Politics in Appalachia: Contributions of Appalachian Women Post 2020 Presidential Election

by

Alysse C. Baker

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the School of Communication

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Scott W. Dunn

April 2021

Scott W. Dunn
_____   _____
Dr. Scott W. Dunn   Date
Thesis Advisor

Lisa Baker-Webster
_____   _____
Dr. Lisa Baker-Webster   Date
Committee Member

Theresa Burriss
_____   _____
Dr. Theresa Burriss   Date
Committee Member

Abstract

Many have questioned the agenda behind political support for Donald Trump in the 2016

presidential election, as well as continued support through several partisan disputes

leading up to the 2020 presidential election. Research thus far has been done on

Appalachian politics as well as female Trump supporters from 2016-2019. There is a

significant gap in literature concerning political support among Appalachian women and

how this particular demographic influenced the 2020 presidential election. The purpose

of this research is to determine core values and beliefs that influence political

involvement and opinions among women in rural Appalachia while exploring the role of

agenda setting through traditional and non-traditional platforms. The study uses a two-

stage mixed methods approach and applies the underlying framework of standpoint

theory.

Keywords: Appalachia, Appalachian women, political affiliation, standpoint

theory, presidential election, values, Trump

Alysse C. Baker, M.S.
School of Communication, 2021
Radford University

Politically Marginalized Appalachia: A Focus on Women's Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, Behaviors, and Voting Patterns

Stereotypes have beset Appalachian people for centuries and particularly since Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty in the 1960s when media coverage portrayed an inaccurate picture of the region (Blevins, 2012). The existing distrust Appalachians have toward outsiders can be traced back to industries exploiting natural resources and labor, leaving depleted communities to fend for themselves once large companies move on. The history of Appalachia plays a major role in current events.

While there is extensive research on Appalachian values and quality of life, there has been less research done on political associations and attitudes that drive those associations in the region. Furthermore, research has been conducted on the phenomenon of female Trump supporters, but no research specifically performed on the female Appalachian demographic.

This research uses a two-stage mixed methods approach, resulting in two studies. Data regarding the previously mentioned gap were gathered through quantitative methods leading up to the 2020 presidential election in *Study 1,* and qualitative data were collected after Inauguration Day 2021 in *Study 2*. Using standpoint theory and muted group theory as the underlying framework, these studies are intended to continue research and explain beliefs and attitudes held by Appalachian women about policy issues, political support, morality, and ethics to identify potential influences of future elections while exploring how traditional and nontraditional agenda setting applies to the demographic.

Regional Clarification

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) politically recognizes that the Appalachian region spans from Northeast Mississippi to Southwest New York and includes Northeast and Southern Ohio, Central and Eastern Pennsylvania, a very small portion of Northwest Maryland, Western and Southwest Virginia, all of West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, East Tennessee, Western North Carolina, Northwest South Carolina, Northern Georgia, and Northern Alabama. The ARC also recognizes five subregions of Appalachia: Northern, North Central, Central, South Central, and Southern. Census data collected by the ARC each year shows a consistent trend of distressed counties primarily in the central portion of the region (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Much of Central Appalachia is made up of Coal Country (i.e., West Virginia, Kentucky, and Virginia), and while this study is designed to measure attitudes generalizable to many Appalachian women, the importance of rurality that makes up most of the region is substantial. Regardless of the environmental effects, coal mining has driven the rural Appalachian industry and employment since the late 19th century (Eller, 1982). Research shows that the long time hold coal has had on residents of Appalachia has greatly influenced political affiliation and preferences (Wehrman, 2016). The current political climate suggests support for the Republican party stems across many other areas in Appalachia with a focus on natural resources as forms of industry. It is notable that many other influences affect support for the GOP.

Politics, Guns, and Culture

Historically, the Appalachian region has succumbed to outside threats and social distrust. After Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, one in three Appalachians still lived in poverty and the culture was subjected to ridicule from outside spectators based on

inaccurate media depictions (Blevins, 2012). The government has notoriously

underfunded the area for medical personnel, equipment, and information (Vanderpool et

al., 2007), as well as education facilities, faculty, and resources (Kelly, 2015). Lack of

educational funding in the region causes a trickledown effect of multiple issues.

     Scientific literacy, specifically related to environmental hazards and problems,

has been proven to disseminate more slowly throughout rural areas (Haight & González-

Espada, 2009), suggesting those who reside in rural Appalachia do not receive the

information needed to make informed decisions unless they seek it out themselves. Bell

and Braun (2010) concluded that women tend to take leadership roles and be more active

in environmental activism. Some research points to a rise in environmental justice

activism after results of the 2016 presidential election (Mudliar & Arnold, 2017), while

other research focuses on how quickly communities restore social trust from

environmental fallouts, such as the 2000 Martin County coal waste disaster in West

Virginia (Scott et al., 2012). It is notable that the Trump administration rolled back many

environmental regulations and policies put forth by the Obama administration (Hejny,

2018). Environmental factors are only a small part of the political issues puzzle.

     Gun control seems to be another policy issue that follows the ebb and flow of

political tides. While there is some research on gender and guns, research on Appalachian

values systems related to gun control and the Second Amendment is somewhat limited

and rarely focuses on specific subgroups other than political affiliation. Sentimental

value, rural heritage, and practical use tie Appalachians to protecting gun rights in a

different way than urban residents (Lynch et al., 2018). According to Wolfson et al.

(2020), women are slightly more likely to own only handguns than men, and men are

more likely to own both handguns and long guns (i.e., rifles), which reinforces the somewhat dated evidence that in Southern culture specifically, women are more likely than men to own a gun for protection purposes (Bankston et al., 1990). It is important to point out that only part of Appalachia is considered Southern.

Goss (2017) explored a longitudinal study that finds "partisan identification has come to dominate gender as a correlate of gun policy views," showing that Republicans, both men and women, are more likely to be pro-gun than Democrats. One would assume that since the Appalachian region is overwhelmingly made up of red, or Republican, counties, most women in Appalachia would support this claim; however, Goss highlighted in the same study how regulation campaigns that focus on sympathy are more likely to sway women in general to stronger gun regulations. Spitzer (2020) stated that most red leaning states have tried to roll back gun control laws while more blue, or Democratic, states push for stricter regulations, and based on sheer numbers, the blue states are more successful. Horowitz and Anderson (2009) explored the idea that, ironically, insurrectionism, or citizens' use of rebellion and guns to protect American freedoms from being eradicated by the government, is a bigger threat to American freedom than gun control. The insurrection attempt made by Trump supporters on January 6, 2021 is further evidence to support their research.

Research suggests that family roots play a major role in Appalachian identification, meaning those born into families that have lived in Appalachia for multiple generations, regardless of race, identify more strongly as Appalachian, even if they have migrated out of the region (Ludke et al., 2010). Cooper et al. (2010) found that some North Carolina residents have positive association identifying as Appalachian while

others view the association as negative. Their research shows more participants who had positive associations with Appalachian identity proved to be older, had lived in the region for a large part of their lives, and were more educated than non-identifiers. They argued, "People who identify as Appalachians want to maintain a rural ideal even if it means accepting restrictions on property rights" (p. 34), which demonstrates how identity factors influence policy opinions. On the other hand, Appalachian single mothers who identify as Democrat associate less with rural identity due to conflicting beliefs of the traditional norms, conservative values, and historically patriarchal society (DeGraffinreid et al., 2019). The literature describes a disconnect between rural ideals and political affiliation.

Loyal Jones (1977; 1994) identified beliefs and traditions that comprise Appalachian cultural values used to "get through hard times" that most closely revolve around adaptation, traditions, loyalty, resilience, self-reliance, and resourcefulness. The complexities of Appalachian culture are unique in that many identify more closely with a collectivist mindset, instead of the individualistic culture much of the United States currently embraces (Creamer, 2019). This uniqueness is worth mentioning given the vast differences in demographics and psychographics throughout the region. The culture embodies a strong work ethic not only in terms of blue-collar jobs and labor (Scott, 1996), but also in terms of maintaining interpersonal relationships (Helton & Keller, 2010). Connecting work ethic to relationship maintenance, especially for women, can mean that duties and purpose are focused on taking care of others, rather than taking care of oneself.

H1: The issue of gun rights ranks lower in importance than other policy issues

among both Republican and Democratic female voters.

H2: Women who strongly identify as Appalachian show greater support for

Donald Trump.

H3: Republican Appalachian women are more likely to support Donald Trump

than Democratic Appalachian women.

H4: Support for Donald Trump predicts low levels of concern on environmental

and education issues.

RQ1: To what extent do Appalachian women place responsibility on the

government and its leaders to protect physical, cultural, and environmental

wellbeing?

RQ2: For what purposes do Appalachian women own guns, if at all?

RQ3: Do Appalachian women identify more strongly with party affiliation or

gender concerning Second Amendment rights and gun control?

RQ4: What are the most important aspects of partisanship and party affiliation, if

any, among Appalachian women?

Religiosity

Descriptions thus far of politics in Appalachia seem to categorize the region as

separate from Republicanism and are more closely associated with populist and far-right

ideals similar to the Tea Party (Mason, 2011). A major factor in Appalachian identity is

religiosity. While there are many people who associate with a specific denomination of

Christianity, just as anywhere else in the country, there are those who do not subscribe to

organized religion. The roots of the more collectivist culture stem from Christianity and

organized religion (McCauley, 1995), forcing many characteristics associated with

religion into aspects of life that otherwise would not be related (i.e., community). This

means that those who are not particularly religious are affected by the influence of

religion on the culture in everyday life. Racial and identity factors have a notable

influence on voting behavior among Appalachian voters; however, White (2019) found

that religious issues hold more importance. In terms of identity measurement, Christianity

and rurality have a positive correlation and show an association between religiosity and

community attachment (DeGraffinreid et al., 2019).

   According to a Pew Research report (2020), most Evangelicals see Donald Trump

as fighting for their beliefs and that the Trump administration has helped their cause,

especially when it comes to abortion (Monk-Turner, 2020). However, many have mixed

feelings about his personal conduct, which lays out the possibilities of Evangelicals being

pulled in opposite moral directions.

   H5: Donald Trump supporters believe he serves as a voice for the issues

   important to them, and non-Donald Trump supporters believe he opposes their

   voice and issues of importance.

   H6: Donald Trump supporters are more religious than non-Donald Trump

   supporters.

   RQ5: What moral convictions and conflicts, if any, cause Donald Trump

   supporters to attempt to reduce dissonance (i.e., justify actions that do not align

   with their values) when expressing their support?

Facets of Marginalization

In 2000, an ethnographer studied the lives of three young women over a 4-year period to show how Appalachian history has shaped research and policy discourse and suggests bringing forgotten voices and inequities that the working poor and younger middle-class women have experienced to the public realm for future understanding and research of culture (Hicks, 2004). Despite the suggestion, very little research has been done on the generational understanding of identity management among rural Appalachian women.

