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Introduction

IT'S LATE ON A SUMMER afternoon in 2019, and I'm heading to a bar in Motorville City, Wisconsin, to meet Arthur, the former chair of Motorville's Democratic Party and a retired machinist.¹ Motorville is an overwhelmingly White city of about 25,000 people, founded on blue-collar work. The bar is housed in a former supply depot for the railroad, and the interior still contains remnants of its past purpose—wooden benches against the wall by the entrance and wide, wooden planks that make up the floors—but there is now a bar to the right of the doorway, and a bandstand beyond that. Arthur has asked me to meet him here because, as he says, politics in Motorville happens at the bar. While he nurses a beer, Arthur tells me about his love for Elizabeth Warren, his desire to do away with the “old White guys” in politics (despite being one himself), and his experiences growing up in Motorville and being involved in local politics. As he summarizes the city's political leanings: “The whole town is blue. After the election . . . I get to see who votes where and how they vote. This whole city is blue. Some of it stronger than others.” Arthur is right: statistically, Democrats are favored in Motorville City—Joe Biden won the city with over 59 percent of the vote in 2020, and a Republican has not won a presidential contest in the county since before the New Deal.

Arthur is also correct when he tells me that politics in Motorville happens at the bar: later that same day, he and I gather again with a group of about twenty Democrats of all ages, seated around a long table in a dimly lit room at the back of a different bar along Motorville's Main Street. It's the monthly Democratic Party meeting, and a young organizer named Johnny, sent from the state Democratic Party, begins the gathering with a call to arms: “This meeting is about how we're gonna beat Donald Trump in 2020.” The room whoops and cheers on cue. Over the course of the following hour Johnny doles out organizing roles to the group, articulating a multifaceted

local, state, and national strategy on the long road from June 2019 to November 2020.

Motorville's Democratic Party is energized, although occasionally argumentative and somewhat disorganized. Meanwhile, the local Republican Party is, for all intents and purposes, nowhere to be found. In fact, an email to the county GOP renders a response from the Congressional District Republican Party. Even local politicians who might be interested in organized Republican Party support cannot find it in Motorville. As Ed, a city councillor, told me:

When Scott Walker [a Republican] was governor, he came to town. I saw nowhere that he was coming to town, and he went to a little restaurant. They had assigned a room probably for thirty people or so, and there were probably twenty people in there. The governor is in town and hardly anyone acknowledged. . . . Whereas Tony Evers [a Democrat] comes to town and there are hundreds of people.

As he concludes, the Motorville Republicans are almost like "a secret club."

And that's because Motorville is a Democratic city. Even as the Republican Party has slowly marched toward dominance in most White, postindustrial cities like Motorville, Motorville residents have continued to vote majority-Democratic at all levels of office.

Motorville's exceptionalism becomes even clearer a few weeks later when I travel to Lutherton, Indiana. A small city in a rural part of the state, Lutherton shares many similarities with Motorville. And in July 2019, the county fair is in full swing. Beyond the dirt lot full of games and attractions stand booth after booth with crawling lines of patrons in T-shirts and jean shorts, waiting for their homemade baked goods, fried pickles, and taco salads from the biggest churches and service sororities in the county. Just past the individual tents, long, narrow buildings are lined with further stands for businesses, nonprofits, and the local Democrat and Republican Parties.

The Republicans have a booth set up near the entrance to one of these buildings. It's a small space, but the walls are plastered with brightly colored signs displaying the names of every Republican candidate running for local office that fall. Lauren, the chair of Lutherton County's GOP, is working the booth with three other elected officials tonight—all middle-aged White women with blond hair and easy smiles. On either side of the booth stand cardboard cutouts of the country's top Republicans—Trump on the left and Pence on the right. As I sit with Lauren and the others for the evening, I occasionally have to duck out of the way as residents stop to take photos in front

of the Trump cutout. But the booth's main attraction sits at the tall table in front: paper fans bearing the label "I'm a fan of the Republican Party." On a hot summer evening, they're both funny and practical. Between the Trump/Pence figures, the paper fans, and Lauren's near-encyclopedic knowledge of everyone who passes by, the booth is a popular stopping-off point.

Later in the evening, I go searching for the Democrats' "booth." It is also located near the entrance of one of the major buildings—but at first, I almost miss it. When I eventually do find Carolyn, the party's secretary, she's seated on a folding chair in front of a card table with one other woman. Both appear to be in their sixties. Behind them sits a sign proclaiming "Sondra for Mayor," and another with the label "Democrat," but the other scant decorations are all red-white-and-blue—patriotic rather than partisan. On top of the table sits a small bowl offering Dum Dum lollipops to visitors, and next to that they have two clipboards to register voters. It's a quiet booth, especially compared to the energy that Lauren and company bring to GOP territory.

Republicans have increasingly dominated local and national elections in Lutherton since the 1960s: not a single Democratic candidate won their race in the 2019 municipal elections, and Donald Trump carried the county with over 75 percent of the vote in 2020. As we can see, the Republican Party also dominates when it comes to local social life. Lutherton is, without question, a Republican city.

But in Gravesend, Minnesota—a city much like Motorville and Lutherton—the Democrats and Republicans offer a relatively equal show of force. Each week the parties trade off writing an opinion column in the local paper, and both can count on a sizable group of energized activists to show up at local events with petitions, knock on doors, and attend the quadrennial caucuses for presidential primaries. And in late summer 2019, they both rent out the same pavilion in a local park for their annual picnic, hosted just weeks apart.

In mid-August, the pavilion is decked out in GOP fanfare. It is a cavernous space, with a tall, peaked ceiling and ten round tables filling the room, each with the same centerpiece: two small American flags crossed over each other. A much larger flag, about twenty feet tall, stands at the front of the room, right behind the cardboard cutout of Donald Trump. Various smaller GOP signs adorn the walls, carrying campaign materials for local Republican candidates as well as the Trump/Pence ticket. There are also signs advertising Republican slogans such as "If you love your freedom, thank your veterans" and "GOP" in large letters above the words "Greatest Opportunity Party." A long table in the back is laden with barbecue from a local restaurant and a podium is set up at

the front to host local politicians from state representative up to U.S. congressional representative. By the time the speeches commence, the tables have nearly filled up—there are about forty or fifty people in the room, including the politicians and some of their staff.

The Republican congressional representative for Gravesend is the last to speak. He talks about local issues as well as Democrats' extremist abortion and gun control legislation in the House, and then he shifts his tone: "Have you all seen the recent polls?" he asks. "Elizabeth Warren is surging," he says. A murmur of recognition ripples through the crowd. "And I would love for her to be the nominee," he continues, "because she's a socialist Democratic candidate if I ever saw one." Someone snorts in the front row. "And we don't want a socialist, because it will put our health care at risk. America has the highest-quality health care in the world. Now, it might not have the best delivery, but it does have the best quality. And Democrats' health-care plans will ruin that for us. If we switch to single-payer, reimbursement rates for rural hospitals will fall even further." Your rural health care will struggle even more than it does now, he tells them. Then he concludes his speech: "Let's fight not to become Venezuela!" And the crowd bursts into applause.

Just a couple of weeks later, a similar-sized crowd gathers in the same room. Although the local Democrats—in Minnesota, the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, or DFL—have far less decor, they have a similar slate of speakers, from local- to state- and federal-level politicians. The DFL picnic is a potluck—someone scoffs when I tell them the GOP paid to order barbecue—and the back table is similarly full of food. Once we've all filled our plates and taken our seats, George—the informal emcee of most local DFL events—takes up the mic and introduces the speakers.

