

Collectively Voting One's Culture

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis considers theoretically the institutional nature of culture and its strength as a determinant of political behavior in Southwest Virginia. Beginning with a description of the geography of Southwest Virginia and the demographics of the region's inhabitants, the thesis proceeds to outline the cultural nuances of the region that make it ripe for misunderstanding by the outside world when attempting to explain the cognitive dissonance between voting behavior and regional needs. Then the thesis explores how the culture of the region serves as its own institution that protects itself from outside forces. This phenomenon is explained through an outline of the man-made institutions which have been forged to ensure long-term political power that itself protects the institution of regional culture. Further evidence is presented through voting and demographic data that solidifies the role of culture in determining political behavior.

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### GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the role culture plays in the voting behavior of Southwest Virginians. Beginning with a description of the geography of Southwest Virginia and the demographics of the region's residents, the thesis proceeds to outline the cultural nuances of the region that make it ripe for misunderstanding by the outside world when attempting to explain the tendency of the region's voters voting against their own best interests. Then the thesis explores how the culture of the region serves as its own institution that protects itself from outside forces. This phenomenon is explained through an outline of the man-made institutions which have been forged to ensure long-term political power that itself protects the institution of regional culture. Further evidence is presented through voting and demographic data that solidifies the role of culture in determining political behavior.

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Hypothesis.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Defining and Describing Southwest Virginia .....	5
Methodology .....	16
Thesis Layout.....	17
<b>Chapter 2 The Theory</b> .....	<b>19</b>
The Institutions .....	23
<b>Chapter 3 Election Outcomes and Demographics</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Election Results (House of Delegates).....	36
Election Results (State Senate) .....	39
Election Results (Governor).....	41
Election Results (U. S. President).....	42
Election Results (U. S. Senate) .....	43
Election Results (U. S. House of Representatives) .....	44
Southwest Virginia Economy .....	47
Southwest Virginia Culture vs. National Culture .....	53
<b>Chapter 4 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>66</b>

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### **Hypothesis**

Rural areas of the United States are regularly recognized as places where the majority of voters support candidates who do not support the programs and services that are most beneficial to the financial interests of the voters. It is often noted that states with citizens who receive a relatively high percentage of public assistance overwhelmingly vote Republican<sup>1</sup>. This phenomenon would provide evidence of economic dissonance. If voters are not motivated by their pocketbook, what does motivate them? If it is not the financial benefit that the majority of voters believe they will receive by voting against their financial interests, then there must be another factor. *This thesis will consider whether culture is itself a structure that acts to influence the voting collective and serves as a determinant of voters' political preferences. This phenomenon will be explored through a review of the changing political tide of Southwest Virginia from the 2004 Presidential and Congressional elections to the 2012 Congressional and Presidential elections and then the thesis is further solidified through an overview of the 2016 Presidential election and the 2017 Gubernatorial election.* The question to be studied is: why have the culturally rich, historically poor, and educationally lacking people of Southwest Virginia moved away from supporting political actors that benefit the voters' own economic interests, and why do they now appear to be supporting political actors that are at odds with what would seem to be very much in their economic interests?

For the purpose of this thesis, the working definition of culture is adopted from Hunter,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

who writes: “*Culture is nothing if it is not first and foremost, a normative order by which we comprehend ourselves, others, and the larger world and through which we order our experience.*”<sup>2</sup> Culture is more than language, food, religion, music or dress as those preferences or differences do not by themselves explain actions, particularly political actions. For further explanation, Redfield writes of cultures as “...conventional understandings, manifest in act and artifact, that characterizes societies. The “understandings are the meanings attached to acts and objects. The meanings are conventional, and therefore cultural, in so far as they have become typical for the members of that society by reason of intercommunication among the members.”<sup>3</sup> Prothero explains that, “Cultural politics are always a politics of nostalgia, driven by those who are determined to return to what they remember (rightly or wrongly) as a better way of life.”<sup>4</sup> To wit, specific idioms used by Southwest Virginians distinguish locals from outsiders and provide us with our cultural language. Mountain music, also known as traditional music, the roots of which are grounded in the hills of the region, provides us with our cultural music. Faith traditions, such as attending multiple church services on Sunday, provide us with our cultural religion. These elements of culture, which the “born-heres” are taught from the time of birth, offer an order to the society – what is expected of the society’s members (the region’s residents) so that the society (region) can thrive.

## **Literature Review**

Recent literature about political behavior in rural communities such as Southwest Virginia has focused on the role of the economy in determining political behavior. Frank notes

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<sup>2</sup> James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins*, (New York: The Free Press 1994), p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Redfield, *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press [1941] 1970), p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Prothero, “Why Conservatives Start Culture Wars and Liberals Win Them,” *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2016.

that, “Cultural anger is marshaled to achieve economic ends.”<sup>5</sup> He supposes that cultural issues are only discussed during an election in order to rally the voters to the cause of the Right, and then once the voters have spoken at the voting booths, the elected officials make no attempt to change the policies that affect those cultural issues. The elected officials instead focus their legislative efforts to protect corporate interests.<sup>6</sup> He believes that the Democrats have moved away from populist issues, such as income equality, and have become a party of the “Republican-light” variety in order to attract business interests. This disconnection between the Democratic candidates and populist issues has been recognized by the Democratic Party. In particular, Presidential candidate and U. S. Senator Bernie Sanders described opponent Hillary Clinton as a backer of Wall Street.<sup>7</sup> Clinton for her part offered her own version of populism and has stumbled through an explanation of her support for Wall Street.<sup>8</sup> As the writing of this thesis was underway during the 2016 Presidential election, my supposition was tested. I believed that the populism of Senator Sanders and former Secretary Clinton would be rejected handily by the voters of Southwest Virginia. As the election results attest, the populism of Donald Trump (Trumpism) was fully embraced by the region. Trumpism was embraced because of its acceptance of the cultural status quo.

While Frank and other analysts concentrate on the impact of economics on political behavior, they fail to address the fact that no matter whether economic fortunes fluctuate from year-to-year, the culture of rural communities does not change much over time. Whether the coal industry or the textile industry is in a boom or bust cycle, those who are born and raised in

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<sup>5</sup> Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, (New York: Metropolitan Books 2004), 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Tom LoBianco, “Sanders: Clinton’s Wall Street Remarks ‘a little absurd’,” CNN, November 17, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Scott Beauchamp, “The Populism of Hillary Clinton,” *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2015.



the community are born and raised with a certain belief system that tends to endure. When economic fortunes falter, the belief system within the community remains intact. There may not be assurance of a job that could be off-shored; however, the community that is known and familiar may provide especially comforting support during turbulent, changing times.

Other analysts, such as Fiorina, argue that there is no culture war going on, at least not in the way depicted on maps that differentiate the blue states from the red states. He concedes that the group he refers to as the “political class”, those who are informed and active in the political process, are in fact quite polarized. He does not believe that the non-political class is polarized.<sup>9</sup> Fiorina demonstrates that strong political divisions within the fifty states can exist. This division within Virginia helps to describe the political differences in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

For the *New York Times*, Alec McGillis provided a recent analysis of political behavior among working-class whites. He asserts that people who are dependent on government are not voting against their self-interests because they are not actually voting. He believes that the voters who are helping to increase the margins of victories for Republicans in rural areas are working-class whites who may have previously benefitted from public assistance but who know of people who have taken advantage of the programs. As a result, these individuals are voting for Republicans because they feel that their financial interests are threatened.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps these individuals are filled with shame that they were ever recipients of public assistance, and do not want to be reminded of their previous economic plight and how close they could be to returning to that status.

A recent study completed by Shildrack and MacDonald that considers the view of

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<sup>9</sup> Fiorina, et al, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, (New York: Pearson Education 2006), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Alec MacGillis, “Who Turned My Blue State Red?,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2015.

poverty among poor and working class individuals in England may offer another explanation for the incongruity between the political behavior of Southwest Virginians and residents' need for public assistance programs. Shildrack and MacDonald completed a qualitative study of poor and working class individuals who did not recognize themselves as poor and believed that anyone living in poverty is poor as a result of personal failure.<sup>11</sup> The researchers concluded that people will deny their own poverty while indicting other poor in an effort to avoid the shame of their plight.<sup>12</sup> According to Dr. Neel Brown, [shame is] "in conflict with our self-image and the needs and goals of our ego...." He goes on to explain that "people with high self-esteem are more prone to guilt than to shame, and more likely to take corrective or redemptive action."<sup>13</sup> In contrast, those with low self-esteem may blame those who they believe caused their shame which then creates more shame.<sup>14</sup> Is it possible that the region is experiencing collective shame? Shame may beget more shame because the residents of the region hold the region itself in low-esteem. Perhaps collective shame may also serve as an explanation for the disconnection between the actions of Southwest Virginia voters and their economic interests. This denial of economic condition may translate into voting for those who also blame the poor for creating their own condition.

### **Defining and Describing Southwest Virginia**

For the purpose of this research, Southwestern Virginia will be defined as the Ninth

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<sup>11</sup> Tracy Shildrack and Robert MacDonald, "Poverty Talk: How People Experiencing Poverty Deny Their Poverty and Why They Blame "the Poor'," *The Sociological Review*, May 2013, p. 286.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 301.

<sup>13</sup> Neel Burton, MD, "The Psychology of Embarrassment, Shame, and Guilt," *Psychology Today*, August 26, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Congressional District as its configuration has developed over the course of two Constitutionally-mandated reapportionments completed in 2001 and 2011. The Virginia General Assembly configured the Ninth Congressional District to encompass all parts of the counties of Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Craig, Dickenson, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe Counties; all of the cities of Bristol, Clifton Forge, Galax, Norton, and Radford and parts of Alleghany, Henry and Roanoke counties.<sup>15</sup> Following the redistricting in 2011, the Ninth Congressional District grew to include all parts of the counties of Alleghany, Bland, Buchanan, Carroll, Craig, Dickenson, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Lee, Montgomery, Patrick, Pulaski, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise, and Wythe, parts of Henry and Roanoke counties, and the cities of Bristol, Covington, Galax, Martinsville, Norton, Radford, and Salem.<sup>16</sup>

Kim Davis, the Clerk of Court of Rowan County, Kentucky, provides an example of the cultural struggle taking place in much of rural America. As Clerk of Court, Ms. Davis is responsible for issuing licenses to couples in the county who wish to marry. As a self-proclaimed born-again Christian, she objected on religious grounds to issue marriage licenses to gay couples as required by the recent U. S. Supreme Court decision, *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). Recently, Ms. Davis changed her political party affiliation from Democratic to Republican. Ms. Davis stated, "My husband and I had talked about it for quite a while and we came to the conclusion that the Democratic Party left us a long time ago, so why were we hanging on?"<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Virginia's Legislative Information System (LIS), <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?012+ful+CHAP0007>.

<sup>16</sup> Commonwealth of Virginia, Division of Legislative Services, Redistricting 2010, <http://redistricting.dls.virginia.gov/2010/BoundaryDescriptions.aspx>.

<sup>17</sup> Jose A. DelReal, "Kim Davis is Now a Registered Republican," *The Washington Post*,

While Rowan County Kentucky is not Southwest Virginia, the demographics of this manufacturing-based community are not dissimilar from communities in Southwest Virginia. The population in Rowan County is just under 24,000; less than two percent are black, and less than two percent are Hispanic. The population in the energy-extraction-based community of Buchanan County, Virginia, is just over 23,000. The population in Buchanan County is less than three percent black and less than one percent Hispanic.<sup>18</sup> According to Google Maps, Morehead, Kentucky, and Grundy, Virginia, the two county seats of the two communities, are only 134 miles from each other. That geographic proximity and the similar demographics of the two counties provide evidence that the cultures of the two communities are quite similar in terms of the economy and political culture.

As the national Democratic Party has embraced policy positions that are seemingly at odds with traditionally held cultural beliefs, other less-progressive Democrats living in similarly-situated communities, such as Rowan County and Buchanan County, are also switching party affiliation, whether or not they declare the change through their public campaign activities, and whether or not they declare their change through their private voting activities. There is reluctance among rural voters to grow and change with the party that has traditionally been known to support labor rights, the New Deal, and the Great Society. These three elements represent a number of programs that benefit the people, especially those in Southwest Virginia. For example, the Social Security retirement program is recognized as a New Deal program that ensures a basic level of retirement benefits for all retired workers. In addition, the Medicare program is recognized as a Great Society program that ensures a basic level of health care

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September 25, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/09/25/kim-davis-is-now-a-registered-republican/>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S.Census Bureau. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/21/21205.html>.

insurance coverage for retired workers.

