (or 'social systems')- time notwithstanding (p. 163).

In this research I do not see this mutually exclusive relationship between sociology and history regarding conceptualization and time. In fact, I utilize a synthesis of the practices of both the sociologist and the historian. This research discusses sociological abstract theoretical concepts and their application to social existence in these rural communities as well as discusses individuals involved in the historical socialist movement in North Dakota. Additionally, this research analyzes the big picture of the sociopolitical consequences of the structures influence on ideology as well as chronologically details the rise of fall of the Nonpartisan League. The historical research provides a temporal and granular grounding and presents one side of my research question (*what is the extent of North Dakota's history of socialist programs and policies and how do they reconcile this history with the state's anti-big government Republican politics?*). Additionally, the interview narratives I discuss in the next section supplements the latter portion of my first research question and my second research question as well.

#### *Personal Narratives and the Deep Story*

Sociology as a discipline focuses on abstract concepts about structural systems. I have already discussed the systems I will be analyzing in the previous chapters, but with this particular research topic, the micro level personal narratives are able to demonstrate structural patterns of the macro systems I am studying. Semi-structured interviews allowed for avenues to a more realistic portrait of the area I am studying compared to removed and calculated formal interviews or surveys. The collection of personal narratives from rural North Dakotans helps answer my

other research question (*how do rural North Dakotans articulate their political views (specifically on the economy, religion, and race) and how can we use these narratives to repair the missing links between the urban and the rural?*).

Arlie Hochschild's analysis in of her interviews of Tea Party voters in Louisiana guides my analysis of the narratives given by rural North Dakotans. While there are differences between northern and southern rural communities (most notably in racial demographics), Hochschild's (2016) work on the deep story is crucial in the framework of this research. She defines the deep story as "a *feels-as-if* story-it's the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgement. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel" (p. 135). This story weaves emotion into politics and impedes critical thinking regarding politics. Many of the people she interviewed in Louisiana had personal experiences that shaped their politics - experiences that are specific to their rural communities. She writes they "felt like victims of a frightening loss-or was it theft?-of their cultural home, their place in the world, and their honor" (p. 48). It is easy to pull up statistics of rural communities in North Dakota and conclude that they made their bed and they must lay in it. However, this research aims to bring nuance to the discourse surrounding the political trends of North Dakota. This insight into personal narratives in regards to politics allowed me to analyze my interview material and look for patterns and instances where the deep story is evident and how the personal, the emotional, and the political intertwine.

#### *Linking Micro Narratives and Structural Conditions*

As a way to link the narratives I collected with the structural conditions of North Dakota, I rely on Dorothy Smith's framework of standpoint theory and institutional ethnography. Dorothy Smith, feminist theorist, wrote extensively about the importance of linking micro narratives of everyday lives to the larger structural conditions in which they exist with her development of standpoint theory and institution ethnography. Her work on developing feminist

standpoint theory, which argues that women have a certain valuable knowledge to share due to their position in society and there are embodiments of larger social structures in their everyday lives to be studied, focuses primarily on gender yet she also develops this as a general sociology for people (Smith, 2005, pp. 10-13). Even though Smith focuses primarily on the standpoint of women, I argue this can be applied directly to the population I researched in rural North Dakota. Standpoint asserts that the ideology and beliefs of individuals can be observable and used as data to start an academic discourse (Smith, 2005, p. 25). This creates a basis for using these micro narratives of rural North Dakotans as empirical evidence to be collected, studied, and analyzed in order to draw socially scientifically sound conclusions.

Smith's approach to institutional ethnography as a methodology states that "it would begin in the actualities of the lives of some of those involved in the institutional process and focus on how those actualities were embedded in social relations" (Smith, 2005, p. 31). Collecting these micro narratives through semi-structured interviews allows for data to be collected through the perspective of the knower (rural North Dakotans). Smith writes

for institutional ethnography, the speaking or writing of experience is essential to realizing the project of working from the actualities of people's lives as the people themselves know them. Recognizing and incorporating into the project's ethnographic analysis the actual diversity of perspectives, biographies, positioning, and so on is integral to its ethnographic method (Smith, 2005, p. 125).

This methodology sets the stage for both the importance of collecting these micro narratives as an insight to the influence of structural conditions on personal ideology as well as the framework in which to actually make the linkages between the micro narratives and structural conditions by using personal experiences as data. With these linkages utilizing standpoint and methods of institutional ethnography a more nuanced discourse surrounding rural North Dakotans and the political landscape and ideology of the region is achieved.

### Historical Data Collection

The collection of historical data for this project was achieved in a couple ways. As shown in the previous sections I had already done some preliminary secondary source research into some of the socialist history of North Dakota for the literature review (Huntington, 1950; Pratt, 1992; Summary of North Dakota History - Nonpartisan League, n.d). I then continued my search online for secondary sources of academic scholarship that illustrated this historical past as well as read and collected primary source data from the book *Comes the Revolution: A Personal Memoir of the Socialist Movement in North Dakota* by Henry R. Martinson. Additionally, I searched the archives at North Dakota State University (NDSU) to find more information of socialist programs and policies in North Dakota. In the archives I combed through and took photographs of the contents of the Henry R. Martinson collection. There were many interesting items included in the collection but for the scope of this paper I will be referencing a newspaper clipping of an interview of Henry Martinson regarding socialism and the 24-page document titled “A Socialist Constitution for North Dakota” (Henry R. Martinson Papers, n.d).

### Participant Data Collection

In order to capture the personal narratives of rural North Dakotans I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with sources who have lived in rural North Dakota for at least five years. In this research I utilized the U.S. Census Bureau’s definition of rural which is defined as “as any population, housing, or territory NOT in an urban area” (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Urban areas are defined in two separate population limits: “‘Urbanized Areas’ have a population of 50,000 or more. ‘Urban Clusters’ have a population of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000” (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Using these definitions, I interviewed those who are over 18 and have lived for at least 5 years in a city in North Dakota with a population less than 2,500 people. Other than those two conditions participants were not specifically filtered out due to race, age, political affiliation,

or gender. Names and identifying information were changed in order to practice ethical research and protect the identities of my informants. Due to the unprecedented times of the pandemic, COVID-19, all interviews were held and recorded over Zoom. After I received Institutional Review Board approval, I contacted and set up interviews with two sources through a friend who grew up in rural North Dakota. From there on out, I utilized word of mouth and snowball sampling by asking my participants if they knew of anyone else to interview who met the requirements to gather more access to rural North Dakotan narratives until I collected enough data to start coding and seeking patterns in order to make assumptions and draw conclusions using the theoretical framework I have already discussed. I emailed a preliminary Qualtrics survey (as shown in Appendix A) in which an IRB consent form was attached and collected demographic data from each participant (age, racial identity, annual salary, gender identity, years lived in North Dakota, political affiliation) Page 22 contains Table 1 with the results of this survey providing an overview of participant demographics. Each participant was interviewed one-on-one except for Keith and Pamela, who are a married couple that I interviewed both at one time. Once the demographic data was collected and consent was given, a Zoom meeting date and time was established. Interview times, depending on the participant, ranged from around thirty minutes to one hour. There were ten base level questions (as shown in Appendix B) I was sure to ask each participant but the interview was semi-structured so the conversation was able to flow into different subsections and areas. The questions I asked were largely focused on North Dakota politics and life in rural communities in general. Questions ranged from granular level political questions on specific economic issues in North Dakota to bigger picture questions on the political landscape of the area. Once interviews were completed audio files and transcripts were uploaded to a Google Drive to be coded in my data analysis.