In *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* (1989), Kimberle Crenshaw described a single categorical axis in which marginalization is measured that leads to a great deal of exclusion concerning those who fall into multiple marginalized categories, also referred to as intersectionality (Collins, 2020). Different levels of marginalization should not be looked at on an even playing field. Referring to standpoint theory, one can assume that no two perspectives can be exactly the same, yet the comfort of being part of a similar group can develop bonds of unity through similar experiences. It is impossible to say that two people from a single tier subordinate group (i.e., a White female or Black male) are equally marginalized, but they do share the common aspect of single tier marginalization. Cassese and Barnes (2018) theorized that many White women entertain, endorse, or engage in sexist behavior to protect the privilege they have, specifically women who are economically dependent on White men. The single categorical axis society has revealed that those who fall into multiple categories of marginalization, specifically Black women, are essentially "theoretically erased" (Crenshaw, 1989).

Research shows that almost half of the female population shared biases, including party affiliation, traditional beliefs, and views on sexism and race that influenced the outcome and unexpected support of Donald Trump among women in the 2016 presidential election (Setzler & Yanus, 2018). Historically, there has been a disproportionate gender gap in higher governmental positions (Center for American Women and Politics, 2020), and it is a reasonable assertion that female voters would vote for a female candidate to obtain greater representation in decisions that affect public policies unique to that demographic (i.e., reproductive rights, equal/fair pay, etc.) (Paolino, 1995). Meeks (2018) suggested that partisan and gender identification can sometimes clash, specifically when Republican women are faced with a Democratic female candidate, such as Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. Beyond partisanship, religiosity plays a role in support for women in power, specifically among rural communities (McCauley, 2014).

National Democratic leaders have been historically viewed in Appalachia as elitists who do not protect the sanctity of traditional values (Sutton, 2005). Progressives in the region are a phenomenon within the existing phenomena of Appalachian culture and often experience a spiral of silence effect regarding liberal attitudes. Generational oppositions have been expanding within the region due to young Appalachians feeling misunderstood, invisible, and like they are only accepted with suspicion (Brashear, 2014).

Socioeconomic status is another facet of intersectionality among the marginalization of Appalachia. Oscar Lewis created the concept of "culture of poverty" in *Five Families; Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* in 1959. The idea is

that those who fall into low socioeconomic status create a subgroup, or marginalized

group of their own. Blevins (2012) delved deeper into Lewis's portrayal of subgroups and

subcultures in poverty, showing that poverty affects participation in the larger national

culture. The national culture as defined by Hofstede (2011), in the case of the United

States, incorporates national loyalty, future orientations, traditions, socially accepted

behavior, and other identifying aspects unique to the country. Accepting poverty as a

marginalized socioeconomic status implies that those who fall into that category choose

what normalcy means in terms of national culture. Evidence of the previous claim is

explored in David Sutton's "Living Poor and Voting Rich" in Appalachia (2005), after

the 2004 presidential election showed clear favoritism for George W. Bush in the

Appalachian region. The question lies in self-interest. Why do people who are not

directly served by capitalistic structures and the "free market" show support for policies

and politicians that perpetuate those ideals? Jost et al. (2017) suggested many

conservatives who fall into the lower to middle class income category engage in

economic system justification or are "more likely to endorse the legitimacy of the

American social system" (p. 5). A major component of their research is debunking the

myth of poor optimism. Contrary to a popular belief, there are few living in poverty who

believe they can become wealthy, or part of the 1%, regardless of how hard they try in a

capitalistic society. To this point, their research shows that conservative principles align

with the belief that social class systems reinforce a natural order and that most people

have, or have to, work(ed) equally hard to be successful, hence, Hofstede's national

culture. Similar patterns involving conservativism and system justification have been

identified in Sweden, Italy, Poland, Lebanon, and Turkey (Cichocka & Jost, 2014; Dirilen-Gumus, 2011; Nilsson & Jost, 2017; Pacilli et al., 2011).

Cassesse and Barnes (2018) used data from the American National Election Studies to determine that the Trump campaign surprisingly and "disproportionately attracted and mobilized economically marginal white women" over "downwardly-mobile white men" (p. 684). Their comparison between the 2012 and 2016 Republican presidential candidates (Figure 1) showed low-income White male voters supported Donald Trump less than low-income White females while low-income White females supported Mitt Romney less than low-income White males (Cassese & Barnes, 2018). Attitudes were reversed among low-income White female voters for the 2012 and 2016 candidates, showing greater support for Donald Trump despite endorsements of discrimination against women. The longitudinal evidence leads to a bigger question: What changed in terms of support for the GOP, partisan evolution or candidate character? There will certainly be more data to analyze after finalized results of the 2020 presidentail election.
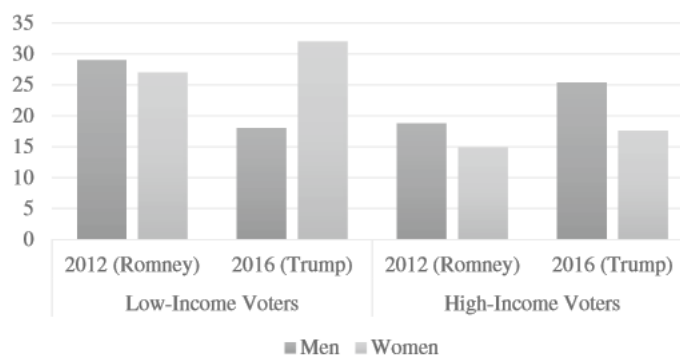

Figure 1 Percentage of low and high-income white voters supporting Republican presidential candidates in 2012 and 2016 (American National Election Studies)

An analysis of presidential elections from 1980-2016 showed the majority of the Appalachian vote only voted Democratic twice, both for Bill Clinton and by an extremely

thin margin, and all but two of the majority votes in Appalachia went on to win the

national election (Ferrari & Rhee, 2017). It is notable that the two Appalachian majority

votes that differed from the national majority were the 2008 and 2012 elections when

President Barack Obama was elected. This data should be looked at from a regional

perspective instead of state by state, as some states that ultimately swung in Obama's

favor, such as Ohio, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, have geographical sections that are

located in the Appalachian region. One of the contributing factors to the disconnect

between Appalachians and Obama was, in fact, racial factors, but research shows that the

higher than average racial favoritism was related to losing White privelage, not

capability, credibility, or likability (White, 2018). Davis (2008) suggested Obama's lack

of support in 2008 was more of a rural issue instead of an Appalachian issue, arguing that

Obama's attempts to connect with rural America was lackluster at best, specifically in the

region.

The large gap between educated and uneducated White voters during the 2016

presidential election helped show that denial of sexism and racism has a positive

correlation with the uneducated White voter (Cassese & Barnes, 2018; Schaffner et al.,

2018). This points to a clear distinction of why certain character attacks on Trump did not

resonate with many Appalachian voters; they simply did not see the issues of sex and

race as having much importance over other policy and character issues. Education cannot

be the only factor in support for Donald Trump among Appalachians; there are educated

Appalachians and to say otherwise would be reinforcing stereotypes that have been

perpetuated for decades. Steele and Jeffers (2020) pointed to more complex factors

outside of education for reasons Trump won the Appalachian vote, such as the protection

of jobs, political unity, and resistance to government due to exclusion.

According to Konrad (2018), there are three ways supporters of Trump resolve

dissonance when his rhetoric reflects ideals (i.e., racism and sexism) that they themselves

disagree with: by denying the prejudicial statements or actions occurred, denying the

statements or actions are prejudiced, and/or by denying responsibility for prejudices as a

whole and their effects. Researchers Redlawsk et al. (2010) stated that strongly affiliated

partisans will accept negative information and change their voting behavior only when a

high level of anxiety and dissonance about the candidate has been reached.

Trump has consistently attacked people of color, Latinx, women, Muslims, and

LGBTQ+ individuals through prejudiced rhetoric in speeches and on social media posts

(Konrad, 2018). Coe and Griffin's research (2020) indicated Donald Trump used Twitter

as a sounding board for both tonally positive and negative invocation of marginalized

groups during the first 2 years of his presidency. It is believed that Trump's use of

prejudicial rhetoric, proposed exclusionary policies, and endorsement of stereotypes have

increased distress among individuals, specifically college students, with long-standing

experiences of oppression having at least one marginalized identifying aspect, more so

among those with more than one marginalized identifying factor (Albright & Hurd,

2020). Perceived discrimination affects health in negative ways in both mental and

physical aspects; however, research suggests that when people who experience perceived

discrimination practice active coping strategies that challenge the validity of

discriminatory occasions, such as social support and confrontation, there is progress in

reducing severe negative impacts on mental health outcomes (Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

H7: Donald Trump supporters believe the economy is of high importance in

greater numbers than non-Donald Trump supporters.

H8: Feelings of belonging to a majority are held by Trump supporters, while

feelings of belonging to a minority are held by those opposing Trump.

H9: There is a strong positive correlation between generational differences and

conflicting attitudes of issues to consider when voting for President.

RQ6: At what levels of discrimination do Appalachian women abandon support

for a presidential candidate?

RQ7: To what extent do Appalachian women view themselves as marginalized?

Agenda Setting and Nontraditional Platforms

Typically, social media has been a "safe place" for individuals belonging to

marginalized groups (Devito et al., 2019), and even a place for those same individuals to

raise their voices (Ortiz et al., 2019). There is a gap in literature regarding social media

usage among Appalachians as a specific demographic; however, there is research that

shows the Appalachian region has fewer households with broadband internet access than

the national average (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2019). One could assume that if rural

Appalachian communities do not have access to broadband internet, they are less likely to

actively participate on social media platforms, but more research needs to be conducted

to be conclusive. This study incorporates the data collected from a survey distributed via

digital outlets, so it seems appropriate to explore how the traditional constructs of agenda

setting have adapted with modern media sources, such as social media platforms.

As social media platforms grow as popular political news sources for Americans

(PEW Research, 2012), misinformation that bypasses most social media sites' fact-

checking techniques has spread exponentially since 2016 through manipulators and false content producers (Kornbluh et al., 2020). This is especially worrisome considering over two thirds of American adults use social media (Perrin & Anderson, 2019).

A study by Mihailidis and Viotty (2017) explored the concept of spectacle in media and media literacy, specifically how it affected media interaction during the 2016 presidential election. Kellner (2009) argued that higher education points to a clear path of the deconstruction of media spectacles in political campaigns, while the more recent study (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017) posed the argument that the public who normally deconstructs and who is considered more media literate is made of people who perpetuate spectacle as much as mainstream media through social media platforms. Essentially, the scope of characteristics that influence media literacy are not just education levels. As media literacy standards and norms change, it is assumed that communication channels among media and publics also change. The increase of disregard for credible news sources (Sundar, 2016) changes how we should think about traditional agenda setting as put forth by McCombs and Shaw (1972).

Thorndyke (2012) proposed that beyond issues of popular culture, Twitter is not viewed as a newsworthy platform; however, Artwick (2012) determined through the interpersonal communication abilities of tweets and retweets that emerging social media are sources of influence in traditional news media. Furthermore, Arugute (2017) discovered that growing participation regarding newsworthy content on social networking platforms, specifically Twitter, has provided proof of significant resistance to media's agenda setting power. The research done thus far suggests that as interpersonal communication becomes more normalized through social networking sites, the users of

those sites set the agenda for mass media. "Social media outlets are providing users the

ability to gather news as well as allowing the candidates to actually control entire news

cycles" (Shill & Hendricks, 2018, p. 27). Further research needs to be done on the power

social media sites have in terms of rules and removal of major political influences, such

as the removal of Donald Trump's Twitter and Facebook accounts after spreading

misinformation and disinformation while inciting violence leading up to the attempted

insurrection on January 6, 2021.

