A Failure to Communicate: Government of Alberta's Bill 6 and the rural Albertan response in late 2015

By

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This capstone is dedicated to my partner Stephen and to my kids Jasper and Mia, the loves of my life. We made it! Thanks for giving me joy and motivation to finish this during the challenges of a pandemic.

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Disclaimer

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Abstract

This capstone examines the rural Albertan reaction to the Government of Alberta's legislation of new farm and ranch safety requirements and includes a content analysis of comments from people who signed the largest petition against Bill 6. Through a case study with the use of deductive quantitative content analysis to explore the rural consciousness and perceptions of Alberta's Bill 6 as collected in an online petition against the government, my research explores how rural Albertan protesters responded during the Bill 6 debate, and what this reveals about rural culture and politics in this province. This research employs Cramer Walsh's (2012) concept and typology of rural consciousness as a lens to examine how the petition comments illuminate the response to Bill 6. Overall, the case study found a strong presence of rural identity and distrust reflected in the data, with key element framing rural identity being the group consciousness of the rural community with values and lifestyle including hard work and family, and top targets of distrust and blame for injustice towards the rural community identified as the government and urban political elites.

Introduction

On November 17, 2015, the Alberta NDP headed into rural Alberta to introduce a bill on farm safety. On a farm northeast of Edmonton, the NDP government held a morning news conference on the Increased Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act that would be introduced as Bill 6 to the Legislature that afternoon. A local NDP MLA, Colin Piquette, introduced Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour Minister Lori Sigurdson with a quip that he trusted that "everyone found their way out there, hopefully a little more efficiently than we did". On the matter of Bill 6, efficient way-finding in rural Alberta would not be in the cards for the NDP that year. In the six weeks following the bill drop (see Appendix A for timelines), more than 40 protests would be held across Alberta against the legislation, and the Premier Notley would admit to a failure to communicate.

To study this communications challenge for governments and citizens, my research is a case study focused on the Bill 6 protests in late 2015. This capstone examines the rural Albertan reaction to the Government of Alberta's legislation of new farm and ranch safety requirements and includes a content analysis of comments from people who signed the largest petition against Bill 6. Through a case study with the use of deductive quantitative content analysis to explore the rural consciousness and perceptions of Alberta's Bill 6 as collected in an online petition against the government, my research explores how rural Albertan protesters responded during the Bill 6 debate, and what this reveals about rural culture and politics in this province. This research employs Cramer Walsh's (2012) concept and typology of rural consciousness as a lens to examine how the petition comments illuminate the response to Bill 6. Overall, the case study finds a strong presence of rural identity and distrust reflected in the data, with key element framing rural identity being the group consciousness of the rural community with values and

lifestyle including hard work and family, and top targets of distrust and blame for injustice towards the rural community identified as the government and urban political elites.

Problem and Research Questions

In fall 2015, I attended one of the protests against Bill 6 as a staff in a Minister's office. I was five months pregnant at the time, and recall feeling vaguely comforted that I was visibly pregnant as I navigated through the most hostile crowd I have ever observed in my 10-year career with the Government of Alberta. How had the NDP government made so many people so angry with what appeared to be a bill bringing farm and ranch safety standards up to the same level as other provinces had had for years? Why was there such mistrust of government, especially government communications? As I and my minister waded in the angry crowd, I wondered how far back this mistrust of government went for rural Alberta and how much of it was sparked by just the bill. Back in the office, I saw the membership balloon for a Facebook group called "Farmers Against NDP Bill 6" and one of their petitions raised more than 25,000 signatures against the government for which I worked. Outside my office window, thousands of protestors chanted while I worked. While my job wasn't specific to Bill 6, I observed that everything government did during that time (and to the end of the NDP's term in 2019) was influenced by the outrage expressed against Bill 6. The failure to communicate Bill 6 was felt across ministries as effective engagement and clear communications of government actions became increasingly important.

The questions I asked while experiencing Bill 6 were broad, wide-ranging, and difficult to answer. My research here doesn't answer all of them, but it does aim to better understand the distrust of government at the crux of the Bill 6 events. This study explores how protesting Albertans responded during the Bill 6 protests in late 2015, and what it reveals about rural culture and politics in this province and how governments might better engage citizens. This study uses the Bill 6 petition comments as a case study to answer two research questions:

- RQ1: How do the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust?

- RQ2: What do the petition comments reveal about rural culture and politics in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta?

Literature Review

After living through and learning from the Bill 6 protests in Alberta, my capstone research was prompted by the fundamental question of there was such animosity towards government from rural Albertans, and how the petitions as a communication tool influences the relationship between citizens and governments. The increasing accessibility and reach of online petitions has made it easier than ever to communicate directly to government in the public sphere. Does this expanded political engagement increase trust, or is mainly adding fuel to existing tensions between citizens and governments? While these questions are broad, the scope of my research contained within this capstone is narrowed for practical reasons to what the Bill 6 case study reveals about rural distrust as expressed in the petition comments.

The academic foundation for this research is the culmination of three major themes that arose from the literature search, which I will soon discuss at length:

1. *e-Government* - Online platforms are changing how governments and citizens communicate, but the adoption of new technology is not as productive or beneficial for this relationship as hoped.

2. *Citizen-government relationship* - The relationship between government and citizens is one of increasing distrust of government. Alberta has a long history of mistrust of government interference and communications.

3. *Rural-urban divide* - Political power and influence in Alberta and other jurisdictions is divided along the lines of rural and urban representation and interests, with a significant fear in rural communities that their way of life is in decline.

The examination of these themes in the literature gave direction and guidance to my study, and provided a context in which to interpret and discuss my findings. The literature also revealed

some gaps in research that give additional relevance to my research as providing value in those areas of the field.

e-Government

Are online platforms improving how governments and citizens communicate? The literature shows a trend in the use of "e-government" (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2003; Welch, Hinnant, & Moon, 2005; Aikins & Krane, 2010; Halachmi & Greiling, 2013) to encapsulate how public sector organizations use online information and communication technologies, so this literature review will also employ this term. Several studies focus on government adoption of online tools to reach citizens, and the literature reveals that the implementation of e-government has significant limitations in the areas of design and use. These studies begin with an optimistic premise—that the Internet provides great potential to improve communication between government and citizens—but their conclusions outline different explanations for why this great potential has not been reached.

Governments are not known to be first adopters of technology, and online engagement with citizens is one of many areas where this is evident. After surveying local government officials to study how government administrators use online communication to connect with citizens, Aikins and Krane (2010) conclude that "although the Internet has great potential to improve government-citizen relations, many governments at all levels have not taken advantage of this potential to improve website features to enhance online citizen participation in the policy process" (p. 87). Aikins and Krane (2010) posit that government officials prefer traditional citizen engagement to online participation, which calls into question the progress governments are making towards e-democracy and effective use of modern communication tools. Graham, Avery, and Park (2015) also found implementation to be a weakness for e-government, in their

study how governments use social media tools to communicate with citizens. They surveyed 300 local government officials in the United States to examine how social media was used to "communication important government information, extend government services, and garner feedback and ideas about government operations with citizens" (p. 396). After discussing the survey results through the lens of situational crisis communication theory, they conclude that local governments may lag in social media use compared to corporations and other organizations.

Despite government lag in adopting electronic communication, there is still a perception of the potential for e-government to enhance citizen engagement in public policy using online communication tools and platforms. Bakardjieva (2009) studies the potential of the Internet to enhance civic participation, concentrating specifically on "the role the medium plays in affording and supporting new forms of making sense of public issues and getting involved in civic activities that evolve at the level of everyday life" (p. 91). Her data was collected from in-depth interviews with Calgary residents about Internet use and civic participation. She concludes that the Internet has not delivered as expected on its promise for democracy, particularly in support of advocacy and debate forums, despite significant investment from public institutions. Similarly, Brainard and McNutt (2010) conclude that government is not using online resources to do new things, such as dialogue and joint problem solving, but rather is "performing old tasks in new ways" (p. 852). They study how government and citizens interact online by researching the police and local residents in Washington, DC, and how they communicate through online discussion groups. After using descriptive data and thread analysis to examine the conversations, they conclude that the bulk of the activity is informational as opposed to transactional (i.e. requests for service) or collaborative.

Governments still have much to learn about effective online communication, and many lessons can be learned from how the private sector has already harnessed online communication. In studying how to create more useful government websites, Simmons and Zoetewey (2012) posit that governments can provide citizens with effective resources to solve problems in their communities if website development takes into account what counts as useful information for these citizens. This emphasis on usability is reflected in their methodology: interviews and protocol analysis were used to collect data, and the citizens' own words were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Simmons and Zoetewey (2012) conclude that creating useful websites requires creating a relationship with the audience, believing that citizens have something to contribute to the conversation, and developing a site that supports how people really want to use the information.

Ineffective use of e-government tools by governments may be part of why online political engagement has proliferated by citizen-driven initiatives such as online petitions. Halpin, Vromen, Vaughan, and Raissi (2018) studied online petitions in Australia, where there is no government-supported platform for citizen petitions. While petitions are not a new form of political participation, digital technology has created the opportunity for it to take on novel dimensions. Halpin et al. studied a five-year period and over 17,000 petitions to document the development of the Change.org platform and how it has been used by Australians to petition government. They found that "very few individuals or organizations created petitions multiple times" and "the more active a signer is across petitions, the more likely they are to also engage across broad issue contexts" (2018, p. 440). This findings led Halpin et al. to conclude that rather than attracting "keyboard warriors" or "clicktivists" who participate in shallow ill-informed engagement, online petitions hosted on Change.org are a "distinct and important part of citizen

engagement in politics" and "an important feature of contemporary political engagement in advanced democracies" (2018, p. 428).

So why isn't e-government improving communication between government and citizens? Aikins and Krane (2010) and Graham, Avery, and Park (2015) blame government implementation, in identifying that government officials prefer traditional methods and have not fully invested in or employed online tools. Brainard and McNutt (2010) as well as Bakardjieva (2009) counter this to posit that even though "public institutions have poured ample resources and scored positive results in harnessing the Internet" (p. 102), governments have focused on the provider-client paradigm—which may improve government services but not political engagement or dialogue. Simmons and Zoetewey (2012) point to weak design of government websites, and suggest the remedy is "designing and testing web sites for citizen knowledge work requires creating a relationship with the audience" (p. 270) so the public will actually want to use e-government. Halpin et al. (2018) point to how citizen-driven online petitions on non-government platforms such as Change.org are leading to effective and important political engagement. While potential may remain for e-government as government-led communication online with citizens, the proliferation of easy and accessible citizen-driven political engagement through communication tools like petitions has put the pressure on governments to respond and communicate more effectively.

While extensive research was found on e-government and social media, there was limited literature specifically addressing governance or engagement contributions of online petitions as a way that citizens and government communicate. This illuminates an opportunity for my research to contribute to this angle of e-government, particularly as platforms such as Change.org proliferate and provide an accessible and effective tool to gather public reaction and protest to

government activities. The literature also prompted me to examine my findings from the e-government lens to ask whether the Bill 6 online petition improved communication between government and Albertans.

Citizen-government relationship

Digging deeper than e-government—the tools used by government to communicate with citizens—is a literature on the relationship itself between government and citizens. A theme of mistrust in government emerged from the literature, with varying explanations for why the government-citizen relationship is strained. Research specific to Alberta outlines a long history of citizen mistrust of government, and potential explanations for why this is the case.

Many scholars have studied this relationship between government and citizens, identified a trend of mistrust, and offered explanations and potential solutions such as increased transparency. With the goal of explaining public dissatisfaction with government, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) study how citizens perceive and prefer political processes as part of the public relationship with government. After administering a national survey and conducting focus groups in the United States, they conclude that a variation between public expectations and policy results result in citizen displeasure with government process, as there is a disconnect between "how the public thinks government ought to work and how it thinks government works in practice" (2001, p. 151). Studying the role of secrecy in the political process, Chambers (2004) employs deliberative democratic theory to develop the argument that "when deliberation goes behind closed doors it is important that we reproduce the pluralism of the public in private" (p. 390) in order to produce better discussion and decision-making by government.

Transparency is offered as a potential solution to citizen mistrust of government, but some researchers outline its limitations. De Fine Licht (2013) also studies the relationship

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between transparency and perceived legitimacy for government decision-making, but comes to a different conclusion than Chambers. After conducting an experiment where Swedish citizens were presented with varying levels of information about a health care policy decision-making process, de Fine Licht (2013) concludes that "transparent decision-making procedures tend to weaken rather than strengthen general trust" (p. 183) for governments. This study challenges the general wisdom that transparency enhances public trust in government, and provides a valuable counter position for studying the relationship between government and citizens. Halamachmi and Greiling (2013) also believe there is a limit to transparency, though they come at it from a practical perspective. They study the tension between government openness and efficiency in use of information and communication technology to relate to citizens. After reviewing the literature and leading theorists on government transparency and public administration, they conclude that while transparency "may invite citizen participation, foster e-governance, and facilitate e-democracy...but beyond a certain point, more government openness may be dysfunctional if it reduces operational capacity" (p. 562). While this resource is directed towards government managers, it offers a practical examination of the challenges faced by governments communicating with mistrustful citizens.

The advent of the internet provides governments with new tools and communication platforms to communicate with citizens, as outlined in the e-government section above, but it is not observed to have improved trust in the citizen-government relationship. Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2005) study the connections between Internet use, citizen satisfaction with online government resources, and citizen trust in government. They use survey data obtained from the Council on Excellence in Government to develop and test a model to predict experience, satisfaction, and trust as key factors for online government communication. They outline how

there has been a decline in public trust over the past half century, referencing a body of scholarly work to demonstrate how "public trust in government reached the highest point in 1966 before it started diminishing" (p. 373). Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2005) conclude that transparency is a key factor for e-government that affects citizen satisfaction and trust. Tolbert and Mossberger (2003) also blame poor government communication and transparency for mistrust. They study the relationship between e-government use, attitudes about e-government, and trust in government. By analyzing Pew survey data, they identify a statistically significant relationship between citizen trust and use of a local government website. In their conclusion, Tolbert and Mossberger (2003) make a case for more investment in e-government and communication to build better relationships between citizens and government.

The Alberta-specific literature on the citizen-government relationships provides important context for the Bill 6 case study, and highlights how long the history of citizen mistrust is this province. In his research on the citizen-government relationship in Alberta, Kiss (2014) analyzes the rise of more strategic, professional, and politically sensitive communications for the government during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Kiss (2014) argues that Albertans became increasingly interested in more transparency from government and citizen participation in political decision-making because of the deteriorating, decline of major industries, and increased citizen interest in environmental protection during the Getty and Klein years. He posits that increasing citizen demands for transparency and participation also led to an increased importance of strategic government communications, which spurred the creation and evolution of the Public Affair Bureau as a centralized strategic communications for the Government of Alberta. The Public Affairs Bureau heralded an age of more public opinion research, public engagement, and increased media access to politicians, but it also led to increased mistrust of a

government seen as politicizing and manipulating communications with Albertans. Kiss (2014) notes that "because persuasion depends on the communications being seen as credible, the more governments resort to strategic communications, the less credible they are seen, and the harder they have to try to persuade citizens to go along with some course of action" (p. 44).