The opposition by residents of Southwest Virginia to the passage of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (ACA), better known as Obamacare, is a recent example of the cultural dissonance that has been experienced in the region. Each year thousands of individuals from around Southwest Virginia, Eastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia, gather at the Wise County Fairgrounds to receive free medical care through the Remote Area Medical (RAM) Clinic.<sup>19</sup> The needs in the region for affordable health care are so great that additional RAM clinics have been held in Buchanan County and a few miles outside of Virginia at the Bristol Motor Speedway in Bristol, Tennessee. In spite of the demand for affordable health care, thousands of Southwest Virginians attended town hall meetings in 2009 to express their opposition to the passage of the ACA because it was seen as a government takeover of health care in the United States.<sup>20</sup> The fact that nineteen percent of the population of the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district is 65 years old or older, indicating eligibility for government-run Medicare, provides evidence of this dissonance -- that so many would be opposed to the ACA. In addition, of the 580,506 civilian population over the age of 18, eight percent are veterans. While not all veterans are eligible for veterans' health care benefits, a significant number would conceivably be eligible. In addition, a full twenty percent of the total population claims a disability, and less than half of that number is 65 years of age, and therefore eligible for Medicare.<sup>21</sup> These data would seem to indicate that the population would value or support government-assisted health

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Sorrell, "Remote Area Medical Clinic Wraps up Historic Weekend in Wise County," *Bristol Herald Courier*, July 19, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Bruyn Jones, "Boucher Town Hall Meeting on Health Care Draws 1,200," *The Roanoke Times*, August 17, 2009; Wes Bunch, "Crowd Packs Boucher's Health Care Town Hall Meeting in Abingdon," *Kingsport Times News*, August 20, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Fast Facts for Congress Virginia 9<sup>th</sup> District, "People" tab, <http://www.census.gov/fastfacts/>.

care. Yet the opposite often seems to be true. Even with the passage of the ACA, there remain individuals whose incomes are so low that even with the receipt of federal subsidies, they are unable to afford health insurance through the new health insurance Marketplace. The ACA was designed under the assumption that states would expand Medicaid to cover the working poor.<sup>22</sup> However, the Virginia General Assembly has thus far not opted to expand Medicaid coverage to the working poor. Republican members of the General Assembly, including those representing Southwest Virginia, have cited both 1) the need to reform the current state Medicaid program to reduce waste, fraud and abuse, and 2) the federal budget deficit that could adversely affect the federal matching funds the Commonwealth receives for the Medicaid program.<sup>23</sup> Virginia, able-bodied, childless adults are ineligible at any income level for Medicaid.<sup>24</sup> Those in Southwest Virginia who would benefit from Medicaid expansion do not tend to publically clamor for it, and instead tend to agree with their Republican state legislators who explain that since the federal government *is broke*, and the promise of federal funding in future years cannot be guaranteed, Medicaid should not be expanded.<sup>25</sup> Rather than complain to their state legislators about the need to partner with the federal government, they complain about President Obama and his *failed* “Obamacare” because they cannot obtain health insurance at a reasonable cost and have heard that they cannot choose their own doctors.<sup>26</sup> To wit, during Ken Cuccinelli’s failed gubernatorial campaign he was able to rally supporters in Roanoke by explaining that “a vote for him is a vote

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<sup>22</sup> Olga Khazan, “Living Poor and Uninsured in a Red State,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> David McGee, “Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources Hazel Continues Pushing His Support for Medicaid Expansion in Virginia,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, March 9, 2014.

<sup>24</sup> “Where are States Today? Medicaid and CHIP Eligibility Levels for Adults, Children, and Pregnant Women,” Kaiser Family Foundation, April 13, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Allie Robinson Gibson, “Budget, Medicaid Hot topics at 28<sup>th</sup> Annual legislative Breakfast,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, November 24, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Jenna Portnoy, “In Southwest Va., Health Needs, Poverty Collide with Antipathy to the Affordable Care Act,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 2014.

against Obamacare.”<sup>27</sup> The voters of Southwest Virginia answered Cuccinelli by casting approximately sixty percent of their votes for him instead of his opponents.<sup>28</sup>

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The book *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*, written by former U. S. Senator Jim Webb, serves as one of the best sources of material for understanding the people and the culture of Southwest Virginia. Webb points to a rugged individualism among the Scots-Irish who settled the region. While Webb dismisses the idea of group-think, there is an argument to be made that while Southwest Virginians are good at fighting each other, we come together to fight outside forces.<sup>29</sup> Southwest Virginia lies in the heart of Central Appalachia. When someone pronounces the word *Appalachia*, the speaker reveals her origins and allegiances. Author Sharyn McCrumb explains that, “The safest way to say it is Appa-Lat-Cha.” She goes on to explain in a Youtube video that there is a walled city that lies between Donegal and Belfast in Ireland that was once conquered by the British. If a visitor stops at a store to ask for directions to the city, the storekeeper will know the political leanings of the visitor and whether to trust the visitor based on the name the visitor uses to describe the walled city. This is salient because, as McCrumb explains, the walled city to the Irish is known as Derry and to the British conquerors it is known as Londonderry.<sup>30</sup>

While Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* focuses on country-wide conceptions of nationalism, there are parallels to be drawn from his definition of a nation and the culturally

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<sup>27</sup> Sarah Mimms, “McAuliffe Campaigns with Obama as Cuccinelli Highlights ACA,” *National Journal*, November 4, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Virginia State Board of Elections,  
<http://historical.elections.virginia.gov/elections/view/43843/>.

<sup>29</sup> James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*, (New York: Broadway Books 2004), 327.

<sup>30</sup> Sharyn McCrumb, “*Appalachia*” *A Guide to Pronunciation*, 2010.

homogenous region of Southwest Virginia. Anderson notes that a nation “is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>31</sup> Similar to Anderson’s supposition that a nation develops through a group of people who come to see themselves as connected in time and space, and by a common language, among other cultural factors, a region such as Southwest Virginia also develops strong bonds based on the people who are connected in time and space, and by a common language. The role of newspapers in developing a sense of an imagined community is but one example that may demonstrate the importance of Anderson’s theory of nationalism at a sub-national level. Weekly newspapers with the latest county-level news abound in Southwest Virginia. Daily newspapers that provide regional and some state and national levels news are more widely read locally than those newspapers that are considered national in scope, such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.<sup>32</sup> The residents of a region may feel more connected to their community through the stories that have been presented in the local newspapers. The readers may know the people involved in a drug bust or in a land re-zoning request. Those same readers may not have the same interest in reading similar stories from Richmond or New York or London, England. As Anderson notes, “...we have seen that the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even ‘world events’ into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers....”<sup>33</sup> Recognizing similar stories in other parts of the world though does not connect people together; it is only when people feel they are part of the story that they become connected to it.<sup>34</sup> Anderson demonstrates the role of newspapers in developing nations; to bring his theorization into the

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<sup>31</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso 2006), 6.

<sup>32</sup> The Reynolds Journalism Institute on behalf of the National Newspaper Association, 2013 Community Newspaper Readership Study,” February 3, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso 2006), p. 63

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63



twentieth century, one could add the role of local television news. Perhaps Southwest Virginians have created their own version of their nation based on their unique experiences – what they know of the world as provided in their local newspapers and local television news broadcasts. This may be how the region’s people define “their” America or “their” country. The America that is emerging on the national stage may not be the country they recognize, so they vow to *take back their country* while not realizing that their country belongs to others, too. What about those others?

Edward Said explains that “culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state, differentiating “us” from “them,” almost always with some degree of xenophobia.”<sup>35</sup> He explains that a culture identifies a people and can be the basis of vigorous defense of actions that if fully scrutinized would not be acceptable in the larger world.<sup>36</sup> Said notes that “[re-establishing culture and tradition] accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behavior that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity.”<sup>37</sup>

By adapting Anderson’s analysis of nationalism and Said’s considerations of culture to the regional level of Southwest Virginia, an explanation of the political behavior of Southwest Virginia as separate from the rest of Virginia may emerge. Southwest Virginia may have created its own version of a nation and its own cultural identity that does not reflect the larger homeland much at all. Southwest Virginian’s political behavior could be offered as an explanation for similar political behavior in other rural, culturally-homogenous, isolated areas of the country.

Frank Kilgore, a local attorney who practices in the Town of St. Paul, located along the

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage Books 1994) p. xiii.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiii.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiii.

Wise County/Russell County line, wrote an editorial that was published in the *Roanoke Times* in June 2008, which attempts to quash the notion that racism could be a reason for lack of support in Southwest Virginia for then-Democratic Presidential nominee, Barack Obama. Kilgore points to the support that candidate L. Douglas Wilder received in Southwest Virginia during his gubernatorial bid in 1989. Although former Governor Wilder received 49 percent of the vote of the traditional counties and cities of Southwest Virginia compared to the 39 percent that candidate Barack Obama received in 2008 or compared to the 33 percent that President Obama received in his re-election in 2012, Wilder, similar to Obama, did not win Southwest Virginia. Kilgore claims that “guns, God and nationalism, mark the difference between the support for Wilder and the lack of support for Obama in Southwest Virginia, and he encourages candidate Obama to embrace those ideals in order to attract the voters. Kilgore’s editorial was written months before the general election. The results of the 2008 and 2012 elections indicate the irrelevancy of those issues to the rest of the electorate of Virginia.<sup>38</sup> The demographic changes occurring in Virginia, including the loss of population in Southwest Virginia and the gain of population in Northern Virginia, reduces the need for candidates for statewide office to kowtow to the culture and traditions of Southwest Virginia in order to win an election. This loss of Southwest Virginia’s political power and influence may provoke strong negative reactions to any perceived outside force.

Kilgore does acknowledge that while racism exists in Southwest Virginia, racism is no more or no less present in Southwest Virginia than anywhere else in the United States or the world. Kilgore offered that, “If [Obama] fails to carry Appalachia it will not be because he is black, it will be because of his lack of understanding of what is important to us as a culture just

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<sup>38</sup> Frank Kilgore, “Obama Should Understand Appalachia,” *Roanoke Times*, June 14, 2008.

as we cannot pretend to truly know what is important to his black, urban culture.”<sup>39</sup> It could be argued that being unable to accept others because of their believed-to-be different culture could actually demonstrate the existence of racism.

Following the brutal murders of members of a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, a debate over the continued use of the Confederate battle flag has raged throughout the country, including Southwest Virginia. Residents of the region have battled whether their use of the flag celebrates their Southern heritage or whether their use of the flag celebrates the KKK or the desire to return to a slave-labor economy. In July 2015, a 17 year-old from the Tennessee-side of Bristol organized a freedom-flag parade to celebrate his Southern heritage. He rejected the assertion that the Civil War was fought over slavery but rather was fought over states’ rights.<sup>40</sup> While this study’s purpose is not to revisit the causes for the War Between the States, the alternative narrative of its underlying cause that is espoused in the region and represented by the parade organizer may offer a glimpse into the political mindset of the Southwest Virginia culture. Few will readily admit in public to being a racist, but the connection between the rejection of *Others* and the voters’ rejection of President Obama and his policies may be worthy of further exploration.

In her book *Political Leadership: A Source Book*, Barbara Kellerman quotes Irving Janis’ view of groupthink, “According to the groupthink hypothesis, members of any small cohesive group attend to maintain esprit de corps by unconsciously developing a number of shared illusions and related norms that interfere with critical thinking and reality testing.”<sup>41</sup> Former Southwest Virginia Congressman Rick Boucher has stated, “Many people will cast votes that are

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<sup>39</sup> Frank Kilgore, “Obama Should Understand Appalachia,” *Roanoke Times*, June 14, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Sorrell, “Flag-waving Parade,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, July 3, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Kellerman, *Political Leadership: A Source Book*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2009), p. 327.

contrary to certain interests that those individuals have. I think oftentimes it is the image that a party has in a region or that a party has in a person's mind that leads a person to vote in a certain way."<sup>42</sup> In consideration of this view and in order to understand the political behavior of Southwest Virginia residents, it may be useful to consider why people vote almost in lock-step, deciding together to reject one perspective over another. Do the voters make individual decisions based on calculation of personal benefit or is the culture of the region institutionalized to the point that voters are influenced based on the need of the institution, the culture, in order to protect itself?

In the case of the political behavior of Southwest Virginians, viewing the decision-making of the region through the lens of historical institutionalism may be more useful than viewing the political behavior of the region through the lens of rational choice. There are different schools of thought pertaining to decision-making within social theory. Sil explains that "Rational-choice theorists typically assert that all social phenomena -- including the formation of rules, institutions, communities, and norms -- ultimately can be reduced to the instrumental behavior of strategic individual actors."<sup>43</sup> Hall and Taylor credit Sven Steinmo for coining the term *historical institutionalism*.<sup>44</sup> They "[define historical institutionalism]...as the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy."<sup>45</sup> Hall and Taylor explain that "Institutions are resistant to redesign ultimately because they structure the very choices about reform that the individual is

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<sup>42</sup> Jenna Portnoy, "In Southwest Va., Health Needs, Poverty Collide with Antipathy to the Affordable Care Act," *Washington Post*, June 19, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Rudra Sil, "The Foundations of Eclecticism: The Epistemological Status of Agency, Culture, and Structure in Social Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*. 12 (3): 356.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies*, 44 (1996), 937.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies*, 44 (1996), 938.

likely to make.<sup>46</sup> The organizational structure of Southwest Virginia has both formal and informal elements, and there exists “procedures, routines, norms and conventions” that direct the political behavior of the region’s voters. It may be that formal institutions such as churches, labor unions, and local political bodies wield enough influence and power to control the political behavior of Southwest Virginians in order to maintain a status quo. This could explain the reason Southwest Virginians appear to be disinclined to accept change that is perceived to be thrust upon them from the outside world.

The Southwest Virginia region is isolated from the centers of political power in Washington, D. C. and Virginia’s capital in Richmond. In fact, parts of the southwest Virginia region are farther west than Detroit. The physical isolation of the region from the rest of the Commonwealth may keep interlopers at bay. In addition to the physical isolation, an intellectual isolation exists as a result of low educational attainment levels of the region’s residents. I have very briefly considered the cultural isolation caused by the homogeneity of the region. The region’s voters appear to reject that which is not familiar to them. I will further consider these elements of isolation as I analyze the political behavior of Southwest Virginians in chapter 3.