Table 1.1

*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age Range	Gender Identity	Racial Identity	Income	Political Affiliation	Religious Affiliation	Length in North Dakota (years)
William	55 - 64	Male	White/Caucasian	\$200,000 or more	Democrat	Christian (Protestant)	55
Lawrence	65 or above	Male	White/Caucasian	\$100,000 - \$149,999	Democrat	Agnostic	64
Anthony	18 - 24	Male	American Indian/Alaska Native	\$50,000 - \$74,999	Democrat	Lakota Tradition	21
George	25 - 34	Male	White/Caucasian	\$100,000 - \$149,999	Republican	Catholic	27
Michelle	45 – 54	Female	White/Caucasian	\$150,000 - \$199,999	Socialist	Agnostic	most of life
Keith and Pamela	55 – 64	Male and Female	White/Caucasian	\$75,000 - \$99,999	Republican	Catholic	58
Cynthia	55 – 64	Female	White/Caucasian	no answer	no answer	Christian	30
Todd	45 - 54	Male	White/Caucasian	no answer	Democrat	Christian (Protestant)	45

*Data Analysis*

After the historical data was collected, I identified the Socialist Party of North Dakota and the Nonpartisan League as the primary focuses of the historical work for this research. Outlining the rise and fall of these socialist groups through supplemental primary and secondary sources gave a juxtaposition to look for in the responses from my participants on how rural North Dakotans reconciled this history with the current Republican majority. I coded the interviews of rural North Dakotan's ideology and through Smith's ethnomethodology and Hochschild's deep story and connected these micro narratives back to the three larger structural conditions of the economy, religion, and race. Specifically, I listened back to audio clips all the way through two times. Once, identifying and pulling important quotes and themes from each participant regarding each question. With initial reactions to the data and pulling emerging themes I went

back and listened to the audio files all the way through again. This allowed me to focus on solidifying major themes and catch any patterns in the answers of my participants I might have missed the first time around. Once I examined the interview data for common patterns, I utilized my theoretical framework of Marx's historical materialism, Althusser's ideological state apparatuses, and Veracini's settler colonialism to then draw conclusions about the broader causes for a Republican majority in rural North Dakota. Using this methodological and conceptual framework I was able to get to the root of my research questions, draw conclusions based on patterns in the data, and thus begin to use this research as a way to break down misconceptions of rural Republican communities and repair missing links between the urban and rural communities regarding politics.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### *Socialist History and Reconciliation*

The first part of this chapter delves into the socialist history of North Dakota detailing the groundwork the Socialist Party of North Dakota laid for the rise of the Nonpartisan League (NPL) in North Dakota. Specifically, I provide historical context to North Dakota's unique socialist past and its juxtaposition with the current Republican political landscape. The second part of this chapter uses the responses from participants surrounding socialism to illustrate the ways in which rural North Dakotans reconcile this history with the current Republican majority.

### **Socialist History of North Dakota**

In the preface of the personal memoir of Henry Martinson (1969), *Comes The Revolution*, he writes

conventional historians will probably shrug off, with a sentence or two, the weird—to them—creed of the early socialists in North Dakota. But future historians may, at least, wonder why socialists concerned themselves with the thankless task of convincing people that they should vote for a change in our economic system (p. i).

When analyzing the socialist movement in North Dakota I want to hone in on the Nonpartisan League (NPL) and its history and influence. Preceding the rise of the NPL the Socialist Party, the North Dakota Federation of Labor, and the American Society of Equity were all working against the effects of capitalism in urban and rural areas of North Dakota in the early 1900's. Labor was protesting against issues such as “unemployment, low wages, poor working conditions, and long hours” while farmers were protesting against issues such as “low farm prices, high transportation costs, unfavorable marketing conditions, and monopoly” (Saloutos, 1946, p. 43). Before delving into the North Dakota's socialist history, it is important to briefly discuss the broader growing movements contributing to the rise of socialist ideas in the United States.



In the 1890s the movements based on socialist ideas such as workers rights and unions were taking a hold nationally. Saloutos (1946) writes

The Nonpartisan League which was organized in North Dakota in 1915 was not an isolated incident and spontaneous movement; it was but one of several organized protests of farmers and laborers that swept the United States in the first two decades of the twentieth century (p. 43).

During this time in the late 1800s the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Industrial Workers of the World, and the American Railway Union were already setting the stage for pushing back against capitalism. Due to the conservative leadership in the AFL, the Industrial Workers of the World was founded by prominent socialists in 1905 to help organize workers in lumber camps, textile mills, and mines cross the country (Morgan, 1958, p. 212). These conditions across the United States lead to a rise in socialist ideals during this time. Even outside of workers directly involved in the labor movement, socialism started gaining traction in the minds of Americans at this time. Morgan (1958) writes that “A rising quantity of literature favorable to the theory of socialism, often written by nonsocialists, paid tribute to socialism's place in the progressive movement that dominated American political and social life between 1901 and 1909” (p. 213). Middle class Americans started to turn towards political candidates who represented some of these socialist ideals, like Theodore Roosevelt’s campaign to break up the trusts and prevent monopolies from dominating the economy (Saloutos, 1946, p. 43). Eugene V. Debs also had a large role in the spread of socialism nationally in the United States prior to the rise of The Socialist Party of North Dakota and the NPL. Debs was the five-time presidential candidate for the Socialist Party of America. In 1900 he gained almost a hundred thousand votes and four years after nearly quadrupled those votes (Morgan, 1958, p. 217). Although Debs never won the presidential position, he measured his success in campaigning for the ideals of socialism

(Morgan, 1958, p. 236). By the time of the rise of The Socialist Party of North Dakota and later the NPL, socialism was nationally relevant to the social and political lives of many Americans.

The Socialist Party of North Dakota from 1908 to 1914 set the stage for the basis of the NPL. The Socialist Party of North Dakota was a trailblazer for spreading socialist ideas. The *Iconoclast*, a socialist newspaper in Minot, played a large role in the publishing and spreading of socialist ideals in the state of North Dakota. Martinson (1969) details articles in The *Iconoclast* where the socialist platform was published. He writes that there was a list of demands published in one of the articles ranging from “workman’s compensation, old age pensions...abolition of the state and national Senate; abolition of the veto power of the president and governor; equal suffrage, child labor laws; union label on public printing; an eight-hour day and municipal liquor stores” (p. 13). As described by Martinson (1969) the Socialist Party of North Dakota in Minot also achieved getting the City Library to include socialist classics like Marx and Engels (p. 8), obtained a socialist hall and library (p. 21), and established a socialist park (p. 24). Martinson describes the death of the *Iconoclast* and the Socialist Party of North Dakota as a result of the rise of the NPL. Despite seeing the end of the newspaper and party he had spent copious amounts of time and energy into, Martinson (1969) writes “none except the die-hard left wingers mourned when the Nonpartisan League was taking over at prairie fire pace, which would soon give them political control of the state, and would in turn put into operation a few of the immediate socialist demands” (p. 70). The Socialist Party of North Dakota, while not implementing as much socialist policies and programs as the NPL, was able to lay the groundwork that made the NPL so successful in gaining legislative power.

