



Louisiana and the Coronavirus Pandemic: A Case Study and Future Scenarios

Master's thesis in Futures Studies

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In the lead up to the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, United States residents were grappling with widespread increase in cost of living, mainly in the form of housing and cost of food. Specific to Louisiana, it had the same issues, as well as a host of widespread chronic health issues, a lack of living wage and large-scale effects of climate change with little will to make needed policy changes.

This thesis evaluates media coverage during the first three months of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic to evaluate how media coverage about the pandemic was framed in relation to social issues specific to the state of Louisiana and how this could affect its future. A media and literature review were conducted and used to craft two future scenarios. The literature review was helped to develop a list of social issues affecting Louisiana just before the beginning of the pandemic in the United States, which is when the first U.S. case was reported.

The literature review revealed that social issues in Louisiana and its causes and policies have been studied in-depth in academic circles. It provided a comprehensive list of the issues, how they are connected and the root causes. The media in its state in 2020, provided mostly shorter-format reporting that relied heavily on statistics but not much context or historical perspective. It did provide many quotes from state politicians to develop an understanding of their ideologies and the political landscape of the state of Louisiana.

Keywords: coronavirus – Sars-Cov-2 – Louisiana – social issues – chronic health issues – living wage – climate change – food security

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List of abbreviations

Baton Rouge Advocate - BRAdv

New Orleans Times-Picayune - NOTP

1 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

As the coronavirus made its way around the world, the United States was both unprepared and unable to ramp up the needed capacity to handle the influx of sick patients (Schwartz, S., 2020, 211). The state of Louisiana, with a historically unstable economy, suffered further because of this lack of adequate healthcare. For this thesis, unstable means an inability to weather certain disruptions, whether they be social, economic or environmental. Since 1851, Louisiana has experienced two tropical storms every three years with one hurricane making landfall every 2.8 years (Barnes, et al., 2023, 1). Despite the extensive knowledge of natural disasters and climate change, the state has not implemented policies meant to help off-set said disruptions (Wall, 2008).

1.2 Research objective

The aim of this master's thesis in Futures Studies is to evaluate how an added stressor on a historically precarious economic structure and its social issues are covered in the media. In this instance, it is the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. This thesis will use the media coverage (Simon Fraser University, 2023) as well as academic research via a literature review to determine what factors in Louisiana were exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. As the pandemic loomed, many U.S. states were facing inflation, compounded by a cost-of-living crisis as well as having to operate in a historically dysfunctional healthcare system (Ciasullo, M. V., et al., 2020 and Schwartz, S., 2020, 210).

With Louisiana as the focus, a media review covering January 1 to March 31, 2020, was conducted to gauge how local media outlets covered the progress of the coronavirus pandemic and in how much detail. The relevance of this topic lies in the effect southern states could have on the U.S. economy. While the southern U.S. has been the focus of climate change research because of the increasing severity of hurricanes, many state and federal administrations have shown an unwillingness to make drastic policy changes with Fazey, I., et al. (2021, 46), describing Louisiana climate policies so far as "piecemeal and silo-based approaches that have further contributed to the emergence of climate change." The area also has eight of the 10 largest oil refineries in the U.S, in

Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, respectively. As there has been much talk but few steps towards a green transition, it appears very likely that reliance on oil and gas will continue for the foreseeable future, even if it is to the detriment of the environment (ibid, 49). By using the coronavirus pandemic as an illustrative case study concerning Louisiana, this thesis looks at what possible societal and policy changes on the state level can be made even if there is little will on the federal level. As shown in the past elections, policies can swing from liberal to conservative in a four-year period, depending on the elected president and congress. In general, I found very little examination of how these issues are covered in the media as compared to what academic research has been done. This will be detailed in the media and literature review discussed in the Methods and Materials section.

The media review uses news reports, which mention coronavirus or some derivation of the word, from four Louisiana publications, two newspapers and two radio stations from January 1 to March 31, 2020. Opinion letters and commentary articles were excluded. The goal of the media review is to determine how local media outlets covered the pandemic and social issues in Louisiana. Social issues are defined as any systemic issue or their effects on residents. In this thesis, the main social issues are poverty due to lack of a living wage, food insecurity, lack of health insurance or substandard healthcare services and chronic health issues caused by substandard health services and food insecurity. The most prevalent chronic health issues in Louisiana are obesity in adults and children and diabetes (Laraia, et al., 2004).