## **Methodology**

In this thesis the role of culture in the collective political behavior of Southwest Virginia will be analyzed in order to explain the reason that individual economic interests do not fully explain individual voting decisions. Primary sources considered include voting data from the Virginia Board of Elections, newspaper editorials, and personal accounts of elected officials or their surrogates who experienced the political shift in Southwest Virginia from 2004 to 2012. Secondary sources considered include recent literature on the theories related to culture and

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<sup>46</sup> Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies*, 44 (1996), p. 940.

political behavior. Economic data presented demonstrate that the economic fortunes of Southwest Virginia do not necessarily explain the political behavior of the region's voters. The case will be made that historical institutionalism provides a theoretical explanation for voter preferences within the context of the chosen case study of Virginia's Ninth Congressional District elections from 2004 through 2012.

### **Thesis Layout**

The thesis is comprised of four chapters. This introductory chapter explores and analyzes Southwest Virginia, its people and its culture. It offers a geographical definition of the area of Southwest Virginia and provides a picture of the isolation of the region compared to the rest of the Commonwealth. It also explains briefly the history of the people, who they have been, who they are, and who they aspire to be. The description reveals the incongruity between the region's needs and the region's rejection of political actors that can best address those needs.

The second chapter explores the theories of political behavior and how those theories may be applied to Southwest Virginia. Rational choice theory and historical institutionalism in relation to the decision-making processes of Southwest Virginians will be compared and contrasted. This chapter will highlight how collective decision-making that protects the region's formal and informal institutions, instead of individual decision-making that protects one's personal interests, better explains the voting behavior of Southwest Virginians. Southwest Virginians' brand of nationalism and whether that view aids in the isolation of the region and perhaps serves as an explanation for its appearing to the *outside world* to be racist will be considered. This chapter also explores the theory that political behavior reflects the shame the region's residents hold for their plight and considers how and why the residents deny their problems and project those problems onto others.

The third chapter analyzes, qualitatively, the election results from 2004 through 2012 and offer theories based on the election outcomes as to the reasons for shifting political fortunes. In addition election results, economic data is presented from the same period of time. The economic data confirms that economic woes do not fully explain the political shift in the region. Further, the chapter will describe the cultural changes that have occurred nationally that appear to have been rejected by the region's residents.

The conclusion provides an explanation, based on the previously analyzed theories, for Southwest Virginia voters appearing to vote against their own best interests. This chapter will reveal how the political behavior of the region's residents will continue to perpetuate itself and will limit its ability to thrive without an appropriate cultural shift. The chapter will also provide an overview of both the results of the Presidential election of 2016 and the Gubernatorial election of 2017 which provide further evidence of the strength of the region's culture in determining political behavior.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Theory

This chapter explores theories of political behavior and how these theories may be applied to Southwest Virginia. Rational choice theory and historical institutionalism in relation to the decision-making processes of Southwest Virginians will be compared and contrasted. This chapter will highlight how collective decision-making that protects the region's formal and informal institutions, instead of individual decision-making that protects one's personal interests, better explain the voting behavior of Southwest Virginians. Southwest Virginians' brand of national identity and whether that view aids in the isolation of the region and perhaps serves as an explanation for its appearing to the *outside world* to be racist. This chapter also explores the theory that political behavior reflects the shame the region's residents hold for their plight and how the residents often deny the existence of their problems and project those problems onto others.

There are several different schools of thought pertaining to decision-making within social theory. Sil explains that "Rational-choice theorists typically assert that all social phenomena -- including the formation of rules, institutions, communities, and norms -- ultimately can be reduced to the instrumental behavior of strategic individual actors."<sup>47</sup> Chong defines rational choice in the context of this theory as "choosing the course of action that maximizes one's expected utility."<sup>48</sup> Research cited by Chong indicates that voters tend to make electoral decisions not based on their own monetary self-interests but rather on their understanding of

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<sup>47</sup> Rudra Sil, "The Foundations of Eclecticism: The Epistemological Status of Agency, Culture, and Structure in Social Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*. 12 (3): 356.

<sup>48</sup> Dennis Chong, *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), Ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, p. 99.



national economic interests and “long-standing values.”<sup>49</sup> In addition, research findings indicate that political attitudes are formed long before one becomes politically active.<sup>50</sup> It is recognized that conforming to a group, even when conformance may not serve the individual’s best interest, is often preferable to being a non-conformist.<sup>51</sup> It would appear that something else other than individual, rational choice decisions informs voting behavior.

Hall and Taylor credit Sven Steinmo for coining the term *historical institutionalism*.<sup>52</sup> They “[define historical institutionalism]...as the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy.”<sup>53</sup> Hall and Taylor explain that “Institutions are resistant to redesign ultimately because they structure the very choices about reform that the individual is likely to make.”<sup>54</sup> The main thrust of historical institutionalism versus rational choice theory is that historical institutionalism does not constrain itself to the narrowly defined parameters of rational choice. Rational choice would have one believe that every decision that is made is simply based on one’s perception of one’s self-interest. The only role an institution would have would be to set the rules, and decisions of the actors are structured by those rules. Historical institutionalists understand that decisions that are made are not always made with one’s self-interest in mind.<sup>55</sup> As Steinmo, et al note, “...most of us, most of the time, follow societally defined roles, even when so doing may not be

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<sup>49</sup> Dennis Chong, *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), Ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, p. 101.

<sup>50</sup> Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies*, 44 (1996), 937.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 938.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 940.

<sup>55</sup> Sven Steinmo, et al, *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.

directly in our self-interest.”<sup>56</sup> A firefighter running into a burning building is not contemplating her self-interest (narrowly defined) when making the conscious decision to risk her life. In the case of public policy decisions, individual members of an elected body, such as a town council, could vote with the majority of the elected body to preserve the elected body’s standing on an issue that is controversial and run the risk of leaving the individual council members vulnerable to electoral defeat.<sup>57</sup> While institutions are composed of individuals who may approach decision-making through the prism of self-interested goals and objectives, unless the decision-makers consider the interests of the institution, the institution would fail. Therefore, an historical analytical approach to political behavior provides useful context to the political decision-making process.<sup>58</sup>

In particular, an analysis of the political behavior of Southwest Virginians and the decision-making process of the region through the lens of historical institutionalism may be more useful than viewing the political behavior of the region through the lens of rational choice. The organizational structure of Southwest Virginia has both formal and informal elements, and there exists “procedures, routines, norms and conventions” that direct the political behavior of the region’s voters. It may be that formal institutions such as churches, labor unions, local political bodies wield enough influence and power to control the political behavior of Southwest Virginians in order to maintain a status quo. This could explain the reason Southwest Virginians

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<sup>56</sup> Sven Steinmo, et al, *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Damean Matthews, “Two Unseated in Abingdon Town Council Race.” *Bristol Herald Courier*. May 3, 2016. The two incumbent council members may have agreed fully with the decision to rezone property; however, if they had chosen to act in their own self-interest, they would have voted against the rezoning, likely saving themselves from electoral defeat. The controversial decision to rezone property still would have been approved by the remaining majority of the council members whose seats were not on the ballot.

<sup>58</sup> Sven Steinmo, et al, *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 9.

appear to be disinclined to accept societal change that is perceived to be thrust upon them from the outside world.

In analyzing the success of institutions in achieving their policy goals, Immergut focuses on something she refers to as “veto points.” She recognizes that forces can exist that could challenge an institution’s ability to successfully implement “policy innovation.” These “veto points” are not static. The points can shift at any given time depending upon the makeup of the membership.<sup>59</sup> For instance: in 2015, Abingdon, Virginia town officials considered and approved the rezoning of property from agricultural use to commercial use at the behest of a large corporation headquartered in the town. Pursuant to procedure, the initial consideration of the proposed rezoning was conducted by the Town’s appointed Planning Commission. As part of the formal review process, the Planning Commission held a public hearing and afterward made a recommendation to the elected Town Council. The second portion of the review was conducted by the Town Council. The Council considered the recommendation of the Planning Commission, held its own public hearings, and voted unanimously in favor of the rezoning in spite of loud, organized public opposition.<sup>60,61</sup> Anywhere along the review process, the policy change (the rezoning) could have been quashed. A majority of the individual members of the two institutions in control of the decision, the town’s planning commission and the town council, could have accepted and adopted the positions of the opposition. Instead, both institutions agreed to the rezoning and have been accused by the opposition of acting outside of open

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<sup>59</sup> Sven Steinmo, et al, *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Abingdon Virginia Town Blog, “Proposed Rezoning Q&A Part 1,” November 23, 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Kaylan Brickey, “Abingdon Town Council Approves Rezoning that will Allow a New Food City to be Built,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, December 7, 2015.

government rules.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Institutions**

In addition to local governments and their myriad appointed boards and commissions, Southwest Virginia also maintains other institutions that collectively preserve the status quo, even while claiming to own a change-mission. Institutions can maintain status quo by populating local government boards and commission, and even regional development organization boards with the same individuals. The Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission (CPPDC) which serves the counties of Tazewell, Russell, Buchanan and Dickenson, and the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission (LPDC) which serves the counties of Lee, Scott, Wise and the City of Norton, sought a joint venture for the deployment of fiber optic infrastructure in their regions. The two organizations came together to establish a non-profit corporation known as the Virginia Coalfield Coalition (VCC) which received both federal and state funding for the deployment of the fiber optic network.<sup>63</sup> As noted in the annual report filings with the Virginia State Corporation Commission, the Coalition's board is populated by members of the two planning district commissions, and these same individuals happen to also serve as elected officials for the counties and city that make up the planning districts.<sup>64</sup>

The locally elected boards are not alone in maintaining their power base within the context of public policy decision-making. Members of the Virginia General Assembly have also utilized the process of legislating state authorities, outlining in code the membership of the different authorities, often populated by themselves and locally-elected officials.

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<sup>62</sup> Kaylan Brickey, "Group Fights to Nullify Rezoning of The Meadows," *Bristol Herald Courier*, January 7, 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Allie Robinson, "First Phase of Wireless Project for Southwest Virginia Completed," *Bristol Herald Courier*, January 12, 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Virginia State Corporation Commission, Virginia Coalfield Coalition, Inc., SCC ID: 05085691 <https://sccfile.scc.virginia.gov/arsearch>.

In 1988, the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) was established for the purpose of diversifying the economy of the coal-producing counties of Virginia.<sup>65</sup> It was recognized that the region's economy was overly dependent on the historical ups and downs of the coal economy, and VCEDA was established to be a conduit of economic change.<sup>66</sup> As an economic development marketing organization, it serves the same region as the CPPDC and LPDC. Its funding has been provided through coal and gas severance taxes paid by the coal and gas operators to the Commonwealth.<sup>67</sup> The Code of Virginia Title 15.2-6003 specifically outlines the makeup of the VCEDA Board. Five members of the Board are appointed by the Governor; three members of the Board are appointed by the Boards of Supervisors of the three counties contributing the most to the VCEDA fund from the previous fiscal year; three members are appointed by the three largest coal producers as determined by the amount contributed to VCEDA for the previous fiscal year; one member is appointed by the largest gas and oil producer as determined by the amount contributed to VCEDA for the previous fiscal year; two members are the executive directors of the LPDC and CPPDC; one member is designated by the chief executive officer of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership; and one member is designated by the Virginia Coal and Energy Alliance.<sup>68,69</sup>

The Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation was established by the General Assembly in 2008. The Foundation's definition of Southwest Virginia includes the CPPDC, the

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<sup>65</sup> *Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority*, 1988, Virginia Code Title 15.2 Chapter 60 §15.2-6002.

<sup>66</sup> *Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority*, 1988, Virginia Code Title 15.2 Chapter 60 §15.2-6001.

<sup>67</sup> *Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority*, 1988, Virginia Code Title 15.2 Chapter 60 §15.2-6009.

<sup>68</sup> Laura Blevins, GIA 5354, Policy Brief Two, August 3, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> *Coalfield Economic Development Authority*, 1988, Code of Virginia Title 15.2 Chapter 60 §15.1-1635.

LPDC, the Mount Rogers Planning District (MRPDC), the New River Valley Regional Commission (NRVRC), and the counties of Franklin and Patrick from the Western Piedmont Planning District.<sup>70</sup> The MRPDC encompasses the counties of Washington, Smyth, Wythe, Bland, Carroll and Grayson, and the cities of Bristol and Galax. The NRVRC encompasses the counties of Pulaski, Giles, Montgomery, and Floyd, and the City of Radford. The Foundation's mission is to:

encourage the economic development of Southwest Virginia through the expansion of cultural and natural heritage ventures and initiatives related to tourism and other asset-based enterprises, including the Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Center, The Crooked Road, 'Round the Mountain, and other related cultural and natural heritage organizations and venues that promote entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

The Code outlines the membership of the Foundation which includes two members of the State Senate, three members of the House of Delegates, two executive directors of planning district commissions from the regions served by the Foundation, an elected or appointed official from the Town of Abingdon, and an elected or appointed official from the Washington County Board of Supervisors. While there are additional members on the Foundation Board, some of those additional members represent other entities with vested interest in maintaining their power base within the context of public policy decision-making, including the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, Virginia Highlands Community College, and the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development.<sup>71</sup> The Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center is also established by Virginia code, and its membership includes members of the Virginia General

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<sup>70</sup> Friends of Southwest Virginia Communities, <https://www.myswva.org/swva/communities> .

<sup>71</sup> *Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation*, 2011, Code of Virginia Title 2.2 Chapter 27 Article 10 §2.2-2734 – 2.2-2735.

Assembly.<sup>72</sup> The Virginia Highlands Community College, part of the Virginia Community College System (a state agency), maintains a local advisory board made up of individuals appointed by the local governments within the college's service region of Smyth County, Washington County and the City of Bristol. The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development is a state agency. All of these entities receive appropriations from the Virginia General Assembly.

