Introduction

• Political interest in rural America tends to ebb and flow
• After the 2016 election of Donald Trump, Google searches, newspaper trends, and academic literature all showed increased interest in the economic decline of many rural American areas
• Most literature focuses on prescriptive approaches to “fixing” rural areas, like increasing broadband or restructuring loans
• None have actually catalogued what these municipalities are doing themselves

Methodology

• Inductive analysis of 50 towns/counties from a 3007 town sample
• Five case studies based off of interviews and content analysis

Research Question:

What are local governments in rural areas experiencing economic decline doing to combat it?

Types of Econ Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Initiative</th>
<th>Number of Towns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Development</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving QOL</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No evidence</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

• There are several broad categories that most towns fall into:
  • commercial development,
  • improvement of services,
  • promoting tourism, and
  • no evidence
• These trends do not fall on any obvious geographic or political lines
• Prescriptive policies from academics or outside thinkers should bear in mind the wide variation of local governments’ willingness and ability to combat decline

Future Studies

• Future work could focus on understanding why some towns focus on certain types of economic development
• It could also seek to understand why towns that appear to be taking no action are deciding (or being forced) to do so

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