Beyond the public leading the media concerning the political agenda, there seems

to be confusion surrounding politicians and their influence on their constituents (Barberá

et al., 2019), meaning that many higher-level political figures who continuously break

societal norms (i.e., Donald Trump) shape the public's agenda that in turn shapes the

agenda of lower-level political figures (i.e., governors and mayors) who tend to better

follow the rules and expectations of public office. Other research shows that political

information that has less activity from the public draws less attention and is found less

newsworthy due to fewer comments to gauge others' reactions (Pierce et al., 2017).

Political populism (i.e., the attempt to reach political sovereignty) is used by

politicians on social media platforms to capitalize on the power and influence that

unmediated messages have in the development of public opinion (Engesser et al., 2017).

There are two sides of disseminating populist information on social media platforms: It

allows the person posting to maintain direct contact with their supporters and elude the

elites, or those who control conventional media (Van-Kessel & Castelein, 2016), and it

allows messages to reach a viral trajectory, causing a quick infiltration of the media

agenda, therefore reaching a much larger audience (Bartlett, 2014; Elmer, 2013; Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016).

Social media users see a wide variety of opinions that do not necessarily align with their own (Masip et al., 2018), but there has been extensive research about "echo chambers" and how they develop due to media selectivity based on political preferences and affiliation through SMSs. This selective exposure causes similar attitudes to be echoed through consistent groups and/or social media threads (Bakshy et al., 2015; Fox & Holt; 2018; Pariser, 2011). Seldom do social media users change their minds based on what others post (Anderson, 2016), which reinforces the importance of attitude strength in persuasion techniques (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The evolving research poses a problem in the analysis of the effects of social media algorithms and selective exposure on traditional thoughts about agenda setting.

RQ8: What media, including traditional and non-traditional media, do Appalachian women receive news from, and why do they believe their preferred news choices are credible?

Theoretical Framework

Standpoint theory, influenced by Georg Hegel in 1807 (Cameron, 2005) and expanded by Sandra Harding and Julia Wood (2009), highlights how analysis of marginalized groups provides a more accurate depiction of how society works, not how it is portrayed by people who hold more power. Standpoint is based on social location, or group memberships to certain demographics, but is not determined by social location (Griffin et al., 2019). "To be 'for women' is one thing; to be overtly against male supremacy and regulative ideals that, critics claim, are in fact defined against whatever is

associated with 'the feminine' is quite another matter" (Harding, 2009). This statement

from Harding's *Standpoint Theory: Productively Controversial* demonstrates the

difference between equity and equality concerning dominant and marginalized groups.

There seems to be a conflict of beliefs and attitudes regarding politics and public

policy among Appalachians. According to Cheris Kramerae (1981), muted group theory

(MGT) focuses on marginalized or subordinate groups and the perception of their voice

among power imbalances that surround them. It is notable that MGT is a continuation of

standpoint theory. Appalachian men and women share the common subgroup

Appalachia; however, Appalachian women fall into an additional marginalized group of

the already existing subgroup, causing a double muted effect. This idea of a double muted

effect is taken further as the layers of marginalization continue (i.e., a Black Appalachian

woman).

MGT principles are different than those of standpoint theory in that they are based

on the same multi-axis framework of marginalization; however, MGT focuses more on

how, as a person checks more boxes on an intersectionality scale, that person feels not

only silenced, but less likely to express their beliefs and opinions due to perspective of

dominant groups. Many intersectionality factors, such as race and gender, are visible,

while others are not. The significance of using MGT as part of the underlying framework

to this study is to see if and how Appalachian women view themselves regarding

marginalization and intersectionality, and if they feel their voice is muted. Considering

the purpose of this study is to analyze political communication in Appalachia, the

principles of MGT will be applied to the perceptions of political affiliation as well as any

other seen or unseen facets of marginalization. Based on standpoint theory and MGT,

understanding the standpoint of Appalachian women would provide a more accurate

depiction of public policy and politics in relation to women as a whole.

Methods

For the purposes of this study, a two-stage mixed methods approach is used. The

first stage uses quantitative methods to determine political attitudes, values, and beliefs;

Appalachian identity; and policy opinions held by Appalachian women before Election

Day 2020. The purpose of measuring political attitudes and opinions prior to the election

is to evaluate any changes after Inauguration Day. Further, the quantitative data collected

prior to the election ensured a baseline understanding of the attitudes held by women in

the sample and provided a point of comparison for the second stage.

The second stage of this study uses qualitative methods to measure changes

regarding the apparent political attitudes, values, and beliefs; identity issues; and policy

opinions put forth in the first study. Further, media consumption is explored to see what

media-related influences, if any, played a role in attitude strength and issue management

of the target demographic of this research. Interviews were conducted after Inauguration

Day 2021. The time that passed between the two studies offers insight into the transition

from pre-election to post-election concerning changes in attitudes about political

leadership and policies.

Study 1

To evaluate political attitudes, values, and beliefs; Appalachian identity; and

policy opinions held by Appalachian women and test hypotheses presented in this paper,

a survey (see Appendix) was created using Qualtrics, a survey generator software

available to students and faculty of Radford University (radford.qualtrics.com). Statistical

Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data received. The IRB-approved survey was distributed via social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Instagram) and list-servs provided by the Director of Appalachian Studies and the Appalachian Regional & Rural Studies Center at Radford University approximately 2 weeks before the 2020 presidential election. One of the reasons social media were used for dissemination of the survey was to facilitate a snowball sample among unique and varying social networks.

While much of the survey determines attitudes of public policy and politics, there are questions designated to determine geographic and demographic relevancy. Survey responses that indicate the participant does not identify as female and/or lives outside of the Appalachian region were discarded from the total sample of responses before analyzing data (n = 343).

Survey questions vary from Likert scale and multiple-choice questions to questions intended for a write in response and include variables to test for respondent attention and consistency. The objective of the survey was to (i) provide insight into attitudes and beliefs of the marginalized group, (ii) measure the relationships between politics and attitudes of the marginalized group, if any, and (iii) form a clearer picture of Appalachian culture as seen through the eyes of women in the region.

Study 2

This study was designed to investigate (i) voting behaviors of Appalachian women in the 2020 presidential election, (ii) media usage and receptivity, (iii) how women of Appalachia view the relationship between the government and the region, culturally and physically speaking, (iv) views on policy issues, and (v) potential cognitive

dissonance regarding voting behavior. In-depth interviews were conducted using Zoom video communication technologies to address the aforementioned topics.

The IRB approved in-depth interview questions (see Appendix) that were derived from the research questions presented throughout the secondary research and designed to facilitate discussion that focused on the current political climate and media, including changes, challenges, and concerns. The sample (N = 12) was gathered from survey respondents who opted to be part of future research in *Study 1*. All survey respondents contacted identified as Appalachian women over the age of 18. The sample was chosen through systematic interval sampling from the compiled email list previously collected. The selected participants were contacted via email by the address they voluntarily provided with an invitation for participation and an informed consent document, both approved by the IRB.

Interviews were conducted and recorded between March 4, 2021 and March 12, 2021. The interviews were saved on the Zoom Cloud server and uploaded to Radford University's learning management system, D2L. The author used the recordings to transcribe the interviews for analysis of any general themes or noteworthy contributions that could be applied to the general perspectives of Appalachian women. Interview length times varied from 19 to 59 minutes.

Results

Study 1

To test the hypotheses related to public policy issues, we looked at the descriptive statistics of issues that were broken down by party affiliation. Participants ranked the relative importance of different issues on a scale from 0-10, 0 being not at all important

and 10 being extremely important. Second Amendment rights ranked second of

importance to Republicans ($M = 8.98$) and last for Democrats ($M = 4.23$). It is notable

that the Second Amendment standard deviation is higher than any other policy issue for

the Democrats ($SD = 2.79$). Though the level of importance for gun control for

Democrats ($M = 7.04$) is much higher than Second Amendment rights, it is still ranked

second to last for Democrats on the scale of importance. Gun control was ranked fourth

most important for Republicans ($M = 8.3$). These findings partially support H1; however,

it is clear there is a significant difference regarding partisanship.

   The data indicates there is a strong correlation between identifying as an

Appalachian and being proud to be from Appalachia ($r = .745$, $p < .001**$), so these two

items were averaged to create an overall measure of Appalachian identity. Using a 5-

point scale, Joe Biden supporters ($N = 196$) identified less as Appalachian ($M = 4.08$)

than those who support Donald Trump ($N = 116$) ($M = 4.64$). While the average means

are fairly similar, there is a significant difference that supports H2. A one-way ANOVA

comparing the means for those supporting Trump, Biden, third party candidates, and

undecided voters indicated that these mean differences were significant, $F(3, 341) =$

11.67, $p < .001$, and a *post hoc* Tukey HSD test indicated that the specific difference

between Trump and Biden voters was significant, $p < .001$. There is not a significant

difference between party affiliation and candidate support. This means there was a strong

positive correlation between Republican party identification and voting for Donald

Trump and a strong positive correlation between Democratic party identification and

voting for Joe Biden, which supports H3.

Democrats' single most important policy issue was social equality ($M = 9.34$),

narrowly above healthcare ($M = 9.25$). We found opposing views of Republicans and

Democrats on social equality as the Republican mean ($M = 7.61$) was significantly less

than Democratic mean; however, the standard deviation was much wider ($SD = 2.52$ as

opposed to 1.10). It is notable that Republicans ranked social equality second to last,

behind environmental issues ($M = 6.46$). Environmental issues ranked third most

important for Democrats ($M = 8.84$). These findings partially support H4. Education was

fifth most important for Republicans ($M = 8.21$), and fifth most important for Democrats

($M = 8.6$), which does not support H4.

There was a strong Pearson Correlation ($r = .974$, $p < .001**$) between two

survey questions intended to measure how much or how little they agreed that Donald

Trump stands for what they believe in, so these items were averaged into one scale.

Based on our 5-point scale, H5 is supported by the evidence that shows those who said

they would vote for Trump had a much higher mean ($M = 4.42$) of agreement that Trump

represents what they believe in than those who said they would vote for Biden ($M =$

1.09), $F(3, 340) = 656.81$, $p < .001$, Tukey HSD test indicates $p < .001$ for Trump- Biden

comparison. There was also a significant difference between Trump voters and Third

Party voters ($M = 1.35$, $p < .001$), as well as a significant difference between Trump

voters and those who did not know who they would vote for ($M = 2.42$, $p < .001$). The

data show a significant difference ($p < .001$) between Biden supporters and those who

responded, "I don't know," and a significant difference ($p < .001$) between women who

voted Third Party and those who responded to the voting question with "I don't know."