The Southwest Virginia Health Authority, which encompasses geographically the LPDC, the CPPDC, and the additional counties of Washington, Smyth and the City of Bristol, was established in 2007 by the General Assembly with the purpose of:

[establishing] regional health goals directed at improving access to care, advancing health status, targeting regional health issues, promoting technological advancement, ensuring accountability of the cost of care, enhancing academic engagement in regional health, strengthening the workforce for health-related careers, and improving health entity collaboration and regional integration where appropriate.<sup>73</sup>

The membership of the Health Authority, similarly to the other institutions established by the General Assembly includes two members of the Virginia State Senate, two members of the Virginia House of Delegates, and appointees of the Boards of Supervisors and City Councils of the region the Authority serves. In addition to members of the region's medical education community and two of the region's hospitals, the Authority's board also includes the Executive Director or designee of the VCEDA and the Public Health Directors for the LENOWISCO and Cumberland Plateau regions.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center*, 2016 , Code of Virginia Title 23.1 Chapter 31 Article 7 §23.1-3126.

<sup>73</sup> *Southwest Virginia Health Authority*, 2007, Code of Virginia, Title 15.2 Chapter 53.1 §15.2-5368.

<sup>74</sup> *Southwest Virginia Health Authority*, 2007, Code of Virginia, Title 15.2 Chapter 53.1 §15.2-5370.

The Southwest Virginia Regional Recreation Authority was established by the General Assembly in 2008 to develop a recreation area within the region of LPDC and CPPDC. Its board membership is populated by individuals appointed by the locally elected boards of supervisors and city council that make up the region.<sup>75</sup>

The Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC), previously known as the Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission, was established by the General Assembly in 1999. It serves the historical burley and flue-cured tobacco producing communities of Southwest and Southside Virginia. The TRRC is responsible for the distribution of funds to farmers adversely affected by the reduction in the tobacco-production economy and to those communities that had also received the economic benefit of a robust tobacco industry.<sup>76</sup> Following a series of questionable investments by the TRRC, in 2015 the General Assembly made slight changes to the make-up of the Commission membership.<sup>77</sup> While reducing the overall size of the TRRC from 31 members to 28 members, by eliminating three citizen member positions, the membership of the six legislators from the House of Delegates and four members of the State Senate remained intact.<sup>78</sup>

These above-mentioned legislatively-established entities serve to direct public policy through the funding mechanisms available to the organizations. Since the majority of the organizations have membership from the General Assembly, those members, with the ability to attract state appropriations, can wield additional influence in the direction the organizations

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<sup>75</sup> *Southwest Virginia Regional Recreation Authority*, 2008, Code of Virginia, Title 15.2 Chapter 60.1 §15.2-6016 - §15.2-6018.

<sup>76</sup> *Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission*, 1999, Code of Virginia, Title 3.2 Chapter 31 §3.2-3101.

<sup>77</sup> Carman Forman, "Tobacco Commission Legislation Aims for Spending Reform, Increased Transparency," *Roanoke Times*, July 5, 2015.

<sup>78</sup> H 2330, Virginia General Assembly, 2015



follow. It stands to reason that the non-legislative members of these organizations do not want to challenge or alienate those deemed to be in control of the state's purse strings (members of the General Assembly). The inability to freely consider divergent policy views for fear of reprisal, perhaps a lost political appointment, not only aids the class of elected officials to direct public policy pursuant to their political philosophy, but it also indoctrinates the region's "thought leaders" to those philosophies. In meetings of the boards of directors of the organizations, those who speak and whose positions are heard are the entrenched elected officials. The political philosophies of the elected officials are adopted by leaders of the organizations, and they in turn share the adopted philosophies within their institutions. Those institutions adopt the philosophies, further enhancing the political support of the local legislators.

In addition to the quasi-governmental institutions that have been developed by state legislative action, traditional institutions, such as labor unions and churches, also influence the region's political behavior. The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), the U. S. Steelworkers Union, the Communication Workers of America (CWA) among others all boast membership in Southwest Virginia. The UMWA would arguably be recognized as the most influential union in the region. In 1989, UMWA local president, Jackie Stump, successfully ran a write-in campaign for a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates against an incumbent Democrat whose son, as a judge, had fined the union millions of dollars during a contentious strike. As an article in the *Washington Post* at the time noted, the incumbent lacked an organized campaign apparatus, whereas Jackie Stump's efforts were aided by striking miners who willingly volunteered their time to get out the write-in vote.<sup>79</sup> The UMWA's past political influence has prompted national political candidates to include the union's regional events on hectic campaign

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<sup>79</sup> Dana Priest, "Virginia Coal Miner Strikes Gold in Politics, *Washington Post*, November 20, 1989.

schedules, most notably, in 2008, when then-Vice Presidential candidate Joe Biden attended the annual Fish Fry held in the unincorporated town of Castlewood.<sup>80</sup>

Labor unions represent one traditional non-governmental institution that influences political behavior in Southwest Virginia and organized religion represents another. Organized religion in the form of churches also serves as an influencer of political behavior. According to data collected through a study in 2010, approximately forty percent of the population of Southwest Virginia is a member of a religious organization.<sup>81</sup> That total percentage is not significantly different from the percentage of the population in Fairfax County (forty-four percent) or in Loudoun County (thirty-eight percent) that is religiously affiliated; however, the contrast and salient point in considering the role of church and religion in Southwest Virginia lies beneath the larger religious affiliation. Of the forty percent who are affiliated with a church organization, approximately sixty-three percent are members of an evangelical protestant church, and if mainline protestant church membership is included, approximately ninety-two percent of the total population claims to be affiliated with a religious organization. Committed Evangelical Protestantism is known for its political activism with respect to the culture war, and committed Evangelical Christians have a greater propensity to vote (and vote for Republicans).<sup>82</sup> That activism cannot be downplayed in the political behavior of voters in Southwest Virginia. Recently, William “Bear” Lloyd, a former staffer of Congressman Morgan Griffith and a former candidate for the School Board in Washington County, placed a quarter-page ad in the Bristol

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<sup>80</sup> Ryan Corsaro, “In Southern Virginia, Biden Tries to Connect, *CBS News*, September 20, 2008.

<sup>81</sup> *U. S. Congregational Reports*, reported by The Association of Religion Data Archives, from *2010 Religious Congregations and Membership Study*, conducted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies.

<sup>82</sup> Fiorina, et al, “Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America, (New York: Pearson Education 2006), p. 128-130.

Herald Courier entitled “Why a True Christian Cannot Vote for a Democrat.”<sup>83</sup> As defenders of religious tradition, churches and committed evangelicals, such as Bear Lloyd, influence the flock of believers who recognize a changing outside world and through their participation in the political process work to protect their region from those forces that attack the traditions they know. Churches, with or without blatant disregard for the Johnson Amendment, encourage their disciples to vote, and in some cases provide them with voter guides obtained from groups such as the Christian Coalition and the Virginia Christian Alliance.

Anthony Giddens argues that we are now living in a “thoroughly post-traditional society”; one that is “of a globalizing, cosmopolitan order.”<sup>84</sup> He explains that this undoing and remaking of traditions, has aided in the emergence of fundamentalism, one that goes beyond religious fundamentalism and “...includes ethnic relations, nationalism, gender and the family.”<sup>85</sup> Fundamentalism in this sense is more than protecting tradition as tradition. As Giddens writes, “...fundamentalism is protecting a *principle* as much as a set of particular doctrines.”<sup>86</sup> Fundamentalism, that which protects and defends both particular doctrines of tradition and the principles of tradition, underlies the political behavior of Southwest Virginians. Religion remains one of those traditions defended both as doctrine and principle within the region. As Giddens recognizes, fundamentalism is not limited to religion.<sup>87</sup>

In Southwest Virginia, ethnic relations and nationalism go hand-in-hand. The population of Southwest Virginia, similarly to other parts of the South, can be defined as being populated with *unhyphenated Americans*. Keith Gaddie and Kirby Goidel describe these *unhyphenated*

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<sup>83</sup> William Lloyd, “Why a True Christian Cannot Vote for a Democrat,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, October 10, 2016, p. A10.

<sup>84</sup> Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press 1994), p. 83.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 84-85.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p. 85.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

*Americans* as those who have identified themselves as Americans on Census forms, tend to identify as Evangelical Protestants, consider the identification of “American” to translate to the word Patriot, concerned that American culture is at risk by foreign influences, and vote for candidates on the conservative side of the ideological spectrum.<sup>88</sup> Gaddie and Goidel also note that “nearly two-third of them live in the Census South, and especially in Greater Appalachia.”<sup>89</sup> According to the American Community Survey, people reporting single ancestry during a 3-year estimate of 2006-2008, almost thirty-three percent of the population of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District identifies as “American.”<sup>90</sup> For the American Community Survey updated for its 5-year estimate, 2010-2014, almost thirty-seven percent of the population of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District identifies as “American.”<sup>91</sup> These are the individuals that Samuel Huntington would say are concerned that “...the shifting racial balance in the United States means a shifting cultural balance and the replacement of the white culture that made America great by black or brown cultures that are different and, in their view, intellectually and morally inferior...For them, to keep America America, it is necessary to keep America white.”<sup>92</sup> In Southwest Virginia, America is white. Of the 578,493 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District residents counted during the 2000 Census, approximately 16,104 or not quite three percent were African-American, while 554,345 or almost ninety-six percent were white.<sup>93</sup> By the 2010 Census, with the increased geography, the total population equaled 656,200. Of that amount, 25,211 or not quite four percent were

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<sup>88</sup> Keith Gaddie and Kirby Goidel, “The American Nationalism Problem,” *Huffington Post*, December 6, 2015.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> U. S. Census, American Fact Finder, 2006-2008 American Community Survey.

<sup>91</sup> U. S. Census, American Fact Finder, 2010-2014 American Community Survey.

<sup>92</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, (New York: Simon and Schuster 2004), p.312.

<sup>93</sup> U. S. Census, American Fact Finder, Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2000, Congressional District 9 (106<sup>th</sup> Congress) Virginia.

African-American, while 609,372 or almost ninety-three percent were white.<sup>94</sup> One would be hard-pressed to find overt signs of racism in Southwest Virginia – with overwhelming majority White residents, overt racism is not necessary. The region’s history with respect to race relations is mixed, likely because of the limited African-American population. Southwest Virginia, with its mountainous terrain, was not a strong-hold for slave-owning plantation dwellers, and as a result, during the Civil War many in the region were sympathetic to the North.<sup>95</sup> Even with Northern sympathizers in the region, Southern sympathy existed as well, which helps to explain the monuments dedicated to Confederate soldiers, including a monument depicting a Confederate Soldier with rifle pointed north that sits on the grounds of the Washington County Courthouse, and the memorial dedicated to the unknown Confederate dead and decorated with flowers by the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in the historic Sinking Springs Cemetery in Abingdon. The scarcity of African-Americans among the population and the mixed loyalties in the American Civil War do not improve the outlook for non-whites in Southwest Virginia. In Governor Linwood Holton’s memoir, *Opportunity Time*, he describes friendships with several African-Americans with whom he grew up in Big Stone Gap.<sup>96</sup> He indicates that these relationships provided a backdrop to his support for public policies that would be beneficial to the African-American population of Virginia during his tenure as Governor. As Governor Holton provides stories about his friends, and he describes their occupations which are often within the domestic help and service sectors. Even those who worked for the railroad, he points out “...were intelligent, educated to the extent possible in the

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<sup>94</sup> U. S. Census, American Fact Finder, Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010, Congressional District 9 (111<sup>th</sup> Congress) Virginia.

<sup>95</sup> Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press [1970] 2015), p. 205.

<sup>96</sup> Linwood Holton, *Opportunity Time*, 2008, p. 9-12.

public schools available to them, and aware without apparent bitterness that they suffered second-class status as a result of the color of their skin.”<sup>97</sup>

While one may believe that racial attitudes in Southwest Virginia may have evolved since Linwood Holton’s childhood in the 1930’s, the oddity that is race relations in the region can be no better described than by Chris Spencer. In 2015, Hurley High School in Buchanan County received national recognition for its refusal to remove Confederate flags from the school when communities around the country were debating the topic.<sup>98</sup> The principal reasoned that the use of the flag by the school could not be racist since Chris Spencer, the lone African-American student and football player, proudly wears a tattoo of the rebel flag on his arm, and he offers that it is simply a flag. The principal claims that racism is not the reason for the continued persistence of the flag which is flown in honor of those who fought in the Civil War, but rather the flag is a symbol of the heritage of the region just like gun rights, pickup trucks and country music.<sup>99</sup> To revisit Frank Kilgore’s remark pertaining to the 2008 Presidential election, “If [Obama] fails to carry Appalachia it will not be because he is black, it will be because of his lack of understanding of what is important to us as a culture just as we cannot pretend to truly know what is important to his black, urban culture.”<sup>100</sup> Phillips notes that, “In practically every state and region, ethnic and cultural animosities and divisions exceed all other factors in explaining party choice and identification.”<sup>101</sup> Southwest Virginians have constructed their own America. As long as one assimilates to the dictates of the culture, acceptance by the majority is guaranteed.

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<sup>97</sup> Linwood Holton, *Opportunity Time*, 2008, p. 9-12.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Holley, “Why a Virginia Principal Refuses to Take Down Her School’s Confederate Flags,” *Washington Post*, August 22, 2015.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Frank Kilgore, “Obama Should Understand Appalachia,” *Roanoke Times*, June 14, 2008.

<sup>101</sup> Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press [1970] 2015), p. 18.