The last of these is the Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. Although the content of his speech is different from his Republican counterpart's, the message is the same: Gravesend is under threat, and only one party can save them. He begins by talking about the closure of a local agro-business that will cost the district several hundred jobs. "Do you know why that happened?" he asks the crowd. "For three reasons: it happened because of the tax breaks given to big corporations. Do you know where the corporation is headquartered?" He pauses for effect. "China." The crowd grumbles in displeasure. "And it happened because of an endless trade war," he continues. "And finally, it happened because the corporation that owned the plant could just do that overnight because the workers had no unions to represent them." When he concludes, the crowd erupts in cheers. The

relatively equal shows of force by both parties in Gravesend hint at the decades during which residents favored Democrats and Republicans about equally—Gravesend was a classic swing city. But since 2016, residents have been swinging to the right, although for different reasons than in Lutherton: just over 52 percent of the city’s two-party vote went to Donald Trump in 2020, and Republicans swept statewide offices.

As these snapshots indicate, Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend each has a different set of politics: Motorville votes majority-Democratic; Lutherton votes majority-Republican; and Gravesend has sat on the line in most presidential races until 2016, when it began favoring Republicans. And yet, at one point in history—during the New Deal era of the 1930s and 1940s—all three places were part of the national Democratic coalition. Moreover, all three cities are nearly identical on several dimensions that are considered important for electoral outcomes: they have long been overwhelmingly White, blue-collar, small cities of 16,000–28,000 people, whose employment today is concentrated in manufacturing, transportation, public sector, and service sector jobs. I refer to these cities as part of the “American Heartland,” because they are archetypes of the largely White, postindustrial cities in the Midwest that were considered singularly important in shaping the outcome of the 2020 presidential race.² In sum, while the usual explanations—demographic composition, region, and size—cannot account for why Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend vote differently, understanding politics in places like them is central to American electoral outcomes.

This raises several questions: How have historic political and economic transformations produced a fractured response among the places that were once part of a working-class political coalition during the New Deal, sending Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend on different political trajectories? And how does place *still* produce a persistent tendency toward Democratic partisanship among Motorvillians, despite pulls toward the right that have attracted most other White, postindustrial places, including Lutherton and Gravesend? And finally, how can place-based political differences persist despite the increasing nationalization of American politics? These are the puzzles at the center of this book. My contention is that, by answering these questions about the past, present, and future of these three cities, we can also learn something new about White, postindustrial politics and how local contexts are still shaping the trajectory of American national politics today.

Over the course of eighteen months, from May 2019 through the November 2020 presidential election, I interviewed just over 175 residents and community leaders across Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend. Before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, I conducted nearly six months of fieldwork and interviewed more than 90 “community leaders”—elected officials, labor leaders, heads of nonprofits, pastors, and party activists—about the challenges their cities are facing and how they work to resolve them. But the book’s core arguments come from four waves of interviews with 86 White “residents” across Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend, beginning in June 2019 and concluding just before the 2020 presidential election. I refer to these interviewees as “residents” because they are not formally involved in local politics or governance.³

This book builds from these conversations to explain why Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend defy both commonsense and social scientific expectations. It offers three answers to the puzzles laid out above. The first is about how the past shapes the present. Places are bounded geographies that are defined by their structural demographic and economic characteristics; the cultural meanings residents share from living in those conditions; and the organizations that link the two.⁴ As part 1 shows, the structural, organizational, and cultural features that define Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend today are products of each city’s path-dependent evolution in response to state and national transformations: when residents and community leaders respond to external shocks they shape the organizational and cultural materials that are available in the future. Over time, such decisions not only make distinct places; they also create the conditions in which residents make sense of changes in national party politics.⁵ While Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend were not *identical* places during the 1930s and 1940s, they shared sufficient characteristics for their residents to favor the New Deal Democratic Party. But as the cities adapted differently to extra-local disruptions, they became distinct places that made residents more or less open to shifting party coalitions, ultimately sending each place on a different political trajectory.

The second answer is about place and politics in the present: not just *that* place matters for politics but *how* it helps sustain residents’ partisanship today. I use the term *place-based partisanship* to refer to the portion of one’s partisan identity that is explained by where they live. I argue that place-based partisanship emerges as residents make sense of local structural conditions and national politics from within their organizational contexts, leading them to cohere around two cultural frameworks: (1) *diagnostic frames* that they use to define their social problems and identify political solutions; and (2) *narratives of*

community identity that describe what kind of community they are and where they fit into party politics. Place is just one of many factors that inform Americans' partisanship, but my argument is that it is particularly important among *cross-pressured* voters: people whose political loyalties are sought by both parties, like the White, working- and middle-class voters I study here.⁶ Within the constraints of individuals' social group memberships and national party maneuvering, place makes it more likely that residents will adopt certain social and political identities.

How does this happen in practice? As part 2 shows, Lutherton's churches, nonprofits, and volunteers constitute a private but collective problem-solving arrangement that makes *visible* efforts to address emergent social problems. Residents learn that problems related to economic precarity—including hunger and homelessness—are “community challenges,” to be resolved locally. Over time, local and nongovernmental solutions become commonsense, and residents tend toward a particular kind of communitarian anti-statism. Their ties to the Republican Party are reinforced by routine social interactions that remind them they are part of a White, Christian community; and the Republican Party is the party for them. By way of contrast, in Motorville ties among unions and elected officials ensure that community leaders define their challenges as rooted in systemic economic decline—the drain of good jobs—and focus residents' attention on the government as a vehicle for shaping economic outcomes. Here, in a community “built on the back of labor,” residents imagine themselves as part of a group of Americans disadvantaged by an unequal system and look to the state and the Democratic Party to solve their problems. Gravesend, alone among the three cities, lacks a stable organizational context that helps residents agree on how to solve their problems. Losses mount without solutions, and residents feel their community's survival is threatened. As the Republican Party wields a language of immigration and socialism as twin threats to the (White) small-town way of life, it resonates with Gravesend residents. None of these place-based processes create a monolithic set of politics—each city votes *majority* Democratic or Republican in local, state, and national elections, suggesting that many, but not all, residents identify with that party—but place does produce a tendency toward certain ways of defining each community, what their problems are, and which political party best represents them.⁷ In short, place helps shape residents' partisan attachments and reinforce them over time. And in Motorville, it leads residents to reject the many pulls that have succeeded in turning other, similar places toward the Republican Party.

This brings me to the book's third and final argument, which is about the future of place in American politics: will national crises, elite polarization, and fragmented media eventually erode place-based partisanship? Political scientist Daniel Hopkins (2018) has shown that forces like these have *nationalized* politics, pulling Americans out of their local environments and making even local elections about partisan divisions. But part 3 will argue that these factors are not likely to erode place-based partisanship because they do not destabilize local organizational contexts or cultural frameworks.⁸ Chapter 6 shows how residents of Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend continued to deploy existing diagnostic frames to make sense of the federal government's role in their lives amid the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, because the crisis did not undermine local organizational contexts. And even as individuals consuming partisan news did polarize on the public health response to Covid-19, chapter 7 will show that this issue polarization was temporary and did not undermine the narratives of community identity that residents used to locate themselves within partisan politics. In fact, throughout my time studying these cities, residents routinely evoked the talking points prevalent in national media at the time of our conversations but forgot them when the spotlight moved on to other issues; in other words, polarization on national issues was somewhat epiphenomenal to the place-based processes that sustain partisan tendencies in Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend.