Four of the survey questions were combined to determine levels of religiosity. These items were found to have a high level of reliability (Cronbach's α = .859), so they were averaged into one religiosity scale. This scale was then broken down into categories of candidate support; Donald Trump (N = 116), Joe Biden (N = 196), Third Party (N = 13), and "I don't know" (N = 20). Those who said they plan to vote for Trump (M = 4.06) were significantly higher on the 5-point scale of religiosity than those who said they plan to vote for Biden (M = 2.28), $F(3, 341)$ = 75.148, $p < .001$, Tukey HSD indicates $p < .001$ for Biden-Trump comparison. There was also a significant difference (MD =1.2*) between Trump supporters and those who said they were voting Third Party (M = 2.87, $p < .001$), and those who claimed they did not know who they would vote for (M = 2.91, $p < .001$). There were also significant differences between Biden supporters and those who said they did not know who they would vote for ($p < .05$). These findings strongly support H6.

On average, Republican Appalachian women (N = 85) ranked the economy (M = 9.11) as the single most important policy issue when voting for the President of the United States, while Democratic Appalachian women (N = 154) ranked the economy (M = 7.72) seventh most important issue supporting H7.

Out of Biden supporters (N = 194), 67 (34.5%) said that over 50% of the people they are in close proximity to in daily life, including friends and family, support Donald Trump. One hundred and twenty-seven (65.5%) of the Biden supporters reported that fewer than 50% of the people they are in close proximity to in daily life support Donald Trump. Trump supporters (N = 106) overwhelmingly reported feeling like part of the majority with 101 (95.3%) who believe over 50% of the people they are in close

proximity with support Trump, and only five (4.7%) who reported less than 50% of those around them support Trump. H8 is partially supported. The evidence shows that Trump supporters overwhelmingly place themselves in the majority, but most Biden supporters also believe they are part of the majority.

Healthcare was the second most important issue for Democrats ($M = 9.25$), and third most important for Republicans ($M = 8.85$). Both means are consistently high, and both standard deviations are relatively low, showing that healthcare is viewed similarly as issues of importance for both Republicans and Democrats.

Other policy issues that were explored but not related to any specific hypothesis were immigration (Republicans $M = 8.05$; Democratic $M = 8.06$), supreme court justice appointments (Republicans $M = 7.99$; Democratic $M = 8.68$), and abortion (Republican $M = 8.13$; Democratic $M = 7.43$). The data collected regarding public policy issues will be used to formulate interview questions for *Study 2*.

Generational Policy Differences

For the purposes of transparency, the data collected regarding generational identification had two major limitations: Only two women belonging to the Silent Generation (born before 1946) participated in the study and 58 women answered that they did not know what generation they belong to. The mean is determined on a 10-point scale for all policy issues. Specific generations are defined as follows: Baby Boomers – born 1946-1964; Generation X – born between 1965 and the mid-1980s; Millennials – born between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s; Gen Z – born after the mid-1990s.

There are generational differences regarding the level of importance Second Amendment rights hold on a presidential election, $F(5, 336) = 5.91$, $p < .001$. The Silent

Generation ($N = 2$) placed the most importance on the issue ($M = 7.5$), but it is notable

that those who answered "I don't know" ($N = 58$) were close behind ($M = 7.43$). The

respondents who answered they did not know what generation they belonged to shared

significant differences with Generation X ($M = 5.67$, $p < .05$) and Millennials (M = 5.14,

$p < .001$). The Baby Boomer generation ($N = 79$) placed the issue at reasonably high

importance ($M = 7.06$), showing a significant difference between Baby Boomers and

Millennials ($p < .01$). Generation X ($N = 78$), Millennials, and Gen Z ($N = 14$) ($M = 6.29$)

all placed the issue at lower importance than Baby Boomers, the Silent Generation, and

those who answered "I don't know." The evidence supports H9.

There is a slight increase of level of importance regarding the issue of gun control

across all generations, but it still ranks highest with those born before Generation X. The

Silent Generation ranked the issue of gun control highest ($M = 10.0$), Baby Boomers

ranked the issue second highest ($M = 8.06$), those who answered "I don't know" ranked

the issue third highest ($M = 7.53$), Generation X fourth ($M = 7.45$), Gen Z fifth ($M =$

7.07), and Millennials last ($M = 7.05$). There is no evidence of significant differences

between generations on the issue of gun control, $F(5, 337) = 2.14$, $p = .06$, which does

not support H9.

According to the data, there is no significant generational difference when it

comes to the issue of abortion when voting for president. The Silent Generation scored

the issue the lowest of importance ($M = 3.5$) and Gen Z scored the issue of abortion the

highest ($M = 8.62$). In between were Millennials ($M = 7.61$), Baby Boomers ($M = 7.5$),

and Generation X ($M = 6.63$).

The Silent Generation placed the highest level of importance on the issue of environment ($M = 8.5$), and those who answered "I don't know" placed the least importance on the issue ($M = 7.2$). In between the Silent Generation and those who answered "I don't know" are Baby Boomers ($M = 7.96$), Generation X ($M = 8.1$), Millennials ($M = 8.15$), and Gen Z ($M = 7.43$). There are no significant differences supporting H9, $F(5, 337) = 1.60$, $p = .16$, but it is important to note that the youngest generation placed the least amount of importance on the environment besides the women who did not know what generation they belong to.

Funding for educational institutions was of great importance across all generations, showing no significant difference, $F(5, 338) = .48$, $p = 79$, which does not support H9. The Silent Generation showed the lowest levels of importance regarding the issue of education institutional funding ($M = 8.0$). Those who responded "I don't know" ranked the issue second lowest ($M = 8.19$), next is Baby Boomers ($M = 8.25$), then Generation X ($M = 8.32$), and Millennials ($M = 8.57$) and Gen Z ($M = 8.57$) view the issue of educational funding of the highest importance when voting for the president of the United States.

Like educational issues, economic issues rank of high importance across all generations. Interestingly, Gen Z, the youngest generation, ranked economic issues at the highest level of importance ($M = 8.93$), and Millennials ranked economic issues at the lowest importance ($M = 7.58$). In between Millennials and Gen Z were the Silent Generation ($M = 8.0$), Gen X ($M = 8.35$), those who responded "I don't know" ($M = 8.37$), and Baby Boomers ($M = 8.7$). These results do not support H9 and show that the economy is a fairly agreed upon issue of importance across all generations.

The issue of immigration was averaged the third least important issue across all generations ($M = 7.93$). The difference between generational attitudes is not significant, $F(5, 338) = .13$, $p = .99$, which does not support H9. Baby Boomers reported the least level of importance ($M = 7.83$), and Gen Z reported the highest level of importance ($M = 8.21$). In between Baby Boomers and Gen Z are those who answered "I don't know" ($M = 7.88$), Generation X ($M = 7.96$), Millennials ($M = 7.98$), and the Silent Generation ($M = 8.0$).

Healthcare, like economy and education, was viewed as a very important issue by all generations ($M = 9.06$). Gen Z ranked the issue highest ($M = 9.21$). After Gen Z, Baby Boomers ranked healthcare at a high level ($M = 9.19$), then Millennials ($M = 9.1$), then Generation X ($M = 9.06$), then the Silent Generation ($M = 9.0$), and last, those who answered "I don't know" ($M = 8.78$). Though there are slight differences, the evidence still does not support H9, $F(5, 338) = .69$, $p = .63$.

There are significant differences in how different generations view the issue of social equality when voting for president, $F(5, 337) = 3.10$, $p < .05$, supporting H9. The Silent generation ($M = 10.0$) and Millennials ($M = 9.19$) are closely aligned, while those who answered "I don't know" ($M = 8.29$), Baby Boomers ($M = 8.33$), and Generation X ($M = 8.51$) are closely aligned. There is a significant difference between Baby Boomers and Millennials ($p < .05$), and between Millennials and those who do not know what generation they fit into ($p < .05$) It is worth pointing out that the issue of social equality is of high importance when voting for president throughout the generations described ($M = 8.67$).

The data shows that there are no significant differences regarding the importance of Supreme Court Justice appointments across generations when voting for president of the United States, $F(5, 338) = 1.39$, $p = .23$, meaning this issue does not support H9. The Silent Generation reported a higher level of importance than any other generation ($M = 10.0$). Continuing from highest of importance to least importance, the generational categories are as followed: Millennials ($M = 8.53$); Baby Boomers ($M = 8.44$); Generation X ($M = 8.08$); and those who answered "I don't know" ($M = 7.88$).

In regards to the importance of climate change when voting for president, there is a significant difference among attitudes held by different generations, $F(5, 338) = 5.47$, $p < .001$, specifically attitudes held by Baby Boomers ($M = 7.73$) and Millennials ($M = 8.82$, $p < .05$), a significant difference between Generation X ($M = 8.24$) and those who do not know which generation they identify with ($M = 7.03$), and a significant difference between Millennials and those who answered "I don't know" ($p < .001$). Gen Z ($M = 8.43$) and the Silent Generation ($M = 8.0$) had no significant differences with other generational attitudes toward climate change. This information supports H9.

The combined data show H9 was supported for some issues and not for others. While issues such as abortion, economy, and Second Amendment rights had the greatest polarization between policy opinions and generational differences, issues such as education, immigration, and healthcare had minimal discrepancies (see Chart 1).
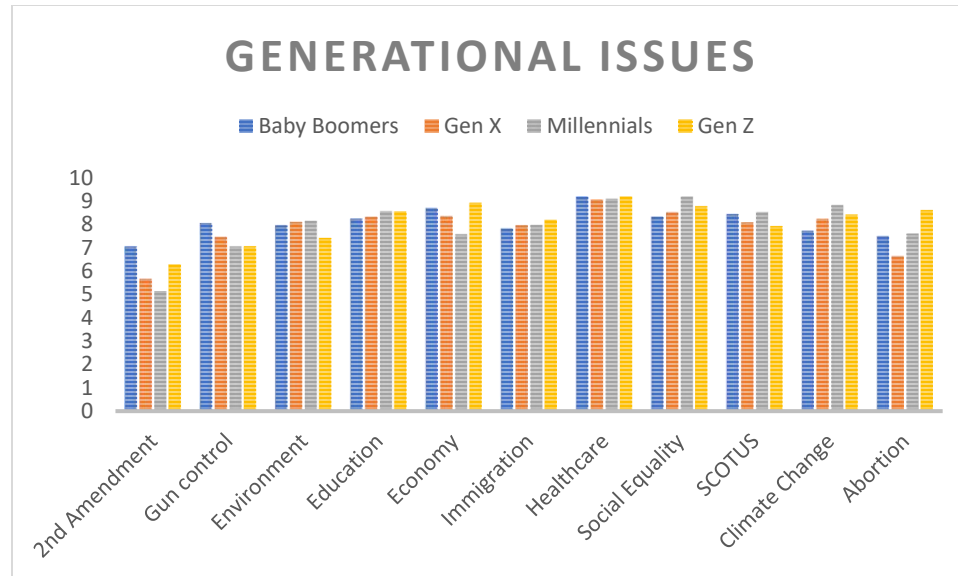
Chart 1

Study 2

Interview questions and data collected after the inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States were not age, race, or county specific; however, many participants included narratives related to those aspects even though the researcher did not intend to address them. Ages of the participants ranged from 20s to 70s, and perhaps older. Only one participant identified as biracial, while some identified as White, and some did not specify. Many participants spoke of their location, which included Eastern Kentucky, Southwest Virginia, and Western parts of North Carolina. While participants were not directly asked about their party affiliation, all alluded to identifying as a member of one of the three major parties: Republican, Democrat, and Independent. No one who participated in this study identified as a Republican, and only one expressed support for Donald Trump. For confidentiality purposes, all participants' names have been removed and replaced with Participant 1, Participant 2. . . Participant 12.

