

University of Mary Washington

Eagle Scholar

Student Research Submissions

Spring 4-24-2018

Political Participation, Efficacy, and Community Organizing in Appalachia: How A Marginalized Region Makes Sense of their Circumstances

Christopher Cassingham

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cassingham, Christopher, "Political Participation, Efficacy, and Community Organizing in Appalachia: How A Marginalized Region Makes Sense of their Circumstances" (2018). *Student Research Submissions*. 256. https://scholar.umw.edu/student_research/256

This Honors Project is brought to you for free and open access by Eagle Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research Submissions by an authorized administrator of Eagle Scholar. For more information, please contact archives@umw.edu.

Political Participation, Efficacy, and Community Organizing in Appalachia:
How A Marginalized Region Makes Sense of their Circumstances

Chris Cassingham
Department of Political Science and International Affairs

Advisor: Dr. Chad Murphy
Department Chair: Dr. John Kramer

Appalachians are portrayed in the media and scholarship as politically fatalistic, but in reality the region has a rich history of non-traditional political action. Why are Appalachians portrayed this way, and what are they doing today to reclaim their agency? In this paper I examine the ways popular culture has shaped our understanding of Appalachia and Appalachians, as well as how we perceive them as political beings; I also briefly discuss the history of the treatment of Appalachians by coal companies. This paper also examines previous scholarship on political participation in Appalachia in order to provide context for the rest of the discussion. I conducted a probit regression to determine whether or not being from Appalachia has an impact on political participation and attitudes, specifically efficacy. Based on data from the 2016 ANES pre- and post-election survey, I concluded that being from Appalachia is a significant determinant of certain political attitudes and actions. The paper concludes with a broad discussion of the types of political actions Appalachians take in the face of injustice, as well as how grassroots movements can, and should, add to our understanding of how marginalized groups make sense of their circumstances.

Appalachia is often described, and portrayed in the media, as culturally homogenous. The typical image conjured up in discussions of the region is one of a poor, uneducated, white man living in isolation in the mountains. Popular culture perpetuates Appalachian stereotypes of simplemindedness, backwardness, drunkenness, and violence in television programs like *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Hee-Haw*, and in movies like *Deliverance* (Noe 2002). Corbin notes in his study of workers in West Virginia that coal miners “did not need any special day or excuse to drink” (Corbin 1981). These Appalachian stereotypes highlight the negative extremes of what is actually a complex and rich culture. In *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*, edited by W. K. McNeil, Horace Newcomb uses *The Beverly Hillbillies* as an example of some of the problematic depictions of Appalachians in popular culture, saying “we must realize that there are no fully developed adult characters” who represent the characteristics of someone who actually lives in the real world (Newcomb 1980). He argues that the viciousness of these depictions comes not from their humiliation in the program through their various misadventures and screw-ups, but because they aren’t considered valid members of the fictional universe created by the show. The Southerners in the show are good people, no doubt, but their goodness is rooted in their simplemindedness (Newcomb 1980). Appalachians are made out to be caricatures, even in their own stories. It is hard to take a group of people seriously in the real world if the popular culture tells us they are one-dimensional.

Caudill’s 1962 work, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, is a biography of Eastern Kentucky, though its purpose is to “trace the social, economic, and political forces which produces the vast ‘depressed area’ of Eastern Kentucky” (Caudill 1962). The work has been criticized by scholars for perpetuating the culture of poverty theory, coined by

anthropologist Oscar Lewis in the 1950s. His theory suggests that people who grow up in poverty are predisposed to make choices that reinforce their economic conditions (Noe 2002). Bickel and Brown (2008) characterize these choices as the “inability to defer gratification in the rational pursuit of goals.” This would suggest that people who grow up in poverty are unable to succeed in a system founded on making rational economic decisions.

Lewis coined the term “culture of poverty” in the 1950s, though he is criticized for “mistaking behavior for culture” (Billings 1974). The culture of poverty theory led scholars for most of the 20th century to view Appalachia as a social endpoint, a place from which society can only improve (Keefe 2008). There is a mentality that the people and dominant culture of Appalachia are problems that need to be solved (Cassese et. al 2012); The Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1964, they explain, recognized the region as unable to transition to modern economic conditions, and aimed to align it with the rest of modern America. An institutional recognition of Appalachians’ irrationality is significant, because it signals that not only are negative stereotypes of Appalachian people engrained in popular culture, they are part of the fabric of our political system.

Caudill’s work in 1962 was a significant turning point in the scholarly approach to studying Appalachia. His theory of the region was grounded in the notion of the culture of poverty, but he did assign some blame for the region’s apparent backwardness and poverty to the alignment of business and government interests and its “willful exploitation of the region’s simple people and once plentiful natural resources” (Noe 2002). This admission set the stage for future critique of the culture of poverty theory as it applies to Appalachia. David Corbin focuses work on the industrialization of the region starting in the 1880s. In

Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields (1981) Corbin directly challenges the notion that Appalachians stand idly by and accept their colonialism by corporate interests. In fact, the arguments in his book are based on not only challenging Appalachian passivity, but also highlighting their activism against exploitation. Dwight Billings and Katherine Blee (2000) argue that the institutional basis for fighting contemporary poverty in Appalachia remains obscure; thus, a long-term plan for eradicating it is unlikely to take hold if current solutions only tackle symptomatic, rather than systemic, problems.

Focusing on the southern region of West Virginia, Corbin recounts corporate authoritarianism in the early coal industry. Mining towns were individual economic entities, almost entirely siphoned off from the rest of the modern society. Coal miners were not paid in United States currency, but rather in coal scrip, a form of currency printed in the mining town by the coal company (Corbin 1981). That meant miners had to pay for all of their necessities in the mining town. Additionally, because company stores could, and did, raise their prices in line with wage increases, any pay fluctuation lost virtually all its economic impact. Corbin also highlights miners' lack of political voice in unincorporated mining towns; Coal operators "governed completely", which often meant that miners had difficulty in obtaining voting information, certain critical news media, and even personal mail whose contents, particularly union propaganda, challenged company authority (1981).