In their study of social capital and civic community, Pickup, Sayers, Knopff, and Archer (2004) notes that Albertans' attitudes towards government are "notoriously negative" (p. 617), and that "widespread suspicion of government appears to encourage Albertans to place a premium on other forms of social agency" (p. 618). While Pickup et al.'s (2004) analysis of survey data found that "a large number of Albertans feel alienated from government" (p. 628), they also observed that "those who place themselves further right on the political spectrum are more likely to have confidence in the provincial government, while they are less likely to have confidence in the federal government" (p. 633). To explain why Albertans have uniquely high levels of civic participation with low confidence in government, they theorize that Alberta's political culture has been highly influenced by American populism (p. 634). This populist strain both explains and informs why "traditional parties and other institutions of government have been seen as unresponsive to the values and interests of Albertans" (p. 635). Further, the relationship in Alberta between citizens and government is disadvantaged because its "populist civic community does not view the political life as noble; it is, in fact, suspicious of politics, politicians, and the political life" (p. 637). Pickup et al. (2004) conclude that several factors contribute to Albertans' lack of trust in government, including the young population, populist political leaders who foment distrust of the government even while leading it, agrarian populism influenced by American political culture, and a long-felt sense of alienation from government. All of these factors shape Alberta's civic community. Of most relevance to the Bill 6 case study

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is Pickup et al.'s (2004) observation that "given the political alienation that Albertans have always felt, the potential for any movement that provides such positive effects [of political efficacy and political community] is great (p. 636)."

So why is the relationship between citizens and government one of increasing mistrust? Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) believe it is a matter of expectations, as there is a significant gap between what the public expects and the government delivers. However, the bulk of the literature points to lack of transparency as the key factor for mistrust. Chambers (2004), Halachmi, and Greiling (2013) argue that government secrecy undermines public trust, though de Fine Licht (2013) believes some secrecy actually strengthens public confidence and Halachmi and Greiling (2013) note the practical limitations to transparency as it decreases government efficiency. Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2005), as well as Tolbert and Mossberger (2003), assert that increased transparency and accessibility will rebuild public trust in government. Welch, Hinnant, and Moon (2005) say it best when they argue that the decline in public trust in government during the last half century requires "better, more convenient services, more accessible and complete information, and new and improved channels of communication" (p. 372) to improve the citizen-government relationship. While noting that Albertans having increasing interest in political participation, Kiss (2014) argues that the Government of Alberta's focus on strategic communications both responded to and increased Albertans' mistrust as it was seen as political manipulation. Pickup et al (2004) posit that Albertans' "high levels of alienation from and low levels of confidence in its governments" (p. 619) is due to a perceived lack of political influence as well as agrarian populism that breeds suspicion of politics.

The findings for this theme highlight that the distrust observed in the Bill 6 case study was not an isolated event, as mistrust is increasing between citizens and government. To further

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examine the relationship between citizens and government, I also studied research on how the rural-urban divide plays a role in how rural communities perceive and respond to government.

Rural-urban divide

What does the literature show for how political power and influence divides along the lines of rural and urban representation and interests? The finding for this theme is that the urban-rural divide is a powerful schism in society that influences how people communicate and act in public affairs, with a significant fear and distrust in rural communities that their way of life is in decline due in part to urban governments.

Significant research has been conducted on the rural-urban divide in the United States. In her participant observation study of rural consciousness, Cramer Walsh (2012) identifies a class- and place-based identity intertwined with a perception of deprivation. To answer why people vote against their interests, Cramer Walsh (2012) observes that the study participants in Wisconsin attributed "rural deprivation to the decision-making of urban political elites, who disregard and disrespect rural residents and rural lifestyles" (p. 517). The study uses an ethnographic approach to examine how rural consciousness helps them "organize and integrate considerations of the distribution of resources, decision-making authority, and values into a cohesive narrative that people use to make sense of the world" (p. 518). Cramer Walsh (2012) notes how in politics, "a particularly powerful act of categorization is the parsing of people into "us" and "them" (p. 519), and that "conflicts between rural and urban areas within states are intensifying" (p. 520). After a historical overview of Wisconsin's rural-urban division, Cramer Walsh's (2012) data analysis reveals four elements for how participants identified as rural residents versus urban others: 1) inequalities in power; 2) differences in values and lifestyle, such as hard work; and 3) inequalities in resources. The findings included that "rural residents often

blamed threats to rural life on cold, distant bureaucracies located in cities...and readily viewed government as anti-rural" (p. 524). Cramer Walsh (2012) compares the rural observations with those from urban and suburban conversations, and concludes that rural consciousness provides an important lens for understanding the rural-urban divide and why some rural residents vote the way they do.

Through a review of literature addressing rural identity, Lichter and Brown (2011) illustrate "how rural America is in flux -- buffeted by change that often originates from urban America and the larger global economy" (p. 566). They identify 10 common conceptions of rural America as: 1) a cultural deposit box; 2) backwater; 3) an engine of urbanization; 4) exurbia; 5) place of consumption; 6) new immigrant destination; 7) ghetto; 8) food basket; 9) repository of natural resources; and 10) dumping ground. Some of these have become misconceptions, such as the food basket. Lichter and Brown (2011) describe how the "the past century was marked by a massive shift away from labour-intensive, small, diversified farms (i.e. many different types of crops and animals) that served nearby communities and surrounding regions" to "large, specialized farms that employ only a tiny fraction of U.S. workers", which has paradoxically led to food deserts in rural areas (p. 580). Digging into how rural Americans have historically been portrayed as backwater -- unsophisticated, uncultured, and uneducated -- Lichter and Brown (2011) highlight studies showing rural mistrust of government and reactive movements "as a response to threats to traditional lifestyles and values" (p. 571). Lichter and Brown (2011) conclude the rapid changes in rural America have blurred rural-urban spatial and social boundaries, leading to more symmetrical and interdependent relationships between rural and urban areas.

Gimpel and Karnes (2006) studied surveys to examine why rural areas of America were much more likely to vote Republican. Their focus on the rural side of the urban-rural gap highlighted several explanations, such as higher home ownership and self-employment rates connected to fierce individualism. Their analysis showed that while rural Americans are more conservative in terms of religious, moral, family-orientation, and traditional values, these are not the only reasons for why they would vote conservative. Gimpel and Karnes (2006) conclude that rural American voting record reflects the "individualistic ethic and legacy of self-employment and homeownership inclines them to adopt the self-image of the independent entrepreneur and property owner rather than that of the labourer in need of state regulation and protection" (p. 471). They also highlight the need for more study of rural politics, as "for all the research on urban politics, there is no remotely comparable body of accumulated wisdom on rural populations" (p. 467).

In the shadow of the 2016 presidential election, Wuthrow (2018) examines rural American political culture and why they voted the way they did to elect Trump. After spending a decade studying rural communities and conducting over a thousand in-depth qualitative interviews, Wuthrow (2018) argues that "understanding rural America requires seeing the places in which residents live as *moral communities*", where people "feel an obligation to one another and to local the ways of being that govern their expectations about ordinary life and support their feelings of being at home and doing the right things" (p. 4). While this community orientation contrasts with the stereotype of rural Americans as rugged individualists, it highlights how rural American is composed of small towns where people have deeply rooted identities. Wuthnow (2018) outlines how "the moral outrage of rural America is a mixture of fear and anger" because they perceive their ways of life are disappearing and they are under siege (p. 7) by urban

government that misunderstands, ignores, and intrudes on their communities. After examining how rural communities consume and are portrayed in the media, how they identify their threats and potential local solutions, how their dissatisfaction with Washington has simmered for a long time, and their perception of moral decline in America, Wuthnow (2018) concludes that the sense of moral community in rural America prompted their outrage against Washington as expressed in their votes.

Moving across the border to Canada, I found excellent analysis from Epp (2019) specific to the Albertan context and highly informative to the Bill 6 case study. Epp (2019) studies the historical development and forces in Alberta's approach to rural politics in recent decades, and highlights how the Bill 6 case study demonstrates the development of "post-rural politics" in the province. By post-rural, he means "something closer to a politics where rural…no longer features prominently in the way the government imagines and speaks to Albertans" which is "different from the historic balancing of rural and urban in a governing coalition or in public policy, and different again from the kind of raw resentments sometimes expressed across that divide" (Epp, 2019, p. 296). By examining throne speeches and electoral boundary changes from the Klein to Notley eras, Epp (2019) dissects how rural Alberta is defined, considered, and catered to by various Alberta governments, and illuminates an eclipse in rural influence that culminates in the Notley government's near total oversight of rural interests, rhetoric, and engagement. He outlines how the Bill 6 events exposed the historical rural-urban divide that had become "increasingly evident by the end of the Klein era" when "rural people lived increasingly on the defensive" (Epp, 2019, p. 295) from government cuts and regional disparities. Under Stelmach, rural Alberta received new government reinvestment but also centralized electricity corridor policies that "provoked a property-rights backlash" as it was seen to be unjustly taking

rural land to benefit urban energy demands. Redford's era was noted for rural seat losses from the PC government to the upstart Wildrose party who capitalized on rural resentment, which prompted Prentice's government to "set about repairing its relationship to rural Alberta" (Epp, 2019, p. 302). Epp (2019) discusses how the Notley government treated rural Alberta "as longer a backbone or cornerstone" to Alberta's political language and priorities, and rural resentment boiled over after decades of simmering. He notes that the fundamental change for rural Alberta when the NDP was elected was that "people are less afraid to express that resentment in public", "no longer need to be polite about it", "imagine that government is 'alien' to them", and that Albertans who support Bill 6 don't understand or value rural lifestyles on the farm. Epp (2019) also references Cramer's (2016) rural consciousness theory, and notes how "there are recognizable echoes of Cramer's Wisconsin in Alberta, particularly in the angry Bill 6 rallies and the Main Street truck parades against a carbon tax, and indeed in an undercurrent of Alberta politics with a much longer history" (p. 308). By outlining this historical current leading to post-rural politics, Epp (2019) argues that the NDP government may have provoked rural outrage, but the foundations for this anger had been building for decades as the "geographic centres of gravity in Alberta shifted some time ago" (p. 310).

Larsen (2008) and O'Connor (2016) research Canadian examples of rural political protest. Larsen (2008) studies grassroots protest and activism by examining how rural leaders in British Columbia "constructed and politicized a local sense of place as a means of rallying insiders against outside forces and pressures" (p. 172) in the early 1990s to protest NDP government legislation for natural resources consultation and development. Larsen (2008) concludes that this activism exemplifies the new rural politics taking place in the developed world, with an emphasis on defending their communities against external pressures. O'Connor

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(2016) studies rural activism and influence on government policy by researching how PEI farmers staged "high-profile public protests against the provincial government's neglect of family farm issues" in 1971, which led to "a consultation process between the government and small farmers" (p. 31) towards developing new family farm development policy. After a detailed overview of the background and events of the demonstrations, O'Connor (2016) concludes that these rural protests continue to influence provincial policy deliberation in PEI in the form of anti-modernist sentiment known as the "Island way of life".

The literature shows that political power and influence is divided along the lines of rural and urban representation and interests, with a significant fear in rural communities that their way of life is in decline, and a history of political protest and outrage against government. Cramer Walsh's (2012) study on rural consciousness is most illuminating for my research on rural identity and distrust in the Bill 6 case study, and provides a useful framework for analyzing my results through the lens of rural consciousness[1]. In their examinations of rural American voting motivations, Lichter and Brown (2011) highlight how rural mistrust of government as part of their response to how their way of life is threatened, Gimpel and Karnes (2006) note the rural-urban divide is influenced by individualism, and Wuthnow (2018) argues that it is actually the community orientation of rural towns that drives political culture and action. Larsen (2008) and O'Connor (2016) research Canadian examples of rural political protest. Larsen (2008) studies grassroots protest and activism by examining how rural leaders in British Columbia "constructed and politicized a local sense of place as a means of rallying insiders against outside forces and pressures" (p. 172) in the early 1990s to protest NDP government legislation for natural resources consultation and development. Larsen (2008) concludes that this activism exemplifies

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[1] I explore Cramer Walsh further and how it applies to my research in my Methodology and Findings sections.

the new rural politics taking place in the developed world, with an emphasis on defending their communities against external pressures. O'Connor (2016) studies rural activism and influence on government policy by researching how PEI farmers staged "high-profile public protests against the provincial government's neglect of family farm issues" in 1971, which led to "a consultation process between the government and small farmers" (p. 31) towards developing new family farm development policy. After a detailed overview of the background and events of the demonstrations, O'Connor (2016) concludes that these rural protests continue to influence provincial policy deliberation in PEI in the form of anti-modernist sentiment known as the "Island way of life". Larsen (2008) and O'Connor (2016) digs into the root causes for protest for rural communities, and see political protest as defending a way of life that is perceived to be under threat.

The literature reviewed also revealed a gap on Canadian studies related to my research. Beyond Epp (2019), Larsen (2008), and O'Connor (2016), I did discover other Canadian research on rural-urban divides specific to education, broadband, social networking, and healthcare, but also observed a lack of Canadian research in the vein of political culture compared to the United States. This finding also supports the need for my research as a Canadian examination of rural-urban divide as exhibited in the Bill 6 case study in Alberta.

Summary

In summary, the literature review highlights that online platforms are increasingly where government and citizens communicate, the relationship between government and citizens is increasingly one of distrust, and the urban-rural divide is a powerful schism in society that influences how people communicate and act in public affairs. It also highlighted how online

petitions are an increasingly effective tool for political engagement, and that Albertan political culture includes a long history of mistrust of government interference and communications.

The literature review provided significant direction and guidance to my research, particularly in how I was inspired by Cramer Walsh's theory of rural consciousness and chose to apply and test it in the Albertan context for my case study. The literature also illuminates a gap in research specific to online petitions as communication between citizens and government, and to rural culture and politics in Canada. As these are key areas of focus for this study, the literature highlights the relevance and need for my study.