Figure 1 summarizes this three-part argument, showing how the structural, organizational, and cultural dimensions of place are the product of past responses to external shocks (figure 1a), productive of partisan ties today (figure 1b), and resilient to certain kinds of national disruptions (figure 1c). Each panel corresponds to one of the book's three parts.

Taken together, this book offers two contributions. First, my findings suggest that existing accounts of the Heartland's reddening are both correct and incomplete: it is an outcome produced not just through a realignment of political parties and social groups amid a racialized backlash by White voters; rather, it emerged in interaction with local processes that have slowed down or sped up these voters' move toward the right. My contention is that, as the two political parties craft racial-, religious-, and class-based appeals to win over White, working- and middle-class voters, those appeals will resonate differently in different places.⁹ As we will see in Motorville, place helps prevent racial resentment from pushing White voters out of (what they see as) a multiracial working-class Democratic coalition. In contrast, Gravesend voters are starting to view the Democrats as the party that wields the government for the benefit

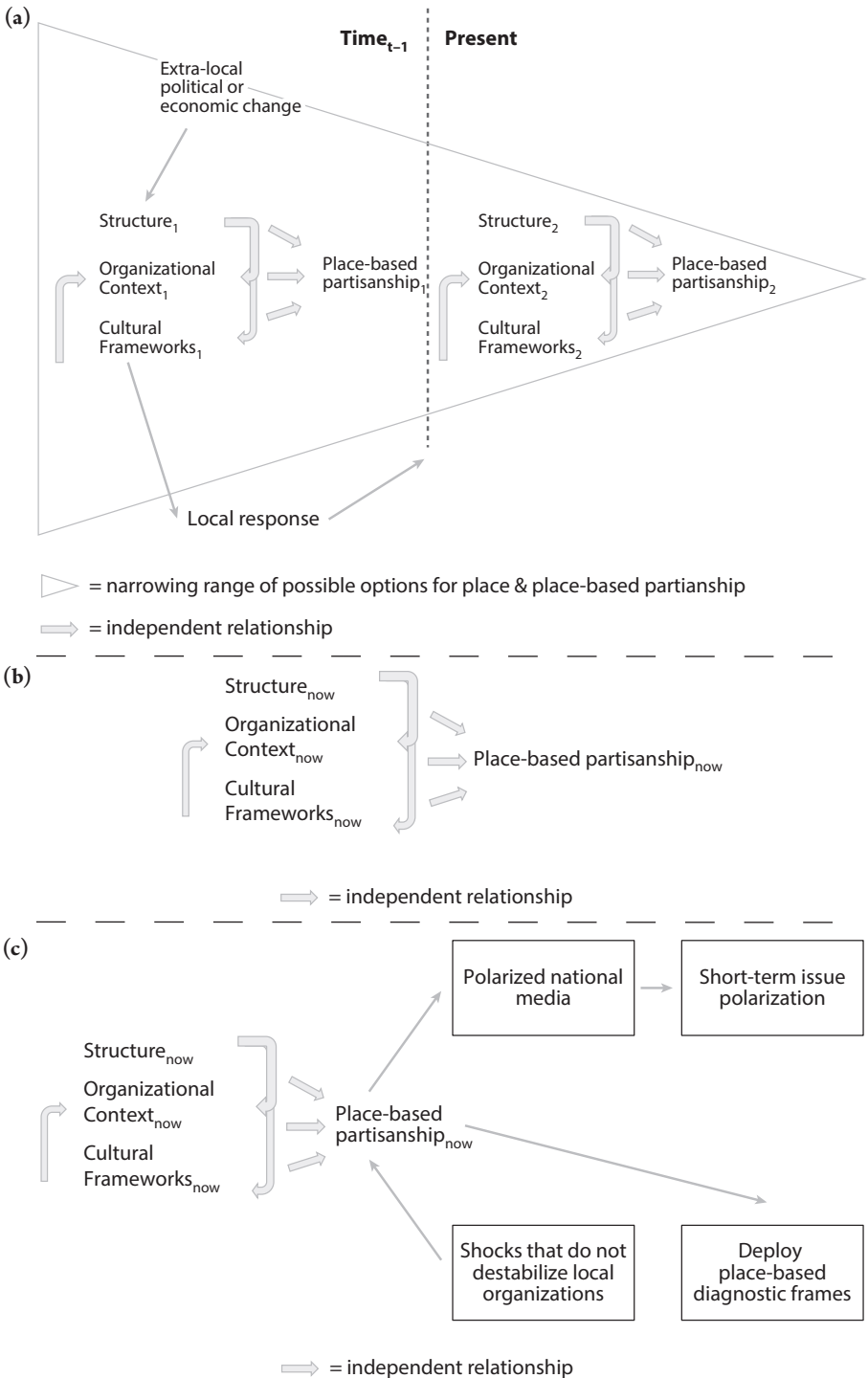


FIGURE 1. The past, present, and future of place-based partisanship. **Figure 1a.** How the past informs the present (Part I). **Figure 1b.** Place-based partisanship in the present (Part II). **Figure 1c.** The (possible) future of place (Part III).

of immigrants, often at the expense of White voters like them. In Lutherton, race and religion both nudge residents into the Republican column, but here it is less about racial resentment than ethnoreligious identity, which leads Luthertonians to embrace Republicans as the party of White Christians.¹⁰ These cases will show us that when we focus on macro- or micro-level accounts that privilege race, religion, *or* class as explanations of White, postindustrial politics, we miss the very sites in which voters are making sense of their social identities in a shifting political-economic terrain and figuring out which party best represents them.

Second, in showing *how* place shapes and sustains partisanship by guiding voters to the political party that best represents “people like them,” I develop an argument that moves beyond White, postindustrial politics. In particular, my claim is that place will matter for partisanship among any Americans who *could* find representation in either of the parties—including Latinx, Asian, and new immigrant groups. In a world where people have a multiplicity of intersecting and overlapping group memberships, places help make certain identities more salient and then help residents link those identities to one party or the other.¹¹

As such, this book’s most ambitious goal is to revive and extend a contextual account of how partisan attachments form and endure. As the pioneers of survey-based voter studies noted in the 1940s and 1950s, Americans’ relationship to their political party often persists for a lifetime.¹² Over the ensuing decades, researchers have developed an increasingly detailed portrait of the micro- and macro-level processes that shape and sustain partisan identities—how individuals develop social identities and how parties court social groups. But they have paid less attention to how everyday, contextual factors mediate between these processes. At the same time, researchers who have documented the links between contextual factors and other dimensions of political behavior—including public opinion, political participation, and intergroup hostility—have rarely extended these analyses to the study of partisan identity.¹³ This book brings these two approaches together, arguing that place is among the contextual factors that inform partisan identity and that it is particularly relevant for cross-pressured voters.

Comparison across Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend will offer us insight into how social contexts return voters to their party, again and again, over time. This insight was central to the voter studies that helped found the field of American political behavior research, conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and their colleagues from Columbia in the 1940s. According to them, partisanship endures in part because voters are part of social networks

of similar people who interpret national politics for them and reinforce their political views.¹⁴ This means that individuals' partisan attachments are rooted not just in social psychological processes but also in social-contextual ones.

This is the argument that I revive and advance in this book, adapting it for a twenty-first-century world in which voters are embedded in both local- and extra-local flows of information. The remainder of this chapter describes in greater detail how a study of these three cities will accomplish this, then situates my argument in the context of existing debates about the “reddening” of the American Heartland, and finally concludes by laying out the plan for the rest of the book.