The literature review consisted of academic articles that were the result of searching the following terms: political economy, media coverage, media review, media objectivity, natural disasters, Louisiana, social issues, food security. The goal was to investigate and understand what specific social issues existed in Louisiana before the coronavirus pandemic and how they are framed in the media as well as what government policies are used or developed, if any, for said issues. In many instances, the literature review framed the issue in context of the entire Gulf South. The Gulf South are the six U.S. states that have the Gulf of Mexico as its southern border.

A media review was then conducted by searching the four listed news outlets, using NewsBank, a news database that archives newspapers throughout the world, available through a free membership with the East Baton Rouge Parish (Louisiana) public library

system that could still be accessed abroad (Newsbank, Inc., 2023). For the radio stations, a coronavirus specific page to aggregate all their reports were put on a dedicated landing page on the websites of both stations. This, along with their Twitter accounts was used to compile their reports. As both radio stations broadcast hourly news reports as well as present long form local reports in a state news-focused show, Twitter, which is used by news outlets to share information in near real-time. This was necessary for comprehensive collection of information from the radio stations. Along with the term “coronavirus,” the derivations of coronavirus that were searched are as follows: covid-19, SARS-CoV-2, covid. A PESTLE table was used, as a version of a futures table, to organize the list of social issues and any related policy and outcome, if there was a policy in place. This combination of news reports and academic research was then analyzed. Based on the evaluation of this information, two future scenarios specific to Louisiana, were developed.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The thesis structure, after the introduction is as follows:

In the Theoretical Framework section, I explore the concept of Political Economy, which is the lens used during the literature and media review and scenarios. I briefly outline the origins, its uses and provide examples of how it is used in academic research on social issues as well as economic development or lack thereof. The limitations are also presented.

In the Methods and Materials section, I outline the different methods I use to craft the thesis as well as the structure of the media and literature review and what information I hoped to gain from both. The method used is a Case Study of how the state of Louisiana reacted to the coronavirus pandemic, as an unexpected crisis, which is analyzed through a political economy lens and is then used to explore future directions in the scenarios. Materials used were four local news outlets, two newspapers and two radio stations, and academic articles compiled while searching using a variety of terms, which are listed in this section. The benefits and limitations are discussed. The process of using media framing in the media review and the process of developing scenarios is explained.

The Louisiana History and its coronavirus timeline gives a brief history of Louisiana up to the present as well as key points and events in the first three months of the coronavirus pandemic as it spread throughout the U.S. and more specifically, Louisiana.

The Results section summarizes the findings of the media and literature reviews, with the key factors listed and detailed in relation to Louisiana.

In the Discussion section, I explore the reasons for some of the findings, such as a lack of more in-depth reporting.

In the Future Scenarios section, I present two scenarios. One scenario presents a future if politics in the state of Louisiana continues as usual after the coronavirus pandemic. The second scenario presents a future if needed reforms are made to address social issues and known disruptions that have happened and will repeat in the near future. Both are presented with the PESTLE options, which were used to organize information gained through the literature and media review. The Conclusion summarizes the overall thesis.

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Case Study

This thesis uses a case study methodology to evaluate how an added stressor, the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, on a historically precarious economic structure and the social issues caused by this, are covered in the media, with Louisiana as the focus. The information will then be used to craft two future scenarios.

When researching how foresight methods are selected, Popper (2018, 63-64), suggests that some methods are unintentionally promoted, not because they are the best fit but because of unconscious preferences for certain methods. He then proposes that you must first understand the key attributes of foresight methods and their linkages to the main phases of a foresight process. This will provide useful insights into how to select a method to use. Poli (2018, 3), writing on future-related methods classification, first posits that there should be a criterion to determine and organize methods based on future-based criteria. Part of that criteria is first categorized into three rules for how to look at the future (Poli, 2018, 6).

Yin (2018, 14-15) defines a case study as research method as a method used to investigate modern event, the case, in detail and within its real-world context. In other words, you would do a case study because you want to understand a real-world case and assure that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case.