Billings's research in 1974 found that poverty in Appalachia "is not a consequence of insufficient modernization, but the result of a particular kind of economic development and its political consequences" (Billings 1974). Appalachian poverty, he argues, is a result of actions rooted not in culture, but in behavioral adaptations; they are a response to these

particular economic developments and political consequences. While Billings does not explicitly mention Appalachia's history of economic exploitation by the coal industry and its alliances with local and regional politicians, he does highlight Valentine's assessment of Situationalists, who recognize Appalachians' "healthy and positive aspects" which allow them to adapt to economic deprivation in new and creative ways (Billings 1974).

Political participation in Appalachia also looks different compared to the rest of the country. Cassese et. al. find that Appalachia is politically disengaged at a statistically significant rate compared to the rest of the country, and that areas within the region with more favorable economic designations, that is, economically better off than areas with less favorable designations, have higher rates of political participation (2012). They also suggest the existence of Appalachian culture that "makes residents less politically efficacious, less interested in politics, and less sophisticated on political matters" (2012). Overall, however, they conclude that the region is not as politically fatalistic as earlier research has suggested, which is encouraging, because it means that the region's propensity for disengagement isn't final or absolute.

Bickel and Brown take a different approach to political research in Appalachia: they investigate whether or not there is a distinctive Appalachian voting pattern. They concluded, after controlling for traditional voting determinants such as income, education, and race/ethnic group membership, that there isn't a statistically significant difference in the way people from Appalachia vote compared to people not from the region (2008). They argue this finding is inconsistent with the general assumption that Appalachian culture overrides traditional parameters of political engagement. However, when the authors removed the controls on demographic factors, allowing for a complete assessment of the

differences between Appalachia and the rest of the country, differences in voting patterns became statistically significant; in the case of the authors' study, removing controls for demographic factors showed a 4.1% greater likelihood of Appalachians voting for George W. Bush in the 2004 Presidential election (2008).

Cooper et, al. took yet another different approach to studying Appalachia and Appalachians' relationship with politics. Their investigation of policy opinions aimed to distinguish people who identify with the region and those who don't in the types of issues they support or oppose. They concluded, given Appalachia's history with corporate exploitation of natural resources, that people who identify as belonging to Appalachia are more likely to support the protection of green spaces and the restriction of steep slope ordinances (2010). While these strong indicators of policy preferences do not guarantee or assume participation in the political process, they do support Cassese et al, conclusion that Appalachian's are not politically fatalistic.

The coal industry's role in Appalachian history and society is impossible to ignore, and there have been interesting investigations into the ways Appalachians adapt to economic exploitation. Corbin's research highlighted the mistreatment of coal workers in southwestern West Virginia at the turn of the 19th Century and beyond. Coal companies had total control of the goings-on in mining towns, which significantly reduced the individual freedoms of coal workers living there. Corbin quotes United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Vice-President Frank Hayes from 1910 saying:

“West Virginia separated from Virginia during the Civil War period on account of the slavery question. If the miners of West Virginia were awake to

their interests, both economically and politically there would be another historic separation in the state, and that would be the miners' separation...from the hands of the coal barons and other organized forces of greed."

Coal workers in southern West Virginia were not part of the UMWA. The group blamed coal workers' apathy to change for its ineffectiveness in building an active coalition of workers fighting for their rights. Coal operators were even poaching UMWA officials from their positions in order to destroy "the miners' organization of...[West Virginia]" (1981).

Corbin also argues that it was difficult for miners to form a collective mentality of protest. Geographic mobility hindered collective action; miners frequently moved from one mining town to another, most often in the same region in search of better conditions, pay, education, or facilities. In a sense, says Corbin, the miners' transient lifestyle was an indirect form of individual protest even before the emergence of unions (1981). Eventually, however, this frequent movement of miners resulted in "a strong, collective mentality as it made a single, gigantic community out of the five coal fields in southern West Virginia and the hundreds of isolated company towns scattered across them," (1981). Knowledge of each other's whereabouts – over hundreds of miles – was in part responsible for collective resistance after 1912. Before that, however, Corbin highlights several UMWA-organized strikes in which the miners of southern West Virginia refused to participate. Strikes in 1894 and 1897 protesting reduced wages brought trainloads of workers into non-union West Virginia, where miners refused to stop working. The UMWA even

organized a boycott of West Virginia coal in 1898 to “force the state’s coal operators into signing a union contract” (1981). This boycott also failed, the cheap prices and superior quality of the coal winning the day. Only once the formation of the Baldwin-Felts guards around 1910 and their physical assault of union miners took hold did miners in southern West Virginia form a “class consciousness” necessary for unionization, as well as a distrust of the political systems that formed the guards in the first place (1981). The fight for unionization was an early indicator of what coal miners were willing to sacrifice for their livelihoods; the UMWA called for sacrifice, exhausting commitment, and devotion, all integral parts of a successful grassroots movement.

Social movement scholar, Shannon Elizabeth Bell, investigates the barriers to participation in the environmental justice movement in Appalachia in *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia*. She argues that scholarly research has already focused enough on the reasons why people *do* participate, and not on the factors that prevent engagement. Bell examines the four criteria for grassroots social engagement: solidarity, identity, consciousness, and mobilization. Central to her theory on grassroots mobilization is solidarity, also referred to as social capital. In some Appalachian towns where coal production is the major industry, Bell identified low levels of “social trust” (2016). In Coalville, West Virginia, one of the towns in her study, a 1981 union conflict ate away at the town’s social capital, leading to increased levels of mistrust, evidenced by residents’ almost complete lack of interaction with each other (2016).