The existence of shame provides part of the explanation for the political behavior of Southwest Virginians. Joumana El Alaoui explains, “Shame is linked to others, whereas guilt is an individual feeling. I feel shame because others are judging that I am behaving outside of the social norms and I could not stop their discovery from happening.”<sup>102</sup> Weisband and Thomas describe shame as a form of discipline meted out by the community against those who act outside of the interest of the community at-large. They write, “Individualism does not exist in kinship communities. On the contrary, kinship rules, rites of passage, and honor and shame disciplines exist in part to erase the individual intentions of community members, teaching them to subordinate their own desires to the demands of communal life.”<sup>103</sup> They describe “kinship communities” as ones in which ancestral bonds hold society together, and they describe “societies of strangers” as ones in which a “common fate” hold society together.<sup>104</sup> As J. D. Vance writes, “The Scots-Irish are one of the most distinctive subgroups in America... We do not like outsiders or people who are different from us, whether the difference lies in how they look, how they act, or most important, how they talk.”<sup>105</sup> In describing the Scots-Irish of Appalachia, Razib Khan writes, “... [they are] a parochial clannish folk trying to hold onto to their traditions, albeit with the downside of being inward looking and often regressive (downside from the perspective of Westerners that is).”<sup>106</sup> Southwest Virginia, well-populated by Scots-Irish descendants, holds attributes more aligned with kinship communities than with societies of strangers. The clans of the Scots-Irish hold strong and hold accountable those who would up-end

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<sup>102</sup> Jessica Rohan, et al., “Cultural Reflections on Shame and Guilt: an Intergenerational Dialogue,” *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, December 20, 2014, 12:448-449.

<sup>103</sup> Edward Weisband and Courtney I.P. Thomas, *Political Culture and the Making of Modern Nation-States*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers 2015), p. 43.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>105</sup> J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*, (New York: Harper Collins 2016), p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Razib Khan, “The Scots-Irish as Indigenous People,” *Discover*, July 22, 2012.

the community's status quo. Breaking trust with the kin by supporting public policies that appear to be at odds with the culture of the region will not be tolerated and a cleansing by the community is provided through the ballot box.

This chapter has provided an explanation of historical institutionalism in the decision-making process of a community, specifically Southwest Virginia and more largely defined as the Ninth Congressional District. The majority of voters look to the established institutions for guidance at the ballot box instead of individually determining candidate choice based upon one's own economic self-interest. The institutions, led by strong political leaders, provide guidance that, if followed, maintains the understood cultural norms of the region.

For an understanding of the institutions and their strength to hold political power, descriptions of both the formal and non-formal institutions have been provided. The organizational documents demonstrate that the leadership within a number of the institutions overlaps providing an overarching single voice to be shared from one organization to another. This cognitive resonance is aided by the region's physical isolation from the urban and more culturally progressive areas of Virginia. Fealty to the region's "way of life" is rewarded in a manner similar to a kinship community. Also like a kinship community, rejection or challenge to the "way of life" is punished.

The election results, demographics, and economic data of the region that are provided in the third chapter provide evidence that political behavior is not dictated by economic self-interest. The data will also show that political candidates who are not deemed as representing the "values" of the region, will not remain in office.



## CHAPTER 3

### Election Outcomes and Demographics

This chapter will explore the election results for the period 2004 through 2012 and will consider the reasons for the shifts in political behavior. This chapter will also explore the economic fortunes of the region during that same time period in order to demonstrate that economic variables do not fully explain the political behavior of the voters in Southwest Virginia. Lastly, this chapter will explore the shifts in the national culture that are at odds with Southwest Virginia's culture causing voters to reject any candidate perceived to be opposed to the cultural status quo.

#### **Election Results**

All the elections results discussed in this section have been compiled from the electronic records of the Virginia State Board of Elections (SBE). The source material can be accessed from the SBE's website, elections results, historical election results, 1789 to 2017:

<http://historical.elections.virginia.gov/>. This section reviews each of the following elective offices: House of Delegates, State Senate, Governor, U. S. President, U. S. Senate, and U. S. House of Representatives for the geographic area that constitutes the 9th Congressional District.

#### House of Delegates

There are thirteen seats in the Virginia House of Delegates that represent some or part of the geographic region of the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district. During the period of 2005 through the elections of 2011, the few seats that had been held by Democrats shifted to Republicans.

Montgomery County resident, Jim Shuler who held the 12<sup>th</sup> House of Delegates district had token opposition in 2005 from an Independent and received 79.1 percent of the vote, ran

unopposed in 2007, and in 2009 held off another Independent and gained 72.2 percent of the vote. In 2011, Shuler chose not to seek re-election in a newly configured 12<sup>th</sup> District, and while the race was close, Republican Joseph Yost defeated Democrat Donald Brian Langrehr, 51.6 percent to 48.3 percent.

Prior to the 2005 election, Democrat W. B. (Benny) Keister lost the 6<sup>th</sup> House of Delegates seat to Republican Anne Brown (Annie B.) Crockett-Stark. Keister attempted to regain the seat in 2005, but his efforts fell short, 53.8 percent to 46.2 percent. Crockett-Stark continued to increase her win percentages in 2007 (55.6 percent to 44.3 percent), and in 2009 (65.2 percent to 34.7 percent), and she was rewarded in 2011 with an opponent-free election. When Crockett-Stark retired, another Republican, Jeff Campbell was elected in her place in 2013.

Democrat J. T. (Jackie) Stump who represented the 3<sup>rd</sup> House of Delegates District ran unopposed in 2005. When Stump resigned his seat at the end of the year, a special election was scheduled.<sup>107</sup> Democrat Dan Bowling won the Special Election against three opponents. When Bowling ran in 2007, he was unopposed; however, in 2009, he was defeated by Republican James W. (Will) Morefield. Morefield prevailed with 57.1 percent of the vote to Bowling's 42.8 percent. In a reconfigured 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2011, Morefield was able to hold-off opposition from Democratic challenger Vern Presley, 59.7 percent to 40.3 percent.

Democrat Joseph (Joe) Pickett Johnson, Jr. re-joined the Virginia House of Delegates in 1989 after having served in the House in the 1960's. He won an open seat in 1989 that had been previously held by a Republican. From 2005 until his retirement in 2013, Johnson faced no opposition. His reconfigured 4<sup>th</sup> District in 2011 offered him a larger vote (14,487) than he had

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<sup>107</sup> Bill Archer, "Parties Scramble to Fill Spot Left by Stump Resignation," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 12, 2005.

earned in the Gubernatorial election year of 2009 (13,032). When Johnson retired in 2013, the open seat was picked up by a Republican.

In 2005, Democrat incumbent Clarence E. (Bud) Phillips soundly defeated his Republican challenger 64.1 percent of the vote to 35.9 percent of the vote. In 2007 and in 2009, Phillips had no opponent. Of note, however, in 2009, write-in's accounted for 9.9 percent of the vote total. In 2011 re-districting shifted the 2<sup>nd</sup> House District and would have pitted Phillips against Joe Johnson. Phillips chose to retire, and his peers in the General Assembly rewarded him with a judgeship.<sup>108</sup>

Democrat Ward Armstrong served the 10<sup>th</sup> District in the Virginia House of Delegates. In 2005, Armstrong handily defeated a Republican opponent 63.4 percent of the vote to 36.5 percent. In 2007, he had no opposition. In 2009, Armstrong prevailed against a Republican challenger with 56.5 percent of the vote to 43.4% of the vote. In 2011, redistricting moved the 10<sup>th</sup> House District to Northern Virginia, and Armstrong moved his residence into the 9<sup>th</sup> House District to run against an incumbent Republican in the reconfigured 9<sup>th</sup> House of Delegates District. Republican Charles Poindexter defeated Armstrong who had been serving as the Democrat's House Minority Leader. Poindexter received 52.6 percent of the vote while Armstrong received 47.2 percent of the vote.<sup>109</sup>

With the 2011 redistricting and subsequent elections, the House of Delegates districts located within the boundaries of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District are now all Republican. This shift in representation from Democratic office holders to Republican office holders reflects the recognition by the community at large that its culture will be maintained by "R's" not "D's".

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<sup>108</sup> Debra McCown, "Bud Phillips Moves on as Joe Johnson Looks to Run," *Bristol Herald Courier*, August 22, 2011.

<sup>109</sup> Laurence Hammack, "Charles Poindexter Defeats Ward Armstrong in Incumbent Match," *Roanoke Times*, November 8, 2011.

## State Senate

There are seven seats in the Virginia State Senate that represent communities that are either partially or fully within the geographic region of the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district. During the period of 2005 through the elections of 2011, two seats that had been held by Democrats shifted to Republicans, two remain in Democratic hands, and the other three remain Republican. Both of the seats held by Democrats cover turf outside of the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district, and the turf includes urban, traditionally Democratic areas. The 21<sup>st</sup> State Senate seat is held by John Edwards and includes the City of Roanoke. The 25<sup>th</sup> State Senate seat is held by Creigh Deeds and includes the City of Charlottesville.

The redistricting of 2011 proved crucial in one of the lost Democratic State Senate seats. In 2007, Roscoe Reynolds had easily defeated Republican Jeff Evans by garnering 63 percent of the vote while Evans earned 36.9 percent of the vote. In 2011, Republican incumbent William M. (Bill) Stanley found himself written out of a District, and he moved a short distance in order to challenge Reynolds.<sup>110</sup> In a three-way race, Stanley overcame Reynolds with 46.8 percent of the vote to Reynolds' 45.5 percent of the vote. Evans, running as an Independent, gained 7.6 percent of the vote.

Incumbent Democrat Phillip Puckett, representing the 38<sup>th</sup> State Senate District had no opposition in 2007; however, in 2011, he hung on to win an expensive race with 53% of the vote against a Republican challenger who earned 46.9 percent of the vote. Both Puckett and his opponent in 2011 spent approximately \$1 million each on the race.<sup>111</sup> It was a hard-fought battle that connected a local race to national politics. During the election, Puckett declared that he

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<sup>110</sup> Associated Press/NBC4 Washington, "Control of the Senate at Stake in Virginia," *NBC4 Washington*, November 9, 2011.

<sup>111</sup> Associated Press, "Dem Candidate in Va. Coal Region Slams Gov, Obama," *News Leader*, June 8, 2014.

would not be supporting President Obama's re-election campaign in 2012, citing the Obama administration's policies related to coal.<sup>112</sup> Puckett resigned in 2014, citing a desire for his daughter to be appointed to a judgeship which was being held up by the State Senate because of a rule against the consideration of judicial appointments for family members of sitting State Senators. At the time of Puckett's resignation, Governor McAuliffe was attempting to push through Medicaid expansion and believed with a split State Senate, advantaged by the Democrat's Lieutenant Governor, he would prevail.<sup>113</sup> The Republican, Ben Chafin, who won the 38<sup>th</sup> State Senate seat in the special election held in 2014 vowed to fight against Obamacare.<sup>114</sup> Chafin had no opposition when he ran for a full four-year term in November 2015.

Like the political shift in political party representation in the House of Delegates, the State Senate has also shifted from "D's" to "R's", again reflecting the recognition by Southwest Virginia voters that their culture is protected by the region's "R's". The "D's" that remain represent urban, more culturally-diverse pockets that are on the outskirts of Southwest Virginia. The contrasts between Southwest Virginia voters and the rest of Virginia, and the shift from more support for "D's" to less support for "D's" are further reflected in the statewide races for Governor, President, and U.S. Senate as the following breakdown of elections results reveal.

#### Governor

In the year after the 2004 Presidential race, the 2005 gubernatorial race pitted the Commonwealth's Lieutenant Governor, Tim Kaine (D), against the Commonwealth's Attorney

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<sup>112</sup> George Jackson, "VA Sen. Phillip Puckett Says He Will Not Support Obama in 2012," *Bristol Herald Courier*, September 22, 2011.

<sup>113</sup> Laura Vozzella, "Puckett's Senate Exit Undid McAuliffe's Secret Plan for Medicaid Expansion," *Washington Post*, November 22, 2014.

<sup>114</sup> The Richmond Times Dispatch, "Republican Delegate Seeking Puckett's Senate Seat," *Roanoke Times* (Roanoke.com), June 9, 2014.

General, Jerry Kilgore (R). Kilgore grew up in Southwest Virginia. Kaine had been the Mayor of Richmond and had his father-in-law, former Republican Governor Linwood Holton, stumping on his behalf.<sup>115</sup> Kilgore stressed that Kaine did not share Virginians' values and was criticized for negative campaigning, including using an ad indicating that Kaine's opposition to the death penalty, based on his Catholic faith, would mean that as Governor he would not even condemn Hitler to death.<sup>116</sup> While Kilgore prevailed in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district by winning 54 percent of the votes to Kaine's 44 percent of the votes, Kaine won the three-way statewide race with 51.7 percent of the votes to Kilgore's 46 percent. In a day-after analysis of the election results, it was noted that the message of moderate/centrist politics had moved to the outer suburbs of the populous areas of the state – geographic areas in which Kaine did well. On the other hand, Kilgore's message resonated better in the rural areas of the Commonwealth.<sup>117</sup>

In the year following the 2008 Presidential election, the 2009 gubernatorial race pitted the Commonwealth's Attorney General, Bob McDonnell (R) against State Senator Creigh Deeds (D). Just four years earlier, McDonnell had won the Attorney General position over Deeds by a mere 323 votes, representing only one-tenth of one percent of the vote. Four years later, the race would not be as close. McDonnell prevailed statewide by earning 58.6 percent of the vote to Deeds' 41.3 percent of the vote. In the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district the race was even more lopsided. McDonnell earned 66.36 percent of the vote while Deeds earned 33.55 percent of the vote. Although the Republicans claimed that the victory was proof that President Obama's policies were unpopular in Virginia, polling indicated that the President's favorability in Virginia was only slightly diminished, and the reason for McDonnell's win was more the result of low

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<sup>115</sup> Michael D. Shear, "Democrat Kaine Wins in Virginia," *Washington Post*, November 9, 2005.