Methodology

In the last section, we explored a selection of literature related to the interactions between government, citizens, online communication, rural politics, and political protest. The literature review found that online platforms are increasingly where government and citizens communicate, the relationship between government and citizens is increasingly one of distrust, the urban-rural divide is a powerful schism in society that influences how people communicate and act in public affairs. In the Albertan context, the literature revealed that political culture here includes a long history of mistrust of government interference and communications. Informed by this literature, particularly in regards to Cramer Walsh's rural consciousness research, the methodology section will now outline in detail my specific research questions; the research design, procedures, and analysis completed to answer these questions; and the limitations of the research conducted as part of this case study.

Research questions. This study explores how protesting Albertans responded during the Bill 6 debate, and what, if any, it reveals about rural culture and politics in this province and how governments might better engage citizens. Research from Kiss (2014) found that Albertans have rising interest and motivation to participate in political decision-making, and analyzing the rhetoric between the government and Bill 6 protesters can give us some insight into the rural consciousness that influences politics in this province. Therefore, this study uses the Bill 6 petition comments as a case study to answer two research questions:

- RQ1: How do the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust?
- RQ2: What do the petition comments reveal about rural culture and politics in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta?

To answer these questions, the methodology employed is a case study using content analysis to study the rural response to Alberta's Bill 6 as collected in an online petition against the government in late 2015. The study employs Cramer Walsh's (2012) concept and typology of rural consciousness as a lens to examine how the petition comments illuminate the reaction to Bill 6. Petition comments were coded for categories of rural consciousness using deductive content analysis.

The research questions for this study are inherently focused on gaining understanding about a phenomenon in a way that reveals experiences and perspectives of key players in the Bill 6 debate. The research is designed to dive into perceptions and positions of the Alberta protestors who participated in the Bill 6 events in late 2015. To conduct this research, I will employ a case study approach in order to study a very specific example of a political event in depth.

A case study is the intensive and detailed analysis focused on a single community, family, organization, person, or event. It is "defined by its location, such as a community…and its intensive examination of the setting" (Bryman and Teevan, 2005, p. 42). Denscombe (2014) notes that the case study approach "enables the research to delve deep into the intricacies of the situation in order to describe things in detail, compare alternatives, or, perhaps, provide an account that explores particular aspects of the situation (p. 57). Case studies are "significant because they illuminate in detail larger...forces while focusing on individuals" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 7).

As mentioned earlier, while the original questions for my research are quite broad, the specific research questions raised and addressed by this capstone are much narrower for practical reasons. I am conducting a case of an event—the Bill 6 protest in Alberta during late 2015 (see Appendix A for timelines)—experienced by a community comprised of the Albertans who joined

a Facebook group called "Farmers Against NDP Bill 6" and the government itself represented by the NDP politicians. To narrow the focus of this case study even more, the primary research was conducted on the comments captured publicly by those who signed a petition against Bill 6.

Denscombe (2014) outlines how "case studies have been used, though less commonly, in relation to the testing of theory (following a deductive logic)" and the purpose of the case here "is to allow the researcher to see whether things that a theory predicts will take place will actually be found in practice in real-world settings" (p. 57). By employing Cramer Walsh's typology of rural consciousness for content analysis of the petition comments, my case study aims to test whether this theory works under the specific conditions in the setting of Alberta's Bill 6 protest. The "main strength of content analysis is that it provides a means of quantifying the contents of a text, and it does so by using a method that is clear and, in principle, repeatable by other researchers" (Denscombe, 2014, p. 284).

Case study is "an approach to understanding a bounded system" (Mayan, 2009, p. 50). In this study, the bounded system is the petition comments posted by thousands of Albertans protesting Bill 6. Stake (2005) notes that case study is not a "methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied" (p. 443). After choosing a case study approach, the method to understand the case "must still be decided, and it can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method (Mayan, 2009, p. 50). My research employs documents (in the form of online petition comments) as the data source, to be studied using a quantitative approach that employs deductive reasoning to test Cramer Walsh's rural consciousness typology. The results were then analyzed with the aim to better understand the relationship between government and rural Alberta, why Bill 6 sparked such quick and impassioned protest against the NDP government in late 2015, and

how the government might learn from this experience to better approach engagement and policy for rural Alberta.

Design

Data Source. I began my research exploration by studying in depth existing traditional media coverage of the Bill 6 events, social media activity including protests events, and Hansard discussion by the politicians of the Bill 6 protests. Following this, I narrow my data source to the largest standalone petition against the government and Bill 6, as hosted on Change.org with 25,313 supporters. Specifically, my dataset is pulled from more than 5000 comments posted by petition supporters posted under "Reasons for signing" in late 2015. The petition, called "Stop NDP Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act", was created on November 22, 2015 by Shandele Battle, a rural farmer from Delia, Alberta. Within four days, more than 10,000 signed the petition against the NDP and Agriculture Minister Oneil Carlier. On December 9, 2015, the petition was presented to the Legislature as part of nearly 30,000 total signatures in petitions against Bill 6.

The landing page for the petition[2] includes a photo of a farm family with a short introduction outlining the dangers posed to the family farm way of life in Alberta, arguing that the NDP government has insufficient understanding of farm life, and demanding that Bill 6 be stopped. Below this is a section on "Reasons for Signing" where more than 5000 petition comments are posted. Each comment includes the person's name, including first and last, the time it was posted, the comment itself posted in response to a question from Change.org for why they signed the petition, and the number of likes received by the comment. Some comments

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[2] Available online at https://www.change.org/p/agricultral-minister-alberta-ag-minister-oneil-carlier-ndp-bill-6-enhanced-protection-for-farm-and-ranch-workers-act.

include a photo of the person, as their Change.org account was linked to their social media (Facebook or Twitter), and most also include location information about the person, including city and country. While a traditional petition would be collected on hard copy, online platforms such as Change.org present the petition online as a form of social media, with features that enable users to easily create, share, and interact with the content and each other. It also connects to other social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, to enable the petition to be disseminated and promoted broadly.

Stop NDP Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

🔒 **Petition Closed**

This petition had 25,311 supporters

Agricultral Minister...

f Share on Facebook

f Send a Facebook message

✉ Send an email to friends

🐦 Tweet to your followers

🔗 Copy link

Shandele Battle started this petition to The NDP and 1 other

Bill 6 will change the family farm way of life and how efficiently farm and ranches are run in Alberta! We have had such a decrease in the family farms for the last decade and legislation like this will force more to dissolve!! Until the NDP government can show us they have any experience or knowledge about what really goes on with a family farm and the fundamentals of all that is included, we need to stop this bill!

Figure 1 - Petition introduction as hosted on Change.org.

Bill 6 sparked substantial social media and online communication about Bill 6, including a private Facebook group called "Farmers Against NDP Bill 6" with more than 32,000 members. This group was a primary source of organizing, including hosting more than 50 Facebook events to rally in-person protests at the Legislature and throughout Alberta. As well, a multitude of tweets (e.g. #killbill6) and Facebook posts more generally were created during late 2015 to protest the bill.

With a plethora of potential data sets of online protest comments related to Bill 6, there are several reasons why I selected the petition comments to study:

1. Due to the nature of a petition, the petition comments are signed openly by people using their full names, who were highly motivated to protest the bill and government, and were willing to put their names publicly behind it and their comments. In contrast, Twitter handles and Facebook names often contain pseudonyms or incomplete names.

2. The petition comments were created in response to a specific question posed by Change.org about the reasons a person signed the petition, and were created right after the petition was signed. In contrast, the tweets and Facebook posts and comments are by nature less focused and more wide-ranging in motivation.

3. The petition is publicly available online, without any log-in or membership required. In contrast, the Facebook group is not publicly available online, as it requires an account and group membership to be granted by the group administrators.

4. The petition was widely reported on in the media and was presented to the Legislature, which lends it additional public exposure and legitimacy as organized protest.

5. Overall, the tone and tenor of the petition comments present as more thoughtful and focused than other social media platforms, as the comments are written in a completely

public space and are directed specifically to the NDP government and Minister of Agriculture.

6. Due to how Change.org collects and presents petition comments, each stands alone without follow-up comments. This presents a more clearly organized and accessible data set, as opposed to a collection of tweets or Facebook posts with complex threads and conversations.

7. Focusing on the petition comments most highlights the voices of individual rural Albertans who signed it, as social media platforms tended to include more of a mix of organizations, media, and politicians who also participated in the Bill 6 discourse.

8. Petition comments, as opposed to tweets in particular, tended to be a bit longer and include more developed thoughts. This may be due to a lack of word limit, or the environment that a petition creates as opposed to more frantic social media with live posting and threads.

9. Compared to social media posts on Twitter or Facebook, the petition comments are easier to collect into a spreadsheet and sort for author, date, and location.

These petition comments offer a narrow lens into the case study of Bill 6, as studied from the communications perspective of how the authors reflect rural identity and distrust, as well as rural culture and politics in Alberta. They do not, however, reflect the entirety of the Bill 6 event nor the community organized as the "Farmers Against NDP Bill 6" Facebook group or all rural Albertans.

Ethics. Article 2.2 of the Panel on Research Ethics (2014) Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 states that:

> Research that relies exclusively on publicly available information does not require Research Ethics Board review when: a) the information is legally accessible to the public and appropriately protected by law; or b) the information is publicly accessible and there is no reasonable expectation of privacy.

As this study exclusively uses publicly available petition comments hosted by Change.org[3] and the legislative debate published by the Government of Alberta, no ethics approval was required.

Procedures

Data collection. The petition comments were collected directly from Change.org from the content still online for the "Stop NDP Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act" petition. Using a script, the comments and identifying information (author, location, time, likes) were extracted from the webpage into an Excel spreadsheet.

Instrument. Petition comments were collected and categorized into a table designed for this study with the following columns:

1. Comment;

2. Likes received by the comment;

3. Date and time posted;

4. Location;

5. Author; and

6. Code(s) for rural consciousness categorization;

Coding. One of Yin's (2018) five analytic techniques for data analysis is pattern matching, which recommends that researchers apply a pattern that they know to a case study in a model of independent and dependent variables, which allows the researchers to examine the outcomes of complex and abstract scenarios (Yin, 2008, p. 136-137).

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[3] https://www.change.org/p/agricultral-minister-alberta-ag-minister-oneil-carlier-ndp-bill-6-enhanced-protection-for-farm-and-ranch-workers-act

Following this technique from Yin (2018), my deductive coding followed these steps: 1) I researched and examined Cramer Walsh's eight characteristics of rural consciousness as a known pattern; 2) I used these characteristics to set the patterns I sought in the data set of petition comments; 3) I assigned the independent variable as the presence or absence of rural consciousness characteristics for each comment in the data; and 4) I coded the dependent variables as the particular characteristics outlined by Cramer Walsh in her typology for rural consciousness, as identified and interpreted from the petition comment.

Data Analysis

To answer my research questions, I employed quantitative deductive content analysis using Cramer Walsh's characteristics of rural consciousness[4] as the theory being applied to analyze the petition comments.

In 2012, Cramer Walsh published a study with the *American Political Science Review* called "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective". As outlined briefly in my literature review, Cramer Walsh conducts a participant observation study that examines a class- and place-based identity in Wisconsin, and asserts that group consciousness provides an important lens for understanding the rural-urban divide and why some rural residents vote the way they do. She finds that people "process political information through a perspective constituted from social identity and notions of distributive justice", specifically through group consciousness as how "identification with a social group" combined with "a politicization of that identity" (Cramer Walsh, 2012, 517). As part of this research, Cramer Walsh develops a theory of rural consciousness that includes eight characteristics[5]:

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[4] I revisited the work of Cramer Walsh in greater detail in the literature review.
[5] See the Coding Framework (Appendix C) as well as the Findings section for how I applied these characteristics to the data.

1. "It is a set of ideas about what type of geographic place one is from, and where that place stands in relation to others in terms of power and resource allocation.
2. It contains ideas about what people are like in rural places--that is, their values and lifestyles--with a particular emphasis on the importance of hard work in rural areas.
3. It operates as a lens through which people think about themselves, other people, and public affairs, among other things.
4. As a form of group consciousness, it contains a social identification with rural residents, as well as a perception of distributive injustice towards this group.
5. This sense of injustice is a perception of deprivation relative to other groups--in this case, residents of metropolitan (i.e., urban and suburban) areas.
6. This injustice is perceived as the fault of political elites in urban areas.
7. Rural consciousness encompasses orientations towards government. In particular, it encompasses political trust because it contains judgments about the past performance of the government and an expectation that future actions will not be in line with rural interests;
8. Rural consciousness also encompasses the concept of political alienation, which includes lack of support for the system as well as a sense of political isolation from others. That is, it contains a rejection of political norms and goals that are widely held and shared by other members of society. The rural consciousness uncovered here includes a perception that the rules of the game do not apply equally to people from all places. Alienation is also a part of rural consciousness insofar as the former concept encompasses political efficacy. Specifically, rural consciousness involves low external efficacy, or a belief that government is unresponsive to the concerns of rural residents." (Cramer Walsh, 2012, 518).

In outlining the theory, Cramer Walsh goes into detail for each of these characteristics as observed in participant observation conversations about public affairs with 37 groups of people across 27 communities in Wisconsin, and explains how rural consciousness can be understood and applied as an orientation to government (Cramer Walsh, 2012, 529).

One of Cramer Walsh's concluding observations is striking, particularly as in light of major political events in the United States since the study was published:

"The most important political identification I observed was not partisanship. All of the groups, even the ones that claimed a party identification, eventually asserted that no part or politician represents their concerns. The main orientation to government was a sense that people are ignored by the political system. This study has drawn our attention to the fact that there are other perspectives than partisanship that guide public opinion." (Cramer Walsh, 2012, 530).

While Cramer Walsh's research was conducted several years before the 2016 US election, her reflections on orientation to government were echoed in the global public discourse around the rise and election of President Trump, who was seen to have capitalized on the mistrust and discontent of many Americans, including those in rural areas.

There are several reasons why I decided to apply Cramer Walsh's theory of rural consciousness to my research on Alberta's Bill 6. While conducting my literature review, her work resonated the most with the research questions I was raising about how and why rural Albertans responded so strongly to Bill 6 in late 2015. The eight characteristics of rural consciousness outlined a pattern that I informally observed in the petition comments I was gathering, and they presented an opportunity to test Cramer Walsh's theory in the Albertan context. As I worked on my capstone during President Trump's term and fall-out, I found Cramer Walsh's research compelling in the bigger picture of how people communicate about politics, and why they make their political decisions including voting and protest. While Alberta in 2015 is a different place and time than Cramer Walsh's research and the recent US presidential election, I saw the opportunity to apply the theory to my own backyard in Alberta and experience with the Bill 6 protesters. My research then not only aims to explore rural Albertans' response to Bill 6 and orientation to government, but also presents an opportunity to test existing theory and the usefulness of applying it to petitions as the data source.