Bell points to Gaventa’s argument that the “quiescence of Central Appalachia is a ‘function of power relationships, such that power serves for the development and maintenance of the quiescence of the non-elite’” (2016). In other words, the coal industry is

able to keep social trust levels low in order to prevent collective action against itself. Alternatively, in Farmstead, a primarily agriculture-dependent town in West Virginia, residents exhibited very high levels of social trust and interdependence. Bell recounts events in 1981 in Coalville when Massey Energy bought mines in the town, effectively eliminating union culture in the town. As a result, union loyalists clashed with non-union workers who “chose to abandon their identity as UMWA members” (2016). As union members lost part of their identity, they withdrew from the collective mentality that had prevailed before 1981.

Bell argues that people will join social movements when they know other people participating in the movement and identify with and trust them (2016). The actions by Massey Energy, which diminished union culture after 1981, eliminated a critical source of collective identity and mutual trust; Bell argues these are critical to the formation of any grassroots social movement. Billings and Blee (2000) argue that the culture of poverty theory and the strict internal colony theory both have limitations. The former paints Appalachians as victims without the means to advocate for their own well-being, while ignoring the region’s obvious history of resistance; the latter blames outside ownership of resources for the dangerous and exploitative working conditions for the region’s workers while ignoring the instances where other states that have outside ownership of their resources are able to provide their workers with fair wages and safe conditions. Billings and Blee argue further that localities are partially to blame for undiversified economies and inequitable tax policies that hold them back compared to other regions.

Anglin explored grassroots organizing movements in response to corporate exploitation of Appalachian workers. She explains three instances in which Appalachians

used “articulations of identity” to fight back against exploitative business practices and win back their autonomy (2002). In the early 1990s the Pittson Coal Company received backlash for abusive policies towards its employees, including diverting much of its business through a non-union mining division known as Pyxis Resources Company. Eventually these workers fought back with an aggressive public relations campaign aimed at invoking the Civil Rights Movement and non-violence as a means to winning back their autonomy as workers. Pittson Coal Company, however, fought back with similar strength to discredit the miners’ campaign as opportunistic. In the end, the language of human rights and the strategic representation of coal communities through their media campaigns helped the miners win back their rights, as well as pushed Pittson to sell off their coal assets. Another instance occurred when female workers at the Moth Hill Mica Company in North Carolina suffered employment discrimination by bosses with ties to the local political elite. The women called upon a collective articulation of their identities as women in a declining industry to win back their rights (2002).

In Blair County, Kentucky, two grassroots social programs have emerged in recent years to combat a shortage of employment opportunities. This shortage has caused many residents to rely on social welfare programs, but neoliberal reforms of these schemes have hurt the region. The emphasis on self-reliance championed by policies like the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act made it difficult for people without jobs to participate in the local economies and gain their footing in a stagnant job market. In the face of these obstacles, local activists created The Eastern Kentucky Project and the Blair Development Association (BDA). They employ broad-based approaches to solving

residents' economic problems. Specifically, the BDA created local credit unions, agricultural cooperatives and educational programs to help children stay in school.

Euchner (1996) highlights a 1993 coal strike in Appalachia that was fought not only over better wages and benefits, but also over access to information from the coal company. Like Corbin said in his study of early 19th Century coal towns in southern West Virginia, coal companies had control over miners' access to information through their mail systems. They would search mail for union propaganda and political information that was counter to the company's interests. It is not surprising that miners would seek alternate forms of political action in the face of declining individual autonomy. Weinbaum (2004) cites a strike in 1988, during which the Citizens Against Temporary Services (CATS) in Tennessee fought against General Electric who shut down their plant after refusing their factory workers' request to form a labor union.

Reid argues that exploitive policies perpetuate the mystification of Appalachia (1980); they paint the region as an easy target, where residents are ignorant of social issues and defenseless against manipulation by corporations, and Weinbaum notes that a vast majority of factory shutdowns do not prompt worker resistance or protest (2004). Given Bell's work on the obstacles to entrance in the grassroots social movement space, these five examples of protest are points of optimism in the current political and social discourse on Appalachia.

Theory

Socioeconomic status is directly correlated to the instance and frequency of political participation. Factors such as income and education increase one's awareness of the impact

of political participation as well as of the pertinent social and political issues of the day. Margret Conway's book on political participation in America outlines the various implications of these socioeconomic factors (2000). People who have attained higher levels of education are more likely to be informed on pressing issues, know the impact of their political participation, and tolerate and appreciate varied political opinions. Conway also highlights three explanations for the influence of income on political participation. First, the poor must focus a disproportionate amount of time on obtaining the necessities for everyday life, thus leaving them with little time and income to waste on outside activities. Second, wealthy people are likely to inhabit social environments that encourage political engagement. Finally, Conway argues, those who have attained higher income may be predisposed in their personality to be more politically efficacious (2000). This final point, however, perpetuates a culture of poverty mentality that places the blame for political inefficacy on emotional and cultural characteristics rather than on systemic conditions that actively dissuade marginalized people from participating.

In his 1995 book *Politics and the Class Divide*, David Croteau examines the cultural differences between working class and middle class people that influence the respective groups' propensity to participate or not participate in politics. The middle class left, which he describes generally as educated and engaged, and today constitutes groups like Black Lives Matter, the Women's March, and other sociopolitical movements, is comprised of people who believe in both an individual and collective capacity to affect change in a broken system. This belief is built on a foundation of social capital that not only facilitates a profound sense of political efficacy, but also provides the financial means to act. Working class people, argues Croteau, do not share an abiding sense that one's individual actions

can sway political tides. They believe, like the middle class activists, that politics is mired in self-serving individuals too concerned with re-election and making more money for themselves; but they diverge from the middle class in their doubt that individual actions are effective to combat it (Croteau 1995). Appalachia's inhabitants are almost exclusively members of the working class. But the historical cultural divides between Appalachians and the rest of the country warrant a deeper investigation into whether their political efficacy is similarly divergent.