The Socialist Party of North Dakota eventually morphed into the establishment of the NPL in 1915 by Arthur Townley. Townley was a failed farmer who was a part of the Socialist Party before founding the NPL, also known by its original name the Farmers Nonpartisan

Political League of North Dakota (Porter, n.d.). During the early establishment of the NPL, recruitment to the organization soon began. Newspapers warned about the “gold-brick agents” meeting in secret to recruit farmers to their nefarious schemes (Saloutos, 1946, p. 49). As word spread and socialist ideals reached across North Dakota, the NPL started to gain serious traction and notoriety. Saloutos (1946) states that “it is estimated that the League conducted five to six hundred meetings during the winter of 15-16. By February 1917 some 30,000 members were said to be enrolled” (p. 51). Soon enough, candidates from the NPL were on the ballot to become a part of the North Dakota legislature. The State Historical Society of North Dakota states “that NPL used the primary election to take control of the Republican Party in 1916, dominated all state government by 1918, and enacted its program in 1919” (Summary of North Dakota History - Nonpartisan League, n.d.). Although it was not implemented, the NPL members of the legislature introduced House Bill 44 which is a 24-page document titled “A Socialist Constitution for North Dakota”. This included, but was not limited to, calls for the state to engage in business for public purposes, four year term limits for representatives, increasing local taxation, and state ownership of all land (“A Socialist Constitution for North Dakota”). Even though this socialist constitution did not live to be enacted, there are several policies and programs the NPL accomplished during the height of their power. The NPL enacted various reforms such as a “re-organization of state services, development of health care agencies, and improved regulation of public services and corporations” (Summary of North Dakota History - Nonpartisan League, n.d.). An example of how the NPL used their legislative power is their legislation that made it easier to get access to medical checkups in rural schools as well as providing free transportation for children living more than 2 ¼ miles from their school (Saloutos, 1946, p. 58). The most notable of the NPL’s legacy is their establishment of the two crucial state-owned institutions. The Bank of North Dakota and the North Dakota Mill and Elevator which are

still operating and generating revenue for North Dakota to this day (Pratt, 1992, p. 44). The establishment of these institutions were criticized for being un-American and League leaders tried to dissuade this by drawing parallels between this institution and Alexander Hamilton and George Washington who planned and supported the First Bank of the United States (Saloutos, 1946, p. 60).

As the NPL grew powerful and was accomplishing their socialist programs and policies, counter groups sprung up in opposition. A group called the Independent Voter's Association eventually gained enough traction to sow seeds of dissention within the NPL. This, combined with the economic distress in North Dakota at the time, resulted in the IVA taking control of the house and a recall election of governor Lynn Frazier in 1921 was successful (Summary of North Dakota History - Nonpartisan League, n.d.). The NPL lost their political hold on North Dakota and the socialist movement that coalesced from the Socialist Party of North Dakota to the NPL dissipated.

Although the socialist movement in the early 1900's led by the Socialist Party of North Dakota and the Nonpartisan League eventually dissipated, the legacies of these ideas and policies still are still discussed today. Martinson (1969) closes out his memoir by stating "We may never have another Socialist Party in North Dakota; and inevitable changes in our economic system, which in turn will affect our ethics, culture and economics may be brought about by other means. But like ever-widening ripples on a calm lake, from a stone cast on its surface, the ideals of the early socialists will live on forever." (p. 71).

### **Reconciling Socialism Using a Capitalist Lens**

When analyzing the interviews, I noticed two patterns in how rural North Dakotans make the reconciliation of the socialist past of North Dakota with the current Republican majority. First, respondents reconciled socialism by stripping away the word socialism and all the negative

connotations that come with it. Removing the word socialism absolves rural North Dakotans from believing what they are practicing, praising, or benefitting from is socialism. Second, rural North Dakotans centered the positive socialist programs and policies around how they generate profit for revenue for themselves or for the state.

I start my discussion with the different definitions of socialism provided by my participants. When listening to their descriptions of socialism and what specific good it can bring, I noticed that my participants were operating within a capitalist framework. Yet, my participants provided a variety of answers when I asked them what socialism means. Michelle, Anthony, and Lawrence all included the same simple sentiments regarding socialism defining it as something like sharing or taking care of others. Michelle said she could go into a more specific definition of socialism but in general she explained that “Socialism to me means taking care of people”. William, George, and Todd referenced the European examples of socialism which includes a higher and larger tax base in which to fund a more comprehensive social safety net, higher standards of living, and various public services. Keith, Pamela, and Cynthia’s definitions of socialism centered around governmental control and specifically an excess of it. Despite the variety of answers given, none of my participants disagreed when asked “do you think some aspects of socialism can be good?”. Whether it be the Bank of North Dakota, the North Dakota Mill and Elevator, public education, Medicare, or social security there was always something good to be identified.

The word socialism and all the negative connotations that comes with it is much more an issue than the actual socialist policies and programs for folks in these rural Republican communities. Lawrence remarked that “[socialism] has a lot of negative connotations because of the communist scare in the 50’s and we still live with that.” He also went on to say that in rural areas “Co-ops are huge! And that’s the people owning them. Of course if you said co-ops for

communists then people wouldn't like them anymore." People in these communities are much more willing to accept programs and institutions based on the tenets of socialism just as long as they are not reminded that they are socialist. Anthony mentioned that if a Republican were to come to these communities with programs that were based on socialist ideals, then people would be wholeheartedly behind it lamenting that "it's all branding." Socialism is not a marketable word to rural North Dakotans. When discussing possible beneficial socialist policies or institutions George noted "I don't know if calling them socialist programs is the best way to win votes." Michelle asserted that institutions like the Bank of North Dakota and the North Dakota Mill and Elevator lose their historical socialist roots over time and that they get stripped of that title as time goes on. Taking the word and its negative connotations away alleviates the dissonance in the minds of rural North Dakotans between the socialist history and the current political landscape. Rural North Dakotans can accept practicing socialism and benefitting from socialist programs and policies as long as they can distance themselves from calling it socialism. Along with stripping away the socialist branding, rural North Dakotans also view the positives of socialist programs through a framework of a profitable business.

Looking at socialism through a capitalist lens also allows rural North Dakotans to view the Bank of North Dakota and the North Dakota Mill and Elevator as simply good business ventures. William, Lawrence, and George all mentioned that both those institutions run well and, more importantly, that they make money for the state and are important economic successes. Lawrence, who works as a lobbyist for farmers, states that "many Republicans and legislators from around the country and North Dakota say 'boy we'd love to have that state owned bank like you guys do.'" The revenue generated by these institutions is a huge pillar in their acceptance. This viewpoint shifts the view of socialism as government mandated handouts and realigns it with capitalistic definitions of success. Capitalist businesses also operate under the free market

where consumers are allowed to choose where they would like to take their business and those businesses either fail or succeed based on that without government intervention. When discussing the mill Keith noted that the mill is successful and that is a positive thing but a key point is that the government was not forcing it upon anyone and that you can sell to the mill if you would like to but if you want you do not have to. As discussed above Keith, Pamela, and Cynthia all stressed the importance of governmental control in their definitions of socialism. In order to reconcile the socialist institutions in their minds this capitalist lens is used to view these institutions as simply good businesses and investments rather than forced governmental compliance. These two patterns illustrate that socialism can be accepted in these communities for one or both of these reasons: the description of the socialist institution or program is not labeled with the word socialist or it is viewed through a capitalist lens in which the institution or program is seen as a good business investment that will benefit them.

### *Structural Influences on Contemporary Ideologies*

#### **Introduction and Discussion of the Other**

The structures of the economy, religion, and race in North Dakota all play some part in influencing contemporary ideologies on the region. Each part of this section analyzes patterns in respondents on how they as rural North Dakotans, or other rural North Dakotans they know, think about political issues relating back to the three structures I am looking at. Utilizing the theory from the previous conceptual framework chapter, I analyze their responses and draw conclusions about the way these structures in North Dakota influence ideologies that result in a Republican majority. Notably, these structures produce an ideology based on distrust for what I will call the Other.

The Other for rural North Dakotans takes many forms. It could be government regulation of the oil and agricultural economies, or those not practicing Christianity, or anyone non-white.