Thus, to answer my research questions I developed the following coding for the Bill 6 petition comments based off Cramer Walsh's eight characteristics of rural consciousness (2012, p. 518):

1. Sense of rural place and relation in terms of power and resources;

2. Rural values and lifestyles, particularly the importance of hard work;

3. Rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs;

4. Identification with rural as a group, including a perception of injustice towards this group;

5. Perception of rural deprivation relative to other groups;

6. Perceived injustice caused by urban political elites;

7. Distrustful orientation towards government, including an expectation that their actions will not benefit rural interests; and

8. Political alienation, including lack of support for the system, perception of unfair application of rules, and that government is unresponsive to rural concerns.

These categories are a summarization of her theory intended to provide a clear and useful coding for my deductive quantitative research, as part of my exploration of how the Bill 6 petition comments reflected rural identity and distrust in Alberta.

  Pilot test. To test the methodology, pilot coding was conducted using some of the first and last of the petition comments. The pilot test (Appendix B) revealed that of all one but of 30 comments examined exemplified at least one category of Cramer Walsh's rural consciousness, and many comments were coded as multiple categories. The pilot test exposed some dilemmas to resolve before coding the full data set, including whether to use an independent variable (i.e., yes or no for whether the comment demonstrated Cramer Walsh's concept of rural consciousness), whether to include the number of likes received by a comment, and how to interpret comments

with imprecise language. After the pilot, I decided to keep the independent variable even though it provided limited value, as the overwhelming majority of comments were coded as yes. I also adjusted my methodology to now include the likes received by comments, as this data provided another way to quantify the comments. For comments with imprecise language (e.g. "Keep the communist retards out of our business"), I decided to keep these in scope and use limited but informed interpretation to translate the comment (e.g. in this instance, as referring to the NDP government).

Design limitations

While a case study using content analysis of petition comments was determined to be the best approach for this research on Alberta's Bill 6 protest, the design does come with limitations.

Case studies. Denscombe advises that case study researchers may receive questions about whether the research can be generalized, and specifically about how representative the case is, whether the findings are unique to that particular case, and whether the findings can be generalized (2014, p. 61). Bryman and Teevan (2005) argue that "the question of how the case study fares on research design issues of measurement validity, reliability, and replicability depends in large part on whether the researcher feels these criteria are appropriate for evaluating case study research" (p. 43) as writers of qualitative case studies tend to downplay these factors, while those conducting quantitative research amplify them. The quantitative analysis part of my

research is likely more possible to replicate. This doesn't necessarily undermine the validity of the research, however, as a case study "entails immersion in the setting and rests on both the researcher's and the participants' worldviews" (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 93). Furthermore, Bryman and Teevan (2005) note that while "one of the standard criticisms of the case study is that its findings cannot be generalized", case study researchers "argue strenuously that this is not the purpose of their craft (p. 44).

Content analysis. Similar to case studies, content analysis is not usually generalizable. Another limitation is that content analysis tends to remove the data from the bigger picture or context that can influence interpretation. Denscombe (2014) describes content analysis' main limitation as that it "has a built-in tendency to dislocate the units and their meaning from the context in which they were made, and even the intentions of the writer" (p. 284).

Another limitation is that the deductive content analysis relies on a typology developed by a third party. Although Cramer Walsh's rural consciousness research has undergone the rigours of peer review, it is still a single source with definitions and descriptions derived from research in a different place (Wisconsin). While similarities exist between rural Alberta and rural states such as Wisconsin, there are still differences between these places. Furthermore, Bryman and Teevan (2005) warn that "even in quantitative content analysis it is almost impossible to devise coding manuals that do not require some coder interpretation" (2005, p. 349).

Furthermore, as outlined by Denscombe (2014), it is challenging for content analysis to "deal with the meaning of the text in terms of its *implied* meanings, how the meaning draws on what has just been said, what followed, or even what is left unsaid" (p. 284).[6]

Data source. Bryman and Teevan (2005) assert that "content analysis can only be as good as the documents on which the practitioner works" (p. 349). A limitation of this research is that it was conducted in 2021, more than five years after the case study event in late 2015. Furthermore, when using documents as a source of data, researchers "generally rely on something which has been produced for other purposes and note for the specific aims of the investigation" as the documents "can owe more to the interpretations of those who produce them than to an objective picture of reality" (Denscombe, 2014, p. 240). Further limitations of using a petition as the data source include:

1. Petitions are not representative of an entire population. Findings from this petition cannot be generalized to Albertans as a whole, or even from the petition comments to everyone who signed the petition.

2. Petition comments are generally quite short, and do not reflect the entirety of someone's thoughts about the issue.

3. Petitions are often signed in anger, or in response to a specific event or catalyst that prompted the person to sign. The petition comments are presented without that context

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[6] I speak further to this in my Findings section under the Data Analysis sub-section.

for the individual who signed and posted, as well as the greater unfolding of political events during the Bill 6 protests.

4. Petitions contain limited information about the participants. Fortunately for this petition I was able to gather time stamps collected by Change.org for the comments, but there is no way for me to confirm that authors gave their real name or location.

Summary

Studying government policy, political protest, and online communication offers a plethora of potential research questions and methodology paths. By taking the approach of a case study with the use of deductive quantitative content analysis to explore the rural consciousness and perceptions of Alberta's Bill 6 as collected in an online petition against the government, my research explores how rural Albertan protesters responded during the Bill 6 debate, and what this reveals about rural culture and politics in this province. While there are limitations to the case study approach, as well as the narrow scope of this particular capstone research using petition comments, my methodology incorporates consideration and mitigation of these challenges.

In the next section, we review the findings of the study, and present the data studied as part of this research.

Findings

In the last section, I outlined the methodology for my research, including my specific research questions; the research design, procedures, and analysis completed to answer these questions; and the limitations of the research conducted as part of this case study. To answer my research questions, I described how I would use quantitative deductive content analysis using Cramer Walsh's characteristics of rural consciousness as the theory being applied to analyze the petition comments. Having completed this research, the Findings section will now present the data I collected, after outlining how I sorted and coded it.

Data Analysis

This section outlines the procedures used to sort, code, and interpret the data as part of this research. Using the Bill 6 petition as a case study, this research used quantitative content analysis on a random sample of petition comments, taking a deductive approach based off Cramer Walsh's (2012) rural consciousness theory to explore how the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust, and what they reveal about rural culture and politics in Alberta.

Sorting. The data source is the Change.org petition called "Stop NDP Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act", that attracted 25,313 supporters. During the sorting process, I began with 5000 comments posted under Reasons for Signing, and followed the following steps to develop a data set of 454 that were analyzed as part of this study. Table 1 outlines the specific steps and procedures taken to sort the data, including how I arrived at the data set that was analyzed.

Step	Procedures used to sort data	Resulting data (number of individual petition comments)

1	**Downloaded 5000 petition comments from Change.org posted under "Reasons for Signing".** The columns in the resulting spreadsheet are: Comment, Likes, Created_At, City, Country, Name. While more comments appeared to exist on the webpage, the script used to extra the comment had a capacity of 5000 during one download into an Excel Spreadsheet.	5000
2	**Limited comments to relevant time period.** The data set was restricted to the time before petition was presented to the Legislature on December 9, 2015, as this scopes data down to petition comments that came in before the government received the petition. This also aligns the dataset closely with the timing of the Bill 6 being passed by the government on December 10.	4929
3	**Limited comments to authors residing in Canada.** Using the Country column, I removed all comments from authors based outside of Canada (e.g. Australia, Cameroon, Chile, France, Great Britain, Equatorial Guinea, Mexico, Zimbabwe, Kuwait). While some authors noted that they used to live in Canada or Alberta, I excluded all who did not identify as currently residing in Canada.	4881
4	**Limited comments to authors residing in Alberta.** Using the City column, I cross-referenced all cities listed against Google Maps to ensure that only authors living in Alberta were included in the data set. As many authors listed hamlets or non-incorporated municipalities, this step required use of Google Maps as the Government of Alberta's list of municipalities is limited to incorporated municipalities. During this step, I also removed authors with clearly false names and locations (e.g. Johnny Canuck from the North Pole), and comments who didn't include municipalities.	4548
5	**Used random selection to identify the data to study.** Starting from the beginning from a list sorted by location in order to spread out representation geographically, I selected one of every ten comments to be included in the study. Within this data set, I checked for author and comment duplication, and none were found. During this I did not include comments that didn't contain enough words to be studied meaningfully.	454

Table 1 - Sorting steps, procedures, and results

The sorting process resulted in an appropriately sized randomly selected data set of

petition comments that were clearly identified as created by authors residing in Alberta, during

the time period between the creation of the petition on November 22 and its tabling in the

Legislature on December 9, 2015. The data set is well scoped to the case study research being conducted.

     Coding. To answer my research questions, I employed quantitative deductive content analysis using Cramer Walsh's (2012) characteristics of rural consciousness as the theory being applied to analyze the petition comments data set. As outlined in the Methodology section, I studied Cramer Walsh's (2012) theory of rural consciousness, how it was developed, the eight characteristics that it outlines to describe rural group consciousness, and how her research provides a lens for understanding the rural-urban divide including underlying reasons for political beliefs and actions taken by rural residents in Wisconsin. By employing Cramer Walsh's (2012) typology of rural consciousness for content analysis of the petition comments, this case study aims to explore the rural Alberta reaction to the Government's farm and ranch safety legislation in late 2015, and test whether rural consciousness theory works to study the specific conditions in the setting of Alberta's Bill 6 protest.

     To code the data, I first assessed the petition comment to confirm that it was in scope for the case study, in that it was posted during the time frame being studied, and by an author identified as residing in Alberta. Next, I evaluated for whether the petition comment demonstrated rural consciousness, including any of the eight characteristics. If the comment did not exhibit rural consciousness, I coded it as such. If it did, I then analyzed for which of the eight characteristics were present, and coded it for one or multiple characteristics.

     As advised by Denscombe (2014), who noted the challenges for content analysis to "deal with the meaning of the text in terms of its *implied* meanings, how the meaning draws on what has just been said, what followed, or even what is left unsaid" (p. 284), I looked to limit interpretation as much as possible beyond the text of the comment. To provide clear and

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consistent guidelines for analysis, my Coding Framework (Appendix C) included the code options, references to Cramer Walsh's definitions, and clarifying questions to assist with the coding process.

To apply and organize the codes, I used Altas.ti, a platform for analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. This tool streamlined my coding and analysis work by providing quick and easy application of codes, live tracking of resulting code totals, and visualization tools for interpretation and analysis. For example, Figure 1 shows a screenshot of a selection of comments with code applied in Atlas.ti.
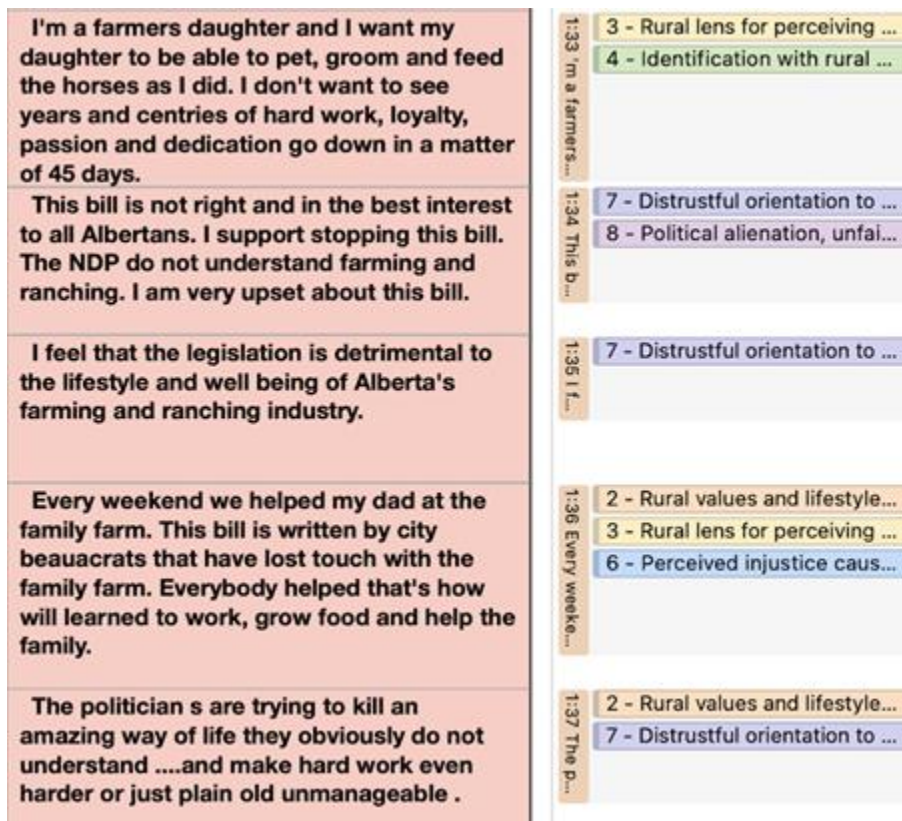

Figure 1 - Sample of coded comments

Data Presentation

This study uses the Bill 6 petition and comments as a case study to answer two research questions:

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- RQ1: How do the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust?

- RQ2: What do the petition comments reveal about rural culture and politics in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta?

To answer these questions, the methodology employed is a case study using content analysis to study the rural response to Alberta's Bill 6 as collected in an online petition against the government in late 2015. The study employs Cramer Walsh's (2012) concept and typology of rural consciousness as a lens to examine how the petition comments illuminate the reaction to Bill 6. Petition comments were coded for categories of rural consciousness using deductive content analysis. Figure 2 presents a snapshot of the coding results, which will be presented and examined in more detail through quantitative deductive content analysis. This section includes several approaches to present and examine the results, including the prevalence and frequency of rural conscious codes, as well as the relationship between codes and top keywords expressed in coded comments.