Conway notes psychological involvement, the possession of complex beliefs, values and attitudes about something, is a prerequisite to engagement in the political process. Croteau's extensive interviews with members of the working class suggest they all possess beliefs, attitudes, and values about politics. But, the consensus among working class people that politicians are unresponsive, self-interested, and out of touch suggests that external political efficacy has declined significantly. Efficacy is a critical component to any type of practical civic engagement. In the case of Appalachia, the population has historically been treated as a commodity by the wealthy elite, and has been denied basic access to the political process under non-union working conditions. One would expect people in the region to have different attitudes towards traditional methods of political participation, and turn their attention towards elsewhere.

The factors discouraging political participation amongst working class people, however, are not universal. Even if lower rates of political participation occur among poor individuals compared to wealthier ones, this does not guarantee that all poor people are politically ineffectual. Croteau notes early on in his book that there are plenty of working class people who are socially engaged and taking action in traditionally middle class

spheres of activism (1995). As Corbin, Bell, and Anglin have shown in their research, economic exploitation does not bring with it a cessation of political action. In fact, economic exploitation by multinational corporations in Appalachia can spark, and has sparked, civic engagement.

Euchner's book *Extraordinary Politics* explains "spurs and limits" to political action in America. In minority communities, he says, immediate interests take precedence over broad threats like environmental degradation and discriminatory economic policies (1996). However, a crisis can spur even the most politically dormant groups into action. It "clears away hesitation and uncertainty... and crystalizes possible strategies for action," (1996). When a community observes the proliferation of harmful practices that put their lives in danger they can move to immediate action. Such was the case in the early movement for environmental justice, and such is also the case today in the Black Lives Matter movement, the Women's March, and burgeoning justice movements in Appalachia.

In Appalachia multinational coal companies have disregarded the well-being and longevity of the environment to the point that the people at the bottom rung of the corporate ladder, the miners and their families, started to physically feel the effects (Bell 2016). While Bell argues in her book that there is more inaction in Appalachia against harmful corporate practices than there is action, the presence of an immediate health crisis is an undeniable motivator for unconventional political engagement.

Material interests, like income and unemployment, act as a base motivator for political action, as well (Euchner 1996). Bell argues the uncertainty over jobs and wages at the mercy of coal companies in Appalachia has created quiescence throughout mining communities (Bell 2016). As economic frustrations accumulate over the years, hierarchical

relations maintained by coal companies take hold at the expense of family relations and community connectedness. The lack of grassroots organization in southern West Virginia is interesting to see in relation to the three examples from Anglin, which did not originate in southern West Virginia. Where the dominance of the coal industry has fostered the quiescence mentioned in Bell's work, freedom from the most intense trappings of corporate domination perhaps allows citizens to have more self-efficacy in the face of injustice.

The coal industry in Appalachia has created persistent economic inequalities between coal workers and the people who own the coal companies. However, the coal industry has also created a strong sense of shared identity, and the degradation of union culture, as Bell describes, has "meant the loss of an identity and a breakdown in the community's social trust and social norms," (Bell 2016). As Bell's research on Appalachia shows, social trust and social capital are key to the emergence of a coherent grassroots movement. It would make sense, then, to see more successful grassroots political movements in areas with a greater sense of shared identity. There is reason to believe that while conditions in Appalachia discourage traditional political participation, a sense of shared identity, founded upon a long history of alienation in popular culture and academic discourse, could foster an emerging tradition of grassroots resistance to injustice.

Methods and Results

Researching conditions for grassroots political movements requires an understanding of a group's political efficacy. Efficacy is the key component to a successful movement whose aim is to upend established norms and behaviors. No political movement

can succeed without a belief in the effectiveness of protest and opposition. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to understand Appalachians' political efficacy in order to dispense any judgment on the region's nascent social and political movements.

In order to gauge Appalachians' political efficacy accurately we must find out whether or not being from Appalachia has an effect on an individual's level of political efficacy. The American National Election Survey's (ANES) 2016 Time Series Study has data on the demographics, political opinions and efficacy among its respondents. The study records respondents' political participation, including: monetary donations to political candidates, voting, and attendance of political rallies and meetings; and opinions of the responsiveness of the government to citizens' needs, the citizens' faith that it will do what is right, interest in politics, and whether or not the citizens' feel they have a say in what the government does. I expect variables measuring opinions on government responsiveness and levels of various types of political participation to be good indicators of political efficacy. More specifically, based on the research I expect respondents from Appalachia to have negative opinions about government and politics, and low frequency of political participation. Sorting out these responses by geographic location can show whether or not people from Appalachia have different levels of political efficacy than people not from Appalachia.