Why Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend Can Tell Us Something New about Heartland Politics

Writing in 1969, Republican Party operative Kevin Phillips argued that Nixon's election signaled the beginning of a new “Republican Majority” that was “becoming much more lower-middle class and much less establishmentarian” (543). The GOP, he claimed, was the beneficiary of a political realignment around race, class, and geography, riding to victory on the backs of “a populist revolt of the American masses” in the South and West (550). Nearly forty years later, another political observer offered a similar argument, this time from a perspective that was critical of, rather than congratulatory toward, the Republican Party and their voters. In *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2004) Thomas Frank argued that White working- and middle-class voters across the American Heartland had been swindled by Republican Party operatives who convinced them to vote against their economic interests in favor of cultural validation. And just a few years after Frank's writing, observers revived this same set of concerns about the Republican Party coalition in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election.¹⁵

The persistence of these questions alludes to their practical importance for American electoral outcomes. Although the United States is an increasingly urbanized, multiracial society, the politics of White voters in postindustrial towns and cities—particularly those in sparsely populated states—have an outsize impact on American elections because of the electoral college and the Senate.¹⁶ Take, for example, Wyoming, the least populous state in the union, and California, the most populous state. In 2021, Wyoming had one U.S. senator for every 190,000 citizens and more than 80 percent of the population identified as White, Non-Hispanic on the U.S. Census. In California, where

Non-Hispanic Whites compose just under 35 percent of the population, each senator represents nearly 20 million citizens. In other words, Whites living in less-populous states are disproportionately important for national electoral outcomes, which means that it is also important to understand how they form partisan attachments amid the competing demands of both parties.

And as Phillips's and Frank's comments indicate, the question of whether these voters will vote with their class interests via the Democratic Party, or their racial (and religious, if they are Christian) interests via the Republican Party, has been a subject of concern among pundits and social scientists for decades. So why will this study of Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend be able to offer us new insight into this long-standing puzzle? My argument is that by examining political variation *within* White, postindustrial cities, we can better understand the role of race, class, and religion in the past and ongoing process of the Heartland's reddening. This logic informed the study's design: as a cross-city and over-time comparative study, grounded in in-depth interviews and contextualized with ethnographic observation, administrative data, and archival evidence.

But why these cities in particular? I arrived at Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend because I was interested in understanding how White, postindustrial politics today are rooted in national political and economic transformations since the New Deal. To do so, I needed cases with the *right kind of variation*: cities that have always been largely White and blue collar; that voted for FDR during the New Deal; but whose politics later diverged, such that only one still votes majority-Democratic today, one votes majority-Republican, and one is more of a "swing" city. I began by using historical census and voting data to identify all counties that could be considered part of the White, working-class, New Deal coalition and that have remained largely White and working-class to the present. This second constraint was important because I wanted to rule out demographic change as an explanation for political change: as political scientist Jonathan Rodden (2019) has shown, increasing racial heterogeneity is a key reason that many postindustrial cities and towns are still voting Democratic today. These criteria led me to 467 counties, shown in figure 2.

Next, I wanted to describe the different political trajectories that the New Deal counties took *after* the New Deal era. Although there is no clear date when New Deal politics "ended," I chose to focus on what happened after 1964, the year the Racial Realignment broke into national politics, as this was one of the first national ruptures in the New Deal coalition and posed a key challenge for White voters in particular.¹⁷ I compiled the 467 New Deal counties' presidential vote shares from 1964 to 2016 and used a hierarchical clustering

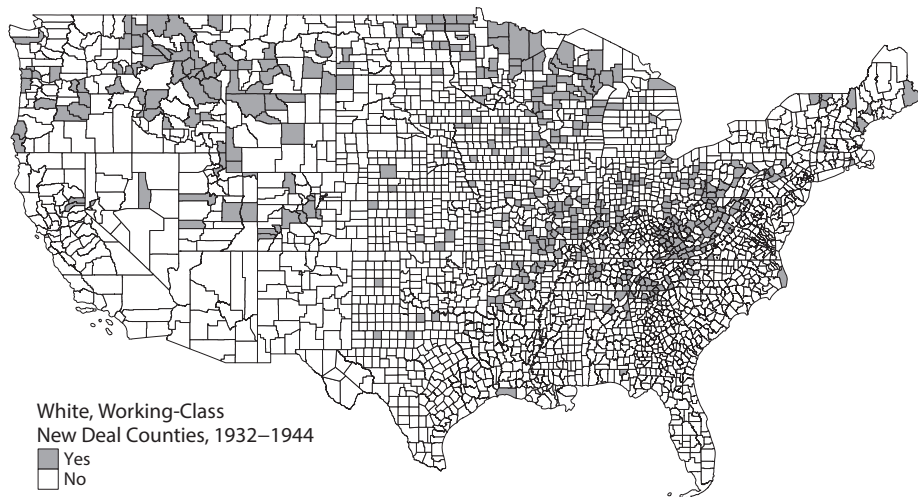


FIGURE 2. Map of White, working-class New Deal counties. *Note:* Counties were coded 1 if they voted, on average, Democratic from 1932 to 1944; had third tertile employment (for all U.S. counties) in craftsmen, operatives, or laborers occupations or in the manufacturing sector in the 1940 and 1950 census; had third tertile employment in construction, maintenance, transportation, or production occupations or the service sector from 2000 to 2016; and were more than 90 percent White in 1940 and remained more than 85 percent White and Non-Hispanic in 2016, according to the American Community Survey’s five-year estimates.

algorithm to identify clusters of different voting behavior over that period.¹⁸ I first found four clusters: two of the clusters, together containing 68 percent of the counties, began voting majority-Republican in 1968 after the Racial Realignment. This included Lutherton. The smallest cluster, representing 11 percent of the New Deal counties, began voting majority-Republican in 2000, after the political mobilization of the Christian Right. The mid-sized cluster, including 21 percent of the New Deal counties, remained reasonably competitive to Democrats through 2012/2016. Within this third group, I further identified one “swing” cluster that turned Republican in 2012/2016, a cluster that includes Gravesend; and one cluster that remained Democratic through the entire 1964–2016 period, a cluster that includes Motorville. This last cluster included just 4 percent of the original 467 New Deal counties.

Figure 3 summarizes the different political trajectories for the three clusters of which Motorville (“Stayed Democratic”), Lutherton (“Turned Republican, 1960s”), and Gravesend (“Lean Dem, Swing to Republican 2016”) are a part.