Prevalence of rural consciousness. Figure 3 provides a high-level overview of the coding results, which shows how strongly the data set demonstrated rural consciousness. Figure 3 visualizes the prevalence of rural consciousness in the data set. Of the 454 petition comments studied, 435 petition comments, or 95.81% of the data set, exhibited rural consciousness and were coded with at least one characteristic of the theory. There were 18 (3.96%) petition

1 - Sense of rural place and relation in terms of power and resources	8
2 - Rural values and lifestyles, particularly hard work	96
3 - Rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs	113
4 - Identification with rural group, including perception of injustice	150
5 - Perception of rural deprivation relative to other groups	13
6 - Perceived injustice caused by urban political elites	68
7 - Distrustful orientation to government, including expectation that it doesn't benefit rural interests	172
8 - Political alienation, unfair rules, unresponsive government	119
Doesn't reflect rural consciousness	18

Figure 2 - Overview of coding results

comments that did not reflect rural consciousness and one (0.22% was excluded as it did not provide content that was meaningful enough to study.
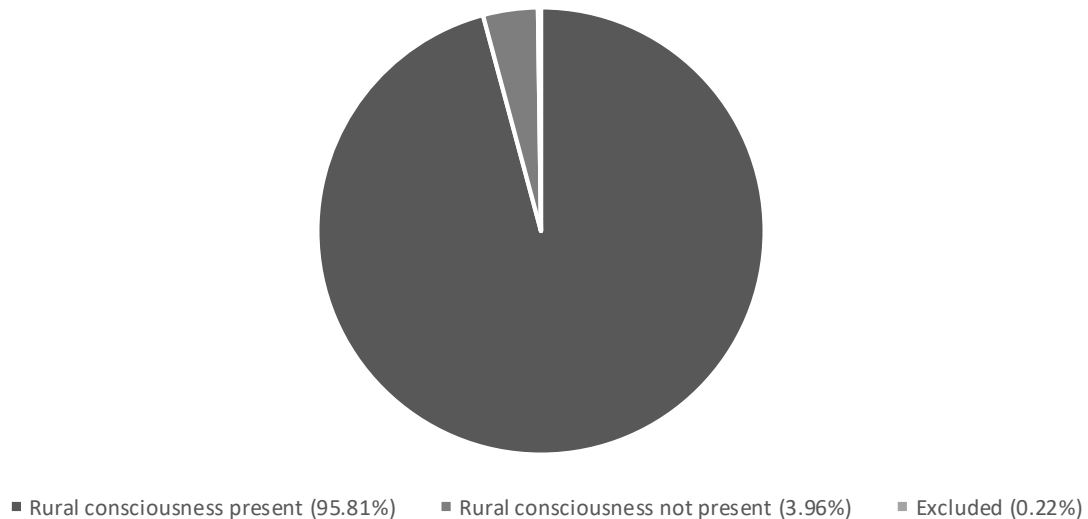
Prevalence of rural consciousness in petition comments

■ Rural consciousness present (95.81%)   ■ Rural consciousness not present (3.96%)   ■ Excluded (0.22%)

Figure 3 - Prevalence of rural consciousness in Bill 6 petition comments

Frequency of rural consciousness codes. To better understand the results and answer the research questions, let's explore how often each of the rural consciousness characteristics appeared in the petition comments. Figure 4 breaks down the frequency of each rural consciousness code in the data set. The strongest characteristics revealed in the data are:

- distrustful orientation to government, including expectation that it doesn't benefit rural interests (172 codes, or 37.89% of the comments in the data set);

- identification with rural group, including perception of injustice (150 codes, 33.04%);

- political alienation, including perception of unfair rules and unresponsive government (119 codes, 26.21%);

- rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs (113 codes, 24.89%);

- rural values and lifestyles, particularly hard work (96 codes, 21.15%);

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- perceived injustice by urban political elites (68 codes, 14.98%);

- perception of rural deprivation relative to other groups (13 codes, 2.86%); and

- sense of rural place and relation in terms of power and resources (8 codes, 1.76%).
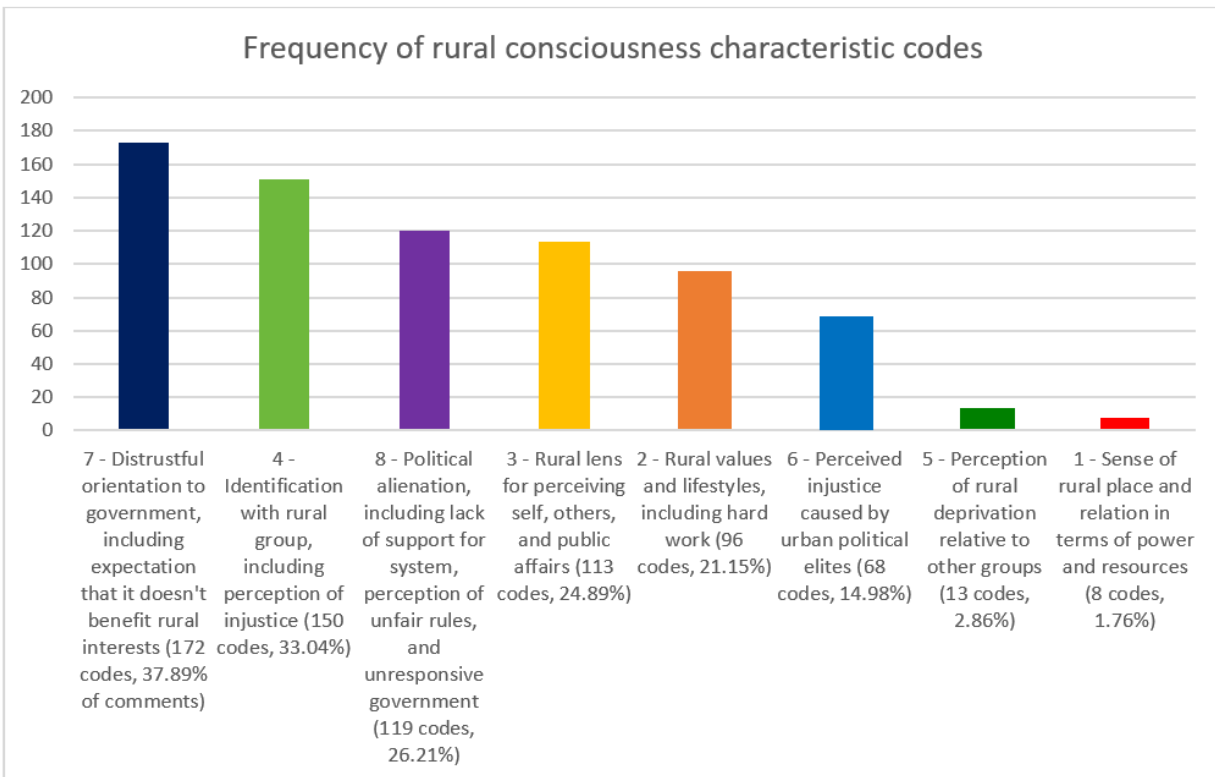

Figure 4 - Frequency of rural consciousness characteristics

Co-occurrence between rural consciousness codes. To deepen our exploration and understanding of rural culture and politics, let's explore the relationships between rural consciousness codes in this case study.

Of the 454 petition comments, 199 (43.83%) were coded with one characteristic of rural consciousness, while the rest (56.17%) were coded with multiple characteristics. Table 2 outlines how many petition comments received a single code. Of the eight, "Distrustful orientation to government" received the most standalone codes (57), followed by "Identification with rural as a

Classification: Protected A

group" (41), "Political alienation" (40), "Rural lens" (25), and "Rural values and lifestyles" (19). This order is the same as the total codes received for each characteristic, and offers limited value for analysis.

Coding	Number of comments receiving only that code	Percentage of total data set (454 comments)
1 - Sense of rural place and relation in terms of power and resources	0	0
2 - Rural values and lifestyles, particularly the importance of hard work	19	4.12%
3 - Rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs	25	5.51%
4 - Identification with rural as a group, including a perception of injustice towards this group	41	9.03%
5 - Perception of rural deprivation relative to other groups	1	0.22%
6 - Perceived injustice caused by urban political elites	16	3.52%
7 - Distrustful orientation towards government, including an expectation that their actions will not benefit rural interests	57	12.56%
8 - Political alienation, including lack of support for the system, perception of unfair application of rules, and that government is unresponsive to rural concerns	40	8.81%
Total comments receiving a single rural consciousness code (doesn't include comments excluded or coded as not reflecting rural consciousness)	**199**	**43.83%**

Table 2 - Comments that received a single rural consciousness code

More insights are offered looking at how codes relate to each other. Of the 435 petition comments coded as rural consciousness, 236 exhibited more than one characteristic. Figure 6 illustrates the co-occurrence between the eight codes as a Sankey diagram, based on the same data presented in Table 3.

| | 1 - Sense of r... | 2 - Rural valu... | 3 - Rural lens... | 4 - Identificati... | 5 - Perceptio... | 6 - Perceived... | 7 - Distrustful... | 8 - Political ali... |
	8	96	113	150	13	68	172	119
1 - Sense of... 8		1	3	2	3	1	2	1
2 - Rural val... 96	1		34	30	3	11	21	9
3 - Rural len... 113	3	34		34	5	15	22	12
4 - Identifica... 150	2	30	34		3	20	40	22
5 - Perceptio... 13	3	3	5	3		5	3	
6 - Perceive... 68	1	11	15	20	5		19	11
7 - Distrustf... 172	2	21	22	40	3	19		49
8 - Political... 119	1	9	12	22		11	49	

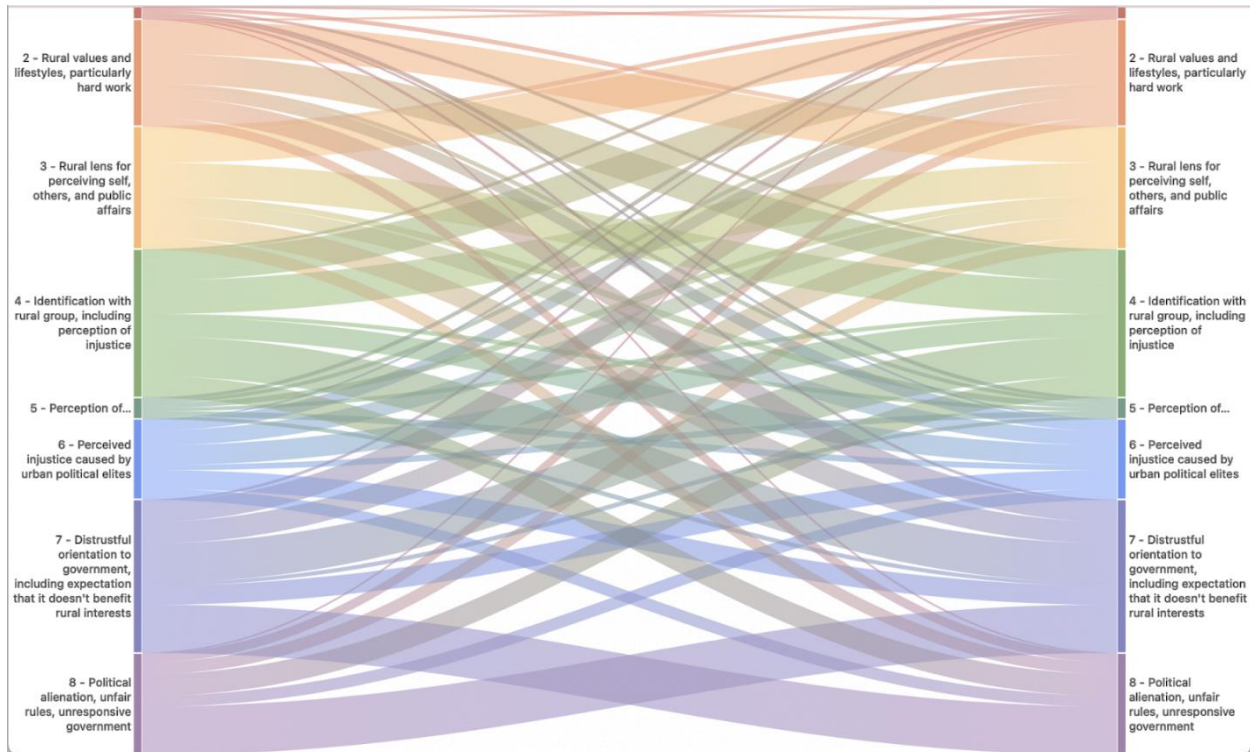*Table 3 - Co-occurrence between rural consciousness codes*

Figure 6 - Co-occurrence between rural consciousness codes, which is the same data as Table 3 but illustrated using a Sankey diagram

The data shows that "Distrustful orientation to government" and "Political alienation" are the most intertwined codes with 49 co-occurrences. Following this, the closest code relationships are between "Distrustful orientation to government" and "Identification with rural group" with 40 co-occurrences; "Rural lens" and "Identification with rural group" with 34 co-occurrences; and "Rural lens" and "Rural values" also with 34 co-occurrences. While "Rural lens" had a high co-occurrence with "Identification with rural group" (34), it didn't overlap as much with

"Distrustful orientation to government" (22) or "Political alienation" (12). "Rural values" had a similar rate of overlap with "Distrustful orientation to government" (21) and a lower rate for "Political alienation" (9). In contrast to "Rural lens" and "Rural values", "Identification with rural group" co-occurred much more with "Distrustful orientation" (40) and "Political alienation" (22). The rest of the code co-occurrences ranges from 1 to 15.

Most common keywords reflected in coded petition comments. To dive deeper into how the data answers the research questions and explore further how rural consciousness is present in this case study, let's examine the top terms present in each of the characteristics coded in the petition comments. For each characteristic, data has been collected on the most frequently observed terms. See Figure 5 for an example of how this data has been collected and organized using Altas.ti. It includes how most of the commonly used words with limited research value (e.g. prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, etc.) have been removed from the keywords list by utilizing a "Stop List" to exclude them.

Figure 5 - Example of most frequently observed keywords for all comments coded with a particular rural consciousness characteristic

After evaluating the prevalence and frequency of rural consciousness in the data set, this data takes the analysis a level deeper to explore findings related to how each characteristic is exhibited in the data set. It also provides data points to compare and contrast the eight rural consciousness codes, and evaluate the usefulness of each in conducting content analysis for this case study. This will be presented in order of the rural consciousness characteristics most present in the data set.

The most frequently found rural consciousness characteristic for this case study was "Distrustful orientation towards government, including an expectation that their actions will not benefit rural interests." We will study this code in the most depth as it relates most closely to the research questions, particularly the first question on how the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust. The "Distrustful orientation towards government" code was applied to 172 petition comments, which means that 37.89% of the data set exhibited this rural consciousness

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characteristic. As mentioned above in the Data Analysis sub-section, this characteristic is described by Cramer Walsh (2012) as encompassing orientations towards government and in particular "political trust because it contains judgments about the past performance of the government and an expectation that future actions will not be in line with rural interests" (p. 518). In applying the codes, my Coding Framework (Appendix C) noted that clarifying guidance including that:

- Phrases that reflect distrust and lack of rural benefit include that the NDP doesn't understand farming/ranching, that the government doesn't know anything about farming, inadequate research, etc.;

- Terms that reflect orientation towards government include government actions such as bill, legislation, regulation, NDP, etc.; and

- Distrustful orientation to government includes protesting government interference, wanting government out of their business, etc.