The ANES 2016 Time Series Study indicates each respondent's congressional district, which allows for a more accurate measure of which respondents live in Appalachia. Rather than observing all respondents within an Appalachian state, identifying Appalachian respondents by congressional district allows us to exclude respondents from districts outside of Appalachia even if other parts of the state are in the region. I completed

two different tests to determine whether or not a specific congressional district was within Appalachia. The first test came from a line of code that indicates whether or not any part of that congressional district is in Appalachia. The following are the two lines of code I used to determine Appalachian Congressional districts:

```
var districtInAppalachia = appalachia.districtInAppalachia;
```

```
districtInAppalachia('MD', 8);
```

The independent variable is a state's two-letter abbreviation and congressional district number, and the dependent variable is whether a congressional district is in Appalachia. The code runs these variables and produces either a "Yes" if any part of the district is in Appalachia, or a "No" if no part of the district is in Appalachia. The test produced 71 total congressional districts either completely or partially in Appalachia from 13 states, including: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Even though all of the congressional districts confirmed by the code are partially within the geographical boundaries of Appalachia, there are some that only have small parts in the region. Using my best judgement and the help of congressional maps of Appalachia, I decided which of these districts were sufficiently inside the region to be considered "Appalachian". Those districts with about fifty percent or more of their area in Appalachia were considered Appalachian and coded as such in my data.

The next step was to create an “Appalachia” variable within the ANES raw data. For every individual respondent’s congressional district I entered in a new column of data either a “0” if the district was not in Appalachia, or a “1” if the district was in Appalachia. Labeling the two outcomes with a “0” or a “1” allows the statistical program, R, to run correlation tests because it gives only one of two outcomes against which to test.

The 2016 ANES pre- and post-election survey asks respondents questions to gauge their political efficacy and political participation. There were several questions that fell under these categories, but I chose one variable from each. The political participation question asked respondents in their post-election questionnaire whether or not they contributed money to a political party during the election year. The political efficacy question asked respondents how often they felt they could trust the government in Washington to do what is right. I chose these two variables because they clearly represent quintessential actions (monetary donations) and feelings (distrust) that scholarship says contributes to the lack of political engagement in Appalachia. Measuring the statistical significance of being from Appalachia on a respondent’s likelihood of donating money to a political party or trusting the government will provide evidence of political attitudes in the region.

I ran a probit regression on both variables for two reasons. The first is that it would allow me to simplify the coding process for the variable asking the respondent’s level of trust in the government, which had answers ranging from “Never”, “Some of the time”, “Sometimes”, “Most of the time”, to “Always”. I simplified these answers by coding “Never” and “Some of the time” as “0” and the other three responses as “1”. The second reason is that a regression, in this case a regression where the dependent variable takes only two

values: “0” and “1”, allows me to determine the statistical significance that one or more variables has on that dependent variable. Instead of finding a correlation between two variables, a regression highlights a clear, statistical relationship between two variables in which one has a concrete effect on the other.

The first variable I tested was whether or not a respondent trusts the government in Washington to do what is right. I ran a probit regression between the variable, which I coded into R as “GovtRight”, and the Appalachia variable, labeled as “ALLAPP”, which denotes whether respondents live in Appalachia or not in Appalachia. I used Income, Education, and Gender as control variables. The probit regression revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between being from Appalachia and a respondent’s trust in government. In other words, if a respondent is from Appalachia, they are statistically less likely to trust the government in Washington to do what is right. This result is displayed in Figure 1 and Table 1.

The second variable I tested was whether the respondent donated money to a particular political party during the election year. I ran a probit regression between the variable, coded as “Money”, and the “ALLAPP” variable. Just as in the previous probit regression, I controlled for Income, Education, and Gender. The probit regression revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between being from Appalachia and a respondent donating money to a political party during the election year. In other words, being from Appalachia made it more likely for someone to donate money to a political party. This result is displayed in Figure 2 and Table 2.

Figure 1. Effect of Being from Appalachia on Likelihood to Not Trust the Government