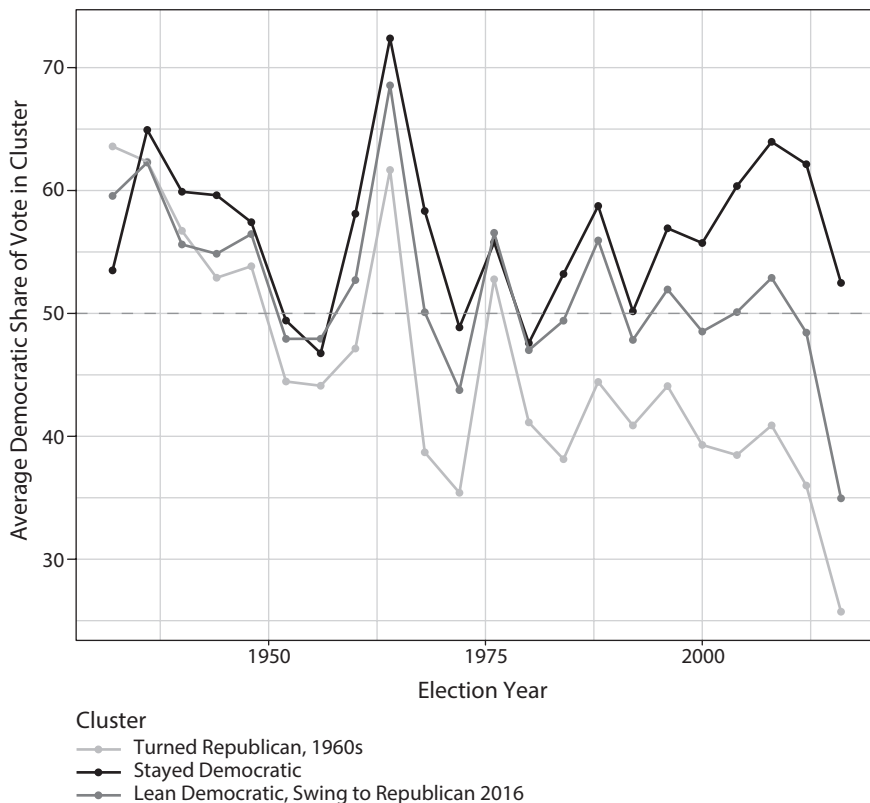


FIGURE 3. Presidential voting trajectories of former New Deal counties, 1932–2016. *Note:* The figure shows the average Democratic presidential vote share from 1932 to 2016 for all counties that were part of the same clusters as Motorville (“Stayed Democratic”); Lutherton (“Turned Republican, 1960s”); and Gravesend (“Lean Dem, Swing to Republican 2016”).

The analyses that produced figure 3 provided exactly the kind of present-day variation, rooted in historical processes, that I wanted among my cases; but I still had over 200 counties from which to choose, and many more towns and cities within them. I further narrowed my focus to the Midwest, both to hold region constant and to study a region seen as critical to the outcome of the 2020 presidential election. Finally, I chose to focus on counties containing small cities of 10,000–30,000 residents. Amid growing rural-urban polarization, cities have a high probability of voting majority-Democratic, and rural areas have a high probability of voting majority-Republican. Smaller cities are somewhat more politically heterogeneous. As such, my argument is not limited to cities with fewer than 30,000 people; rather, I focused on cities of this size

identify cases where I could hold certain variables (demographics) constant, while allowing other variables (voting) to vary. At this point in the case selection process, I was somewhat agnostic about choosing my final cases, and I finally arrived at Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend with some amount of luck, as I detail further in the Methodological Appendix.

Based on these analyses, the overwhelming tendency among White, working-class, New Deal counties since the 1960s has been toward Republican voting; moreover, Lutherton and Gravesend each represent two distinct but relatively common pathways to that outcome. Motorville, in contrast, represents an exceptional case that bucks this trend: *a place where local processes have prevented White voters' defection from the Democratic Party*. I argue that by understanding this exceptional case we can also understand why the alternative outcome is more likely in other places, thus revealing how contemporary postindustrial politics has emerged from a point of interaction between national transformations and local contexts. And while this argument is about the political transformation of White, postindustrial cities across the country (per figure 2), it is particularly relevant for the “Heartland” region—states where U.S. manufacturing, unionization, and working-class political mobilization have historically been concentrated.¹⁹

The comparative cases are thus a key component of the study’s research design, but it has two other important dimensions that will enable this book to shed new light on a long-standing puzzle: it is both longitudinal and qualitative. The spine of my argument comes from more than 400 interviews I conducted over the course of 18 months, including: four rounds of interviews with the same 86 residents between June 2019 and November 2020 (totaling more than 300); and 91 interviews with community leaders that took place largely during the summer and fall of 2019.²⁰ I also returned to each city in summer 2021 and reinterviewed a small subset of residents to see how they were faring under the Biden administration.

Before 2019 I had never heard of Motorville, Lutherton, or Gravesend. After choosing to go to those cities, my first informants were political party leaders and elected officials whom I contacted by email or social media. In Lutherton I stayed with the former Republican Party chair during my fieldwork, offering additional opportunities to chew over local politics at the end of each day. After these initial points of contact, I identified further local “opinion leaders”—local elites whose ideas are particularly influential—when I observed their activities at public events, when their names came up in interviews with other leaders, or when residents mentioned them as important to the community.²¹

To meet residents who were not involved in local politics, I used a variety of recruitment strategies: I posted flyers in popular places identified by

community leaders and asked residents to advertise my study on local Facebook groups; I recruited strangers in person at public events, in bars, coffee shops, and the YMCA; and I asked my existing contacts to introduce me to their “least political” acquaintances. This combination of strategies proved useful because I heard from *both* the people who were interested in talking politics—they responded to my flyer or a Facebook post—and the people who typically prefer not to talk politics but were willing to do so because a friend vouched for me.²² But even those who disliked talking politics typically participated in all four interviews over the course of a year and a half—in all, 80 percent of the people I first met in summer 2019 participated in four rounds of interviews with me, totaling about 4.5 hours of conversation each.²³

You may wonder what kind of person was willing to speak with a stranger and an outsider about politics for so many months. Were they some bizarre subset of the public? Were they telling me the truth? Why would they trust a researcher from Chicago with their stories and political opinions? As I mentioned, some residents met with me initially out of a favor to a friend; some thought it would be nice to help a young student; for others, I wasn’t that strange—a White woman raised in a small, overwhelmingly White town who attended a Catholic high school. And even though I remained an outsider to many—for example, that small town I grew up in was on the East Coast, synonymous with urbanity for many of my interviewees—I often didn’t stay a stranger after hours of conversation, texts, and emails shared during a frightening national pandemic. In part because of this trust we built up over time, I do not think that people were lying to me, nor do I think they were shy about sharing their opinions. There are also several other reasons to support this conclusion. First and foremost, as I will discuss in chapter 7, there was a great deal of stability in the core concerns that residents shared with me over the course of our conversations. In other words, if they were lying, they were doing so with a remarkable degree of consistency. Second, people often began their responses by saying “I don’t want to offend anyone, but . . .” and then went on to articulate an opinion that might offend many people. And finally, for many people, the “offensive” opinions they hold simply *aren’t* offensive. People believe what they believe is right; and in a social context that supports this view, they are not shy about sharing those beliefs.

Although the kind of in-depth interviews I conducted are rarely used in studies of American political behavior, they are ideally suited for revealing patterns of meaning-making and the subjective interpretations that residents have about their social context.²⁴ But interviews cannot tell us the extent to which those

perceptions are rooted in real features of residents' cities. In some ways, this doesn't matter for the political outcomes we're interested in here: just the fact that January 6 insurrectionists *thought* the 2020 presidential election was stolen led to an attempted coup d'état. But to understand *how* place shapes partisanship, I had to pin down the relationship between what is really happening in each place and the meaning that residents make from what's happening.²⁵

To do this, I rely on a variety of other sources of data about Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend. During my in-person fieldwork, I took daily fieldnotes of my observations. Sometimes my notes consisted primarily of interview summaries; on other occasions, I attended City Council meetings, political party meetings, church services, or kaffeeklatsches. For three weeks in October/November 2019 I cochaired the campaign of Lutherton's Democratic mayoral candidate. Along with a high school volunteer and the candidate, I canvassed, made phone calls, and attended public events. When this fieldwork was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and I switched to phone and Skype interviews, I sought other sources of data about the cities to develop a clearer picture of the context I could no longer observe in-person.