The structural influences of the economy, religion, and race in these areas instill an ideological fear of the Other. Michelle mentioned that her and two other women, one Republican and one Democrat, started a food pantry at the schools in her area. She said it was interesting that it was the Republican's idea to start this and that on a personal level people in these communities are just as caring as anybody else. However, Michelle stated "There's a disconnect between the way that they treat the person they know and the person they don't know." George also noted the disconnect rural North Dakotans have when thinking about urban areas saying that "The viewpoint we have in rural communities is skewed. I think we think there's a lot more crime, a lot more welfare, a lot more government funding in these urban centers than there really are." In the following sections I identify and discuss how the structures of the economy, religion, and race results in this Ideological Other. Additionally, I discuss how the creation of this Other results or reinforces the current Republican majority in these communities.

### **The Agricultural and Oil State Mentality**

The influence of agriculture and oil on the economy of North Dakota was extremely evident when talking to rural North Dakotans. Each participant had at least some connection to these structures in North Dakota whether it be because they are farmers or they are directly affected by the policies of being a state that relies heavily on revenue from oil. Utilizing the Marxian framework of historical materialism we can see to what extent the base economy is influencing the superstructure ideologies of individual North Dakotans. The agricultural and oil economies depend on exporting, free trade, and limited governmental intervention. Many rural North Dakotans economic prosperity and benefits depend on these economies flourishing so they internalize a laissez-faire political viewpoint that extends past just the economy and transforms into a principled ideological objection towards regulation or intervention of any kind which results in the current Republican political landscape. A Democratic government represents the



Other that threatens to watch, regulate, and control these communities. Firstly, I will analyze the agricultural economy influence on ideology.

The agricultural economy in North Dakota relies heavily on exporting grain to other countries. North Dakota is the country's 9th largest exporting agricultural state (State Benefits of Trade: North Dakota, n.d.). This type of base economy has a clear influence on the ideologies of individual North Dakotans. North Dakota being a primarily exporting agricultural state means that, typically, farmers want to see free trade and less federal regulations in order for their businesses to thrive. Through Marx's lens of historical materialism, we see the influence of that type of laissez-faire economic structure permeate into the ideologies of individuals. William, George, and Keith, who are all farmers, stressed the importance of independence in these agricultural communities. William stated "Independence is a big thing, sort of that frontier individual that's where the power resides. Let people determine their own fate." This coveted idea of independence, specifically from the government, in farming communities is a direct result of the economic structure of the agricultural economy that is currently in North Dakota. George wants to see less federal farming programs and "let the chips fall where they may." I believe that the influence of the base agricultural community and the independent and free trade it heavily relies on results in an ideological opposition to government intervention and control, which often results in an ideological opposition to the Democratic party and socialism. Keith stated "Around here we feel that we get a lot more support with Republicans than we do with Democrats. The Democrats aren't as into farmers as much as Republicans." Lawrence, who is not a farmer but a lobbyist for farmers, also stated "It's not surprising to me that we're Republican in terms of being conservative because farmers don't have any bosses. They run their own show. Some of them never had to work for anybody and they don't like to be told what do."

The hands-off economic landscape of agriculture shifts into a generalized distrust of any kind of intervention or demand. It is clear to see how this can result in a Republican state when Democrats represent government intervention and regulations and socialism represents governmental control or being forced to give up resources for others. Despite being focused on global relations and an open trading system, this mentality regarding the rejection of intervention and a need for independence results in a closed community that fears the Other. Government intervention then becomes a threatening Other that aims to take away their freedom and independence. However, this only applies to the government giving their money to other people. William noted that “we like a little socialism when we’re cashing the checks.” As previously mentioned when discussing the structural conditions of the agricultural economy in North Dakota, farmers in this area see a growth in their personal incomes when given federal subsidies for farming (Rosewicz et al., 2020). This fear of government intervention is only applied to the Other outside their communities, and not themselves who benefit from some of this governmental “control”. While not every farmer is monolith, William is a farmer who identifies as a Democrat, it is clear to see the influence of the free trade and export heavy agricultural economy on how individual North Dakotans think.

Secondly, the base oil economy also has a hand in influencing the individual ideologies of rural North Dakotans. When asked about economic issues in rural North Dakota, Lawrence made a point of highlighting the oil economy as a key structure that benefits many rural North Dakotans, bringing in benefits such as lower property taxes, better roads, and low unemployment. George also noted that the oil boom has been very positive for North Dakota and wages have gone up. He also mentioned that many people are very happy about the Legacy Fund. For context, the Legacy Fund is a fund created by the Legislature in North Dakota in 2010 “which created a perpetual source of state revenue from the finite national resources of oil and

natural gas” (North Dakota: Office of State Treasurer, n.d.). Currently, there is a pot of about \$8.7 billion of state money created through the oil economy waiting to be used for something and North Dakotans are thrilled at the possibilities.

However, not all my participants were boasting about the good things the North Dakota oil economy has done. Anthony, the only Indigenous participant, protested against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 which directly threatened the water supply of Standing Rock. Todd, who works at a university in his town, noticed layoffs and no raises for him or his colleagues the same years that the legislature granted tax cuts for oil extraction and said that with that tax cut restored there would be more funding for education. Again, through the lens of Marx’s historical materialism we see the ways in which the state’s dependence on the oil economy plays a role in shaping the ideologies of rural North Dakotans. Those who remain relatively unaffected by the consequences of oil dependence and instead see the economic benefits in their towns will, typically, have an ideological objection to the Democratic party and socialism, which they view as potential interventionists who aim to regulate and eventually stop that money flow into their communities. Government intervention, which is often associated with the Democratic party, thus becomes the Other to be feared and stopped at all costs. The current sitting President of the United States, Joe Biden, has a plan to ban oil and natural gas development on public lands. According to The North Dakota Petroleum Council “North Dakota, which ranks second in oil production on public lands and fifth in natural gas, would lose \$24.7 billion in GDP over the next 20 years.” (North Dakota Petroleum Council, 2021). Intervention by Democrats is seen as devastating to the economy that pumps a lot of money into small rural towns and employs many. This intervention, similarly to the intervention in the agricultural economy, is seen as the Other only coming into these communities to take away financial benefits. The small population who are directly affected by the negative impacts of the oil dependence, like Anthony and Todd, are

more reserved in their enthusiasm as they face economic and political consequences of such a dependence but not enough to shift the ideological superstructure towards environmentalism or funding for education and away from fear of the Other. The way both of these crucial economies in North Dakota are structured creates and reinforces anti-government and anti-regulation ideologies in rural North Dakotans which results in a Republican majority.

### **Christianity or Ostracization**

In this section I analyze the influence of the institution of religion on individual North Dakotans in these rural red communities. Six out of my nine participants identified as belonging or practicing some sect of Christianity. The other three participants all mentioned how difficult it was to be a non-Christian in these rural towns. The specific type of Christianity in these rural towns, and the importance of religion in the lives of the community members, results in an ideology that is extremely wary of anything they deem as the Other and results in socially conservative political views that reflect that wariness. Christianity serves as an ideological state apparatus that keeps these communities insular and susceptible to conservative moral crises.

The institution of religion is a pillar in these rural communities. When asked about the values of rural folks William, George, and Michelle all made sure to say that religion is a strong value in these communities. George, Keith, Pamela, Cynthia, and Todd all stressed the importance of religion in their lives whether it served as a good moral compass or a way to connect with family and community (or both). Religion in these small rural towns are crucial to the community identity. Cynthia mentioned that there were some people who just go to church to see who is and is not attending church. The high social and community value placed on religion, specifically Christianity, results in negative social consequences for those who do not adhere to it.