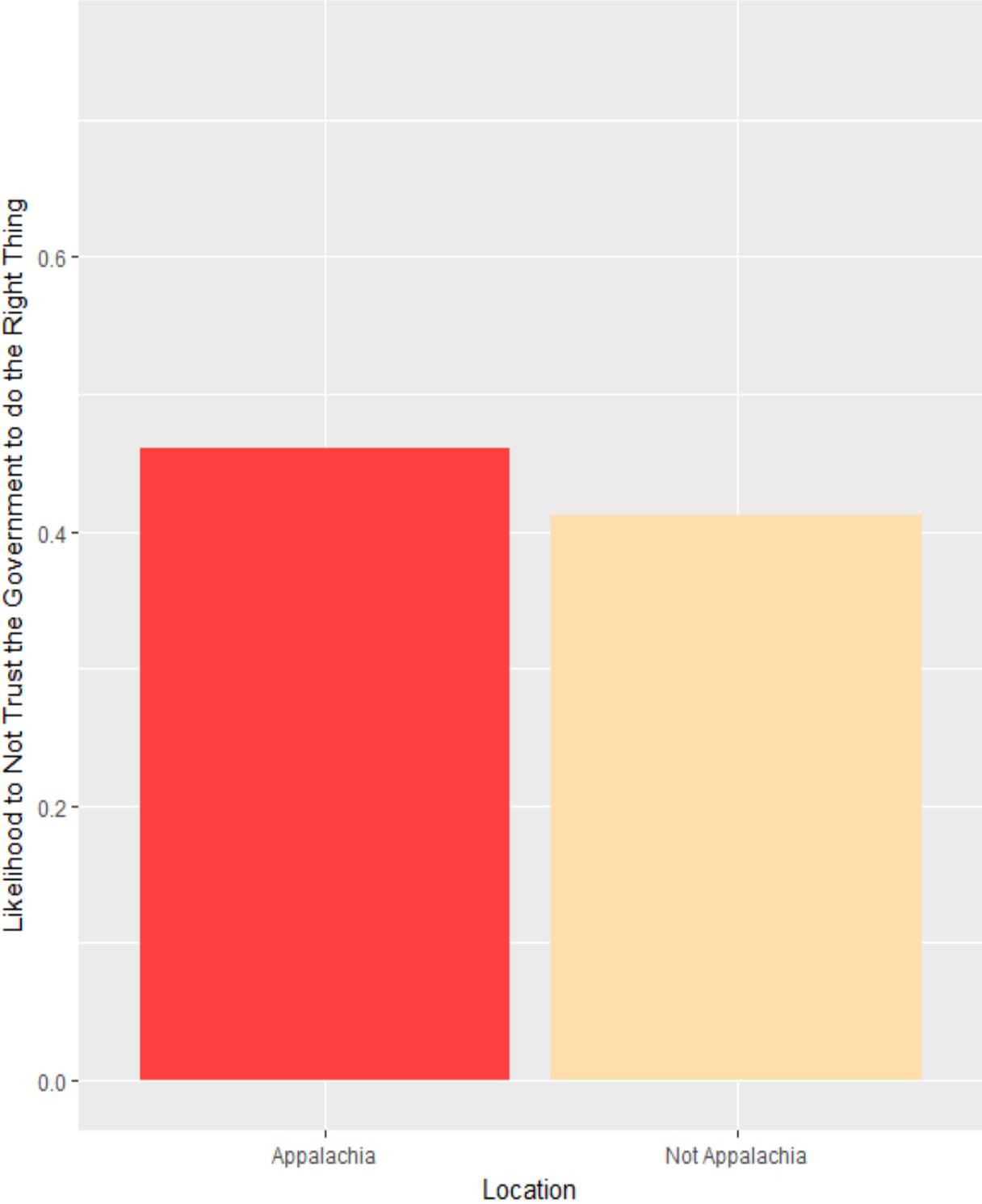


Figure 2. Effect of Being from Appalachia on Likelihood Donate Money to Political Party

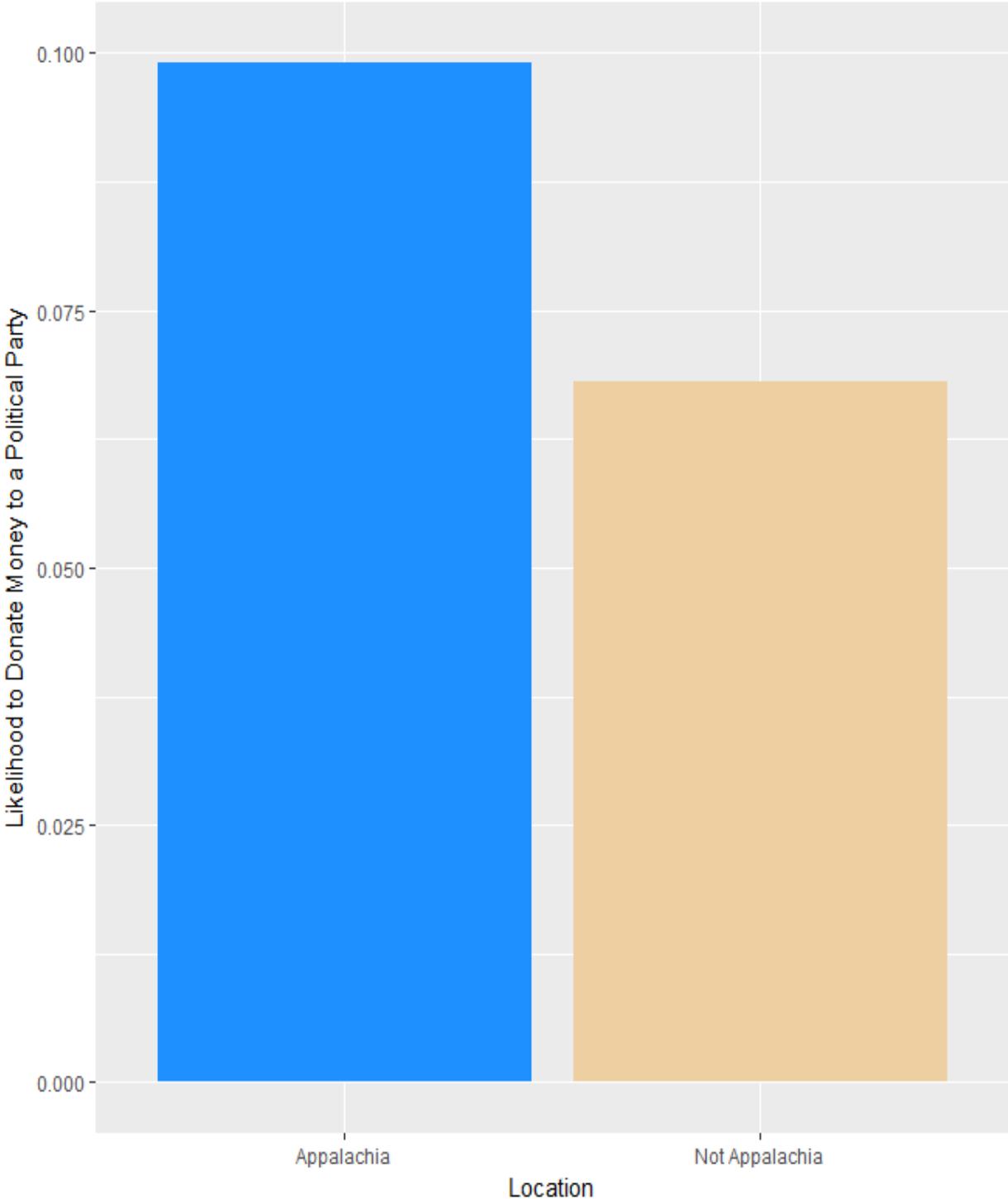


Table 1. Results of Regression for Trust in Government

Trust in Government

Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Appalachia	-1.741 (0.072)^.
Education	0.829 (0.003)**
Income	1.587 (0.007)**
Gender	2.162 (0.038)*
Constant/Intercept	-5.203 (0.045)*

Significant codes: 0 (***), .001 (**), 0.01 (*), 0.05 (.), 0.1 ()

Table 2. Results of Regression for Monetary Donations

Donate Money to a Political Party

Variable	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Appalachia	1.960 (0.105)*
Education	-1.800 (0.006)**
Income	-0.424 (0.011)**
Gender	-1.546 (0.061)^.
Constant/Intercept	-18.312 (0.070)^.