When asked how much the government should take charge of protecting individuals, the environment, and culture, the general theme presented and answer to

RQ1 was essentially, more than they do. The interview question was segmented into three areas of focus: people, the environment, and Appalachian culture. Eight participants explained that they do rely on the government to protect the environment through agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, but many held resentments toward their efforts and thought they could do more. Participant 10 stated, "Anymore, it's hard to rely on the government. I feel like we kind of come from an area that I think is forgotten about." Participants 4 and 12 told stories about trying to expose environmental dangers such as illegal waste dumping into rivers and air dropping pesticide sprays to local government leaders and committees with little to no response. Participant 12 pointed to problems with absentee land ownership involving Christmas tree farmers, specifically Bottomly Evergreens, located in North Carolina, negatively impacting her land, community, health, and personal relationships.

Cultural and personal aspects were a little more difficult to gauge in regard to RQ1. Only two participants believed the government should have any involvement in cultural preservation, and only three said they relied on the government to protect them in terms of physical attributes, such as medical insurance and financial security. Two participants expressed the opposing view that government involvement would, and has, only counteract(ed) the goal of cultural preservation.

Only three of the eleven participants owned guns themselves, while two others mentioned their male counterparts owned them. Participant 1 owns a nine-millimeter for protection. Participant 8's explanation for owning a gun was neither for protection nor recreational purposes. She stated, "[The gun] was my great grandmother's and it got handed down to me. . . I've had it for the past couple years because I was living alone, so

my dad [felt] comfortable that I had it," alluding to a level of comfort that if she needed it

for protection, she would have access to it. The last participant to own a gun was a strong

advocate for Second Amendment rights and stated that she regularly used guns for

hunting purposes. In order to answer RQ2, further research should be conducted with a

larger sample size of gun owners.

Six participants expressed support for protecting the Second Amendment;

however, all participants of the study said there should be, at the very least, stricter

regulations on obtaining automatic weapons. Most women thought automatic weapons

should be banned entirely. Ten participants held the view that there need to be stricter

gun control laws, several mentioning mass school shootings. There were overlapping

beliefs on Second Amendment rights and gun control laws among Participants 1, 6, 8,

and 12, most of whom spoke with regards to hunting and physical protection. The overlap

in viewpoints also speaks to gun control as an issue at large, in that gun control is not

equivalent to an anti-gun attitude. Two participants spoke of the rhetoric used by the

National Rifle Association and how it is purely a point of contention concerning political

motivation and often serves as misrepresenting the Second Amendment. The findings on

gun control and Second Amendment rights concerning RQ3 suggest research that has

been done so far does not apply to Appalachian women in this case. Appalachian women

with progressive attitudes and Democratic ideals are not distinct from the traditional

Republican ideals. RQ3 can only partially be answered since there were no Republican

participants interviewed. The underlying research (Goss, 2017) on gun control and the

generalized gender specific reasoning of sympathy is reinforced by this research.

The underlying theme that can be applied to RQ4 is that Democrats are empathetic to others and financially irresponsible, while Republicans are self-centered and have conservative values. There was one participant, a self-proclaimed Democrat, who refused to say Donald Trump's name out loud and referred to him as "the other guy." She stated:

I have a brother who's just a diehard Republican, and his attitude seems like every welfare dollar comes out of his own personal wallet. He doesn't want to help anybody who can't do it for themselves. And I feel like, that's kind of how I see Republicans. [They think] you shouldn't have been born poor, you shouldn't have been born the wrong color, and I'm going to protect everything I have.

One woman, who used to identify as a Republican, but changed sometime in the Obama years, said:

Partisanship, I think, has been a flag that politicians wave in order to hide the facts. I think partisanship should go away. I really think that people are more towards the center than they like to believe. I think there are a lot of policies that Republicans would agree [on] that Democrats do, and they should do. . . The Republican Party has just gotten so bad that I can't even identify with any of it anymore, because I don't feel like it, I think it's swung so far right, and so far towards the religious and the outliers that it's not indicative of anything that I can relate to anymore.

Many participants had negative things to say about both parties, and half of them clearly stated they believe there are various issues in even participating in a two-party system.

Some of the language participants used when describing the Democratic Party include

whiney, young, caring, do-nothing, racist, liberal, and socialist-minded. Some of the

language used in the description of the Republican Party include conservative, traditional,

religious, racist, older, gun advocates, self-centered, rich and/or wealthy, exploitive, rude,

conspiracy thinkers, and wanting less government control. In speaking to the importance

of belonging to a political party, only two thought it was important.

A major limitation regarding RQ5 is that there was only one Donald Trump

supporter of the 12 women interviewed. That being said, there was evidence of cognitive

dissonance in her reasoning behind choosing Donald Trump over Joe Biden. When asked

about contributing factors that led to her voting behavior, she stated:

Personally, I didn't care for any of the candidates that I was given [a choice of]. I

felt like we could have done better. I understand that I probably should have voted

in one of the primaries if I wanted someone better, but you know, I'm one where I

easily go with the flow. I did end up voting for Trump only because I really didn't

trust Biden. And I think it goes along with Kamala Harris, you know, you get

those bad vibes from people. I'm all for us breaking the glass ceiling with having

a woman as a Vice President, let alone a woman who's part of a minority group. I

think that's something we need, but she just seemed way too power hungry and it

gave me a bad vibe. And I kind of had that feeling if something happens with

Biden, she would be our President, and so that's kind of why I went with Trump

even though, again, I didn't care for Trump.

One can see dissonance occurring in the language used regarding voting in the

primary election, breaking the glass ceiling with Kamala Harris, and the reiteration in the

last sentence that she did not care for Trump. Though this participant stated her preferred

presidential candidate was Joe Jorgansen of the Libertarian Party, the reasons she gave

for abandoning support for a candidate included sexual assault and harassment

allegations as well as illegal activity, which ironically, are all applicable to Donald

Trump.

Using the previous testimony to help answer RQ6, four other participants

indicated that they would lose support for their preferred presidential candidate if the

candidate was accused of or participated in any kind of sexual misconduct including

infidelity, sexual assault, sexual harassment, or rape. Three participants said lying would

make them abandon their candidate. Other themes that occurred regarding RQ6 include

the attempt to restrict women's rights, climate change, racism, changing policy stances,

and poor manners.

All participants identified themselves as Appalachian from a regional standpoint

and length of time living in the region, while only one pointed to cultural factors. When

asked about how they think non-Appalachians view them, or Appalachians in general, all

but one spoke to Appalachian stereotypes, the most prevalent stereotypes being lack of

education and dialect (i.e., accent). Ironically, half of the participants in this study had

achieved a degree higher than a bachelor's. No participants expressed negative views of

Appalachians from their own point of view; most even expressed pride in belonging to

the culture. Participant 12 elaborated on how her views of Appalachians have changed

since she moved to the region when she was a teenager. When talking about her relatives

that already lived in rural Southwest Virginia when she moved there, she said, "You

know, they had never experienced the things that I did. I mean, they'd never ridden on an

elevator, and some of them still used outhouses. And so, it just made me feel

embarrassed that this is where I had to be, [where] I was forced to be." As far as finding

an answer to RQ7, it is tough to measure the levels of marginalization individuals felt,

but it is clear that many knew of the negative perceptions that have been historically

placed upon Appalachians, a perception they felt unjust, untrue, or not generalizable.

Results, therefore, are inconclusive and suggest that more research needs to be done

regarding how people view marginalization and what constitutes feeling marginalized.

To give a multi-faceted answer to a multi-faceted research question (RQ8), the

traditional news source (i.e., print and/or mass media) that was most utilized by

participants was the *New York Times*, followed by [in order] NPR, NBC, CNN, BBC,

The Washington Post, Politico, CSPAN, PBS, Huffington Post, and MSNBC. The non-

traditional news sources (i.e., social media) include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and

Google. One participant outwardly expressed she goes out of her way to not watch Fox

News, Newsmax, or OAN. Concerning credibility, news sources that have been in

business longer and started as print newspapers were considered to be the most

trustworthy, such as the *New York Times.* Another major attribute to trustworthy news

among multiple participants was the ability to cross-reference stories; if two or more

news sources had the same story, they could trust the information. Two participants

admitted they receive news from sources they know will confirm their biases, and three

said they try to receive news from a variety of sources that would go against their biases.

While two participants admitted their biases, it should be noted, again, that all but one of

the participants expressed support for more left-leaning ideals, indicating these results are

not generalizable to more right-leaning, or even potentially politically moderate

Appalachian women. All participants said they participated on Facebook and all said the information found on Facebook is untrustworthy. Participant 4 said that she does not believe the information found on Facebook regardless of the fact-checking measures that have been put in place over the past several months.

Discussion

Study 1

One of the more interesting findings was about Second Amendment rights and gun control. H1 was focused on the correlation between gender and guns. The data partially supported H1 but indicated that guns are more of a partisan issue than a gender issue. Republican Appalachian women viewed both Second Amendment rights and gun control to be very important issues; however, Democratic Appalachian women viewed gun control significantly higher in importance than the issue of protecting Second Amendment rights. It is important to note the difference between the issues; supporting gun control indicates there are beliefs that it should be more difficult to obtain guns, while supporting Second Amendment rights is more about advocating for "the right to keep and bear arms" as set forth by the United States Constitution. The literature (Goss, 2017) suggests that sympathy is the main reason why members of both parties view gun control similarly, but not Second Amendment rights.

There was a strong positive correlation between Appalachian identity and Appalachian pride among the respondents of the survey. Mostly, participants, regardless of who they planned to vote for, scored relatively high on both Appalachian identity and pride, though there was a significant difference showing Trump supporters felt slightly stronger than Biden supporters about being Appalachian. The main point to take away

from this particular area of the study is that most Appalachian women embrace their cultural identity.

Many areas of focus regarding the hypotheses of *Study 1* were straight forward and results were predictable, such as H3 (i.e., Republican Appalachian women are more likely to support Donald Trump than Democratic Appalachian women). Since there had been no prior research done on the subgroup, hence the gap in literature, it was necessary to accurately test the more obvious hypotheses. Another somewhat obvious finding was that the data supported H5; Trump supporters felt he represented what they believed in, while Biden supporters strongly disagreed. There was also a significant difference between Trump supporters and third-party voters, and those who did not know who they would vote for.