First, I document the severity of social problems in each place and the organizational resources available to address those problems using county-level data on industrial output, public health and overdose rates, local government spending, local nonprofit revenues and assets, and church membership.²⁶ Second, I describe how the local information environment conveys both local and national issues to residents using two sources of data: the front and editorial pages from all three cities' local newspapers during the days preceding and following important national political events from 1932 to 2016;²⁷ public Facebook posts from local politicians—including, where available, from city councillors, county commissioners, all the way up to U.S. House of Representatives—from January to November 2020.²⁸

These different sources of data were essential for developing the book's core arguments. As I analyzed the interview data, I saw that place mattered when I observed coherence within cities where I expected variation (particularly across lines of party affiliation and political knowledge) and when I observed differences between the cities where I expected coherence (particularly along demographic lines).²⁹ But to develop the argument about *how* places sustain partisanship, I triangulated among multiple sources of data to understand what it was about the local context that led to such unexpected patterns.³⁰

The longitudinal interviews were a crucial piece of this process. For example, during my first interviews, I asked very open-ended questions that did not

touch on social welfare or the appropriate role of the government. Even so, Lutherton residents often told me they preferred that churches rather than the federal government take care of social welfare provision—even if they didn't currently attend a church. This within-city coherence further stood out as surprising when I saw that Motorville and Gravesend residents rarely articulated similar beliefs unless they were actively involved in their own church or other civic associations. This suggested that churches were central to shaping residents' beliefs about the role of the state in Lutherton, and that church membership itself only explained part of this belief. After I identified these patterns through my analyses of the first-round interviews in winter 2019/2020, I developed more deductive questions to probe them during the second-round interviews: I asked residents across all three cities about how their community solves problems, how they learn about that problem-solving, and how they would solve similar problems on a national scale.³¹ It became clear that church activity was much more visible to Lutherton residents, regardless of individual membership status, than it was in both Gravesend and Motorville. This began to make sense in light of interviews with local pastors, elected officials, and nonprofit leaders; administrative data on nonprofit and church revenue; and data I collected from local newspapers and Facebook posts. These data showed how central Lutherton's churches were to local problem-solving *and* how much local opinion leaders discussed and lauded their activities. From this process of triangulation, I developed one of the core arguments of chapters 2 and 3: relationships among churches and nonprofits shape the way local opinion leaders and residents talk about how to solve problems, leading residents to believe that issues related to poverty, such as hunger and homelessness, are community challenges that can be resolved without government intervention.

Social Groups, Partisanship, and Political Change

This research process was essential in helping me disentangle the two potential explanations for growing Republicanism in the Heartland: either that the Heartland's postindustrial cities are composed of certain social groups—White, working- and middle-class voters—who are increasingly affiliating with the Republican Party, or that places themselves “add something extra” to individuals' experience of politics, leading those cities toward the Republican Party.³² This disentangling is important, because the point of departure for understanding Heartland politics is through the kinds of people who live there—in this case, White, working- and middle-class men and women, often Christians.

Decades of scholarship have shown how this group's turn toward the Republican Party began in the 1960s, after Nixon's successful appeal to the "Silent Majority" in the wake of the civil rights movement. It is a story rooted in group-based theories of American partisanship, which argue that political parties emerge to represent the prevailing divisions in society, and individuals join the party that represents their social group—or the people who share their position in the social structure. As pioneering political scientists in the "Michigan School" argued in the 1960s, partisanship represents the "perfect distillation" of voters' life histories and social positions (Campbell et al. 1960, 34). Although penned more than sixty years ago, this insight has proved foundational to research on American partisanship.

But the process of translation from social group membership—some objective categorical belonging—to partisan identity is not automatic: there are myriad lines of division in society that carve out different groups defined by ethnicity, race, religion, and gender, but rarely do all of these groups carry political meaning for their members.³³ And it's only in recent years that researchers have further specified both the *micro-* and *macro-level* processes that help connect social groups to political parties.³⁴ At the social psychological level (what I refer to as *micro*), an individual's objective group membership becomes a social identity when they incorporate that membership into their self-conceptualization and develop an attachment to the group; a social identity links to a partisan identity when voters see that a particular party embraces that social group.³⁵ As political psychologist Leonie Huddy (2013) has detailed, both of these processes—the move from group membership to social identity, and then from social identity to partisan identification—are contingent.³⁶ And they are contingent, in part, on political party maneuvering (what I refer to as the *macro-level*). Scholars have shown that political parties play a role in both steps of the translation process from social group membership to political identity: they can redefine group interests through strategic communication and efforts to incorporate social groups into their party coalition; and they can clarify to what extent certain groups "belong with" which political party.³⁷

A groups-based account of party politics explains the Heartland's turn toward the right as a product of social groups' movement into and out of party coalitions in the decades since the New Deal. The New Deal was the height of "traditional" class politics in America, a brief period when the working classes were associated with the party on the left and the middle and upper classes with the party on the right.³⁸ But racism posed a barrier to true class-based

politics, as southerners remained central to the Democratic coalition and fought to ensure Black exclusion from certain New Deal social programs.

Over the following decades, as chapter 1 will describe in greater detail, those White, working-class members of the New Deal coalition faced increasing contestation over their political loyalties. First, after the 1960s, Democrats' response to the civil rights movement and Republicans' nomination of Barry Goldwater propelled southern Whites into the Republican Party and Black Americans, those newly enfranchised voters in the South and those with lingering Republican sentiments in the North, toward the Democratic Party.³⁹ Then, over the following years, White Christian groups began mobilizing politically around several issues, including school segregation, school prayer, sex education, and—much later—abortion. By 1980, the Republican Party sought to capture these mobilized voters by endorsing a constitutional amendment to ban abortion and establishing itself as the party of White Christian conservatives.⁴⁰ Alongside these political shifts, unions' sociopolitical power began declining, threatening the importance of class as an organizing principle in Americans' lives. Race and religion increasingly seemed to be the most salient social identities for American voters.⁴¹

Thus, by the 1990s, three decades of political mobilization, social change, and economic restructuring had reshaped the political coalitions of both major parties. Consider what this meant for working- and middle-class White voters, many of whom were Christian, coming of age at different moments in this decades-long process. During the New Deal, their group memberships—both their race and class (and religion among Catholics)—pointed them toward the Democratic Party. But for similar kinds of people registering to vote after the Racial Realignment or the rise of the Religious Right, their racial, religious, and class identities pointed them in different partisan directions—in other words, they became *cross-pressured*.⁴² Party maneuvering amid economic and social change (a macro-story) and how that process shaped political identify formation among different social groups (a micro-story) seemed to provide an apt lens for understanding the Heartland's reddening at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Place, Populism, and Political Change

But the 2016 presidential election reinvigorated questions about White, Heartland politics. To many observers, Donald Trump's election was the result of a swelling populist backlash, signaling new and troubling divisions around race, class, and place: working- and middle-class White voters across the American Heartland had become the foundation of the Republican Party, while

urbanites, people of color, and educated professionals supported the Democratic Party.⁴³ One important explanation for this outcome was the changing political behavior among White voters, particularly those without a college degree: as they felt their social status under threat after the election of the first Black president and the changing racial demographics of the country, they moved toward populist candidates that reaffirmed their racial privilege—first the Tea Party and then Donald Trump.⁴⁴ This populist backlash accelerated the decades-long rightward shift among White voters described above; and crucially, it was just strong enough to tip key swing states like Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania into the Republican column, carrying Donald Trump into the White House in 2016.⁴⁵

But in these accounts, a place is just the aggregate of the kinds of people who live within it—in other words, they explain the rightward shift in White communities across the Heartland via the political behavior of individual voters living within them, not via any political effect of place itself.⁴⁶ In an alternative view, sociologists and political scientists have shown that place does have an effect on the current political stasis: places shape the way their residents interact with one another and interpret the world around them—including when it comes to politics.⁴⁷ And in the American Heartland, scholars tend to agree that the political meaning of place is defined by loss: at the same time as factories disappeared from these cities and union membership declined, the federal government also reformed the way it invested in citizens' lives, shifting the balance of social provision to local, private sources and forcing cities and nonprofits to compete for government funds.⁴⁸ As public and private resources fled from postindustrial and rural areas, so too did their best and brightest young residents, creating a negative spiral of economic and population decline.⁴⁹

In sum, the people and places that make up the Heartland were left behind by this restructuring. And as Katherine Cramer (2016) has shown, in Wisconsin this created fruitful ground for rural dwellers to turn against the state as they began to imagine that the public resources draining from their towns were flowing instead toward urbanites. Cramer's argument is that a place-based identity as rural residents shapes a distinctive kind of populist anti-statism among the Wisconsinites she meets.