Significant codes: 0 (***) , .001 (**), 0.01 (*), 0.05 (.), 0.1 ()

Discussion of Results

The outcomes from the probit regressions are interesting in two ways. First, a negative relationship between being from Appalachia and trust in government is in line with scholarship on the relationship between class and political efficacy. Traditionally, people of lower socio-economic standing are less likely to have politically efficacious attitudes towards government. David Croteau argues that working people, Appalachian or not, believe politicians are self-interested and untrustworthy. Working people, like those from Appalachia, believe that the government doesn't have their best interests at heart, that elected officials don't understand the real problems they face on a daily basis, and that working people don't have the power to change the political structure to represent them more accurately and effectively. Trust in a system intended to make working people's lives better is critical to building up attitudes that breed involvement in the political process. A decreasing level of trust in government for people from Appalachia is not a promising template for individual or group political activism in the region.

Additionally, the positive relationship between being from Appalachia and donating money to a political party during the election year runs counter to traditional scholarship on political participation. Lower socio-economic groups tend to not donate money to political parties, or contribute to other traditional political arenas like campaigns or meetings. This counterintuitive outcome warrants further, specific research into the patterns of monetary contributions to politics in the region. This unexpected result, however, allows for some speculation as to why an accepted political pattern was broken in this particular year, or for this particular demographic.

What does Appalachia need, and what is being done?

Popular culture, literature, and scholarship have alienated Appalachians from the rest of America's working class people, and the harsh divide shapes our discussions about their role in American politics. Traditional methods of political participation are generally unappealing to working class people, including Appalachians. Rather than alienating Appalachians by treating them as if they don't matter in our country's broader political discourse, it is critical that we understand the different ways Appalachians make their voices heard, particularly when they deviate from the norm.

The data in this study shows that entrenched marginalization and exploitation in Appalachian history have tangible impacts on political efficacy today. Exploitation begets inefficacy, and inefficacy begets more inefficacy; exploring new methods of political engagement is the only way to break that cycle. Croteau notes that the invisibility of class makes it hard for social movements to rally around it (1995). Race, gender, and to a certain extent sexuality and gender identity, are all visible identifiers with strong histories of activism. Class, on the other hand, does not come with clear markers, it is not immediately apparent. While there are social movements made up of different class coalitions, it is important for social movements to recognize the discrepancy among economic status because the classes with less social, economic, and political capital could face the same silencing they are trying to fight.

The teachers' strike in West Virginia highlights the immense power of class solidarity, as well as a renewed belief in the influence of a collective voice. The teachers are asking for a "legislative guarantee" that they receive the five percent pay increase for which they are striking. Jessica Salfia, a teacher from Berkley County, West Virginia told NPR that

there is a “level of trust that just does not exist right now,” (NPR, 2018). She continues by saying that the history of the coal industry has influenced their efforts:

“I mean, the women - and make no mistake. This is a labor movement led mostly by women. I mean, the majority of teachers in America are women. And so the women standing on the frontlines of this movement right now are the granddaughters and the daughters of coal miners. And they have watched their fathers and their grandfathers stand up for worker's rights. And, I mean, it's just really inspiring to see that happening across the state.”

Croteau notes that a lot of working class people have strong beliefs about the way the world should work, and how their lives could be made better; but they lack the belief that voicing those convictions can influence decision makers in Washington or other places of power (Croteau 1995). The global reach of social media has shaped and strengthened a number of nascent social movements in a way that was impossible, or at least unlikely, 25 years ago. It allows individuals with low levels of political efficacy share their experiences of marginalization and harness that solidarity into a movement. Whereas a teacher-led protest against low wages might not have travelled far beyond a few counties when Croteau was researching working class people, today a single tweet can ignite an entire movement against injustice. McAlevey argues that the teachers’ solidarity with their own communities at home allowed them to challenge the existing power structure and win their fight against legislation that was hurting their livelihoods (McAlevey 2018). And that solidarity is important to have in any social movement, because no single group or

coalition, particularly from a marginalized industry or geographical region, can change the status quo in political institutions; sometimes it literally takes a village, or a state, to fight back.

Protests against immediate injustices are not the only ways Appalachians are reclaiming their agency. Coalfield Development is a community revitalization, job creation, and education non-profit in West Virginia. It is not aiming to solve problems that crop up without warning, nor is it attempting to protest against injustices. What it does is provide Appalachians with the tools, skills, and opportunities to create a better life in a region facing a stagnant job market and the disappearance of its core industries.

In a world that is increasingly turning away from manufacturing, heavy industry, and resource extraction, many middle class workers feel like they are being left behind. To one group the shifting of economic priorities from one sector to another is the cost of progress, but to others it can feel like abandonment. Coalfield Development's mission is to empower people who feel like they are being left behind. It is a new way to generate efficacy in a region where traditional political efficacy and trust in government is low.

Bell's argument that people join political movements when they know and trust the people leading it translates to apolitical organizations like Coalfield Development. People from West Virginia founded coalfield Development; they know better than anyone what Appalachians are lacking in terms of economic security, and they have the tools to empower others to seek that security, too. The founders of Coalfield Development are successful because they recognize the importance of class solidarity; they represent a success story from Appalachia, and they are using their social and economic capital to lift up their fellow Appalachians.