Lawrence said “I was raised Catholic and I threw the bullshit flag in third grade and I’ve never looked back” but despite his frankness about his agnosticism he was sure to follow that up with “there’s a lot of peer pressure to be a Christian”. Anthony went to a Catholic elementary school and reflected on his experiences noting it wasn’t terrible or forced but he was “brainwashed” into believing in Catholicism and now does not identify with it anymore due to the stained history of Catholicism and Indigenous peoples with boarding schools. Michelle stated that she felt being agnostic set her apart from her community and that her kids, who are exploring religion and are not being forced to follow any sect of religion, have had trouble in school with bullying because they do not ascribe to a religion. When her son was in fourth grade some kids at school would “bully him by under their breath saying ‘hallelujah’ to him.”

However even some of those who identified as religious did not have exclusively positive thoughts on the institution of religion. William identifies as Protestant but said that religion has not been a really big part of his life despite being part of the church council for thirty years straight at the church he grew up in. I asked if he felt that his religion was passed down generationally and he agreed, going on to say “like every religion – indoctrinate them at birth and hope they don’t change their mind.” George did say that he agrees with the Catholic Church on most things but there are some issues in which he skews a bit away from the mainstream. The example he gave is that during the time of the interview one of the North Dakota diocese put out a bulletin board saying the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine was immoral to get because it was based off stem cells. Todd lamented that “So much of what should be the application and interpretation of the gospel has been turned upside down by the fundamentalist right.”

Even though participants expressed that religion was a way to connect people in these small towns, there are many patterns of responses that illustrate a rigid and ostracizing type of Christianity. This type of Christianity and the social value it places on community members

results in some of the negative social consequences. These negative social consequences can be a result of either not practicing Christianity at all or the schisms inside Christianity from people like George and Todd who may go against some mainstream teachings. Religion, specifically Christianity in rural North Dakota, can act as an ideological state apparatus (ISA) that appears on the surface to demonstrate togetherness, acceptance, and a social community but only as long as you nod your head and fall in line. It is demonstrated that those who do not unquestionably fall in line face social ostracization from their communities. This results far-right conservatives weaponizing this type of insular Christianity to create moral crises that are relatively unquestioned by faithful rural North Dakotans.

The ISA of Christianity in these North Dakotan rural communities informs their political views in a variety of ways. Christianity in these areas reproduces this type of religious xenophobia as a way to reinforce the insularity of these communities. The Other is thus represented by those in these communities who are not practicing Christianity. This insecurity or fear of outsiders does not only exist in a religious context but permeates into general ideology regarding every type of outsider. Whether that outsider be someone of a different race, religion, political view, or geographical area they are seen as the Other that threatens the homogeneity of these small towns. When Pamela was discussing some of the best parts of North Dakota she noted that everybody knew everybody so if there was a strange car in town it was nice that they could call the local deputy to check it out. Along the same lines, Keith mentioned while discussing the Dakota Access Pipeline controversy “A lot of out of state people that came - all they do is protest. They’re hired protesters.” George also mentioned when he went to basic training for the National Guard he was sent down to Missouri where they had a lot of Black and Hispanic soldiers and said “it was the first time that I had ever been in a situation where I was not 95% of the population.” He went on to explain that he was an anomaly, and most people

never see that kind of diversity in small towns but “it’s hard to imagine other people’s lives when you just don’t see them.” Religion as an ideological state apparatus creates this wariness towards anyone that does not fall in line with what they view their communities shared identity to be. This wariness extends past a religious context and into wariness regarding unknown cars in town, wariness of out of state agitators, and wariness of the experiences of other races. This ideology is crucial to creating and cultivating a community susceptible to fear mongering and a hesitancy to step outside of one’s comfort zone both physically and ideologically for fear of negative social consequences.

The religious landscape of rural North Dakota results in a Republican majority that thrives on creating moral crises by exploiting this fear of the Other. For example, in January of 2021 in the thick of a deadly and economically devastating global pandemic, the North Dakota legislature introduced House Bill 1298 (HB 1298). HB 1298 would effectively ban transgender girls from competing on the sports teams that align with their gender identity. The bill eventually made it to the desk of Doug Burgum, the current Republican governor of North Dakota. Although the bill was vetoed by Burgum and it never came to implementation, this bill was still passed through the legislature to the governor taking up four months of time during which North Dakotans were grappling with a deadly pandemic (Ronan, 2021). The sponsors of this bill, who are all Republican, are cultivating and reinforcing this fear of the Other by having made and introduced this bill. Todd told a story about the parents of a transgender child trying to look for a church to belong to in his town but had difficulty finding churches in the area that ideologically aligned with both Christianity and acceptance of transgender children. These parents do not see Christianity and acceptance of LGBTQ+ folks as mutually exclusive, but due to religion being weaponized to instill fear of the Other the mainstream religious opinion becomes to ostracize these community member.

## **The Middle Ground on Race**

In this section I analyze the structural influence of race on the ideologies of rural North Dakotans. Out of nine total participants, only one identified as non-white. Anthony, who is Indigenous, felt it was difficult to speak on white rural communities versus native rural communities and that there was a big distinction between the two in terms of experiences. He felt that in regard to the political landscape of North Dakota white people and natives are “two major people at conflict here and it’s been that way forever.” Anthony’s observations fall in line with the settler colonial ideologies ingrained in rural North Dakotans. Firstly, a settler colonial mind shows itself as a compulsory need to define Indigenous groups in a negative context. This defines clear boundaries between the white rural community and Indigenous groups creating a racialized Other whose actions are condemnable. Secondly, the influence of a settler colonial mindset results in a need to see both sides of racial conflicts and therefore absolve white rural North Dakotans of direct opinions or involvement in change. The staunch middle ground regarding racial issues because of the historical and current structural tensions regarding race extends into an ideology that often hesitates to share opinions or fight for any kind of social conflict or problem. The Other then extends beyond just race and encompasses any group facing a social issue or problem and reinforces the social conservatism discussed previously.

When asked about the Dakota Access Pipeline controversy there was a pattern in the interviews that mentioned the negativity in these rural towns surrounding the Indigenous groups of North Dakota during that time. George explained that there was a big anti-Indigenous sentiment in most areas and that, overall, it negatively impacted the Indigenous reputation in the state. He noted that a lot of farmers and other rural folks saw their lives disrupted and that was the only side of the conflict they saw. Cynthia also heard about the inconveniences that the protests caused for those living around that community and said “I don’t think we heard anything



positive about it.” Todd told two stories regarding the level of anti-Indigenous sentiments in these communities. One story was about a time when he went to a barber shop with his son and he overheard a man complaining that he had to switch barbers because his previous one supported the DAPL protests. Additionally, at the time, Todd was serving on the national board of directors for his church and they had agreed to make a statement coming from the presiding bishop of the church regarding the issue. Todd, who supported the protesters against DAPL, felt the statement was fine and ready to be sent out. After the statement was put out, there were members of churches across North Dakota that thought they could not be a part of a church that would make this type of supportive statement towards the protesters. These negative sentiments that George and Cynthia have observed in their rural white communities reinforce aspects of settler colonialism. Indigenous groups do not fit into their shared rural identity and are grouped into the Other in which rural white community members may fear and lash out against. As Veracini suggests, settlers are particularly inclined to adopt this mindset and define Indigenous groups negatively (Veracini, 2015, p. 2). The legacy of colonialism in North Dakota is present in the ways in which white rural community members discuss and react to Indigenous issues.

Todd’s examples illustrate just how deeply ingrained the settler colonial mindset can be in these rural white communities. Anthony’s observation that a key conflict in North Dakota is the tensions between white people and natives is reflected in those stories of the deep-rooted settler colonial ideologies of those who would completely change barbers or churches if they just simply supported an Indigenous protest.