A strong positive correlation occurred between voting and partisanship. There were very few survey respondents who planned to vote for the candidate opposite their party, as many of the media and polls suggested leading up to the 2020 election. It is interesting that Independents were more likely to vote for Biden, and those who preferred not to answer which party they were affiliated with were more likely to vote for Trump. This information could be applied to the idea of shy Trump supporters, but further research needs to be done to determine if responding with "prefer not to answer" speaks to a deeper psychological intention.

When it comes to the environment, it is clear partisanship plays a role in the level of importance. Republicans rated environmental issues the least important out of 10 issues to consider when voting for president of the United States. Democrats ranked environmental issues as third most important, behind social equality and healthcare.

There is evidence that partially supports H4 with the issue of environment. The reason H4 is only partially supported is because the issue of educational funding was not split between parties. Both Republican and Democratic Appalachian women placed about the same amount of importance on the issue of education. Continuing with policy differences, unlike H4, H5 was fully supported by the data. The economy was ranked higher than any other issue for Republican Appalachian women, and seventh most important for Democratic Appalachian women.

One of the most notable findings regarding policy issues was that most respondents answered that all issues were relatively important. The only issue that fell below five on a 10-point scale was Second Amendment rights for Democrats. Even though we see high levels of importance for most issues, partisanship shows polarization. The really important issues for one party are the least important issues for the opposing party and vice versa.

I hypothesized that Biden supporters would feel like part of the minority in Appalachia, based on the historically overwhelmingly Republican population in the region. This study's findings did not support H8. I found that most Biden supporters view themselves as part of the majority by 65.5%, still less than the 95.5% of Trump supporters who believe they are part of the majority. Future research would prove beneficial to understand if geographical location, selective exposure, or any other significant factors play a role in perception of majority and minority.

The generational differences among public policy opinions could be the most interesting findings throughout this study. It is important to note the limitations regarding this section of the research. Only two survey participants identified as belonging to the

Silent Generation, or those who were born before 1946, and there was an unusually high

response rate of people who did not know which generation they belonged to. For the

purposes of this discussion, the two previously mentioned groups will be left out since we

failed to obtain generalizable data regarding those groups. It is worth mentioning that the

responses of those who answered "I don't know" to the question of which generation they

belonged to aligned most closely with the answers given by Baby Boomers (born from

1946-1964).

The largest polarization of attitudes on public policy issues occurred between

Millennials (born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s) and Baby Boomers. These

two groups were polarized on climate change, economy, social equality, Second

Amendment rights, and gun control. The closest attitude similarities between these two

groups were seen regarding healthcare, abortion, and Supreme Court Justice

appointments. Millennials ranked Second Amendment rights the lowest issue of

importance, and social equality highest. Baby Boomers ranked healthcare the most

important issue and Second Amendment rights the lowest. Even though Millennials and

Baby Boomers both ranked Second Amendment rights as the lowest issue of importance,

it remains the issue they are most polarized on.

There was a lower response rate of those identifying as Gen Z (born in or after the

mid-1990s) than participants who belong to the Baby Boomer generation, Millennial

Generation, and Generation X (born between 1965 and the mid-1980s). Gen Z generally

reported high importance levels for most issues except environmental issues, which the

group ranked lower than all other generations. The data shows Gen Z's attitudes are

stronger than all other generations on four issues: abortion, healthcare, immigration, and the economy.

The trend that stands out most about Generation X is that their level of importance was somewhere in the middle for all issues except one, abortion. The attitude the data portrays regarding Generation X and abortion is significantly lower than other generations.

The data indicates that there are many issues agreed upon by multiple generations. H9 is not fully supported because there were only significant differences of attitudes throughout all generational groups among Second Amendment rights, social equality, and climate change. For all these issues, Baby Boomers and Millennials are polarized, and Generation X and Gen Z are closely aligned. Further research should explore these significant differences considering that, most likely, those who identify as Gen Z are children of Generation X, and those who identify as Millennials are children of Baby Boomers.

Study 2

Appalachian women overwhelmingly identified as Appalachian based on geographic location, and most were aware of the negative stereotypes that have been placed on the culture as a whole. It is important to point out that some participants who had moved to the area, even after living in the region for decades, still used terminology that reinforces an insider/outsider dichotomy. Language such as "they and they're" instead of "we and we're" suggests those who have not lived in the Appalachian region from birth view themselves as outsiders.

As stated in the literature review, women who own guns for protection purposes do not necessarily affiliate with a specific political party, but those who own guns for recreational purposes tend to affiliate with more right leaning, or Republican, parties. Considering there were no participants in this study who identified as belonging to such party, it is not surprising to see a lack of strong support for protecting the Second Amendment in the data. Unlike in *Study 1*, the in-depth interviews suggest gun control and Second Amendment rights are not mutually exclusive issues. In the eyes of Appalachian women, gun control does not equal an anti-gun sentiment, and supporting the Second Amendment does not mean an automatic weapon free-for-all. Most women interviewed were on the same page about needing more strict regulations when it comes to owning a gun, and that there is almost no situation in which an automatic weapon should be used and/or necessary. It is notable that this research was done before two mass shootings, one in Denver and one in Georgia, that occurred in March 2021 and recent events had no influence on the responses of participants. The news sources deemed most credible by interview participants are those that have been in business the longest, and the credibility of news stories depends on whether they can be cross-referenced among multiple sources. Though all participants participate in social media sites and gather news from those platforms, very few women found the information found on those sites, specifically Facebook, to be credible, regardless of fact-checking. Fox News, OAN, and Newsmax were considered to be the least credible news sources.

Almost all participants had negative things to say about both Democratic and Republican parties, and many viewed the two-party system to be outdated and problematic. The main characteristics described referring to the Republican Party were

conservativism and self-centeredness, and some view the party as unrecognizable compared to its characteristics previous to the Trump era. The main characteristics participants placed on the Democratic Party included caring for others and being financially irresponsible. Many participants were hesitant to identify with a particular party, but most identified more so with Democratic ideals.

Only one participant had a completely positive view of Joe Biden, but 11 out of the 12 participants thought he was a better option than Donald Trump. The one Trump supporter also believed Trump's character was lacking and admitted that he was not her most desired candidate, but she did not want to feel as though her vote was wasted. Character issues outweighed policy issues concerning the likability of a candidate. Cognitive dissonance was apparent in almost all participants' decision-making process regarding their voting behavior in the 2020 presidential election. All participants expressed optimism and excitement in having the first female vice president in United States history, regardless of their views of Kamala Harris. Overall, attitudes about Kamala Harris were generally positive with the exception of one participant, who stated "she gave her a bad vibe."

When asked about conflict within families and people they were close to, participants had answers on opposite ends of the spectrum. Over half of the participants stated that their families and friends held very similar views to their own, while the rest indicated there were frequent disagreements, sometimes leading to damaged relationships. Many of those who had opposing views within their circles rarely talked politics. There was one participant who said even though her family mostly had political views similar to hers, they still argued a great deal.

The results from *Study 1* concerning policy issues closely align with the depictions of both Republican and Democratic parties as seen in the results from *Study 2.* This indicates that opinions on policy issues have underlying reasoning that relates to party-specific values and attitudes. For example, the issue of social equality, which, according to the data from *Study 1,* is higher on the scale of importance for Democrats than Republicans, correlates with the qualitative data from *Study 2.* One of the themes regarding perception of Democrats is that they are empathetic and caring, sometimes to a fault. Similarly, data from *Study 1* indicate the perception of characteristics of the Republican Party and policy issues are closely aligned. Most participants in *Study 2* described Republicans as fiscally conservative and more responsible with money, which coincides with the high level of importance placed on economic issues in *Study 1.*

Sexual assault, lying, and women's rights were among the top reasons why participants would lose support for their desired candidate. Several participants referenced to the "job they were elected to do" and if they could not do their job, they did not deserve the support of the American people. Local government was a source of contention regarding political and cultural representation. A general theme lies in the distrust of government and avoidance behavior exhibited by locally elected officials. No participants believe the government will protect them, the environment, or their culture based on their past experiences; however, almost all of them believe they should and that they should be held to higher expectations.

No one who participated in *Study 2* thought Donald Trump handled the transfer of power in the White House in a positive way. Words such as horrible, disgraceful, and embarrassing were used in multiple responses regarding leadership and the transfer of

power to the Biden administration. Many participants also suggested the Biden

administration will have a hard time achieving party-driven policy goals due to the very

small majority Democrats have in Congress. Further, several participants who affiliate

more so with the Democratic Party expressed concern and worry about losing seats in

Congress in the next primary election even though they reside in primarily red districts

and counties. It is notable that the research questions were created before the insurrection

attempt on the Capitol by Trump supporters on January 6, 2021. The theoretical

framework of this research can be both supported and dismissed. Many aspects of

standpoint theory are reinforced by the data collected in these studies. Appalachian

women do not have or project generalizable values, beliefs, or political opinions across a

single-axis spectrum. Being an Appalachian woman, as many media and stereotypes

suggest, does not translate to being a White, Republican, uneducated voter. In fact, the

findings from this research show quite the opposite, and therefore bolster MGT.

If one explores MGT through a political affiliation lens, proof of marginalization

occurs regarding more left-leaning Appalachian women who attempt to portray an

accurate depiction of what could be considered unpopular views. This claim stems from

the overwhelmingly abundant participation of Democratically minded women who

participated in this research. The feeling of being silenced could be attributed to a desire

to make their voices heard in an area that has consistently shown conservative voting

patterns and behaviors. This idea indicates that group has previously felt suppressed. On

the other hand, MGT states that people belonging to a marginalized group are less likely

to speak out in a world where they feel dominated by others. If one looks at MGT

through the traditional gender lens, the results of this study could be interpreted as the

more conservative group is marginalized and hesitant to voice their views. As with many

critical theories, the application is very situational. Several factors should be considered

when addressing the connection of this research to standpoint theory and MGT: the

application of gender characteristics to political affiliation, research participation

hesitancy, trust and/or distrust of academic indoctrination, and the multi-faceted

perspectives of critical theories.

If one looks at the quantitative data and research participation in *Study 1*, they can

somewhat predict the results and participation regarding the qualitative data in *Study 2.* In

both studies, the majority of responses were those of Democratic-leaning, postsecondary-

educated women. The data from *Study 2* directly supports many areas of *Study 1,*

including the influence of party affiliation with policy opinion. An interesting finding,

and major point, of the two-stage study is that high levels of Appalachian pride can be

seen across the entire political spectrum. As with most mixed methods approaches, one

method is used to reinforce and expand on the findings of the previous method used, or at

least expose limitations and highlight areas that need further research.

Limitations

The most consequential limitation of this study was obtaining a well-balanced,

easily generalizable sample size. This was somewhat expected as a snowball sample was

used to try and reach as many people as possible through social networking. There were

large gaps in generational identification as well as race and party affiliation. There were

more participants who identified as White Appalachian women belonging to either the

Millennial Generation, Generation X, or the Baby Boomer Generation. Concerns

regarding gaps in political affiliation are not believed to have affected this study. The

racial gaps regarding the sample are somewhat reflective of the demographic make-up of rural Appalachia, but more research needs to be done on the multi-faceted racial aspect of political influence in the region.