Appalachia has a rich history of civic activism in the vein of the West Virginia teachers; its history of community building and revitalization, though, is less well-documented. The Eastern Kentucky Project and the Blair Development Association are relatively recent examples of grassroots efforts to empower residents with education and economic security. Today, Coalfield Development represents the potent power of taking control of one's own economic fortunes. The organization aims to develop "the potential of Appalachian places and people as they experience challenging moments of economic transition" (Coalfield Development). Weinbaum argues that grassroots movements like this help people gain a fundamental understanding of political issues, as well as a new understanding of their own identity in relation to those issues (Weinbaum 2004). Coalfield Development has the potential to establish a strong community revitalization culture in Appalachia, right alongside its rich tradition of protest, which can hopefully help lessen the blow of outside economic forces.

Conclusion

The 2016 Presidential election exposed the political and social dissonance between economically disenfranchised regions like Appalachia and the established political machine. As a candidate Hillary Clinton largely ignored Appalachia, instead focusing on other regions, as well as other social issues like racial inequality, the gender wage gap, and women's reproductive rights. Candidate Trump promised Appalachians he would revitalize the coal industry and bring back jobs to their stagnant economy by upending the political establishment, though a less-than-inconspicuous racial animosity played a role in his victory as well. Clearly Trump's message resonated more with Appalachians; his goal of

ridding Washington of establishment politicians represented a chance for Appalachians' voices to once again be heard. As the results of the regression show, this untraditional candidate may have prompted untraditional levels of donations from a region largely absent from the political narrative.

The results of this study are not the end of the potential for research on political efficacy Appalachia. When political efficacy is missing in a geographic region, a socio-economic group, or in an ethnic cohort, perhaps it is time to change the way we understand what political efficacy can look like among disenfranchised groups. Political efficacy should not have to manifest itself *only* in traditional political arenas like the polls or donations. When coal companies operating in Appalachia took away political sovereignty and agency from coal town residents they had to weather years of economic exploitation. Ultimately, this limited their paths to prosperity. This research suggests that the paths to prosperity available to Appalachians may decreasingly follow traditional political norms.

This study has already examined examples of grassroots programs in the past aimed at revitalizing local Appalachian economies, such as The Eastern Kentucky Project and the Blair Development Association. Today protest is just as vital to Appalachians' political goals as it was in the past. Now, there are new organizations taking a hold in Appalachia; Coalfield Development is moving on from economic exploitation and instead focusing on empowering Appalachians and finding the solutions themselves.

Grassroots political movements are unlikely to undermine the salience of traditional political participation measurements, at least in how scholars measure political participation, but they can add depth to our understanding of how disenfranchised citizens make sense of their circumstances. While Appalachians in the aggregate participate less

frequently in politics than people not from Appalachia, community-building organizations in Appalachia aimed at job creation, land reclaiming, and education represent an inherently political mentality; because even if they don't tackle political issues head on, they reclaim for its beneficiaries all the aspects of personal freedom and advancement that political bodies of the past took from them. When small coalitions with more political and social capital take away political freedom and agency from others, reclamation of those ideals is a political act.

References

- Bell, Shannon Elizabeth. *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia*. MIT Press, 2016.
- Bell, Shannon Elizabeth, and Yvonne A. Braun. "Coal, Identity, and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism in Central Appalachia." *Gender & Society*, vol. 24, no. 6, Dec. 2010, pp. 794–813. *CrossRef*, doi:[10.1177/0891243210387277](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210387277).
- Billings, Dwight B., and Kathleen M. Blee. *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000.
- "Coalfield Development | Courage, Creativity, Community." *Coalfield Development*, <http://coalfield-development.org/>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2018.
- Conway, M. Margaret. *Political Participation in the United States*. 3rd ed, CQ Press, 2000.
- Corbin, David. *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922*. University of Illinois Press, 1981.
- Croteau, David. *Politics and the Class Divide: Working People and the Middle-Class Left*. Temple University Press, 1995.
- Euchner, Charles C. *Extraordinary Politics: How Protest and Dissent Are Changing American Democracy*. Westview Press, 1996.
- Gunter, Matthew C. *The Capra Touch: A Study of the Director's Hollywood Classics and War Documentaries, 1934–1945*. McFarland, 2011.
- McAlevey, Jane. "The West Virginia Teachers Strike Shows That Winning Big Requires Creating a Crisis." *The Nation*, Mar. 2018. www.thenation.com, <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-west-virginia-teachers-strike-shows-that-winning-big-requires-creating-a-crisis/>.

McNeil, W. K., editor. *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*. 2nd ed, University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

Morrone, Michele, and Geoffrey L. Buckley, editors. *Mountains of Injustice: Social and Environmental Justice in Appalachia*. Ohio University Press, 2011.

Peterson, Erica. "Kentucky Doesn't Have Any More Working Union Coal Miners." *89.3 WFPL News Louisville*, 26 Feb. 2015, <http://wfpl.org/kentucky-doesnt-have-any-more-working-union-coal-miners/>.

Pudup, Mary Beth, et al., editors. *Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century*. University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Solt, Frederick. "Does Economic Inequality Depress Electoral Participation? Testing the Schattschneider Hypothesis." *Political Behavior*, vol. 32, no. 2, June 2010, pp. 285–301. *CrossRef*, doi:[10.1007/s11109-010-9106-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9106-0).

---. "Economic Inequality and Democratic Political Engagement." *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 52, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 48–60. *CrossRef*, doi:[10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00298.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00298.x).

Verba, Sidney, et al. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

Weinbaum, Eve S. *To Move a Mountain: Fighting the Global Economy in Appalachia*. New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2004.

"West Virginia Teacher Strike Continues." *NPR.Org*, <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/04/590682900/west-virginia-teacher-strike-continues>.

Accessed 13 Mar. 2018.