<sup>116</sup> James Dao, "Democrat Wins Race for Governor in Virginia," *New York Times*, November 9, 2005.

<sup>117</sup> Michael D. Shear, "Democrat Kaine Wins in Virginia," *Washington Post*, November 9, 2005.

voter-turnout among Obama's supporters.<sup>118</sup> As noted above, the percentages of the vote in the 9<sup>th</sup> District for "D" candidates for Governor have been shrinking, and the same phenomenon is occurring with the election results for U. S. President as outlined below.

### U. S. President

In 2004, incumbent President George Bush received 59.07 percent of the vote in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district, while his opponent, John Kerry, received 39.84 percent of the District vote. The shift in voting between the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district and the overall state was demonstrated by the state percentage totals of 53.7 percent for Bush and 45.5 percent for Kerry.

In 2008, John McCain earned 160,430 (58.71 percent) votes in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district. Barack Obama earned 108,220 (39.6 percent) votes in the District. While Obama lost the majority of the vote in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district, he won the majority of the vote in Virginia (53 percent to 46.3 percent), the first Democrat to do so since Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

In 2012, incumbent President Barack Obama once again won the statewide vote, albeit by a slightly smaller margin, 51.1 percent to Mitt Romney's 47.2 percent. Obama was soundly defeated in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district, losing with 34.83 percent of the vote to Romney's 62.9 percent of the vote. "D" candidates for U. S. President who reflect a more urban, culturally-diverse world-view, are out-of-step with the 9<sup>th</sup> District voters. As that belief has been embraced by the majority of voters in the region and as the established institutions have taken root, the percentage of the vote for the "D" candidate has declined. The U. S. Senate has seen a similar change, with one exception that will be explored below.

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<sup>118</sup> Ian Urbina, "In Virginia, McDonnell Ends Democrats' Streak," *New York Times*, November 3, 2009.

## U. S. Senate

In 2006, incumbent Senator and former Governor, George Allen was opposed by Jim Webb. Webb narrowly won the statewide race with 49.59 percent of the vote to Allen's 49.20 percent of the vote. In spite of Webb, a former Marine and Secretary of the Navy, boasting of roots in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district<sup>119</sup>, Allen garnered 54.88 percent of the District vote over Webb's 44.01 percent.

With the retirement of Virginia's long-time U. S. Senator John Warner in 2008, the Presidential election year provided an opportunity for two former Governors to vie for the seat. Polling in the spring before the November election indicated that Mark Warner would handily defeat the less-popular Jim Gilmore.<sup>120</sup> Virginia voters supported Warner with 65 percent of the vote to Gilmore's 33.7 percent. The vote tally in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district almost mirrored the overall state results with Mark Warner picking up 62.57 percent of the vote and Gilmore receiving 36.22 percent of the vote. *Could the trend that had been occurring for shrinking vote percentages for "D" candidates for statewide office be upended?* Mark Warner's election results for the 9<sup>th</sup> District in 2008 are the anomaly or the outlier. As a former Governor, Warner was more popular than former Governor Gilmore. In addition, Warner successfully worked to cultivate the independent and Republican vote in both Southwest Virginia and statewide.<sup>121</sup> He attempted a similar strategy with his re-election bid in 2014, and he was almost defeated.

Four years later, in another Presidential election year, incumbent U. S. Senator Jim Webb chose not to seek re-election, and once again, the election provided an opportunity for two

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<sup>119</sup> James Webb, <http://www.jameswebb.com/about/about-jim>, 2017.

<sup>120</sup> Associated Press, "Mark Warner in Control of Race with Jim Gilmore," *The News & Advance*, May 4, 2008.

<sup>121</sup> Jenna Portnoy and Rachel Weiner, "On His Way to a Slim Victory in a Changing Virginia, Warner May Have Wooed Wrong Voters," *Washington Post*, November 5, 2014.



former Governors, George Allen and Tim Kaine, to vie for the seat.<sup>122</sup> Unlike the Senate race four years before, the outcome of the election results in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district did not reflect the outcome of the elections results for Virginia. While Tim Kaine won the statewide race with 52.8 percent of the vote against George Allen's 46.9 percent of the vote, in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district, George Allen received 61.77 percent of the vote, and Tim Kaine received 38.09 percent of the vote.

If the shift from representation by some "D's" to only "R's" in the General Assembly, and the shrinking percentage of votes for "D's" seeking statewide office is not enough evidence to demonstrate the stronghold that Southwest Virginia's culture has on its voters, the dramatic ouster of the 9<sup>th</sup> District's long-time Democratic Congressman should suffice.

#### U. S. House of Representatives

In 2004, Rick Boucher had served for two decades in the U. S. House of Representatives on behalf of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district. Boucher was expected to have a difficult race against a well-funded opponent, first-time candidate Kevin Triplett, in a Presidential election year.<sup>123</sup> In a three-way race, Boucher was able to maintain his seat earning a comfortable 59.3 percent of the vote to his main challenger's vote of 38.9 percent. The independent candidate received 1.7 percent of the vote.

Boucher held off a challenge by a sitting member of the Virginia House of Delegates in 2006. He earned 67.8 percent of the vote to Bill Carrico's 32.2 percent of the vote. While Boucher ran on a local-issues platform, his opponent attempted to tie Boucher to national

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<sup>122</sup> Michael D. Shear, "In New Poll, Kaine Ahead in Virginia Senate Race," *The Caucus: The politics and Government Blog of the New York Times*, October 11, 2012.

<sup>123</sup> John Gizzi, "Races of the Week Triplett vs. Boucher," *Human Events*, June 29, 2004.

Democratic politics, such as same-sex marriage. Boucher's messaging, better funding, and his support for the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) proved too much for Carrico to overcome.<sup>124</sup>

After two successful re-election campaigns against somewhat viable candidates, then came 2008. On January 21, 2008, Rick Boucher endorsed Barack Obama for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. In Boucher's endorsement he declared that Obama could win rural Southwest Virginia.<sup>125</sup> Although at the time of Boucher's endorsement he did not have a declared opponent, it was still possible for one to emerge. Oddly, the Republicans chose not to field a candidate, and Boucher received 97.1 percent of the vote.

In February 2010, the then Majority Leader in the Virginia House of Delegate, Morgan Griffith, issued a press release indicating his intention to run for Congress. The press release offered quotes from the Republican members of the Southwest Virginia delegation serving in the Virginia General Assembly. While then-Delegate David Nutter offered that Griffith was supportive of higher education, and Delegate Will Morefield explained that Griffith would fight job-killing cap and trade legislation, the overwhelming theme of the remarks focused on the hope of Griffith taking Southwest Virginia's values to Washington.<sup>126</sup> A hard-fought battle ensued that included a third-party candidate who ended up with a little more than 2 percent of the vote. Griffith overcame the twenty-eight year incumbent earning 51.2 percent of the vote to Boucher's 46.4 percent of the vote. After the defeat, Boucher explained that Griffith and his supportive special interests were able to nationalize the election and were able to capitalize on the

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<sup>124</sup> Tonia Moxley, "Rep. Rick Boucher Defeats Bill Carrico, Sails to 13<sup>th</sup> Term," *The Roanoke Times*, November 7, 2006.

<sup>125</sup> Times-Dispatch Staff, "Boucher Endorses Obama," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, January 22, 2008.

<sup>126</sup> Julian Walker, "Griffith Officially Running for Congress?," *The Virginian-Pilot (pilotonline)*, February 23, 2010.

unpopularity of President Obama and his policies in the region.<sup>127</sup> With Boucher's defeat, the region's culture proved its strength to overcome a strong challenger, who, in spite of serving the needs of the community to improve the region's economic fortunes, was successfully painted as an *outsider*.

In the 2012 Presidential election year, incumbent Congressman Griffith found himself with an opponent in the form of political newcomer, Anthony Flaccavento. Flaccavento's political message was one of building a "bottom-up economy", and he carefully navigated through a pro-environment philosophy while pressing his support for the region's miners.<sup>128</sup> Griffith was able to retain the seat by receiving 61.3 percent of the vote, while Flaccavento received 38.6 percent of the vote. The trend for low "D" support continues even as "D" candidates attempt a populist economic message. As the next section provides evidence, no candidate addressing the region's economic woes, without also embracing the region's cultural values, will lose.

As Virginia's more populous and less rural areas shift along with the nation to a more progressive ideology and support Democratic candidates for congressional and General Assembly seats, the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district appears to be less-inclined to support Democratic candidates who are portrayed by their Republican opponents as not sharing the region's values (culture). Hence, Democratic congressional and General Assembly candidates that were once able to win in the region are at a distinct electoral disadvantage.

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<sup>127</sup> Josh Smith, "Exclusive Interview with Rick Boucher," *Bristol Herald Courier*, February 6, 2011.

<sup>128</sup> Appalachian Voices, "Running on Reality: A Conversation with Anthony Flaccavento," *Appalachian Voices* ([appvoices.org/thevoice](http://appvoices.org/thevoice)), June 21, 2013.

## Southwest Virginia Economy

Southwest Virginia's economy is often defined as dependent and inextricably linked to coal; however, the coal-producing region is limited to a seven-county and one city (Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Tazewell, Wise counties and the City of Norton) area. The population of the coal region per the 2010 Census was 208,150, approximately 32 percent of the total population of the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district at that time.<sup>129</sup> The majority of the population of the 9<sup>th</sup> District lives outside of the coal-producing area. The next paragraphs outline the changes in coal production and coal mining-related employment for the 2004-2012 period.

Coal production and coal mining-related employment has fluctuated during the 2004-2012 timeframe. In 2004, the majority of production, measured in short tons, was in Wise County with 15,868 tons, with the second highest producing county being Buchanan with 10,348 tons. The total coal production for Virginia in 2004 was 31,420 tons. In contrast, the neighboring states of Kentucky and West Virginia had well over 100,000 tons each.<sup>130</sup> The total number of employees in both underground and surface mining operations in 2004 was 4,842, representing a slight increase of 2.6 percent from 2003.<sup>131</sup>

In 2005, the majority of production, measured in short tons, was again in Wise County with 14,601 tons, with the second highest producing county being Buchanan with 7,756 tons. The total coal production for Virginia in 2005 saw a decrease from the previous year, with a total of short tons of 27,743. The number of mines, both underground and surface, increased from 77 underground mines to 83 underground mines and from 46 surface mines to 49 surface mines.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> U. S. Census 2010 QuickFacts.

<sup>130</sup> Annual Coal Report 2004, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p 12-14.

<sup>131</sup> Annual Coal Report 2004, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 36.

<sup>132</sup> Annual Coal Report 2005, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 12-16

In spite of the lower production numbers, Virginia did experience a slight increase from 4,842 to 5,134 (6 percent) in the number of employees working in mining operations.<sup>133</sup>

In 2006, production in Virginia mines increased 7.2 percent over the 2005 production level for a total of 29,740 short tons. At the same time, the number of surface mines increased from 49 to 51, and the number of underground mines decreased from 83 to 76.<sup>134</sup> The net loss in mines combined with the net gain in production for 2006, also saw a slight increase in the number of employees from 5,134 to 5,262, a 2.5 percent increase.<sup>135</sup>

In 2007, production in Virginia mines decreased almost 15 percent over the 2006 production level. Both the number of underground mines and surface mines decreased 6.6 percent and 7.8 percent, respectively.<sup>136</sup> The number of employees also dropped significantly from a total of 5,262 to a total of 4,763, a 9.5 percent decrease.<sup>137</sup>

In the Presidential election year of 2008, production in Virginia mines continued to drop, albeit slight, to 24,712 short tons, a 2.5 percent reduction. The number of underground mines decreased 8.5 percent from 71 to 65, while the number of surface mines increased 4.3 percent increase from 49 to 47.<sup>138</sup> Employment within the coal sector remained relatively steady with a slight increase of .7 percent for a total of 4,797.<sup>139</sup>

For 2009, production in Virginia dropped 14.9 percent for a total of 21,019 short tons. The number of underground mines dropped 15.4 percent from 65 to 55 while the number of surface mines increased 8.2 percent from 49 to 53. It is significant to note that the economic

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>134</sup> Annual Coal Report 2006, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 11-12.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>136</sup> Annual Coal Report 2007, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 11-12.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>138</sup> Annual Coal Report 2008, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 16-18.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

downturn which the country began experiencing at the end of 2008, adversely affected coal production nationwide. The production total for the United States was 8.3 percent lower than the previous year.<sup>140</sup> Employment within the coal sector dropped from 4,797 to 4,646, a decrease of 3.1 percent.<sup>141</sup>

For 2010, production in Virginia increased 6.5 percent from 21,019 short tons to 22,385. The number of surface mines dropped 15.1 percent from 53 to 45 while the number of underground mines increased 10.9 percent from 55 to 61.<sup>142</sup> Employment numbers within the coal sector increased 6.7 percent from 4,646 to 4,957.<sup>143</sup> 2010 marked the end of Rick Boucher's 28 years as a member of the U. S. House of Representatives. The facts of 1) increased coal production in Virginia in 2010 and of 2) increased coal mining employment in 2010 did not stymie the "war on coal" propaganda.