There was also a pattern in the interviews where many felt there were good points to both sides. William said protest was needed because that is often the only power that oppressed folks can enact, although he noted that “like all protests they usually go too far.” Lawrence, whose son was called in as a young sheriff’s deputy to police the protests and had urine and razor wire

thrown at him by protesters, said he felt like he had a “foot in both camps.” He went on to explain that “One of the root conditions of humans is racism” but also conversely stated that “Nothing makes more sense than transporting oil or gas by pipeline. It’s by far the safest way.” George was in the National Guard during the protests and got a call at Thanksgiving dinner to go down to the protest site and was there until around Christmas. George thought that “the initial protest was probably good-willed” but also that “the Standing Rock tribe was aiming for a bigger paycheck.” Keith stated that “It’s fine if they want to protest but be peaceful and you don’t have to destroy things.” Cynthia said that she understood where the protesters were coming from regarding environmentalism and the danger to the water supply but “that was one conversation as opposed to all the other ones.” This middle of the road mentality regarding the issues facing the Indigenous community is what Veracini (2015) would say is a refusal to “‘read’ a settler colonial world where we simply see a ‘normal one’”(p. 8). As stated previously, the settler colonial mindset is deeply ingrained in white rural communities in North Dakota. Climbing outside of that deeply ingrained settler colonial mindset is not an easy task. Through taking the middle ground on the issue of race, white rural community members can avoid the difficulty of learning how to read a settler colonial world and the deep discomfort that racial controversy brings as a white person.

It is clear to see how settler colonialism results in white rural North Dakotans tendency to not take a firm stance on racial issues. However, this avoidance mentality extends beyond just race. William, while discussing DAPL, stated that “If it’s a controversial subject you probably won’t get a real answer from a lot of people.” Todd, when commenting on the general political landscape of North Dakota, noted the unwillingness of many in these communities to speak contrary to the mainstream opinion. Pamela stated that in her community politics is just “something to talk about” rather than a huge issue. Social problems are not high on the agenda,

or even on the radar, for a lot of rural North Dakotans. There is a hesitance to be passionate about discussing or fixing any social problem. William said that he and his wife lean to the left on social issues but “we’re not out there marching.” Todd, who is a Democrat, said that he had regrets when he overheard that man in the barbershop talking about how he was angry with his old barber for supporting the DAPL protests and wishes he had spoken up about it in defense of the protesters. Even for those who have opinions on social issues there is a type of avoidance to get passionate, active, and vocal about where they stand. Social issues not being a priority or even a topic of conversation for those in these areas results in a stagnant community that is not challenged often to push their bounds of thinking outside of what the consensus is. This stagnation reinforces a social conservatism that does not exist in the same degree amongst urban Republicans. According to Pew Research Center, 56% of urban Republicans view the legalization of same-sex marriage at a bad thing for our society compared to 71% of rural Republicans. Even within the same political party, there is a vast difference in the level of social conservatism between the urban and rural due to the influences of settler colonialism on ideology.

### *Shared Rural Identity and Cultural Republicanism*

Earlier in this paper I discussed the fundamental disconnects between urban liberal communities and rural Republican communities and the polarization of politics between them. As discussed in the previous section, the structural conditions in North Dakota result in an Ideological Other in these rural communities that create and reinforce the Republican political majority. In order to have the Other, there must be an identification that exists to separate those inside the community from those outside it. Therefore, what I call a shared rural identity is established in these areas in order to make clear distinctions from “safe” fellow community members deserving of empathy and assistance and “unsafe” outsiders who pose threats to their

ways of life. This shared rural identity benefits those who exist in it immensely, as is expressed by my participants, but results in a community susceptible to far-right fear mongering Republicanism. This type of Republicanism is less grounded in policy-based reasons for Republicanism but rather results in what I call a rural cultural Republicanism.

The shared identity of rural North Dakotans, expressed by my participants, is one of interdependence and generosity. William, when describing the values of rural North Dakotans, said “I think there’s a pretty good community spirit especially in the rural areas.” He went on to expand specifically on the farming community by stating “If somebody needs a hand we will band together so that’s always a sort of underlying safety net that if you do need help on the farm there’s an informal network that will get you through the year at least.” Lawrence put an emphasis on how special his tight knit community made him feel. He stated that “in North Dakota, especially in rural North Dakota, we get to be somebody. Everybody’s somebody.” If you went to a big city, you were just another face amongst the masses, but in these small rural towns you know the plumber, the farmer, the mailman, the bank teller, etc and they all know you. When asked about the best thing about North Dakota, George responded “There’s a lot of good people and I’ve seen that here in our community. Any time there’s a tragedy you see that. People come together when they need to and that’s something that’s always given me a little bit of hope.” Pamela provides helpful example of this banding together during a tragedy. When asked about the values of rural communities, she told a story about how a few years ago someone in the community’s house burnt down in a fire and they lost everything. She explained how the community came together and put on a fundraiser for them, even asking local businesses for donations so they could have an auction to raise money for this person. This kind of rural interdependence mentality seems to be aligned with socialist ideals of community and helping

out the needy despite their ability to pay. George even commented that “I do preach the community thing more than I ever used to and I think that is something I’m glad that I kinda came around to because it does matter. There’s a tinge of socialism in that.” Additionally, the geographical context of rural North Dakota plays a role in this interdependence. In towns with a population less than 2,500 people and extremely harsh winters, depending on other people’s help is a necessity if your car breaks down when it is 30 below because there is a possibility that you might be in that situation at some point as well. The shared rural identity in this geographical context relies on the idea that you could be the person in a dire situation like needing a tow in the winter. However, this mentality does not extend into a broad political context towards the Other outside of their communities in political dire situations like poverty.

This shared rural identity and the lines it draws between those inside the community and those outside is vulnerable to the fear mongering and division dominating far-right conservative media and politicians. This results in a rural cultural conservatism that centrally grounds itself in believing in the ideological threat of the Other. When a fear of outsiders and diversity is instilled into a community identity, they are more willing to accept far-right Republican talking points such as QAnon conspiracy theories, immigrants stealing jobs, people of color getting handouts, or lazy people cheating the welfare systems. For example, Anthony discussed the radicalization of his mother through the QAnon #SaveTheChildren campaign. QAnon is a group of far-right conspiracy theories “alleging without evidence that the world is controlled by a secret cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who are abducting, abusing, and ritualistically murdering children” (Bracewell, 2021, p. 2). The #SaveTheChildren campaign appeals to people like Anthony’s mother because the “central message—act boldly to save the children from an invisible yet omnipresent evil” (Bracewell, 2021, p. 2) manipulates their care for children into a

fear of the Other that does not ground itself in actual reality. George mentioned that growing up his family would listen to Rush Limbaugh, a popular conservative radio talk show host, while they were working on the farm. Limbaugh built his enormous platform on politics views such as illegal Mexican immigrants are an invasive species (Planas, 2017), feminism was created by angry unattractive women (Hesse, 2021), homosexuals are imposing their perversions on families and marriage (Bollinger, 2020), and cities are poisoned by welfare dependency (Schwartz, 2021). Powerful far-right movements tap into this fear of the Other to sow the seeds of fear into these communities. Hochschild's deep story resonates with rural North Dakotans in this aspect. As stated previously, the deep story is a "*feels-as-if* story" (Hochschild, 2016, p. 135). Rural North Dakotans *feel as if* those who exist outside of their shared identity are outsiders who pose various threats to their communities. This shared identity is extremely beneficial to those who fit inside of it. However, it lacks an extension towards the Other and creates an insularity that rejects change or difference. Even though the people in these communities practice mutual aide, such as fundraisers for the homeless and food pantries for the poor, the fear of unknown Others stops them from leaning more socialist and extending their empathy toward groups who are different from them and pushes them towards Republicanism.