The findings for most frequent keywords for comments coded with this characteristic are presented in Table 4. Compared to the full data set, the petition comments for this code contained more frequent references to political keywords such as Government and NDP, and less frequent references to values keywords such as family and work. Of note is how "Know" and "Understand" were much more frequent in the comments coded for this characteristic, as these authors raised a number of concerns that government didn't know how farms and ranches were operated, and didn't understand what rural Albertans needed to succeed or how Bill 6 would affect them negatively. Furthermore, the keyword "Destroy" has been highlighted as a bellwether term illuminating rural distrust in the petition comments; it is present 10 times in the comments coded for this characteristic, representing 23.81% of all the times the word is present in the full

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data set. Similarly, the keyword "Safety" has been selected as a bellwether term to measure how often authors reference it in their reasons for signing the petition; for this code, it is mentioned 10 times, which is lower than other value keywords such as family and work.

Code 7 - Distrustful orientation towards government, including an expectation that their actions will not benefit rural interests (37.89%)		
Most common keywords in comments with this code, with frequency	Most common keywords for all comments, with frequency	To illustrate this data in action, here are purposively sampled petition comments with this code:
1. Farm (148) 2. **Government (112)** 3. Bill (102) 4. Farmer (79) 5. **NDP (66)** 6. *Family (64)* 7. Life (55) 8. Need (49) 9. Way (48) 10. *Work (45)* 11. People (44) 12. Farming (38) 13. Alberta (31) 14. **Know (26)** 15. **Understand (24)**	1. Farm (455) 2. Bill (376) 3. *Family (220)* 4. Farmer (157) 5. **Government (156)** 6. *Work (149)* 7. Life (122) 8. **NDP (118)** 9. Way (99) 10. Work (96) 11. People (88) 12. Farming (82) 13. Alberta (73) 14. Grow (68) 15. Raise (51)	• "I believe this government has been underhanded. They are still being dishonest with the real intent of this bill. It needs to be scrapped." (Leduc County author) • "Please leave our farmers alone. They don't want or need this. You cannot be trusted, as the oil industry quickly found out." (Sturgeon County author) • "To protect our family farms from bureaucrats that don't understand hard work ethics instilled by our lifestyle." (Okotoks author) • Once government gets into farming they will destroy another important part of our Canadian heritage. I am concerned that this bill will drive many farming families out and we all need them. Corporate and government owned and operated farms are scary. Government can't seem to manage a budget so how on earth could they manage farming. (Calgary author)
Other keywords of note, with frequency, for this code	Other keywords of note, with frequency, for all comments	
Destroy (10) Notley (11) Safety (10)	Destroy (42) Notley (22) Safety (33)	

Table 4 - Keywords data for Code 7 comments

The second most frequent characteristic was "Identification with rural groups, including perception of injustice", which was coded to 150 comments or 33% of the data set. The findings for most frequent keywords for comments coded with this characteristic are presented in Table 5. Compared to the full data set, the petition comments for this code contained more frequent

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references to "destroy" as a bellwether keyword for rural distrust, which aligns with the characteristic's emphasis on injustice towards the rural community. It also contains more references to "family", "way", "life", and "province" than the full data set, and includes nearly all the references to "ruin" in the petition comments. In terms of political keywords, the comments coded with this characteristic included more references to "NDP" than to "Government", in contrast to the opposite trend in the full data set.

Code 4 - Identification with rural group, including a perception of injustice (33.04% of data set)		
Most common keywords in comments with this code, with frequency	Most common keywords for all comments, with frequency	To illustrate this data in action, here are purposively sampled petition comments with this code:
1. Farm (153) 2. **Family (108)** 3. Bill (103) 4. Farmer (68) 5. Life (53) 6. Work (53) 7. Way (48) 8. NDP (37) 9. *Government (34)* 10. Farming (33) 11. Alberta (32) 12. Need (30) 13. **Destroy (26)** 14. Province (24) 15. Make (21)	1. Farm (455) 2. Bill (376) 3. **Family (220)** 4. Farmer (157) 5. *Government (156)* 6. Work (149) 7. Life (122) 8. NDP (118) 9. Way (99) 10. Work (96) 11. People (88) 12. Farming (82) 13. Alberta (73) 14. Grow (68) 15. Raise (51)	• "Family farms are a way of life, just as much as a livelihood. They are a fading way of life that is disappearing all too fast, we need to hold on to them and the values they instill in our children. This bill would be another nail in this coffin and what we need is life support." (Glenwood author) • "The family farm is in Alberta's blood. These changes will destroy the community, restrict neighbours helping each other in times of need, and prevent even more children from growing up with good work ethic!" (Red Deer author) • "We are hard working farmers and this will destroy our livelihood. Being a family run farm is challenging enough already." (Sherwood Park author) • "I love family farming, and the NDP is trying to destroy us!" (Thorhild author)
Other keywords of note, with frequency, for this code	Other keywords of note, with frequency, for all comments	
Destroy (26) Notley (5) Safety (11) **Ruin (11)**	Destroy (42) Notley (22) Safety (33) Ruin (12)	

Table 5 - Keywords data for Code 4 comments

The third most frequently found characteristic was "Political alienation, including lack of support for the system, perception of unfair rules, and that government is unresponsive to rural concerns", which was coded to 119 petition comments or 26.21% of the data set. The findings for most frequent keywords for this characteristic are presented in Table 6. Compared to all comments, those coded with this characteristic included more references to "Government", "NDP", and "Bill". Comments with this code included nearly all the references to "Consultation", "Dictatorship", and "Democratic". In contrast to the full data set, these coded comments contained less references to farm-related keywords. They also reflected nearly a quarter of all references to "Destroy".

Code 8 - Political alienation, including lack of support for system, perception of unfair rules, and that government is unresponsive to rural concerns (26.21% of data set)		
Most common keywords in comments with this code, with frequency	Most common keywords for all comments, with frequency	To illustrate this data in action, here are purposively sampled petition comments with this code:
1. Bill (94 instances) 2. Government (56) 3. Farmer (54) 4. Farm (46) 5. NDP (41) 6. People (35) 7. Family (33) 8. Work (31) 9. Consultation (27) 10. Farming (26) 11. Farms (25) 12. Life (20) 13. Want (17) 14. Alberta (19) 15. Way (15)	1. Farm (455) 2. Bill (376) 3. Family (220) 4. Farmer (157) 5. Government (156) 6. Work (149) 7. Life (122) 8. NDP (118) 9. Way (99) 10. Work (96) 11. People (88) 12. Farming (82) 13. Alberta (73) 14. Grow (68) 15. Raise (51)	• "Another socialist government attempt to control the citizenry." (Leduc author) • "I'm signing this petition because I'm fed up. This government feels like a dictatorship telling farmers how it will manage them rather than working with them for a viable solution." (Onoway author) • "This is completely unacceptable dictatorship behaviour! Whatever happened to democracy?" (Tomahawk author) • "Lack of communication stating the contents of this bill by our government. We do not want to change the way we have all grown up for future generations. Please work with farmers to achieve a common ground, not against us. Safety is important to us too.
Other keywords of note, with frequency, for this code	Other keywords of note, with frequency, for all comments	

Destroy (10) Notley (11) Safety (10) Dictatorship (9) Democratic (8) Listen (11)	Destroy (42) Notley (22) Safety (33) Dictatorship (9) Democratic (9) Listen (12) Consultation (28)	Listen to our concerns!" (Magrath author) ● "Because I feel our government is now following the wishes of the majority, and our provincial constitution is broken. I will not live in a "Nanny State", and people have a right to choose their own lives." (Red Deer author)

Table 6 - Keywords data for Code 8 comments

The fourth most frequent characteristic was "Rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs", which was coded to 113 petition comments or 24.89% of the data set. The findings for most frequent keywords for this characteristic are presented in Table 7. Compared to the full data set, comments with this code contained more references to values keywords such as "Family" and "Work" and less to political keywords such as "Government" and "NDP". Of note are the many references to farm family, including keywords such as "Raise", "Learn", "Child", "Love", and "Responsibility".

Code 3 - Rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs (24.89% of data set)		
Most common keywords in comments with this code, with frequency	Most common keywords for all comments, with frequency	To illustrate this data in action, here are purposively sampled petition comments with this code:
1. Farm (142) 2. **Family (87)** 3. **Work (53)** 4. Farmer (51) 5. Bill (49) 6. Life (44) 7. Grow (40) 8. **Raise (35)** 9. Way (34) 10. *Government (28)* 11. **Learn (24)** 12. **Child (23)** 13. Need (23)	1. Farm (455) 2. Bill (376) 3. **Family (220)** 4. Farmer (157) 5. *Government (156)* 6. **Work (149)** 7. Life (122) 8. *NDP (118)* 9. Way (99) 10. **Work (96)** 11. People (88) 12. Farming (82)	● "If this bill passes it will drive most small farmers out of business. It will end the family farm for many and a lifestyle we live and love." (Athabasca author) ● "I grew up in a farming community and know that this will kill the already dying breed of small farmer." (Camrose author) ● "Growing on a farm has not only crafted my sense of hard work and satisfaction for a job well-done, but my appreciation for family and our time

		together on the farm is instrumental to who I am. This Bill threatens not only the livelihood of the farmer, but their families, and the community. Shame on you, NDP." (Edmonton author)
14. **Love (21)** 15. People (18)	13. Alberta (73) 14. Grow (68) 15. **Raise (51)**	
Other keywords of note, with frequency, for this code	Other keywords of note, with frequency, for all comments	• "I grew up on an Alberta farm and feel it's a way of life that needs to be protected. All aspects of the Alberta lifestyle are being attacked by the new government. Leave us something." (Red Deer author)
Destroy (9) Notley (5) Safety (11) Responsibility (8) *NDP (16)*	Destroy (42) Notley (22) Safety (33)	

Table 7 - Keywords data for Code 3 comments

The fifth most frequently found characteristic was "Rural values and lifestyles, particularly hard work", which was coded to 96 petition comments or 21.15% of the data set. The findings for most frequent keywords for this characteristic are presented in Table 8. Compared to the full data set, these comments focused much more on the keywords "Work" and "Hard". They also contain a strong emphasis on "Family" and raising "Children" on the farm, including top keywords such as "Learn" and "Teach". The references to "Raise" comprise nearly half of those in the entire data set, and nearly all mentions of "Kids". The comments with this code also include less references than the full data set to "Government" and especially "NDP", which drops out of the top 15 keywords for this characteristic.

Code 2 - Rural values and lifestyles, including hard work (21.15%)		
Most common keywords in comments with this code, with frequency	Most common keywords for all comments, with frequency	To illustrate this data in action, here are purposively sampled petition comments with this code:
1. Farm (142) 2. **Work (96)** 3. **Family (90)** 4. Grow (48) 5. Life (47) 6. Way (41) 7. **Children (39)** 8. Bill (39)	1. Farm (455) 2. Bill (376) 3. Family (220) 4. Farmer (157) 5. *Government (156)* 6. Work (149) 7. Life (122)	• "My kids need farm work in their life! It's sculpting them into positive, hard working, contributing members of society into their adulthood." (Gibbons author) • "I grew up on the family farm and my children are currently being raised on the family farm. A strong work-ethic,

9. Farmer (36) 10. **Learn (33)** 11. **Hard (32)** 12. **Teach (31)** 13. *Government (29)* 14. People (26) 15. **Raise (25)**	8. *NDP (118)* 9. Way (99) 10. Work (96) 11. People (88) 12. Farming (82) 13. Alberta (73) 14. Grow (68) 15. Raise (51)	along with pride, and family values are instilled in children who are raised on family farms." (Grande Prairie author) ● "The values that our children learn and the work ethic they are taught, that is so desperately endangered in today's society, need not be taken away by an uneducated, misinformed NDP government." (Lacombe author) ● "I grew up on a farm and know what farming is all about…it's sweat, tears, heartbreaking, back breaking long hours of hard work…and this bill will not work for numerous reasons…cannot believe anybody is that stupid and thinks it will… "(Lethbridge author)
Other keywords of note, with frequency, for this code	Other keywords of note, with frequency, for all comments	
Destroy (7) Notley (8) Safety (11) Responsibility (8) *NDP (16)* **Kids (25)** Ethic (12)	Destroy (42) Notley (22) Safety (33) Child (47) Hard (38) Ethic (12) Kids (30)	

Table 8 - Keywords data for Code 2 comments

The sixth most frequently found characteristic was "Perceived injustice by urban political elites", which was coded to 68 petition comments or 14.98% of the data set. The findings for most frequent keywords for this characteristic are presented in Table 9. Compared to the full data set, these comments contain a higher number of references to "NDP"—the highest rate for any of the codes' keyword data. It also includes most of the references to "City" and "Urban", as well as some of the terms I identified in the Coding Framework (Appendix C) as related to urban political elites such as bureaucrats, greenhorns, city slickers, paper pushers, uninformed legislators, etc.

Code 6 - Perceived injustice caused by urban political elites (14.98% of data set)		
Most common keywords in comments with this code, with frequency	Most common keywords for all comments, with frequency	To illustrate this data in action, here are purposively sampled petition comments with this code:
1. Farm (55) 2. **NDP (36)** 3. Family (33)	1. Farm (455) 2. Bill (376) 3. Family (220)	● "I am tired of City people who have lost touch with the country telling me what I can do and putting unrealistic

		regulations on the working farm. I have no trust in the government to regulate me before they understand what a farm is all about, what is good for it and what can destroy it by costs from more and more rules. They aren't asking enough questions and I doubt they would listen." (Hussar author)
4. Bill (31)	4. Farmer (157)	
5. People (24)	5. Government (156)	
6. Farmer (21)	6. Work (149)	
7. Need (20)	7. Life (122)	
8. Work (20)	8. **NDP (118)**	
9. Farming (9)	9. Way (99)	• "The NDP has no clue about anything beyond city limits." (Innisfail author)
10. Life (19)	10. Work (96)	
11. Province (18)	11. People (88)	
12. Government (17)	12. Farming (82)	• "Alberta's family farms and ranches should not be controlled and destroyed by urban leftist NDPs." (Okotoks author)
13. Alberta (17)	13. Alberta (73)	
14. Way (16)	14. Grow (68)	
15. Community (15)	15. Raise (51)	
Other keywords of note, with frequency, for this code	Other keywords of note, with frequency, for all comments	• "Sick and tired of these city people who have no idea what farm life is or means to this province making all these decisions for us. A chance is needed before the NDP ruins it for the small family farm." (Spirit River author)
Destroy (9)	Destroy (42)	
Notley (10)	Notley (22)	
Safety (4)	Safety (33)	
City (14)	City (19)	
Urban (11)	Urban (14)	

Table 9 - Keywords data for Code 6 comments

The seventh most frequently found characteristic was "Perception of rural deprivation relative to other groups", which was coded to 13 petition comments or 2.86% of the data set, and the least frequently found rural consciousness characteristic was "Sense of rural place and relation in terms of power and resources", which was coded to eight petition comments or 1.76% of the data set. Given that these codes were applied to significantly less comments that the ones discussed above, I've decided not to present and analyze their keyword data. As mentioned in the co-occurrence data discussion, the lower rate of coding for these two rural characteristics may be seen as weakness in the theory, but it may also be due to the nature of this particular case study with its focus on political protest.