The fact that, in both studies, Democratic and/or left-leaning educated Appalachian women were more likely to participate in research is somewhat telling in itself and deserves an entirely separate line of research. While the results of this research may or may not be as generalizable to Appalachian women across party lines, they reinforce that the stereotypes that have beset Appalachians throughout a long history are not accurate nor generalizable.

References

Anderson, M. (2016, November 7). *Social media causes some users to rethink their views on an issue.* Pew Research Center. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/07/social-media-causes-some-users-to-rethink-their-views-on-an-issue/

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *50*(2), 179-211.

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1975). A Bayesian analysis of attribution processes. *Psychological Bulletin, 82*(2), 261-277. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076477

Albright, J. N., & Hurd, N. M. (2020). Marginalized identities, Trump-related distress, and the mental health of underrepresented college students. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 65*(3/4), 381-396. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12407

Aruguete, N. (2017). The agenda setting hypothesis in the new media environment. *Comunicación y Sociedad, 28*(28), 35-58. https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/346/34649149003.pdf

Appalachian Regional Commission. (n.d.). *About the Appalachian region.* https://www.arc.gov/about-the-appalachian-region/

Badaan, V., & Jost, J. T. (2017). *Religiosity, sectarian ingroup bias, and system justification in Lebanon.* Manuscript in preparation.

Bakshy, E., Messing, S., & Adamic, A. L. (2015). Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook. *Science, 348*(6239), 1130-1132. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaa1160

Bankston, W. B., Thompson, C. Y., Jenkins, Q. A., & Forsyth, C. J. (1990). The
     influence of fear of crime, gender, and southern culture on carrying firearms for
     protection. *The Sociological Quarterly*, *31*(2), 287-305.
     https://doi.org/10.1111//j.1533-8525.1990.tb00329.x

Barberá, P., Casas, A., Nagler, J., Egan, P., Bonneau, R., Jost, J., & Tucker, J. (2019).
     Who leads? Who follows? Measuring issue attention and agenda setting by
     legislators and the mass public using social media data. *American Political
     Science Review, 113*(4), 883-901. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000352

Bartlett, J. (2014). Populism, social media and democratic strain. In C. Sandelind (Ed.),
     European populism and winning the immigration debate (pp. 99-116).
     Scandbook. https://fores.se/poplulism/

Bell, S. E., & Braun, Y. A. (2010). Coal, identity, and the gendering of environmental
     justice activism in central Appalachia. *Gender & Society*, *24*(6), 794-813.
     https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210387277

Bell, S. E. (2010). *Fighting king coal: The barriers to grassroots environmental justice
     movement participation in Central Appalachia*. (Publication No. 816357349)
     [Doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses
     Global.

Blevins, J. M. (2012). The council on Appalachian women: Short lived by long lasting.
     [Master's Thesis, East Tennessee State University]. Electronic Theses and
     Dissertations. https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/1493/

Brashear, I. (2014). Half acceptance hinders economic transition. *Journal of Appalachian
     Studies, 20*(2), 132. https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.20.2.0132

Cameron, W. S. (2005). The genesis and justification of feminist standpoint theory in

Hegel and Lukacs. *Dialogue & Universalism, 15*(3/4), 19-41.

https://doi.org/10.5840/du2005153/443

Casero-Ripollés, A., Feenstra, R. A., & Tormey, S. (2016). Old and new media logics in

an electoral campaign. *International Journal of Press/Politics, 21*(3), 378.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216645340

Cassese, E. C., & Barnes, T. D. (2018). Reconciling sexism and women's support for

Republican candidates: A look at gender, class, and whiteness in the 2012 and

2016 presidential races. *Political Behavior, 41*(3), 677-700.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-9468-2

Center for American Women and Politics. (n.d.) Research inventory.

https://www.politicalparity.org/research/research-inventory/

Cichocka, A., & Jost, J. T. (2014). Stripped of illusions? Exploring system justification

processes in capitalist and post-Communist societies. *International Journal of

Psychology, 49,* 6-29. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12011

Coe, K., & Griffin, R. A. (2020). Marginalized identity invocation online: The case of

President Donald Trump on Twitter. *Social Media + Society, 6*.

https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120913979

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality*. John Wiley & Sons.

Creamer, H. L. (2019). Collectivism in central Appalachia: Educational and career

implications. [Master's thesis, Graduate School of Education and Professional

Development]. Marshall Digital Scholar Scholarship, Publishing and

Preservation. https://mds.marshall.edu/etd/1214/

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: Black feminist

    critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist

    politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989,* 139-168.

Davis, D. (2008, May 20). Why don't those hillbillies like Obama?

    http://dividethemovie.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Salon-Hillbillies-Dont-

    Like-Obama.pdf

DeGraffinreid, C., Paskett, E. D., Bernardo, B. M., Washington, C., Fisher, J. L., Young,

    G. S., & Huerta, T. R. (2019). Correlates of rural, Appalachian, and community

    identity in the CITIES cohort. *The Journal of Rural Health, 35*(2), 167-175.

    https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12347

Devito, M. A., Walker, A. M., Birnholtz, J., Ringland, K., Macapagal, K., Kraus, A.,

    Munson, S., Liang, C., & Saksono, H. (2019, November). Social technologies for

    digital wellbeing among marginalized communities. In *Conference Companion*

    Publication of the 2019 on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social

    Computing (pp. 449-454). https://doi.org/10.1145/3311957.3359442

Dirilen-Gumus, O. (2011). Differences in system justification with respect to gender,

    political conservatism, socio-economic status and religious fundamentalism.

    Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences, 30, 2607-2611.

    http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.510

Eller, R. D. (1982). *Miners, millhands, and mountaineers: Industrialization of the*

    Appalachian South, 1880-1930. Univ. of Tennessee Press.

Elmer, G. (2013). Live research: Twittering an election debate. *New Media & Society,*

    15(1), 18-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812457328

Engesser, S., Ernst, N., Esser, F., & Büchel, F. (2017). Populism and social media: How

  politicians spread a fragmented ideology. *Information, Communication & Society,*

  20(8), 1109-1126. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697

Fox, J., & Holt, L. F. (2018). Fear of isolation and perceived affordances: The spiral of

  silence on social networking sites regarding police discrimination. *Mass*

  Communication and Society, *21*, 533-554.

  https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2018.1442480

Goss, K. A. (2017). The socialization of conflict and its limits: Gender and gun politics in

  America. *Social Science Quarterly*, *98*(2), 455-470.

  https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12419

Griffin, E. A., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. G. (2019). *A first look at communication*

  theory. McGraw-Hill Education.

Haight, A. D., & González-Espada, W. J. (2009). *Scientific literacy in Central*

  Appalachia through contextually relevant experiences: The "Reading the River"

  project. https://scholarworks.moreheadstate.edu/msu_faculty_research/444/

Harding, S., & Wood, J. (2009). Standpoint theory. In *A first look at communication*

  theory (pp. 441-453)*.* McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Harding, S. (2009). Standpoint theories: Productively controversial. *Hypatia, 24*(4), 192-

  200. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20618189

Hejny, J. (2018). The Trump administration and environmental policy: Reagan

  redux? *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, *8*(2), 197-211.

  https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-018-0470-0

Helton, L., & Keller, S. (2010). Appalachian women: A study of resiliency assets and

cultural values. *Journal of Social Service Research, 36*(2), 151-161.

https://doi.org/10.1080/01488370903578124

Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online

Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2*(1). https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-

0919.1014

Horowitz, J., & Anderson, C. (2009). *Guns, democracy, and the insurrectionist idea*.

University of Michigan Press.

http://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/30235

Jones, L. (1977). Appalachian values and the future. *Appalachian Heritage, 5*(3), 50-58.

Jones, L. (1994). *Appalachian values*. Jesse Stuart Foundation.

Jost, J. T., Langer, M., Badaan, V., Azevedo, F., Etchezahar, E., Ungaretti, J., & Hennes,

E. P. (2017). Ideology and the limits of self-interest: System justification

motivation and conservative advantages in mass politics. *Translational Issues in

Psychological Science*, *3*(3), e1. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tps0000127

Kelly, K. L. (2015). Engaging rural Appalachian high school girls in college science

laboratories to foster STEM-related career interest. *Journal of Microbiology &

Biology Education, 17*(1), 77.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4798822/

Kellner, D. (2009). Media spectacle and media events: Some critical reflections. *Media

Events in a Global Age,* 76-91.

https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/2009_Kellner_MediaEventsJul

yFINAL.pdf

Konrad, A. M., (2018). Denial of racism and the Trump presidency. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 37*(1), 14-30. https://doi.org/10.1108.EDI-07-2017-0155

Kornbluh, K., Goldstein, A., & Weiner, E. (2020, October 12). New study by digital new deal finds engagement with deceptive outlets higher on Facebook today than run-up to 2016 election. *The German Marshall Fund of the United States.* https://www.gmfus.org/blog/2020/10/12/new-study-digital-new-deal-finds-engagement-deceptive-outlets-higher-facebook-today?fbclid=IwAR1QrutEJird6K7bWcYoqAzsMCqeQBsZiGPGPQLMant9SCrKEa_9EsBst40

Ludke, R. L., Obermiller, P. J., Rademacher, E. W., & Turner, S. K. (2010). Identifying Appalachian adults: An empirical study. *Appalachian Journal*, *38*(1), 36-45.

Masip, P., Suau-Martinez, J., & Ruiz-Caballero, C. (2018). Questioning the selective exposure to news: Understanding the impact of social networks on political news consumption. *American Behavioral Scientist, 62*(3), 300-319. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217708586

Mason, C. (2011). From textbooks to tea parties: An Appalachian antecedent of anti-Obama rebellion. *West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies*, *5*(2), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1353/wvh.2011.0020

McCauley, D. V. (1995). *Appalachian mountain religion: A history.* University of Illinois Press.

McCauley, X. (2014). Culture isn't everything. *Mutuality, 21*(2), 12-14.

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda setting function of the mass media.

    Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(2), 176-187. https://doi.org/10.1086/267990

Meeks, L. (2018). Appealing to the 52%: Exploring Clinton's and Trump's appeals to

    women voters during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *International Journal of*

    Communication, 2527+.

    https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A560926677/LitRC?u=viva_radford&sid=LitRC&

    xid=b1b9cad8

Mihailidis, P., & Viotty, S. (2017). Spreadable spectacle in digital culture: Civic

    expression, fake news, and the role of media literacies in "post-fact" society.

    American Behavioral Scientist, 61(4), 441-454.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217701217

Monk-Turner, E. (2020). White evangelical activism and the gender divide in the 2016

    presidential election. *Society*, *57*(1), 30-40. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-019-

    00438-6

Nilsson, A., & Jost, J. T. (2017). *Revisiting polarity theory: Humanism, normativism, and*

    the bipolar structure of left-right ideology in the U.S. and Sweden. Manuscript

    submitted for publication.