For 2011, production in Virginia remained relatively steady with an increase of .6 percent from a total of 22,385 short tons to a total of 22,523 short tons. The number of underground mines remained at 61 while the number of surface mines increased 8.9 percent from 45 to 49.<sup>144</sup> Employment increased 6.1 percent from a total of 4,957 in 2010 to a total of 5,261 in 2011.<sup>145</sup>

For 2012, production in Virginia dropped 15.8 percent from 22,523 short tons to 18,965. The number of mines, both underground and surface decreased as well. Underground mines dropped 6.6 percent from 61 to 57, and the number of surface mines dropped 20.4 percent from 49 to 39.<sup>146</sup> Employment in the coal sector decreased 5 percent dropping from 5,261 in 2011 to

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<sup>140</sup> Annual Coal Report 2009, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 12-13.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>142</sup> Annual Coal Report 2010, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 12-13.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

<sup>144</sup> Annual Coal Report 2011, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 2-3.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>146</sup> Annual Coal Report 2012, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 2-4.

4,998 in 2012.<sup>147</sup> If one were to listen to the rhetoric issuing forth from politicians, one would believe that regulations issued by the Obama Administration would be the reason for the decline in the coal industry. While the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in the absence of congressional action, did promulgate regulations to curb carbon dioxide emissions pursuant to the U. S. Supreme Court decision in *Massachusetts vs. EPA*, it is also the case that market forces in the form of cheap natural gas and large coal reserves in the Powder River Basin of the western United States have played significant roles in the reduction of the production of coal in Central Appalachia (and Southwest Virginia).<sup>148</sup> Before Barack Obama’s EPA was active, an economic study released in 2001 by the University of Kentucky’s Center for Business and Economic Research noted that “...improvements in mining productivity, competition from Western U. S. coal, coal imports from abroad, and environmental legislation all have contributed to substantial job losses in Appalachia.”<sup>149</sup> The cry to preserve coal or to bring back coal appears to have little to do with the reality of a declining industry affected by market forces and more to do with nostalgia for a bygone era. During the 2012 U. S. Senate campaign, mailers were sent to Southwest Virginia residents indicating that if Tim Kaine were elected he would aid President Obama in the destruction of the region’s “way of life.”<sup>150</sup> If this “way of life” were simply referring to coal jobs, the majority had disappeared many years before.

From the eight year period of 2004 to 2012, overall coal production has dropped from a high of 31,420 short tons in 2004 to 18,965 short tons in 2012, and that loss of coal production

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<sup>147</sup> Annual Coal Report 2012, U. S. Energy Information Administration, p. 27.

<sup>148</sup> Steve Cicala, “Who’s Waging the War on Coal? Not the U. S. Government,” *Forbes*, October 27, 2016.

<sup>149</sup> Eric C. Thompson, Mark C. Berger, et al., 2001, *A Study on the Current Economic Impacts of the Appalachian Coal Industry and its Future in the Region*, Center for Business and Economic Research, University of Kentucky, p. 1.

<sup>150</sup> Julie A. Shepherd-Powell, *Beyond the Coal Divide: The Cultural Politics of Natural Resource Extraction in Central Appalachia*, University of Kentucky, 2017, p. 129.

adversely affecting coal severance taxes paid to the localities in which coal is mined; however, during that same period, coal mining employment in the region has fluctuated from a high of 5,262 in 2006, just one more than the total mining employment of 5,261 in 2011, to a low of 4,646 in 2009. According to the American Community Survey for the 5 year estimate 2008-2012, the civilian workforce total for the coal-region was 77,099. Coal sector jobs accounted for less than 7 percent of the employment in the coal region. Coal, while an important part of the economy of Southwest Virginia, is not the only part of the economy, and coal's economic fortunes have waxed and waned for years, longer than the timeframe under consideration in this study.

During the same period, 2004 to 2012, that coal production and employment fluctuated, the overall unemployment rate in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional district tracked slightly below the overall unemployment rate for the United States. In 2005, the average unemployment rate in the 9<sup>th</sup> District was 4.7 percent, and the average unemployment rate in the United States was 5.1 percent. By 2007, the unemployment rate had dropped to 4.3 percent in the 9<sup>th</sup> District and to 4.6 percent in the United States. The 9<sup>th</sup> District, like the rest of the United States, experienced an increase in the unemployment rate in 2008, 2009, and 2010. And similarly to the United States, as the unemployment rate began decreasing in 2011, the unemployment rate in the 9<sup>th</sup> District also began to decrease.<sup>151</sup>

In 2005, the U. S. Census Bureau estimated the median household income in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district to be \$31,908 which was an increase over its estimate in 2000 of \$29,624. In spite of the higher median household income in 2005, the Census Bureau estimated that 18.7 percent of the “families and people whose income in the past twelve months [fell] below the

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<sup>151</sup> Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information and Analytics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics.



poverty level” which was a 2.1 percent increase from 2000.<sup>152,153</sup> For the period of 2008 through 2012, the Census Bureau provided a five year estimate of a median household income of \$38,247 in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district. The poverty rate was estimated to be 18.8 percent.<sup>154</sup> The significance of these numbers lay in the insignificance of any change.

The congressional district, even during changes to its geographic boundaries, has continued to have a greater, but relatively steady, percentage of individuals and families living below the poverty level and has experienced slight increases in median household income, albeit well-below the national median household income. While the financial fortunes of the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district have been less than stellar, it does not appear that a “war on coal” perpetuated by the Obama Administration is to blame for the long-term economic struggles. The economic struggles are not new. The coal economy has been in decline for some time, and the forces that have been adversely affecting the sector pre-date any Obama-era regulatory policies that may have quickened the demise of the industry in Southwest Virginia.

It does not appear that changes in political leadership have aided the improvement of the economy either. Whether the region has been represented in the Virginia General Assembly by a majority of Democrats or by a majority of Republicans as has been the shift from 2004 through 2012, economic fortunes remain the same, generally trending slightly behind the national average. The region’s culture has also remained the same, and also “behind” the national shift to more progressive, diverse views. As this study outlines below, the political leaders have sought

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<sup>152</sup> U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, Selected Economic Characteristics, 2005 American Community Survey.

<sup>153</sup> U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics 2000 Census 2000 Summary File.

<sup>154</sup> U. S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, Selected Economic Characteristics, 2008-2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

to institutionalize the region's culture further solidifying its prominence in the minds of the region's voters.

### **Southwest Virginia Culture vs. National Culture**

In an effort to preserve, promote, and build upon the culture of Southwest Virginia, the Virginia General Assembly established the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation.<sup>155</sup> Some of the programs that it supports include 1) the Crooked Road, a driving trail connecting music venues at which one can enjoy traditional or old-time country music, and 2) 'Round the Mountain, a driving trail connecting artisan studios and locally-made craft resellers at which one can learn the old-time traditions of basket weaving, guitar building, glass blowing or cane chair making.

The idea for the Birthplace of Country Music Museum now located in Bristol, Virginia, began with a joint resolution of Congress which recognized that the first known recordings of old-time mountain music occurred in Bristol, Tennessee in the 1920's.<sup>156</sup> Some of those early recordings included Virginians such as the Stoneman Family and the Carter Family. Thirty years after those first recordings, similar music could be heard on episodes of *The Andy Griffith Show*, and now over 50 years later, re-runs offer viewers the opportunity to become acquainted with traditional mountain music every time the Darlings visit Mayberry.

Mayberry, a town in which the Sheriff does not need to carry a gun, where the only bad people are out-of-towners, where everyone knows everybody, and everybody looks alike, is the idea of the region's cultural history. Mayberry belongs to the region. After all, Mount Airy, the

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<sup>155</sup> *Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation*. 2011. Code of Virginia Title 2.2 Chapter 27 Article 10 §2.2-2734.

<sup>156</sup> U. S. Congress, 1998, "Recognizing the Contributions of the Cities of Bristol, Tennessee, and Bristol, Virginia, and Their People to the Origins and Development of Country Music, and for Other Purposes," 105<sup>th</sup> Congress Second Session, H. Con. Res.214.

hometown of Andy Griffith is just across the state line. A local actor, David Browning, began portraying “the Mayberry Deputy” more than a quarter of a century ago, and continues the role at festivals and meetings more than a hundred times each year.<sup>157</sup> Local educator Ben Talley alluded to Mayberry ideals, of honor, trust, and good faith, when he described a local bike shop as “a real-life piece of Mayberry.”<sup>158</sup>

Looking to traditional music borne in the hills of the region a century ago and to a TV show that idealized living in a small rural town, Southwest Virginians remain steeped in the region’s history. The preservation of the region’s culture has been aided by members of the General Assembly and by members of the U. S. Congress through the legislation that established the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and that recognized the cities of Bristol as the Birthplace of Country Music. It was important to these political leaders to pay homage to the region’s heritage, and by extension, its values.

If Southwest Virginians define their culture by the values of honor, trustworthiness, faithfulness and nostalgia, those traits belong to them, not to those others who live in urban or flatland areas. Those areas are not Mayberry; those areas are not the birthplace of country music; and those areas do not protest the nudity in the stage production of *Liquid Moon* at the local professional theatre.<sup>159</sup>

This chapter has offered an overview of the 2004-2012 election results for the General Assembly, Governor, U.S. President, U. S. Senate, and the U. S. House of Representatives. The results indicate that Southwest Virginia voters are increasingly supporting “R” candidates. The

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<sup>157</sup> Joe Tennis, “Wearing the Deputy Badge Proudly,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, November 8, 2015.

<sup>158</sup> Ben Talley, “A Handshake Agreement,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, October 10, 2016, p.A5.

<sup>159</sup> Joe Tennis, “Tennis Anyone? She’s Still in Love with Barter,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, June 21, 2012.

change cannot be explained away by the fluctuation in coal production and coal mining employment nor can it be explained by the other economic data outlined in this chapter. The culture of the region as manifested by its art, crafts, and music is being preserved through the political establishment of organizations who offer the opportunity for the residents and visitors to the region to reflect on a by-gone era. The region's political leadership that is now fully represented by the "R's" has established itself as the keeper of the region's heritage and values.

The fourth and concluding chapter will reflect on the outcomes of the recent 2016 Presidential and 2017 Gubernatorial elections, particularly noting the political messages that resonated with the region's voters. The narrative will include an analysis of comments by former Congressman Rick Boucher about the prospects for Democrats to regain political leadership in the 9<sup>th</sup> District and other rural areas. And, it will provide further explanation for understanding the cultural underpinnings of the region when embarking on a political campaign.

## CHAPTER 4

### Conclusion

Since the commencement of the research for this thesis, the eyes of the nation have turned to Southwest Virginia to find explanation for the rise of Donald Trump and the phenomenon that has become known as Trumpism. While the initial focus of this thesis limited the timeframe to the elections held between 2004 and 2012, given the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election, the disconnect between the statewide election results and the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district results, and in light of the current gubernatorial election underway in Virginia, neither the 2016 Presidential election nor the 2017 gubernatorial election can be ignored. The Presidential election of 2016 continued the trend in the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district of overwhelming support for the Republican candidate. Although Hillary Clinton won Virginia by over 200,000 votes, she lost the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district by over 131,000 votes.<sup>160</sup> The percentage of her vote count, 27.16 percent, in the congressional district is considerably lower than Barack Obama's vote count percentages in the congressional district in both 2008 and 2012. Bland County, albeit one of the least populous in the district with a large portion of its land in the hands of the U. S. Forest Service, supported Donald Trump with 81.97 percent of its vote. As one would expect, the coal communities were brutal to Clinton. Tazewell County, the third most populous county in the district awarded Clinton 15.59 percent of the vote and awarded Trump 81.70 percent vote. Scott County, a county that has not had active mining for well-over a decade and has benefitted economically because of its geographic proximity to Kingsport, Tennessee and one of the region's largest employers, Tennessee Eastman, awarded Clinton 15.65 percent of

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<sup>160</sup> Virginia State Board of Elections, 2016 Presidential Elections, Elections Database.

the vote and awarded Trump 81.65 percent of the vote. Lee County, a county with limited mining operations since at least 2004, and a county whose hospital's closure is cited to have occurred because Virginia's Republican-majority General Assembly declined to expand Medicaid, awarded Clinton 17.31 percent of its vote and awarded Trump 80.25 percent of its vote.<sup>161</sup> These results continue to baffle those who question the reasons one would vote in favor of individuals who espouse reducing funding for social safety net programs in a region whose residents depend heavily on those same programs.

At the height of the 2016 Presidential campaign, news reports indicated that Trump's support was based on the perceived financial needs of the working class. The demographics of the geographic locations that added up to Trump's win, such as in Southwest Virginia, might lead one to believe that theory; however, as the election results and the exit polling data continue to be dissected, that theory is being challenged.<sup>162</sup> Political pundits who are visiting places such as Buchanan County, Virginia and Mount Airy, North Carolina (a mere five miles from Southwest Virginia), are finding that cultural change and the perceived loss of a by-gone era drove the vote for Donald Trump.<sup>163</sup> The language and the slogan Trump successfully marketed to the region's voters fed their desire for the magical Mayberry, a white town where the amiable drunk walked himself into a jail cell to sleep-off his most recent drinking binge, and everyone went to the same church and sang in the choir. Any challenge to that idyll through the political process or immigration policy or Black Lives Matter protests are to be met with the same fierceness that the Scottish clansmen employed when fighting to protect their homeland.

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<sup>161</sup> Virginia State Board of Elections, 2016 Presidential Elections, Elections Database.

<sup>162</sup> Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu, "It's Time to Bust the Myth: Most Trump Voters Were Not Working Class," *Washington Post*, June 5, 2017.

<sup>163</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "How Nostalgia for White Christian America Drove So Many Americans to Vote for Trump," *Washington Post*, January 5, 2017.