Summary

After outlining the procedures used to sort, code, and interpret the petition data, this chapter presents the findings of this analysis. Overall the data shows that the rural consciousness theory provides a strong fit and frame for understanding rural culture and politics as demonstrated in the Bill 6 petition comments. The eight characteristics of rural consciousness are present throughout the data set and lay a useful foundation for analyzing how the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust, and what they reveal about rural Alberta in the case of the Bill 6 protests. The strongest characteristics revealed in the data are: 1) distrustful orientation to government, including expectation that it doesn't benefit rural interests; 2) identification with rural group, including perception of injustice; 3) political alienation, including perception of unfair rules and unresponsive government; 4) rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs; and 5) rural values and lifestyles, particularly hard work.

In the next section, we discuss the implications for the Alberta and future research.

Discussion

In the literature review, we established that while online platforms are increasingly where government and citizens communicate, e-government has not necessarily improved communication and the relationship between government and citizens generally is increasingly one of distrust. We also noted how the urban-rural divide is a powerful schism in society that influences how people communicate and act in public affairs, and that Albertan political culture includes a long history of mistrust of government interference and communications. Despite this distrust, Albertans increasingly want to participate in political decision-making, and e-government provides online tools such as social media and petitions as an important channel for communication with government.

Informed by this literature, my research explores how Albertans responded to the Bill 6 via an online petition against the legislation and the NDP government who introduced it in November 2015, with an aim to better understand the rural culture and political discourse that informed these protests. In the previous section, we outlined the research methodology and analysis approach for this study. As a case study using deductive quantitative content analysis, this research explores the rural consciousness and perceptions of Alberta's Bill 6 as collected in online comments gathered by a Change.org petition called "Stop NDP Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act" that received 25,313 signatures. To answer my research questions about how the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust, and what they reveal about rural culture and politics in this case study, I employed quantitative deductive content analysis using Cramer Walsh's characteristics of rural consciousness as the theory being applied to analyze the petition comments.

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The data presentation in the Finding section outlined and visualized the prevalence and frequency of rural conscious codes, as well as the relationship between codes and top keywords expressed in coded comments. To discuss the findings, I will begin by analyzing the data by each type of presentation and how the results relate to my research questions:

- RQ1: How do the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust?
- RQ2: What do the petition comments reveal about rural culture and politics in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta?

I will then dive into a deeper discussion of the findings overall including their implications, consideration of weakness and validity issues, and directions for future research.

Prevalence

How does the strong prevalence of rural consciousness (95.81% of the data set) reflect rural identity and distrust, and reveal about rural culture and politics in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta? These results suggest that the petition comments contain a strong representation of rural identity and distrust as interpreted through the lens of rural consciousness, which we will examine next in a more detailed exploration of how each characteristic was found in the case study. At this level, the petition comments reveal that rural culture and politics in Alberta, as captured in this data, can be understood as an influential group consciousness that drove political belief and action in the case of the Bill 6 protests.

These results are not surprising, given that the petition comments were posted by authors protesting the government for a policy issue primarily related to rural Alberta. However, I was surprised to see how strong the prevalence was for the data set as a whole, as I had considered that it was possible for many petition comments to not fit into the rural consciousness theory or have limited relevance to my research questions.

The strong prevalence of rural consciousness in the Bill 6 petition comments also suggests that the rural consciousness theory is a relevant and applicable way to identify, measure, and analyze rural culture and politics for this Albertan case study. If this would not be the case, the rural consciousness theory developed in Wisconsin by Cramer Walsh (2012) would have a lesser degree of relevance in the Bill 6 petition comments.

Frequency

The frequency of rural consciousness codes offer a lens to identify and quantify the significant presence of rural identity as a group consciousness and distrust of government. The petition comments exhibited all of the rural consciousness characteristics, with the ones most present including: 1) distrust of government; 2) perception of injustice against the rural community; 3) pride in and desire to protect rural values and lifestyles; and 4) a sense of blame towards urban political elites. The results suggest that rural identity as exhibited in the data may be most framed by the perception that government doesn't benefit rural interests, that there is injustice towards rural communities, that the political system doesn't benefit rural communities, and that rural values and lifestyles are good and must be protected from threats including the government and urban political elites.

The theory of rural consciousness, as prevalent in the data, provides a window to examine the rural-urban divide in Alberta, and how rural culture and politics can be understood through this lens. The petition authors represent a rural consciousness that sees its values and way of life under attack by a government that doesn't listen to them, doesn't make decisions that benefit their interests, and doesn't treat their communities fairly. It places the blame for this on government itself, and more specifically to the urban political elites that influence and participate in the political system. These results align with the literature review, which found that the

relationship between government and citizens is increasingly one of distrust, the urban-rural divide is a powerful schism in society that influences how people communicate and act in public affairs, that Albertan political culture includes a long history of mistrust of government interference and communications, and that government miscommunication and mistrust foments political protest movements. While this case study of Bill 6 protests as examined through these petition comments is a small slice of data in a long history of rural discontent in Alberta, this research provides a lens to explore and better understand rural culture and politics in this province.

The results may also be seen as exploring the usefulness of Cramer Walsh's rural consciousness characteristics in conducting this case study. The two characteristics seen the least in the data are those that contained a comparison of rural to other groups, which was infrequent in the petition comments. This may be because the primary relationship expressed in the petition comments is that between rural Alberta and the Government of Alberta, as illustrated in the frequency of the three codes related to government: distrustful orientation to government, political alienation, and perceived injustice by urban political elites. It is possible that Cramer Walsh's rural consciousness characteristics would apply differently to a case study not focused on protest of the government, as in the case of Bill 6 in Alberta.

The results suggest that Albertan's response to the Government of Alberta's Bill 6 as captured in the petition comments, as reflected in this data set, are most focused on distrust of government, perception of injustice against the rural community, alienation with the political system, appreciation of rural values and lifestyle that are seen to be under attack by the government, and a sense of blame towards urban political elites. To a lesser degree, the petition

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comments also show a perception of rural deprivation as compared to other groups, and a comparison that reflect the power and resources held by rural Alberta.

Co-occurrence

By studying the relationship between petition comments receiving the same rural consciousness codes, the co-occurrences data provides a lens into how rural identity and distrust is constructed by the petition authors, and how rural culture and politics in Alberta is exhibited in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta. The petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust with high rates of both standalone codes and co-occurring codes. However, there are measurable differences in how rural identity is exhibited, compared to how distrust is exhibited in the petition comments. In the co-occurrence data, political distrust is most closely related to political alienation. While this case doesn't study causation, the relationship between these two codes is the most intertwined of all the codes in the data set. This suggests that authors who expressed distrust of government were also most likely to express political alienation. A "Rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs" is not as closely related to political alienation. Instead, it is most closely related to "Rural values and lifestyles, including hard work." This suggests that there is a gap between authors who expressed rural identity and values, and those who exhibited government distrust and political alienation. While not measured in this study, I suspect this is because many authors who expressed rural values did so with a highly positive lens of pride and celebration, while many authors expressing distrust and alienation articulated their comments with a more negative tone.

These results also helped me test the usefulness of Cramer Walsh's (2012) rural consciousness theory in conducting this case study. It is possible that the co-occurrence rates for some codes are higher because these characteristics are most closely related to each other, which

could be a weakness in how the theory articulates the eight characteristics. Without much more sophisticated statistical analysis, it is not possible to tell from this particular data set and discussion whether the code co-occurrence is related most to the codes themselves or the petition comments being studied. The rural consciousness theory was still useful as a way to identify, organize, and analyze the petition comments for this case study.

Keywords

The keyword data for petition comments coded with the "Distrustful orientation towards government, including an expectation that their actions will not benefit rural interests" characteristic offers several findings for this case study: first, that the Bill 6 petition comments exhibit strong levels of distrust for the government, as anticipated by the literature review given the long Alberta history of distrusting government and the growing distrust in the relationship generally between citizens and government; second, that the NDP and Premier Notley are mentioned at high rates of frequency, particularly for this code, which suggests that the distrust is also influenced by the rural response to this particular political party and politician, which is also foreshadowed by the lower rates of NDP votes in rural Alberta; and third, the relative infrequency of "Safety" being mentioned in the petition comments for this code compared to keywords related to the overall values and wellbeing of the rural community suggests but does not prove that the distrust exhibited in the case study was not solely prompted by Bill 6, the *Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act*, that was introduced by the NDP government shortly before this petition was launched.

The keyword data for the "Identification with rural group" characteristics offers insight into the intersection of rural identity and distrust as exhibited in these petition comments. Rural identity appears to be closely tied to family, which is elevated in these coded comments above

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the rural identity terms frequently in all comment such as farm and work. The perception of injustice is expressed in frequent keywords for these coded comments such as "destroy" and "ruin", and the top keywords associated with a perceived source of injustice appears to be NDP.

Insights offered by this petition comments coded with the "Political alienation" characteristic are that these authors are more focused than the rest on government and the NDP, and that they included the most accusations of "Dictatorship" and other forms of political dysfunction and oppression (see Coding Framework in Appendix C for more examples). Compared to the "Distrustful orientation to government" code, which focused on keywords such as "Know" and "Understand", the comments for "Political alienation" raised the most concerns about consultation for Bill 6. Overall, these petition comments reflect rural distrust in a more extreme form than "Distrustful orientation to government" as well as the data set as a whole. While this data doesn't measure anger or tone, I can anecdotally observe that this data subset appeared to contain the most negative comments and exclamation marks. The "Political alienation" keyword data correlates with literature review findings that Albertans' attitudes towards government are "notoriously negative" (Pickup et al., 2004, p. 617) and that "a large number of Albertans feel alienated from government" (ibid, p. 628).

The keyword data for the "Identification with rural group" characteristics offers insight into the rural identity's emphasis on family farming, and the importance of raising children there. A significant number of authors in this code subset began their "Reason for Signing" comments by noting that they grew up on a farm or currently live on a farm with their children. While this study didn't measure how many petition comment authors currently live on a farm, the frequency of this self-identification of growing up on a farm suggests that rural identity is deeply intertwined with farming as a lens of self-perception. In terms of distrust, the comments with this

code referenced government less than "Distrustful orientation to government" or "Political alienation".

Insights offered by the petition comments coded with the "Rural values and lifestyles" are similar to "Rural lens" but with an even stronger emphasis on hard work and the importance of raising farm kids with good work ethics. This aligns with the literature review's findings on rural culture and hard work, including Gimpel and Karnes' (2006) conclusion that the rural voting record reflects the "individualistic ethic and legacy of self-employment and homeownership inclines them to adopt the self-image of the independent entrepreneur and property owner rather than that of the labourer in need of state regulation and protection" (p. 471). Family is one of the most important elements raised in the petition comments' data on rural identity. In contrast to the full data set, as well as those coded to "Distrustful orientation to government" and "Political alienation", the comments reflected in "Rural values and lifestyles" do not contain as many references to "Government" and "NDP", which is likely due to the definition of this characteristic as it does not contain the sense of injustice and distrust expressed in other characteristics of rural consciousness. While this study doesn't measure this metric, I would be interested in researching further about how the family dynamic of Bill 6 influenced the level of political attention and protest, and whether the outrage lessened when the government amended the bill to clarify that it did not apply to farm children.

The keyword data for the "Perceived injustice caused by urban political elites" characteristics offers insight into the rural-urban divide that influences rural identity and distrust, as well as rural culture and politics. As explored in the literature review, the rural-urban divide is a powerful schism in society that influences how people communicate and act in public affairs. Lichter and Brown (2012) highlight studies showing rural mistrust of government and reactive

movements "as a response to threats to traditional lifestyles and values" (p. 571), and conclude that this reaction is prompted by how changes from urban and global forces have put rural communities in flux.

Some of the major takeaways from this keyword data for the rural consciousness codes in this case study are as follows for each research question:

- **RQ1: How do the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust?** The Bill 6 petition comments exhibit strong levels of distrust for the government. The keyword "NDP" is mentioned at a high rate of frequency, which suggests that the distrust is also influenced by the rural response to this particular political party. Specific to distrust of government, the data illustrates how many authors raised concerns that government didn't know how farms and ranches were operated, and didn't understand what rural Albertans needed to succeed or how Bill 6 would affect them negatively.

- **RQ2: What do the petition comments reveal about rural culture and politics in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta?** The keyword data shows that rural culture and politics appears to be closely tied to family, hard work, raising children on the farm, and preserving this way of life in the face of injustice from the government. While weaker than the levels of political distrust, the presence of political alienation is strong, especially for authors who are most focused on government and the NDP compared to other elements of rural identity including farming. There were also more mentions of "NDP" in comment reflecting perceived injustice caused by urban political elites, which suggests that the rural-urban divide is an influential element of rural culture and politics, particularly in the case of the Bill 6 protests.

Summary

How do the petition comments reflect rural identity and distrust, and what does this study reveal about rural culture and politics in the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta? The analysis, presentation, and discussion of the case study results focused on the prevalence and frequency of rural consciousness in the data, as well as the relationship between characteristics and keywords in each set of coded petition comments. Overall, the case study found a strong presence of rural identity and distrust reflected in the data, with key element framing rural identity being the group consciousness of the rural community with values and lifestyle including hard work and family, and top targets of distrust and blame for injustice towards the rural community identified as the government and urban political elites.

These results align with the literature review, which found that the relationship between government and citizens is increasingly one of distrust, the urban-rural divide is a powerful schism in society that influences how people communicate and act in public affairs, that Albertan political culture includes a long history of mistrust of government interference and communications, and that government miscommunication and mistrust foments political protest movements. While this case study of Bill 6 protests as examined through these petition comments is a small slice of data in a long history of rural discontent in Alberta, this research provides a lens to explore and better understand rural culture and politics in this province.

The data analysis, presentation, and discussion also tests how the theory of rural consciousness, as prevalent in the data, provides a lens to examine the rural-urban divide in Alberta, and how rural culture and politics can be understood through this lens. Overall, the rural consciousness theory was found to be useful as a way to identify, organize, and analyze the petition comments for this case study.