When participants described the political landscape of North Dakota many acknowledged the Republican majority in the state but some did not feel that represented the majority of the population's true political viewpoints. William identified North Dakota as a red state "but it's still pretty middle of the road if you want to put a label on it." George claimed that "North Dakota's Republican party is not a Republican party," explaining further that "We have a lot of Republicans who aren't actually Republicans at heart." George believes that people in these rural Republican communities are more center-right than they think they are but stated that in North

Dakota political races “You have to be a Republican to win so you change your party affiliation.” Regarding North Dakotan voting patterns many felt like voters really are not critically analyzing the way they vote, who they are voting for, or what they are voting for. Lawrence said that “The fact that our government has worked fairly well has made for lazy voters.” George, when discussing important things to rural voters, said that “I don’t think we have people voting on base issues anymore. I think it’s party affiliation or loyalty to someone. And I don’t like that.” Cynthia, when discussing that same question, with exasperation “I wish I could say it was policies.” She felt that some people just look for a last name they recognize when voting. Todd mentioned that the slogan of one of candidates he was running against in a local election was “we all were born here”. He said that as long as you have these cultural “signifiers” the rest of the policy stuff does not really matter to the voters. Based on these patterns in my participants interviews there appears to be a lack of passion in rural voters for the actual policies of the Republican party. Looking at these responses in conjunction with previous statements about the need for independence from government oversight, one might identify North Dakota as a Libertarian state. However, the current two-party system in the United States prevents third parties from being a viable option for many. In addition to this, the previous sections illustrated how the structures of the economy, religion, and race create the Ideological Other which turn people away from the Democratic party or socialism and pushes them towards a type of Republicanism based on fear. Therefore, rural North Dakotans are left with the Republican party as the most viable political option. This results in a rural cultural conservatism that is reinforced by the shared rural identity. Being a Republican becomes part of that shared rural identity that is coveted in these areas. Anyone who then steps outside of this rural cultural

Republicanism, or who even starts to challenge it, becomes the Other that is to be feared and avoided.

### *Repairing Links*

When doing research, especially on communities, one must consider what ways the research could be used to benefit the community they are researching. It is the hope with this research that the missing links between urban liberal communities and rural Republican communities are repaired with a fresh nuanced understanding. Repairing these missing links could start to deconstruct preconceived notions of rural Republican communities, start to depolarize the current political landscape, and serve as a basis for change by pushing those in these communities to think critically about the world around them. In order to start repairing these links a couple things need to be addressed. First, I want to start with addressing some of the problems brought up by participants in these rural communities. According to Pew Research Center (2018), 70% of rural residents feel that people who do not live in the same type of community do not understand their problems (p. 42) Recognizing the problems in these areas humanizes the people living within them and extends empathy for communities outside your own. Second, I want to illustrate some of the ways in which rural North Dakotans care about their communities. 56% of rural residents feel that people who do not live in the same type of community have a negative view of people in their community type (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 42). Understanding why people truly love rural North Dakota will bring some emotional context into why people in these communities feel frustrated when faced with negative misconceptions about the place they live in.

One of the major issues brought up in interviews was the lack of services offered in these small towns. Lawrence brought up the point that rural kids in the public education system do not get offered the same variety of classes or services that kids in bigger cities get. There are little to



no foreign language classes offered as well as short-staffed counselors and nurses. Anthony said that there is a very poor public transit system in these rural areas so if you do not have a car it is almost impossible to live out there. Along the same lines William, Keith, Pamela, and Cynthia all mentioned that having to drive far to get services was a drawback to rural communities. Todd expressed that while a common belief is that it is cheaper to live in rural areas, he notes that while the housing prices are cheaper many do not factor in added costs. He explained further that mail costs more, local groceries cost more, as well as added transportation costs. George worries about large corporations pushing out small local businesses, difficulty in obtaining groceries, a lack of mental health resources in rural areas, and sky-high insurance prices. Michelle said she generally worries about financial desperation within the community. These are all real issues in these communities that require care and consideration, and which have serious consequences in the community. Anthony and Michelle both drew parallels between the Texas energy crisis in February of 2021 and how urban liberal communities feel about rural red communities when they face problems. Anthony was frustrated with how he felt people were discussing the Texas energy crisis. He stated that the common mantra people were saying regarding Texas at the time was that “They’re rural areas. They don’t want social change - just let them all freeze.” Anthony felt that abandoning rural areas in times of great need because of the assumptions made about them based on the political majority was wrong. Recognizing that rural Republican communities are deserving of attention towards the issues facing their communities and that the people living in these communities are deserving of a positive quality of life is one of the first steps in repairing these missing links.

When asked about what they love about rural life and living in North Dakota there was a genuine appreciation expressed from my participants about where they live. William, Anthony, Michelle, Keith, Pamela, Cynthia, and Todd all expressed the idea that the wide-open spaces of

the prairie is one of the best things about rural North Dakota. Specifically, there was a common appreciation for the beauty of natural landscape. When I thought about North Dakota previous to living there, the picture in my mind was simply the unforgiving rigid cold and nothing but boring farmland. Hearing my participants express their love for the prairie and the connection to the Earth and freedom it provides them shifted my perspective on the appeal of life in rural communities. Alongside the natural beauty, my participants appreciated that their communities were safe and that those in their community are good people. Lawrence, Keith, Pamela, and Todd mentioned the low crime rate in their towns. Pamela noted that “we don’t even lock our doors.” There is a huge level of trust in these tight knit small towns that is appreciated by the community members. When discussing the towns they live in many participants came back to expressing their appreciation for their fellow community members. As stated previously, George finds hope in the ways his community comes together when there is a tragedy. Just like Michelle’s food pantry group, William’s mention of the informal support network among farmers, and Pamela’s story about the house that burnt down. Pamela put it simply when she said “everybody watches out for everybody.” Despite the concerns and issues this paper raises about the fear of outsiders in these communities, there is a base level of kindness and care for their neighbors expressed by my participants that is inspiring. It is clear that there is a great capacity for care in these communities that just needs to be tapped into and extended towards those outside of their communities as well.

In this chapter, I discussed the findings and implications of my research. Through outlining the rise and fall of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota and deconstructing how my participants reconciled this history with the current political climate by using a capitalist lens, I addressed my first research question (*what is the extent of North Dakota’s history of socialist programs and policies and how do they reconcile this history with the state’s anti-big*

*government Republican politics?*). Additionally, through the collection and analysis of the micro narratives of my participants I sought out patterns in their answers and was able to use my conceptual framework to draw conclusions about the influence of structural conditions on ideology. I identified the Ideological Other in the minds of rural North Dakotans and illustrate how the structures of the oil and agricultural economies, Christianity, and the settler colonialist mindset in North Dakota creates and reinforces this Other. This reinforces how the Ideological Other results in a Republican majority in the state based on an exclusionary rural shared identity and a rural cultural conservatism that does not always align with Republican policies and platforms. Lastly, I discussed how to start to repair the missing links between the rural and urban through discussing the importance of caring about the problems in rural Republican communities and examining rural North Dakotan's love for their communities. Through the analysis and discussion of the narratives provided by my participants, my last research question (*how do rural North Dakotans articulate their political views (specifically on the economy, religion, and race) and how can we use these narratives to repair the missing links between the urban and the rural?*) is addressed.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the socialist history, geographical conditions of interdependence, and high levels of community care in rural North Dakota this research illustrates how a cultural Republicanism is pervasive in these areas. Although members of these communities might practice socialist ideas like fundraising for the homeless or benefit from socialist institutions like the Bank of North Dakota, the fear of the Other is weaponized by far-right conservatives to create a Republican majority in these areas. What starts off as a general wariness of outsiders or intervention in their communities from the government as a result of the influence of the economic, religious, and racial conditions in North Dakota extends further towards far-right fear mongering. People in these areas are pushed away from the socialist roots and practices and towards a cultural Republicanism that is less policy based and more fear based. Rural North Dakotans Republican voting patterns are a result of both the base level of insularity in these communities as well as manipulation by far-right conservatives like Rush Limbaugh who exploit this insularity to create moral crises and cultivate that fear of the Other. Additionally, anyone in these communities who may push back against this type of cultural Republicanism becomes the Other that is feared and faces negative social consequences as a result. However, it is my hope that this research serves as a way to break this cycle and tap into the high levels of empathy and care in these communities and extend it towards the Other.

