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Executive Summary

Project Name: The Rise of Political Conservatism in Rural Wisconsin

Group Member: Erik Eisenheim

Motivation and Goal: I am interested in understanding what factors have driven the rise of conservative political values in rural Wisconsin.

It is my hypothesis that rural voters have, on balance, become more conservative since the 1970s. An indicator of this conservative trend is the increasing number of rural voters who have switched their votes from political candidates associated with the Democratic Party to those associated with the Republican Party. This trend has become more meaningful since the early 1980s, with the rise of the far-right flank of the Republican Party in national politics and the concomitant polarization of the two dominant political parties.

I hypothesized that the rightward shift is caused by the Democratic Party itself; or rather its rightward shift on economic issues – especially those relating to agricultural policy, organized labor, international trade, and economic regulation (including the trucking, airline, telecommunications, and financial services industries). It is my theory that most rural voters' disapproval of the Democratic Party's socially liberal platform is, in actuality, thinly-disguised proxy-style disapproval of the Democratic Party's rightward economic shift. This can be (somewhat crudely) summarized by the following statement: The Democratic Party no longer represents the economic interests of blue-collar workers (farmers, industrial unskilled and semiskilled workers, and commercial unskilled and semiskilled workers). And there is evidence that this disillusion is rising up through the ranks of skilled workers and those occupying supervisory roles, as these workers are losing their once-privileged pay status.

Required data:

The dependent variable is historical and spatial variations in voting patterns for candidates for federal congressional office for the time period 1976-2018 in Wisconsin. The selection of appropriate independent variables is more complicated and potentially problematic. The key here is to find extant data that can serve as proxy indicators for the economic-neoliberal position of the Democratic Party is critical.

Other independent variables that can affect shifts in voting patterns and that are related to the three factors discussed above: Location1 (rural/suburban/urban), Location2 (northern WI; northeast WI; southeast WI; western WI; Milwaukee, WI; Madison, WI; WOW Counties), income level, age, race, gender, sexual orientation, distance from nearest incorporated

municipality (population >8000), distance from nearest medium-size city (population >50,000), distance from large size city (population >200,000), home ownership (dummy variable), marital status, and parenthood.

Methods:

Multiple Linear Regression, Expansion Method, Spatial Lag Model, Spatial Error Model, Geographically Weighted Regression (Fixed and Adaptive Weighting Scheme).