In a recent essay for *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Rick Boucher wrote that, “The dominance Republicans now enjoy across rural regions is based more on culture than policy differences.”<sup>164</sup> Boucher acknowledges that culture is salient. Explaining his election loss in 2010, Boucher wrote that the results “...did not signal any fundamental change in rural sentiment.” He surmised that the voters, until the 2010 election, were not concerned about his more progressive positions on labor or abortion, because of his staunch support of gun rights. In spite of his defeat, Boucher believes that Democrats can still win in areas that are now considered “red” – as long as the Democratic candidate supports an unfettered right to bear arms and are regularly present in the region. Boucher makes the case that 2010 represented a perfect election storm: 1) the congressional seat was the only race on the ballot, 2) his opponent and his opponent’s supporters were successful in connecting him to national Democratic party leaders who were widely unpopular in the congressional district, 3) the momentum, along with outside special-interest money, was on the side of the opponent. Since Boucher’s initial congressional-seat win in 1982, a number of social changes have occurred that would make his assumption that simply being present and espousing the NRA interpretation of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution more difficult to support: 1) the politicalization of religion with the rise of organizations such as the Falwell movement, 2) the commercialization and availability of the Internet that has allowed for the development of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, 3) the limitations of campaign finance laws by the U. S. Supreme Court through its decision in *Citizens United vs. the Federal Election Commission* and the rise of organizations that have been able to take advantage of the *Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002* better known as McCain-Feingold.

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<sup>164</sup> Rick Boucher, “Yes, Red State Wins are Possible,” *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, 44 (Spring), 2017.

Conservative religious beliefs continue to prevail in Southwest Virginia. Preachers are not shy in espousing political views, veiled in Biblical terms, when offering sermons from the pulpit. Since Boucher's defeat in 2010, we have witnessed both the U. S. Supreme Court fight over the Affordable Care Act's mandate requiring employers to provide health coverage that includes birth control and the U. S. Supreme Court fight over same-sex marriage. These two issues do not receive heavy play by Democrats in campaign advertisement in Southwest Virginia because it would not be a winning strategy in Southwest Virginia to speak in favor of women's choice and same-sex marriage. Case-in-point, John Adams, the current Republican candidate for Virginia's Attorney General has spoken against the position taken by current Democratic incumbent Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring who refused to defend the Commonwealth's constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.<sup>165</sup> With the preponderance of evangelical Christians in Southwest Virginia, positions taken by political candidates that are outside the region's accepted religious norms will not be well-received.

The development and rise of social media, such as Facebook, since Boucher was first elected to Congress in 1982, has allowed Southwest Virginians, just as other users around the world, to seek out others who share their particular point of view. While out-numbered generally in state-wide elections as evidenced by the recent election outcomes, Southwest Virginians consider themselves in the majority because all their friends believe as they do. The clannishness that has been previously explored and noted as part of the historic fabric of Southwest Virginia is not being displaced or diluted by the rise of social media. The ongoing revelations of the use of social media by hostile foreign actors to increase political discord in the United States further demonstrates that social media users seek out points of views shared by

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<sup>165</sup> Matthew Barakat (Associated Press), "Gay Marriage: Key Distinction in Attorney General Debate," *Bristol Herald Courier*, October 21, 2017, p. A8.



their clans. While Southwest Virginia voters have repeatedly voted in favor of the Republican candidate for President in the election period 2004-2012, the evidence would suggest, especially if the election period under review were expanded through 2016 or 2017, that the region is becoming more clannish. The institutionalized culture continues to protect itself.

Further, in order for Democratic candidates in Virginia to win state-wide races they must appeal to a more liberal electorate, an electorate that closely mirrors the Democratic National Party platform. Those candidates are not going to be supportive of an unfettered right to gun ownership. This particular issue was debated between Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders during the Democratic presidential primary. The two actually argued as to who was less popular with the National Rifle Association (NRA).<sup>166</sup> Political action committees or issue-based political organizations that now have the ability to out-raise and out-spend candidates and their respective political party operations will continue to dominate political campaign spending.<sup>167</sup> Middle-of-the-road or moderate political candidates will not attract positive outside funding nor will they attract significant resources from a political party's coffers. In other words, a pro-gun Democrat running for the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District seat will not gain the endorsement of the NRA over the current Congressman Morgan Griffith. Boucher should understand this since he, simply by serving as the incumbent, did receive the NRA endorsement in 2010.<sup>168</sup> However, Morgan Griffith received the endorsement of the organization for both years he has run for re-election with Democratic Party opposition (and against candidates who had provided pro-2<sup>nd</sup> amendment

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<sup>166</sup> Katie Sanders, "Bernie Sanders' NRA Report Card: D-minus is Most Recent Grade," *Politifact*, January 20, 2016.

<sup>167</sup> Matt Bai, "How Much Has Citizens United Changed the Political Game?," *New York Times Magazine*, July 17, 2012.

<sup>168</sup> Ben Pershing, "Pro-gun Democrats Win Endorsements from NRA," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2010.

statements).<sup>169</sup> Should the Democratic candidate appear to be making progress, outside funding groups, on behalf of the Republican, would simply tie the challenger to the more unpopular, culturally-diverse positions of the national party.

The rise of Trump and his support in Southwest Virginia provides further evidence that culture as an institution predicts political behavior. Southwest Virginia demonstrated such during the Republican gubernatorial primary in 2017. Corey Stewart, Chair of the Prince William County Board of Supervisors, who claims that he was Trump before Trump was Trump, soundly won the Republican primary in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.<sup>170</sup> Ed Gillespie, former Chairman of the Republican National Committee and considered to be the establishment Republican candidate was barely able to win the primary race.<sup>171</sup> While Trump as President is unpopular in Virginia overall, he enjoys high approval ratings in Southwest Virginia.<sup>172</sup> Some of the residents perceive that there has been an upswing in the coal economy because they see more trucks hauling coal now than they did throughout the years of the Obama Administration.<sup>173</sup> Harry Childress, President of the Virginia Coal and Energy Alliance, in a conversation held on November 3, explained that the industry is currently estimating a two million ton increase in production over 2016 production figures, mostly in metallurgical coal not steam coal. Childress

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<sup>169</sup> NRA-Political Victory Fund, “NRA-PVF Endorses Morgan Griffith for U. S. House of Representatives in Virginia,” September 28, 2012; NRA-Institute for Legislative Action, “NRA Endorses Morgan Griffith for Virginia’s 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District,” October 7, 2016; Anthony Flaccavento, “Virginia Congressional Election 2012 Political Courage Test,” Votesmart.org, 2012; David McGee, “Kitts Seeks to Unseat 9<sup>th</sup> District Incumbent,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, October 26, 2016.

<sup>170</sup> Peter Galuszka, “Corey Stewart: The Trump Before Trump,” *Washington Post*, October 12, 2016.

<sup>171</sup> Gabriel Debenedetti, “What We Learned From the Virginia Primary,” *Politico*, June 14, 2017.

<sup>172</sup> Cathleen Decker, “In Virginia’s Coal Country, Vice President Pence Praises Trump and Asks Voters to Make History,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 2017.

<sup>173</sup> Alan Suderman (Associated Press), “In Virginia’s Trump Country, Low Enthusiasm for Republican,” *News Advance*, October 23, 2017.

acknowledged that the increase in production is attributable to global market forces, including a reduction in production in both Australia and China. Childress further explained that there has been a slight, a few hundred, new coal mining jobs established as a result of the upswing. Based on his remarks, particularly related to the reason for the increased demand, one can reasonably surmise that once the issues adversely affecting coal production in Australia and China are addressed, coal production in Southwest Virginia will continue its downward trend. During the final gubernatorial debate held at the University of Virginia's College at Wise, both Gillespie and the Democratic candidate, Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam, avoided making broad promises about an improved coal economy. When the local Bristol Herald Courier editorial board declined to endorse either candidate, it provided an overview of Gillespie's economic plan for Southwest Virginia.<sup>174</sup> The review did not include a word about coal.

Now, in the throes of the general election and needing to appeal to more than the Trump base, Gillespie is attempting to maintain a balance between the reliable values-voters of Southwest Virginia and the independent or moderate voters in the urban and suburban areas of Virginia. He is avoiding invoking the Trump name; however, he has adopted some positions that clearly resonate with Trump supporters.<sup>175</sup> One ad that has played frequently in Southwest Virginia indicates that Lieutenant Governor Northam supports the MS-13 gang and ties the gang and its activities to illegal immigration. Another ad that has also played frequently in the region contrasts Gillespie's support for maintaining Confederate monuments to Northam's support for removal of Confederate monuments. Both of these issues, immigration and Confederate pride, demonstrate that cultural issues will resonate with voters and will affect the political behavior of

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<sup>174</sup> Editorial, "No One's Got Our Vote in Virginia," *Bristol Herald Courier*, October 13, 2017.

<sup>175</sup> Jamelle Bouie, "Ed Gillespie is Attempting a Trump Maneuver in Virginia," *Slate*, October 11, 2017.

voters if they believe their culture is under attack by outside forces. Since commencing the completion of this chapter, Election Day of 2017 has come and gone. Electoral maps once again demonstrate the cultural divide between Southwest Virginia and the vote rich and diverse sections of the Commonwealth. Southwest Virginia Democrats did celebrate some good news locally on election night. Democrat Chris Hurst defeated incumbent Republican Joseph Yost in the 12<sup>th</sup> House of Delegates District. While the 12<sup>th</sup> House of Delegates District seat encompassing Giles County, the City of Radford, and parts of Montgomery, and Pulaski County will be changing hands in January that win should provide little comfort to Democrats in the rest of the 9<sup>th</sup> congressional district.<sup>176,177</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> House of Delegates district includes most of the corporate limits of Blacksburg, home of Virginia Tech, which offers its own institutional culture that can on its own turf compete with the larger culture of the region. In a day-after analysis, it has been noted that the political trend continues for Republican dominance in the rural areas and Democratic dominance in the urban and suburban areas of the Commonwealth.<sup>178</sup> The results of the 12<sup>th</sup> House district would tend to support that analysis not portend a shift in political fortunes. Rural Giles County, albeit Joseph Yost's home community, voted overwhelmingly in favor of their native son and provided him with 72.69 percent of the vote. Rural Pulaski County provided Yost with 54.10 percent of the vote. *How did Hurst win?* The City of Radford provided Hurst with 57.31 percent of the vote, and Montgomery County (Blacksburg) provided him with 68.75 percent of the vote.<sup>179,180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Carmen Formand and Robby Korth, "Chris Hurst Upsets Del. Joseph Yost in New River Valley Race," *Roanoke Times*, November 7, 2017.

<sup>177</sup> Election 2017, "How We Voted: Southwest Virginia," *Bristol Herald Courier*, November 8, 2017, p. A6.

<sup>178</sup> Mason Adams, "GOP's Rural Numbers in Virginia Slip Only Slightly From 2016," *DailyYonder.com*, November 8, 2017.

<sup>179</sup> Virginia State Board of Elections, 2017 Election Results.

In 2011, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was interviewed for *Golf Digest*, and as she explained her reasons for playing golf, she stated that "...I've always said as a political scientist that "culture" is what we use when we can't explain things."<sup>181</sup> Yet, culture does help to explain human nature. Specifically considering Southwest Virginia, if one understands the historic context of the Scots who settled in the frontier of Virginia, the strong work ethic, and the willingness to fight for the cause, the idea that culture should be considered an institution or an immovable ship to which the body politic conforms does "explain things." Southwest Virginians are not voting against their interests; they are voting to preserve their interests. The institution of culture weighs more heavily on voters than any economic benefit that might be derived from federal tax dollars.

In 1998, a movie entitled *Pleasantville* debuted. The movie places a couple of characters from the real world into an old black and white television show about the fictional town of Pleasantville. As the "real" people interact with the television show characters and introduce them to the ways of the world, the town of Pleasantville begins to change, one person at a time, to color. The diversity causes strife, conflict, and bigotry. In one scene the mayor of Pleasantville is leading a town meeting of the concerned citizens. In his effort to assure the citizens of their safety from the changes that are taking place in Pleasantville, he points out that since they are meeting in a bowling alley they are safe.<sup>182</sup> For those looking for a lack of diversity and the old ways, Southwest Virginia provides the safe haven of the bowling alley. The

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<sup>180</sup> For a review of the geographic reach of the Montgomery County precincts, you may access this website: <https://www.montgomerycountyva.gov/content/15989/16035/16828/default.aspx>. Cross-referencing the website with the SBE results provide evidence that Blacksburg, and the area specifically in and around Virginia Tech (student housing) is Hurst strong-hold.

<sup>181</sup> John Barton, "Condi Rice: The Former Secretary of State Embraces Golf and 'My Inner Phil Mickelson'," *Golf Digest*, May 1, 2011.

<sup>182</sup> *Pleasantville*, film, (Studio City CA: Larger Than Life Productions 1998)

remoteness of Southwest Virginia continues to make it a safe place so that its own form of Pleasantville can continue to thrive.

Richard Rose, the Producing Artistic Director of Barter Theatre in Abingdon, provided a program to the Washington County Chamber of Commerce on October 19, 2017. During his remarks about the role arts play in the economic health of the region's communities, he stated that he considers Southwest Virginia to be "the last frontier", a place where the culture has not changed, and the region remains true to itself. As Redfield wrote, "...culture is an organization of conventional understandings manifest in act and artifact." The voters of Southwest Virginia have a perception that their "conventional understandings" are being challenged by outside forces, and they vote collectively for candidates who will fight to preserve the last frontier. As this study has revealed, in order to win the majority of votes in Southwest Virginia, embracing the culture of the region and working within the established institutions and with those who have consolidated their political power through those institutions is essential.

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