Sociology pushes us to think critically about the world around us and consider what may be influencing our thoughts, values, and beliefs. Part of the goal of this research is to inspire readers to utilize these findings to find the best avenues to start prompting those in rural and urban communities to consider the impacts of the societal structures around them on their own beliefs. When discussing the approach to politics in her community, Cynthia stated that “I don’t think we have healthy discussions because I think we kind of step back from them and that’s just

the way we're raised." Engaging in productive conversations surrounding sociopolitical concepts is easier said than done, especially in communities that tend to avoid controversy. However, there are a couple ways in which to productively engage in these conversations. First, I want to discuss the limitations of this study and ways in which other research can expand and develop the findings.

As discussed in this research, rural North Dakotans tend to avoid controversial political topics. One of the ways in which this study is limited lies in the number of narratives collected. There was some difficulty in obtaining the nine participants of this research, and more notably a difficulty in obtaining Republican participants who were willing to engage in a research project with a title containing the word "socialist" in it. If future research were to be conducted with the same participant parameters, finding a way to gain access to potential participants I might have missed in this research would gather more data to analyze and therefore expand the findings. Additionally there is a limitation in the data, as shown in Table 1, that most of my participants are in an average or high-income bracket. Interviewing rural North Dakotans of a low-income bracket may bring additional insights for future researchers to analyze the influence of a lower socioeconomic status on the ideologies of rural North Dakotans. An additional limitation with this research is the scope of the structures analyzed. I provided data and arguments for why I specifically picked the structures of the economy, religion, and race in North Dakota. I identified these structures as some of the most important and influential structures on ideology in this region. However, there are various other structures in North Dakota that have important roles in shaping ideologies. Future studies may be able to use this research as a basis for expanding the discussion on the broader reasons for a Republican majority in North Dakota. Lastly, due to this research being primarily sociological, the historical parts of this research were not all encompassing. It may be useful for those in the field of history to expand the literature on North

Dakota's socialist history and have a larger discussion on the implications of this history on the current political climate.

One of the primary goals of this research is for the findings to serve as a basis for change. It is my hope that this research is used as a way for people to engage in discussions with members in rural Republican communities that prompt them to critically analyze their beliefs. In turn, it is my hope that this critical analysis leads to a shift in the Republican political landscape towards a more progressive North Dakota. In this research I break down some of the misconceptions about rural Republican communities by outlining the socialist history of the region illustrate a capacity for these progressive ideas and movements. George, when asked about what he wishes urban people knew about communities, stated that "the mantra of rural people being uneducated is false." Removing the preconceived notions about rural Republican communities and discarding elitism is a helpful step in engaging people in political conversations. Understanding that someone can be educated, thoughtful, and still misled or influenced by the social structures around them is key. Sociologists, who make careers based on the critically thinking about the ways in which societal structures influence us unknowingly, are still pushing ourselves to constantly address our values and beliefs and where they come from.

Another tactic in engaging in these conversations is to be patient, yet uncompromising. As stated previously, prior to living in North Dakota I had what one might consider an elitist liberal view of North Dakota and the people who live here. It was not until I met people from North Dakota who took the time to introduce me to the things they love about North Dakota and learned about the people here working to make their communities better places. To be clear, this research does not aim to absolve rural Republican communities of the harm that is done to marginalized groups who are living in this state. The current Republican landscape in 2021 has resulted in legislation that would put trans youth at risk (Ronan, 2021) and would restrict North

Dakota State University's academic freedom regarding partnering with providers of reproductive health services (Flaherty, 2021). The real political consequences of the rural cultural conservatism are not taken lightly. It is my hope that investment in prompting rural North Dakotans to reconsider their views and beliefs is rewarded with a North Dakota that extends its compassion towards all groups and starts to change the political landscape away from the current fear-based discriminatory policies. Reaching out to these communities and engaging in productive discussions regarding political topics and having differing progressive views are not mutually exclusive. However, had people not been patient with me as I have learned to deconstruct the ways in which I have been unknowingly biased by the society I grew up in then I might have a completely different political outlook. In an archived newspaper interview with Henry Martinson, who dedicated most of his life to the socialist cause in Minot, writer Sylvia Paine asks Martinson if being a "hero" of the people meant anything to him. Paine writes

'No' says Martinson. 'My past experiences were just something I couldn't do any differently, that's all. I believed in them.' But it is of belief that heroes are made—belief and the commitment to principle and the willingness to live by them. It's said that a young man who is not socialist has no heart and that an old man who is not conservative has no head. For Martinson that simply means he hasn't yet grown old, for he has never lost heart, never ceased to believe that a better world—a socialist world—lies just beyond the sunset (Henry Martinson Papers, n.d.)

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## **APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY QUESTIONS**

[https://ndstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_01g5ox7Tipm7IKp](https://ndstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_01g5ox7Tipm7IKp)

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How would you describe living in rural North Dakota?
  - a. What are some of the best parts of rural life?
  - b. In regard to your community, what do you worry about?
2. What do you wish people from urban areas knew or understood about rural communities and rural life?
3. How have economic issues in North Dakota impacted you? Do you have any economic policies, programs, or changes you would like to see in North Dakota in the future?
4. What does socialism mean to you?
  - a. Do you think some aspects of socialism can be good (like the state-run agricultural programs in North Dakota)? Why or why not?
5. How would you describe the political landscape of North Dakota? Is there a recent issue in the state that has impacted you?
6. What would you say are some of the values of rural communities? What is important to rural folks, political or otherwise?
7. In 2016 North Dakota gained national attention from the protests around the Dakota Access Pipeline which crossed over sacred Indigenous lands. What do you remember about the protests? Did they impact you directly and if so, how?
8. What role does religion play in your life?
9. What would you say is the most important thing to rural voters? What do you look for in politicians?
10. In your own opinion, what is the best thing about North Dakota?

## APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



01/22/2021

Dr. Christina D Weber Knopp  
Sociology, Anthropology

Re: IRB Determination of Exempt Human Subjects Research:  
Protocol #IRB0003398, "Understanding Rural Red Communities: Socialist History and Structural Causes of Contemporary Ideologies in North Dakota"

NDSU Co-investigator(s) and research team:

- Christina D Weber Knopp
- Marisa Nicole Mathews

Approval Date: 01/22/2021

Expiration Date: 01/21/2024

Study site(s): Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic research will take place completely online through email and Zoom.

Funding Agency:

The above referenced human subjects research project has been determined exempt (category 2) in accordance with federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46, *Protection of Human Subjects*).

Please also note the following:

- The study must be conducted as described in the approved protocol.
- Changes to this protocol must be approved prior to initiating, unless the changes are necessary to eliminate an immediate hazard to subjects.
- Promptly report adverse events, unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, or protocol deviations related to this project.

Thank you for your cooperation with NDSU IRB procedures. Best wishes for a successful study.

*NDSU has an approved FederalWide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: FWA00002439.*

### RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

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