As discussed earlier in the Methodology section, there are limits to the strength and validity of this research, particularly given the narrow scope of study. Case studies generally are considered challenging for generalizing the findings, though the quantitative nature of my study may offer it an advantage for this compared to more qualitative case study research. As Marshall and Rossman (2011) and Bryman and Teevan (2005) note, case study researchers challenge the emphasis on generalization as a standard criticism, and argue that it is not the purpose of their research. Case studies are "significant because they illuminate in detail larger...forces while focusing on individuals" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 7).

My research focused on the individual petition comments posted by authors protesting Bill 6 in Alberta offers a revealing but limited look into rural identity and distrust as exhibited in the data, and a small contribution to the study of rural culture and politics in Canada through the case of the Bill 6 protests in Alberta. The most practical takeaways are for myself and other communications and policy professionals in the Government of Alberta. Having conducted this case study, even as an urban-based Albertan, I have a much deeper understanding of rural identity and political culture, which I will apply in future development of public engagement and policy development for rural Alberta. As discussed in the Literature Review, while the influence of rural Alberta on the provincial politics has waxed and waned over the years, it is still a significant element in party politics and will always be an important part of Alberta's identity and governance.

Mistrust by citizens is something that governments must continually address and mitigate, and do their best not to inflame. Further undermining of the legitimacy of government itself and its role in society has tremendous implications for public safety and well-being, and we need look no further than recent events in United States following their federal election for

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evidence of how widespread misinformation and fearmongering can lead to very real and tragic events from people who have embraced political alienation and violence. Further research on this, including specific study of Alberta and the Canadian context, is needed to better understand the relationship between political communication, citizen mistrust, and political alienation. While the scope of my research did not include causation of the Bill 6 protests or the underlying mistrust of government from rural Alberta, there is rich potential to investigate the role of misinformation and grassroots organization in rural political culture as well as in Alberta as a whole. As well, with the proliferation of online petitions and other platforms for citizens and governments to communicate, there is need for more research specific to petitions as an evolving and influential communications technology.

Conclusion

While there are many historical and political reasons for why rural Alberta reacted so vehemently to Bill 6, there is also the question of how the government communicated about the bill. In a province prone to mistrust of government, especially government communications, a misstep can spark a wildfire of protest. Bill 6 is just one example of Albertans protesting and organizing against the government, and using online petitions to express their frustration. The data studied here illustrated the deep mistrust of government, as well as the strong streak of political alienation, expressed by the Bill 6 petition comment authors. Directly petitioning government suggests that Albertans don't trust the political system or government to work effectively with its representatives and public servants; they want their message communicated, en masse and in public, directly to decision makers. In this way, the increasing ease of online petition platforms to propagate, collect, share, and present public opinion is an important release valve for democracies. In my experience, politicians and public servants take petitions quite seriously, especially when they garner tens of thousands of supporters in short order. But are petitions beneficial to the citizen-government relationship? This is an area that requires more research beyond this capstone.

To conclude this capstone, let's look back to one of Cramer Walsh's (2012) insights into rural consciousness: that the important political identification is not partisanship, and the main orientation to government is that people feel ignored by the political system. Research into political communication, mistrust, and alienation is important because these elements undermine our society's ability to govern and function at a basic level because a healthy democracy requires a certain level of widespread trust and participation. As we've seen during the pandemic recently, the rural-urban divide studied in this capstone was widened further within the

government itself as well as across a province with a wide spectrum of views on how to respond to the challenges of the pandemic.[7]

Recently the United Conservative Party government in Alberta introduced a bill to give citizens a chance to directly petition the province to amend policies and laws. Bill 51, the *Citizen Initiative Act*[8], would give Albertans 90 days to gather sufficient signatures for legislative and policy initiatives to be referred to a Legislative committee for consideration. It remains to be seen whether these thresholds can be met, even with increasingly easy and accessible petition platforms, or whether committee consideration leads to meaningful change. Albertans generally seem to have a fondness for grassroots democracy, whether it be by petitions like the one studied here by Bill 6 or electing politicians with "grassroots guarantees".[9] Whether petitions and other forms of more direct democracy using the latest communications technology increase trust and communication between citizens and governments is a bigger question that this capstone can answer, but it is one worth asking for future research.

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[7] https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/kenneys-divided-house-covid-pandemic-widens-urban-rural-riff-within-alberta-government
[8] https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=777335C6F8BCF-D70E-1696-EAE21D8C92F2ECDC
[9] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/jason-kenney-ucp-grassroots-guarantee-1.4231083

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Appendices

Appendix A - Timelines

Major events related to Bill 6 in late 2015:
- November 17, 2015 - Bill 6 introduced[10]
- November 22, 2015 - Change.org petition[11] (Stop NDP Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act) created by Shandele Battle
- November 26, 2015 - Government town hall for Bill 6 in Grande Prairie
- November 26, 2015 - Rachel Notley fundraiser in Calgary (where the Facebook event comments are overrun by those opposing Bill 6)
- November 27, 2015 - First in-person protest (at the Legislature in Edmonton)
- November 29, 2015 - Protest in Red Deer
- November 30, 2015 - Second protest at the Legislature in Edmonton
- December 1, 2015 - Protest in Red Deer, government town hall for Bill 6 in Red Deer
- December 1, 2015 - Premier Notley notes "a failure to communicate" on Bill 6
- December 2, 2015 - Government town hall for Bill 6 in Okotoks (Calgary area)
- December 3, 2015 - Protest at the Legislature in in Edmonton
- December 3, 2015 - Government town hall for Bill 6 in Lethbridge
- December 3, 2015 - Notley takes responsibility for "miscommunication"[12]
- December 7, 2015 - Government town hall for Bill 6 in Leduc (Edmonton area)
- December 9, 2015 - Petitions presented to the Legislature (1:30pm MLA Hunter)
- January 1, 2016 - Bill 6 comes into effect

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[10] https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=38853E7C1F49F-F880-84ED-FB41A569968F17BD
[11] https://www.change.org/p/agricultral-minister-alberta-ag-minister-oneil-carlier-ndp-bill-6-enhanced-protection-for-farm-and-ranch-workers-act
[12] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-premier-rachel-notley-won-t-back-down-on-bill-6-1.3349224

Appendix B - Pilot Test

#	Petition Comment (Reason for Signing)					
576	Author (redacted)	Rural cons. (Y/N)	Primary Code	Second Code	Third Code	Notes
	It is important to stop Bill 6 because it is not helping farm families it is making them take WCB and unions. We all knew this was the deal from the start because we had the safest injury ratio of any other province. This bill was pushed through the legislature and yet a year later we still do not have all the things that are going to be implemented. It was a bogus bill and will harm farms/ranches if not completely destroy them.					
	B.B.	Y	7 - Distrust gov't	8 - Political alienation	6 - Blame urban elites	Signed after petition was presented to Legislature and Bill 6 was enacted.
575	Keep the communist retards out of our business					
	C.R.	Y	6 - Blame urban elites			Does distrustful orientation work best for these type of derogative comments? I'm seeing "communist retards" as an interpretation of "urban political elites" being the NDP. Stretch?
574	This is unacceptable...farms protect the environment..children raised on farms are hard workers and responsible					
	D.M.	Y	2 - Rural values			Can I interpret "unacceptable" for secondary code (e.g. injustice)?
573	The NDP government is killing industry in Alberta as well as causing astronomical strife to its citizens					
	J.O.	Y	7 - Distrust gov't			
567	Because I grew up and still live on the land we farmed and support farmers generally, not urban decisions placed on rural environments….					

	C.E.	Y	6 - Blame urban elites	1 - Sense of place		
566	Bill 6 won't make farming safer. It will just add administrative duties to small farm businesses. This isn't the construction industry where costs get passed along to the consumer… Farmers get paid what the market will pay them. I would bet most small farms will either not grow because they don't want to hire people with these conditions, or will scale back so they can let employees go. Good work NDP-another nail in the coffin of the family farm.					
	L.B.	Y	7 - Distrust gov't	5 - Rural deprived	8 - Political alienation	Code 8 includes perception of unfair application of rules and that government is unresponsive to rural concerns.
25	I grew up on a farm, and unlike our Premier of Alberta...I do know that we work around Mother Nature, she does not work around stupid Government hours!					
	J.F.	Y	4 - Identify with rural as group	3 - Rural lens for self	8 - Political alienation	Code 3 includes that author grew up on farm and still identifies as rural (assumed to no longer live on farm)
21	Farmers will be forced out of their livelihood affecting things all the way to the grocery stores!!!!					
	D.P.	Y	4 - Identify with rural as group			Code 4 includes perception of injustice to rural. Not coded as 6-8 as blame is not assigned.
19	I believe this bill will be detrimental to the small time family farm and a way of life that has been for decades.					
	R.H.	Y	2 - Rural values	4 - Identify with rural as group		Code 2 includes ideas about what rural people are like (e.g. values, lifestyles). Code 4 includes perception of injustice to rural.

13	I believe the government is rushing through without educating the public. I also feel most of the people in legislature have not spent any substantial time on a farm to see how they operate. Substantial meaning not an hour or a day, I mean weeks, or months. I don't think you have any idea, and when developing bill 6, you just figured farmers were too stupid to ask! Shame on you!				
	C.S.	Y	8 - Political alienation	7 - Distrust gov't	
3	I believe the farm is a place for all of the family. When I was living on a farm nothing was more exciting than watching my nieces collecting eggs and helping with the livestock.				
	T.W.	Y	2 - Rural values		Code 2 includes ideas about what rural people are like (e.g. values, lifestyles).
2	Farming has been in my family for 3 generations. I'll stand with my fellow farmers to Kill Bill 6.				
	S.F.	Y	3 - Rural lens for self	4 - Identify with rural as group	
1	The NDP Government needs to understand it can't legislature new regulations without proper consultation with the stakeholders it will affect.				
	S.H.	Y	8 - Political alienation		Code 8 includes perception of unfair application of rules and that government is unresponsive to rural concerns.

Appendix C - Coding Framework

Codes		
Cramer Walsh definition (2012, p. 517-518)	**Clarifying coding questions**	**Clarifying terms and assumptions**
Does not exhibit rural consciousness		
How rural people "process political information through a perspective constituted from social identity and notions of distributive justice" related to where they live, and often in relation to other groups and the government.	Can this comment contain elements that identify it or the author as identifying with a rural perspective? Is this comment too general or vague to be coded as exhibiting rural consciousness?	While authors may come from a rural background or community, the comments need to exhibit some characteristics of rural consciousness to be classified as such.
1. Sense of rural place and relation in terms of power and resources		
"A set of ideas about why type of geographic place one is from, and where that place stands in relation to others in terms of power and resource allocation"	Does the comment talk about where they live in terms of power and resources? If yes, consider whether it is Code 1 or Code 4. If it doesn't speak in relation to other places, it is likely Code 4.	Sense of rural place includes geographic references such as farm life, country, specific municipalities, childhood home, where they were born and raised, etc.
2. Rural values and lifestyles, particularly the importance of hard work		
"It contains ideas about what people are like in rural places--that is, their values and lifestyles--with a particular emphasis on the importance of hard work in rural areas."	Does the comment speak to what people are like in rural places, including values and lifestyles, and potentially emphasis on the importance of hard work?	Terms related to rural values and lifestyles include family, hard work, determination, freedom, heritage, pride, independence, etc.
3. Rural lens for perceiving self, others, and public affairs		
"It operates as a lens through which people think about themselves, other people, and public affairs, among other things."	Does comment use reflect a rural lens for self, others, and public affairs, but not include a perceived injustice or cause of blame, nor a relation to other places in terms of power or resources?	Examples of rural lens include references such as farmer, rancher, childhood home, where they were born and raised, farmers feeding the world, farming as a way of life, etc.
4. Identification with rural as a group, including a perception of injustice towards this group		
"As a form of group consciousness, it contains a social identification with rural residents, as well as a	Does comment use plural pronouns for rural identification (e.g. we, our) and include a sense of	Examples of rural identification include references to farming, ranching, etc. Terms

perception of distributive injustice towards this group."	perceived injustice but not cause for blame nor relation to other groups?	expressing injustice include negative connotations including destroy, disappearing, kill, force, wrong, unfair, horrible, etc.
5. Perception of rural deprivation relative to other groups		
"This sense of injustice is a perception of deprivation relative to other groups--in this case, residents of metropolitan (i.e., urban and suburban) areas."	Does comment use plural pronouns for rural identification (e.g. we, our) and include a sense of perceived injustice or deprivation in relation to other non-rural groups?	Terms expressing injustice and deprivation include negative connotations including destroy, disappearing, kill, force, wrong, unfair, horrible, etc.
6. Perceived injustice caused by urban political elites		
"This injustice is perceived as the fault of political elites in urban areas."	Does comment include a sense of injustice or deprivation and attribute blame to urban political elites?	Terms related to urban political elites include bureaucrats, greenhorns, city slickers, paper pushers, bleeding hearts, uninformed legislators, etc. The difference between this code and the next is that code six has perceived injustice and code seven is distrust, while there is some overlap between urban political elites and government (given that the NDP was primarily comprised of urban politicians).
7. Distrustful orientation towards government, including an expectation that their actions will not benefit rural interests		
"Rural consciousness encompasses orientations towards government. In particular, it encompasses political trust because it contains judgments about the past performance of the government and an expectation that future actions will not be in line with rural interests."	Does the comment express distrust towards government, including that government does not benefit rural interests?	Phrases that reflect distrust and lack of rural benefit include that the NDP doesn't understand farming/ranching, that the government doesn't know anything about farming, inadequate research, etc. Terms that reflect orientation towards government include government actions such as bill, legislation, regulation, NDP, etc. Distrustful

		orientation to government includes protesting government interference, wanting government out of their business, etc.
8. Political alienation, including lack of support for the system, perception of unfair application of rules, and that government is unresponsive to rural concerns		
"Rural consciousness also encompasses the concept of political alienation, which includes lack of support for the system as well as a sense of political isolation from others. That is, it contains a rejection of political norms and goals that are widely held and shared by other members of society. The rural consciousness uncovered here includes a perception that the rules of the game do not apply equally to people from all places. Alienation is also a part of rural consciousness insofar as the former concept encompasses political efficacy. Specifically, rural consciousness involves low external efficacy, or a belief that government is unresponsive to the concerns of rural residents."	Does the comment express distrust of the entire political system, perception that rules are unfair, and that the government is unresponsive to rural concerns?	Terms related to government being unresponsive include lack of consultation and listening, etc. Terms related to political alienation and lack of support for the system include dictatorship, Hitler, recall, questioning of democracy, new world order, one world government, government as evil, Lenin, Stalin, terrorists, human rights, socialist poison, government lives off us like a parasite on a host, big brother, nanny state, etc.
Exclude		
N/A	Does this comment provide meaningful content for analysis?	Comments to exclude include those composed mainly of expletives.