Ortiz, J., Young, A., Myers, M. D., Bedeley, R. T., Carbaugh, D., Chughtai, H.,

    Davidson, E., George, J., Gordon, S., Grimshaw, E., Leidner, D. E., Pulver, M., &

    Wigdoor, A. (2019). Giving voice to the voiceless: The use of digital technologies

    by marginalized groups. *Communications of the Association for Information*

    Systems, *45*(1). https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.04502

Pacilli, M. G., Taurino, A., Jost, J. T., & van der Toorn, J. (2011). System justification,

     right-wing conservativism, and internalized homophobia: Gay and lesbian

     attitudes toward same-sex parenting in Italy. *Sex Roles, 65,* 580-595.

     http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9969-5

Pascoe, E. A., & Richman, L. S. (2009). Perceived discrimination and health: A meta-

     analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 135*(4), 531-554.

     https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016059

Paolino, P. (1995). Group-salient issues and group representation: Support for women

     candidates in the 1992 Senate elections. *American Journal of Political Science,*

     39(2), 294-313. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111614

Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the internet is hiding from you*. Penguin.

Perrin, A., & Anderson, M. (2019, April 10). Share of U.S. adults using social media,

     including Facebook, is most unchanged since 2018. *Pew Research Center.*

     https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-

     social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/

PEW Research. (2012, November 29). *Politics + internet/tech: Our research.*

     https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2012/22/29/politics-internettech-our-

     research/

Pollard, K., & Jacobsen, L. A. (2019). The Appalachian region: A data overview from the

     2013-2017 American Community Survey. Chartbook. *Appalachian Regional*

     Commission. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596266.pdf

Redlawsk, D. P., Civettini, A. J., & Emmerson, K. M. (2010). The affective tipping point:

    Do motivated reasoners ever "get it"? *Political Psychology, 31*(4), 563-569.

    https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2010.00772.x

Schaffner, B. F., MacWilliams, M., & Nteta, T. (2018). Understanding white polarization

    in the 2016 vote for president: The sobering role of racism and sexism. *Political*

    Science Quarterly, *133*(1), 9-34. https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12737

Schill, D., & Hendricks, J. A. (2018). Discourse, disruption, and digital democracy:

    Political communication in the 2016 presidential campaign. In D. Schill & J. A.

    Hendricks (Eds.), *The presidency and social media: Discourse, disruption, and*

    digital democracy in the 2016 presidential election (pp. 3-36). Routledge.

Scott, S. L. (1996). Drudges, helpers and team players: Oral historical accounts of farm

    work in Appalachian Kentucky. *Rural Sociology*, *61*(2), 209-226.

    https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.1996.tb00617.x

Scott, S. L., McSpirit, S., Breheny, P., & Howell, B. M. (2012). The long-term effects of

    a coal waste disaster on social trust in Appalachian Kentucky. *Organization &*

    Environment, 25(4), 402-418. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/1086026612467983

Setzler, M., & Yanus, A. B. (2018). Why did women vote for Donald Trump? *PS,*

    Political Science & Politics, *51*(3), 523-527.

    http://acme.highpoint.edu/~msetzler/Why_Did_Women_Vote_for_Donald_.pdf

Shaw, M. E. M. D. L., Weaver, D. H., & McCombs, M. (1997). *Communication and*

    democracy: Exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory.

    Psychology Press.

Shaw, T. C., DeYoung, A. J., & Rademacher, E. W. (2004). Educational attainment in

    Appalachia: Growing with the nation, but challenges remain. *Journal of*

    Appalachian Studies, *10*(3), 307-329. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41446642

Smith, A. (2017, January 12). Record shares of Americans now own smartphones have

    home broadband. *Pew Research Center.* www.pewresearch.org/fact-

    tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/

Steele, R., & Jeffers, M. (2020). The future of Appalachian identity in an age of

    polarization. *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, *26*(1), 57-75.

    https://doi.org/10.5406/jappastud.26.1.0057

Sundar, S. S. (2016, December 8). *There's a psychological reason for the appeal of fake*

    news. New Republic. https://newrepublic.com/article/139230/theres-

    psychological-reason-appeal-fake-news

Sutton, D. (2005). "Living poor and voting rich" in Appalachia. *Appalachian Journal,*

    32(30), 340-351. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40934420

U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *About the Appalachian Region.* https://www.census.gov/

Vanderpool, R. C., Huang, Bin, & Shelton, B. J. (2007). Seeking cancer information: An

    Appalachian perspective. *Journal of Health Disparities Research & Practice,*

    2(1), 81-102. https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/jhdrp/vol2/iss1/7

Van Kessel, S., & Castelein, R. (2016). Shifting the blame. Populist politicians' use of

    Twitter as a tool of opposition. *Journal of Contemporary European Research,*

    12(2). https://www.jcer.net/index.php/jcer/article/view/709

Wehrman, J. (2016). Speaking of malaise: Trumpery & trumpeters in Appalachia.

    Appalachian Journal, 43(3/4), 155-157.

White, S. (2018). Race, religion, and Obama in Appalachia. *Social Science*

Quarterly, *100*(1), 38-59. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12550

Wolfson, J. A., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2020). Gun ownership among US

women. *Injury Prevention*, *26*(1), 49-54. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-

2018-042991

Appendix

Interview/Focus Group Questions

1. What makes you identify as Appalachian and how do you believe non-Appalachians identify Appalachians?
2. To what extent do you rely on the government and its leaders to protect you, your environment, and your culture?
3. How do you feel about guns, Second Amendment rights, and gun control?
4. What social media sites (Facebook, Parler, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) do you participate in and how trustworthy do you view the political information that is typically found on those social media sites?
5. Which news sources do you gather news from and why do you believe those sources are credible?
6. What characteristics do you believe make up both the Republican and Democratic parties and how important is partisanship to you?
7. What were the contributing factors that led to your voting behavior in the 2020 presidential election?
8. What types of disagreements, if any, occurred between you and your family concerning your political views?
9. If you could go back to election day knowing what you know now about the outcome, what do you think you would change, if anything, about your voting behavior?
10. How do you feel about Joe Biden and Kamala Harris?
11. How do you feel the Trump administration has handled leadership and the transfer of power in the White House?
12. What would your preferred presidential candidate have to do to lose your support?
13. What do you think the next four years will look like in America?

Survey Questions

Which gender do you most closely identify with?

○ Male

○ Female

What is your age?

○ Under 18

○ 18-24

○ 25-39

○ 40-59

○ 60-79

○ Over 79

Political affiliation

○ Republican

○ Democrat

○ Independent

○ Prefer not to answer

Are you registered to vote?

○ Yes

○ I don't know

○ No

Do you live in the Appalachian region?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I don't know

If you answered yes or I don't know to the previous questions, what county and state do you live in?

_____

What is the highest level of education you've completed?

○ GED

○ High school diploma

○ Vocational or trade certification

○ Associate degree

○ Bachelor's degree

○ Master's degree

○ PhD

○ Other _____

How many children do you have?

○ 0

○ 1-2

○ 3-4

○ 4-5

○ More than 5

Relationship status:

○ Single

○ Married

○ Divorced

○ Separated

What race do you most closely identify with?

○ White

○ Black or African American

○ American Indian or Alaska Native

○ Asian

○ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

○ Latino or Hispanic

○ Other _____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Values

What religious denomination, if any, are you most closely associated with?

_____

Please indicate the level of agreement you most closely identify with about the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I attend religious services regularly.	○	○	○	○	○
My faith is important to me.	○	○	○	○	○
I pray regularly.	○	○	○	○	○
There should be a clear distinction between church and state. (i.e.- religion should not be incorporated in the public school system)	○	○	○	○	○

My views about abortion are mostly associated with

○ Pro Life

○ Pro Choice

○ Prefer not to answer

○ I don't know

Please indicate the level of agreement you most closely identify with about the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Having an abortion is the same as killing a human life.	○	○	○	○	○
Abortion should be illegal.	○	○	○	○	○
Having an abortion should be a woman's choice.	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate the level of agreement you most closely identify with about the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
There should be stricter regulations on obtaining guns.	○	○	○	○	○
It is important to protect 2nd amendment rights.	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate the level of agreement you most closely identify with about the following statement.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Climate change is real.	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate the level of agreement you most closely identify with about the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The Black Lives Matter movement is important.	○	○	○	○	○
There is systemic racism in the U.S.	○	○	○	○	○

On a scale from 0-10, how important is the issue of abortion when voting for the President of the United States?

- ◯ 0

- ◯ 1

- ◯ 2

- ◯ 3

- ◯ 4

- ◯ 5

- ◯ 6

- ◯ 7

- ◯ 8

- ◯ 9

- ◯ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important are 2nd Amendment rights when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important is the issue of gun control when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important are environmental issues when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important is the issue of funding for educational institutions when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important is the economy when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important are immigration issues when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important are healthcare policies when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important is social equality when voting for the President of the United States?

- ○ 0

- ○ 1

- ○ 2

- ○ 3

- ○ 4

- ○ 5

- ○ 6

- ○ 7

- ○ 8

- ○ 9

- ○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important are Supreme Court Justice appointments when voting for the President of the United States?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how important is climate change?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

＊

Based on the previous question of how important you think climate change is, please use 50 words or less to explain the reasoning behind your answer.

_____

On a scale from 0-10, how important is having a competent president?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how competent do you believe Donald Trump is?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

On a scale from 0-10, how competent do you believe Joe Biden is?

○ 0

○ 1

○ 2

○ 3

○ 4

○ 5

○ 6

○ 7

○ 8

○ 9

○ 10

Who are you most likely to vote for in the 2020 presidential election?

○ Donald Trump

○ Joe Biden

○ Third Party

○ I don't know

Please indicate the level of agreement you most closely identify with about the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Donald Trump has done a good job stimulating the economy.	○	○	○	○	○
Donald Trump is a good communicator.	○	○	○	○	○
Donald Trump has done well handling the COVID-19 pandemic.	○	○	○	○	○
I trust Donald Trump.	○	○	○	○	○
Donald Trump's appointment of Amy Coney Barrett to fill Ruther Bader Ginsburg's seat in the Supreme Court was a good decision.	○	○	○	○	○

Do you trust the government?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I don't know

Do you think the future of American families will be better if Donald Trump stays in office for four more years?

○ Definitely yes

○ Probably yes

○ Might or might not

○ Probably not

○ Definitely not

Please choose the answer most applicable.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I identify myself as Appalachian.	○	○	○	○	○
I'm proud to be from Appalachia.	○	○	○	○	○

Out of the people you're in close proximity to in daily life, including your friends and family, how many would you say support Donald Trump as president?

○ 76-100%

○ 51-75%

○ 26-50%

○ 0-25%

Please indicate the level of agreement you most closely identify with about the following statement.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Donald Trump represents what is important to me.	○	○	○	○	○
Donald Trump serves as a voice for the causes I care about.	○	○	○	○	○

How likely are you to:

	Unlikely	Neither unlikely nor likely	Likely
Vote based on party affiliation? i.e. a solid Republican or solid Democratic ticket	○	○	○

Which generation do you most closely identify with?

○ The Silent Generation

○ Baby Boomer Generation

○ Generation X

○ Millennial Generation

○ Gen Z

○ I don't know

Do you think people belonging to generations other than yours hold different public policy opinions?

◯ Yes

◯ Maybe

◯ No

Thank you for participating in this study. If you'd like to be part of a future study, please leave your email address below.

_____