Cramer's argument is largely race-neutral, but as others like Arlie Hochschild (2016) have argued, individuals' race and class are key to understanding how place shapes politics. Hochschild finds that Whites in her Louisiana study support the anti-government Tea Party movement not just because of the many losses they've seen in their city but because they believe racialized minorities are

cutting them in line for government assistance. This belief, what social scientists refer to as “racial resentment,” has long undermined Whites’ support for redistributive policies.⁵⁰ Hochschild shows that this can happen even in a place where residents would benefit from expanded government intervention to mitigate environmental pollution from local factories and increase health-care access.⁵¹

These studies reveal that place is a key piece of the explanation for growing populism in the American Heartland. But even these arguments are not quite sufficient for explaining the region’s *partisan* shift: as Jennifer Silva (2019) argues, populist resentment toward government does not necessarily lead to Republicanism; it can also lead to political disengagement or even be encompassed within the Democratic Party.

Place-Based Partisanship

This means that even the most compelling explanations for the Heartland’s reddening still cannot explain the puzzles at the center of this book: why the national changes described above produced a fractured response among the places that were once part of the White, working-class New Deal coalition, sending Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend along different political trajectories; *how* place still produces a persistent tendency toward Democratic partisanship among Motorvillians despite pulls toward the right that have attracted both Lutherton and Gravesend residents; and whether these place-based political differences can persist amid a growing tendency toward the nationalization of American politics.

So what can answer these puzzles? My contention is that what’s missing from existing arguments is an understanding of *place-based partisanship*—the portion of Americans’ partisan attachments explained by where they live—and that a comparison across Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend can show us not just *that* place matters for residents’ partisan identities but also *how* it matters. I argue that residents make sense of both local structural conditions and national political-economic developments from within their organizational contexts, leading them to cohere around two cultural frameworks: (1) *diagnostic frames* for defining what their problems are and how to solve them politically; and (2) *narratives of community identity* that tell residents what kind of community they are and where they fit into the party system. Through this process, place helps produce and reproduce residents’ partisan attachments.⁵²

This is true not only among White voters in the American Heartland, or in small cities like Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend, but for anyone whose

political loyalties are sought after by both political parties: today, as both parties vie for favor among a heterogeneous group of Latinx and Asian American voters on the basis of their possible identities as racialized minorities, Christians, or upwardly mobile immigrants from different nations, we should expect that place plays a role in shaping the salience of these identities and helping voters link them to party politics.⁵³

How do places accomplish this? Building on work by Harvey Molotch, William Freudenburg, and Krista Paulsen (2000), I argue that places are defined by their structural conditions, local organizational contexts, and shared cultural frameworks. The structural conditions of a city—the kinds of people who live there and the objective material/economic conditions in which they operate—impose the most basic limitations on residents' diagnostic frames and community identities and, therefore, on their partisan attachments.⁵⁴ For example, it would be difficult to imagine that cities like Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend, which all experience varying degrees of postindustrial social problems like poverty and economic precarity, would understand themselves as communities of wealthy elites; but it is possible that each city has different ways of thinking about their postindustrial problems, which cannot be explained entirely by objective differences in demographic composition or material conditions. We will see that this is in fact the case.

And that's because of local organizational contexts—not just quantitative differences in organizational resources or even qualitative differences in the types of organizations across places but also how those organizations relate to one another and define their role within a city. These qualitative and relational dimensions of local organizational contexts are crucial for understanding place-based partisanship, because ostensibly similar organizations play different roles in different cities. For example, Gravesend still has many union members, but unlike Motorville the city no longer has a local labor movement that engages in community life and politics.

These differences are important because stable organizational contexts like those in Motorville and Lutherton lead residents—both organizational members and non-members alike—toward shared diagnostic frames and narratives of community identity. As we will see, shared diagnostic frames emerge over repeated experiences of collective problem-solving.⁵⁵ The local organizational context helps determine which community leaders get a seat at the problem-solving table *and* shapes the way those leaders think about what problem-solving strategies “work” within their city: they use past experiences of solving problems within local organizational constraints to diagnose and resolve similar problems in

the future.⁵⁶ Community leaders then serve as local opinion leaders for residents, who come to share their place-based diagnostic frames and start to apply those frames to similar issues on both the local and national levels.⁵⁷

Organizational contexts also inform narratives of community identity—the way residents learn about who they are as a community and where they fit into the party system. This happens both directly, via residents who are affiliated with local organizations, and indirectly, through friends (or friends of friends) with organizational ties or local news that discusses certain organizations more than others.⁵⁸ As sociologist Japonica Brown-Saracino has argued (2015, 2018), places are often the sites where people produce accounts of themselves and others in social interaction, creating place narratives—stories about what kind of a community this is—that shape residents’ interpretation of their social identities. This kind of storytelling is important because it moves beyond the differentiating process (a way of framing a struggle in terms of us vs. them) and incorporates a “story of . . . becoming” that establishes “who we are” (Polletta 1998, 422) as a community.⁵⁹ And as the political parties craft appeals to different social groups, those appeals are more likely to resonate when they fit with the narratives residents already rely on to make sense of their lived experiences.⁶⁰ The result, as we will see in Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend, is that residents articulate place-specific interpretations of what the parties mean.

Diagnostic frames and narratives of community identity thus depend, in part, on a place’s structural conditions and the local organizational context: as Mario Small observes (2004, 70), “residents do not merely see and experience the characteristics of their neighborhood ‘as it is’; their perceptions are filtered through cultural categories that highlight some aspects of the neighborhood and ignore others.” This is true in Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend as well. For example, the fact that church membership is so central to many Luthertonians’ lives leads to social interactions where residents attempt to locate one another by asking which church they attend. The result is that residents are routinely reminded that they live in a churchgoing community. But over time, the idea that Lutherton is a churchgoing community becomes so taken for granted that, even if church membership began to dwindle, this social fact would continue to circulate in the way residents talk to each other, in what they tell newcomers about what kind of place Lutherton is, and in how they engage with the built environment. In other words, these cultural frameworks are partially independent from other place dimensions and play a distinct role in sustaining place-based partisanship.

For this reason, while it is possible to study place and place-effects at multiple scales, I focus here on *the local*—not just small, postindustrial cities like

Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend but cities and towns in general—because local contexts and the organizations they contain provide “the infrastructure of repeated interactional patterns” (Swidler 2001, 94) thereby circulating local cultural frameworks.⁶¹ This is not to say that regions, states, and counties don’t matter for residents’ politics, but rather that places are nested—meaning that Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend are the cities they are because of their historic responses to disruptions from their external environments.⁶²

Taken together, the structural, organizational, and cultural dimensions of place can lead similar people, living in different places, to arrive at different understandings of who they are, what their problems are, and which political party best represents them and their community. Moreover, because places are defined by this bundle of self-reinforcing factors, place-based partisanship is somewhat difficult to disrupt from within.⁶³ This means that changes in place-based partisanship are most likely to occur when external forces help destabilize local organizational contexts and over time residents no longer agree on shared diagnostic frames and community identities.⁶⁴ Gravesend offers an example of this: as we will see, organizational instability produces a kind of despair about their community’s future. As the Republican Party increasingly appeals to threatened towns like theirs, Gravesend is becoming increasingly Republican.

