

Ternullo, Stephanie. *How the Heartland Went Red: Why Local Forces Matter in an Age of Nationalized Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024. xiii + 268 pages. Paperback, \$29.95.

Stephanie Ternullo addresses a set of big questions in *How the Heartland Went Red*. The backdrop of many of those questions lies in the breakup of the New Deal Coalition, where common patterns of economic and social changes in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s led to different partisan orientations in areas that were in many ways similar. The main focus of the work involves the intersection of partisanship and place; Ternullo observes that, while many postindustrial cities with a majority-white population have moved toward the Republican Party, others have not. Moreover, the rate and depth of partisan change vary significantly from city to city. Her core contribution is to explore how “place-based political differences persist despite the increased nationalization of American politics” (p. 5). Engagingly written, well-edited, and packing a great deal of information and analysis into a fairly slim volume, *How the Heartland Went Red* should be of interest to many readers from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds.

The book centers on three cities: Motorville City, WI, Lutherton, IN, and Gravesend, MN. These cities, Ternullo tells us, were solidly members of FDR’s New Deal Coalition and continued to vote solidly Democratic into the 1960s. All three cities were predominantly White, and all three were Midwestern and deeply industrial. Since then, however, the three cities (like many others) have seen their industrial bases dwindle and have consequently experienced significant economic turmoil. Despite their demographic, economic, and geographical similarities, the three cities demonstrate very different patterns of partisanship in 2024. Motorville remains staunchly Democratic, while Lutherton is staunchly Republican. Gravesend tended toward balanced competition between the two parties until 2016, though narrowly preferred Donald Trump in 2020 (p. 6). Ternullo uses interviews with approximately 175 members of the three communities, divided

roughly equally between what she calls “community leaders” and “residents,” to add much-needed context to empirical analysis and posit explanations of the differences in patterns of partisan change.

On Ternullo’s account, place matters for partisanship because where one lives contributes to the creation of “diagnostic frames” and “narratives of political identity.” The former assists citizens in “defining what their problems are and how to solve them politically,” while the latter “tell residents what kind of community they are and where they fit into the party system” (p. 6). Diagnostic frames “depend, in part, on a place’s structural conditions and the local organizational context” (p. 24). The heart of *Heartland* lies in exploring these “structural conditions” and “organizational contexts” through 176 in-person interviews supplemented with empirical analysis of demographic and employment data. Ternullo lays out the differences in the social, political, economic, and religious fabric of each city, showing the reader how these different patterns of development fostered different partisan identities. Motorville, for example, has a strong union tradition dating back to the late nineteenth century. Here, unions have not just been involved in collective bargaining but have traditionally been closely involved in local politics as well. Even in 2019, Motorville’s union members openly and proudly do much more than endorse candidates and donate funds. They canvass, volunteer, and interact directly with other members of the community in a variety of other ways (p. 56). Lutherton, on the other hand, seems to have been a more traditional, conservative community, where religion (specifically, the Lutheran faith) has played a more prominent role in social and political life (p. 32), leaving a more circumscribed role for unions. In Lutherton, residents frequently use church membership and church networks for social and political cues, as well as appropriate sources of aid for struggling residents (p. 57-8), which coheres much better with Republican policy and rhetoric, and Lutherton voters indeed realigned

as Republicans beginning in the 1960s—before and more strongly than did Motorville and Gravesend.

Heartland's analysis is well executed, and its story is compelling, but neither is without problems. Particularly surprising is a seeming unwillingness to use “culture” as an analytic concept. Ternullo presents her concepts of diagnostic frames and narratives of community identity as “cultural frameworks” (p. 6), but it seems in many ways like what the author is describing are processes of cultural change and continuity and the impact of culture on the values and preferences of community members. That different places have different cultures, and that different cultures have real impacts on the values and choices of inhabitants is well established, but the idea of culture here seems minimized. A broader geographical net would also have been appreciated. Small, postindustrial cities exist throughout the United States, and the book’s focus on place opens the door to questions about important regional differences. Many small cities in New England, for example, seem to resemble Motorville or Gravesend, while similar cities in the South appear far closer to Lutherton’s trajectory. Ample room remains for wider geographical consideration.

Despite these concerns, *How the Heartland Went Red* is a thoughtful and engaging reflection on the importance local communities have on the ideals, values, and preferences of their members. Ternullo reminds us that the communities we find ourselves embedded in tell us many important things. They give us ideas about who we are, both as individuals and as members of the community. They tell us what problems are important and how those problems might best be addressed. We create and perpetuate communities, but they play an important role in creating us as well. *How the Heartland Went Red* is appropriate for graduate students and practitioners in

Sociology, Political Science, Urban Development, and related fields and is accessible to undergraduates and the interested public. Recommended.

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