Much of this argument about how place helps shape and sustain identities is not new. Since the early 2000s, a growing group of sociologists has argued for greater analytic attention to how place matters for social action and interaction. Like those studies, this book draws on a comparison of “like” places (e.g., not rural vs. urban or midwestern vs. coastal), which, as Japonica Brown-Saracino (2018) writes, is a powerful methodological tool to reveal how “similar places make us different” (18).⁶⁵ What *is* new here is that I extend place studies to the world of partisan politics. In doing so, I will show how the relationship between place and political identity formation is contingent on political constraints—the parties’ efforts to incorporate particular social groups and not others.

A Contextual Account of Partisan Identity in a National Era

Although my argument builds squarely on a growing research tradition within sociology, the idea of reintroducing context to the conversation about partisan identity formation within political science faces two challenges. The first is that Lazarsfeld and colleagues (1948), the mid-century scholars who offered the first account of how social contexts shape partisanship, were writing at a time

that we might think was much more “local”: before social media and digital communications made politics an increasingly national affair; when local newspapers thrived; and before globalization undermined the local industries that sustained many U.S. cities in the postwar era. This means that residents of Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend are not just situated within their *local* contexts; they are also operating in a *national* context in which their political information comes from cable news, Twitter, and the *New York Times*, their social networks may stretch across the country, and their employers may be headquartered in other states, making global decisions about supply chains and employment.

Even as I develop arguments about place, it will be clear that the residents I spoke to do not exist in an isolated context. The influence of “the national” on the local—whether that is partisan news sources, political party realignment, or deindustrialization—is evident throughout the book. Chapters 1, 5, 6, and 7 highlight national forces that have caused change in place-based partisanship (chapters 1 and 5) and those that have not (chapters 6 and 7). Taken together, they suggest that the national factors most likely to disrupt place-based partisanship are those that undermine local organizational contexts and cultural frameworks. Residents’ consumption of partisan media, for example, does create temporary issue polarization and may be consequential for other political outcomes, but it does not disrupt the processes that sustain place-based partisanship.

The importance of “the national” hints at the second challenge to reviving an argument about how context helps sustain partisan attachments: because partisanship seems to explain so much of Americans’ political behavior, it can be difficult to pin down anything that explains partisanship.⁶⁶ By arguing that place supports partisanship, I am not ruling out the idea that partisanship itself may shape certain aspects of place (as well as other political beliefs my interviewees articulate); nor am I arguing that place is the *only* factor (nor even the most important factor) in explaining partisanship.⁶⁷ Instead, I am arguing that place *also* has an explanatory role in sustaining partisan attachments and that this is particularly true for cross-pressured voters. Among these individuals, place helps make certain social identities more salient than others and helps link those identities to certain interpretations of party politics.

Plan for the Book

The remainder of the book addresses each of the puzzles posed by Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend in turn. In part 1, “The Past Informs the Present,” I examine how historical interactions between local and extra-local processes have shaped the trajectory of the Heartland’s reddening, producing different

organizational contexts within each city (chapter 1), which today shape who the community leaders are in each city and how they work to resolve social problems (chapter 2). Chapter 1 draws on archival evidence from each city to show how they reacted differently to historic political and economic transformations, drawing on their existing resources to do so. After every juncture of disruption and reaction, each place emerged as an increasingly distinct bundle of structural, organizational, and cultural materials—with a distinct set of politics. In chapter 2, we see how these historical processes have reverberated through to the present, producing the places I observed during my time in each city. Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend still share certain structural conditions and challenges common to White, postindustrial cities, but they have different organizational resources to address them. I argue that there are two dimensions of local organizational contexts that are consequential for residents' partisanship today: content and stability. Although the content of organizational life differs across Motorville and Lutherton, organizational contexts in both cities are stable relative to Gravesend, which means they provide a source of continuity to civic life and shape who community leaders are and how they diagnose and attempt to resolve social problems.

Part 2, "Place-Based Partisanship in the Present," turns to the cultural dimensions of place. We will shift our view from community leaders to residents to advance a central contention of the book: how place operates in the present to sustain residents' partisanship, keeping Motorvillians in the Democratic fold while reinforcing Lutherton's Republican partisanship and drawing Gravesenders to the right as well. In chapters 3 and 4, I focus on Motorville and Lutherton to show that the stable organizational contexts described in chapter 2 lead residents of each place to cohere around shared diagnostic frames and narratives of community identity. In chapter 3 I argue that structural differences between Motorville and Lutherton do not explain residents' different *diagnostic frames* for solving social problems; instead, it is the routine experience of problem-solving within local organizational contexts that leads Motorvillians to understand themselves as a community that would benefit from state intervention while Lutherton residents understand themselves as a community that takes care of itself. Chapter 4 then shows how everyday social interactions in Motorville and Lutherton lead residents to distinct *narratives of community identity*. Lutherton residents think of themselves as a community of churchgoers, a place where Christianity is central to residents' identities and the community takes care of itself with no need for state intervention. And because they view the Republican Party as the party that stands for Christianity and local control, it is the party for them and their community. Motorvillians, in contrast, think of

their community as struggling under the weight of challenges beyond their control—a community of “have-nots”—in an unequal society that requires state intervention to balance the scales. And to them, party politics express class divisions, with the Democrats working to bring in the state and support organized labor to level the playing field.

In chapter 5, I turn to Gravesend and its recent swing to the right. I argue that local organizational decline—described in chapters 1 and 2—is essential to understanding the swell of right-wing populism here and in other Heartland cities: in the midst of devastating economic and population decline, *and without coherent local leadership to fill the vacuum*, Gravesenders increasingly feel their community’s survival is threatened. Residents are often left sad and angry, and as the Republican Party increasingly argues that they are the party to defend White America from the twin threats of immigration and socialism, those appeals resonate with Gravesenders.

Parts 1 and 2 thus advance two central arguments of the book, showing: *first*, how the reddening of the American Heartland, as a historical and ongoing process, is shaped by interactions between local and national processes; and *second*, that those processes have also created distinct places, defined along structural, organizational, and cultural dimensions, which today help sustain place-based partisanship. We will also see the importance of place throughout these chapters: as the overwhelming majority of White, working-class New Deal counties peeled off from the Democratic coalition, either because of racial and religious identities—like Lutherton—or because of a more recent populist backlash—like Gravesend—place has helped hold Motorville back from both pulls to the right.

Part 3, “The (Possible) Future of Place,” then turns to examine challenges to the persistence of place as a consequential factor in American politics, addressing the final puzzle that we started with: will place still matter for politics in the future? Focusing on residents’ experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and elite polarization on novel issues during the 2020 presidential election, I find that even national tumult did not dislodge the cultural frameworks that sustain partisan differences across Motorville, Lutherton, and Gravesend. Chapter 6 illustrates how local diagnostic frames were reproduced as residents continued to draw on local reference points when they considered how the state should intervene to mitigate the economic crisis. And chapter 7 shows that even when individuals’ partisanship and media consumption drove polarization on novel issues, this was short-lived compared to the enduring narratives of community identity that told residents who they were and where they belonged in party politics.

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