Perry (1998, 786, 778-789) writing about using a case study specifically for master's theses, defines it as a research methodology of a body of knowledge, which investigates a current or recent issue or event within its real-life context. He suggests a literature review in order to develop the research question and develop a theoretical background. When doing the literature review, Perry states that an inductive approach, generating theory from data alone, or deductive approach, developing theory and then finding data to support said theory, are both considered valid approaches to the review. He states that the researcher will bring past knowledge and experiences when starting the process and it will influence the researcher's formulation of the hypothesis or research question.

Using a case study to examine the social issue of energy poverty, Urquiza, et al., (2019, 2), shows that one benefit of a case study is that while they may provide a limited snapshot, they give the option to provide nuance. The specific focus of the paper is on energy poverty in middle development countries, with Chile as the focus of the case study. The paper discusses how other indices are more tailored to either fully developed or developing countries but do not fit when evaluating energy access and quality needed for middle development countries. In these countries, sociocultural and territorial differences must be considered. The researchers found that when indices made for developed or developing countries were applied to middle development countries, either the country was considered not experiencing any or very little energy poverty because they had access to minimum energy services or almost all were in energy poverty because of the different types or the quality of the energy services are used in households. They also found that both equity and access dimensions are rarely considered together, which is key in middle development countries. In this instance, it is also noted that terms should be clearly defined. Access is defined as “physical and technological thresholds which prevent households from getting access to electricity and other modern energy services.” Equity is defined as “economic inequalities associated with excessive energy costs and how these shape energy services that families may have at their disposal.” The relevance of this case study is that it is not so much specific to energy inequality but is dealing with a social issue that is connected to inequality and is explored in a nuanced way, which is possible because of the many varied formats a case study can take (Urquiza, et al., 2019, 4-5).

This is applied to the case study of Louisiana in that social issues should be clearly defined and issues like a lack of a living wage and food insecurity, should be defined and detailed specific to the state of Louisiana. In the case of both, Louisiana follows to a large degree, the same trends as the southern United States.

2.2 Literature Review

To determine the scope of this topic, a literature review was conducted. A variety of academic research databases were accessed through the University of Turku Library’s Volter database, which aggregates academic journals. The search was conducted using

the following terms, combined with Louisiana: food insecurity, health promotion, obesity, quality of life, Lower Mississippi Delta, food access, food security programs, hunger, food security, coronavirus, SNAP, food stamps, food banks, social safety nets, food waste, food poverty, school lunch, child hunger, neoliberalism and welfare services. As the approach was mostly inductive, half of the terms were predetermined, with the other half being added to the list during the review, as they were deemed relevant.

The goal of a literature review with an inductive approach is to help determine the scope of a general thesis topic by researching what academic work has already been published on the subject you are interested in and then to narrow the scope or make any necessary changes to your thesis topic, purpose statement or research question. When reading the articles, it is important to evaluate them in reference to the assumptions the researchers make, what methodologies and theories are used and how they present their results. It is then beneficial to note any patterns, trends or theories that may become common among the articles read (Guelph, 2022).

The initial topic of this thesis was supposed to be how Louisiana food banks were covered by local media outlets during the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Despite having a history of food insecurity and there being many food banks established in Louisiana, coverage was very sparse. There were only eight articles during the first three months of 2020 and 21 total articles published from January 1st to June 30th, 2020. Most were short on details about food banks' role in combating food security in Louisiana and there was usually no mention of the government's role in the issue or of their policies related to the issue. The topics listed above allowed for a more holistic understanding of the issues connected with food insecurity, which will be further detailed in the Background section.

In selecting the materials for the literature review, I hoped to develop a deeper understanding of the state of Louisiana and its prevailing social issues. This would include not only compiling a list of the most common social issues but learning about the causes and policies related to them. Also, if possible, I wanted to try and find an evaluation of the policies enacted throughout the U.S., with hopefully some southern states as examples, to determine their levels of success or lack thereof. In some instances, for example, with a living wage, there were details about the entire legal process of enacting a living

wage policy in many cities in many different forms and multiple years of studies evaluating a living wage's effect on a population. The effect is always positive for people making the lowest wages.

The literature review provided a historical, local and global context for its social issues as well as policies toward said issue or lack thereof.

2.3 Media Review

For the media review, the four main news outlets in Louisiana that were used were The Baton Rouge Advocate newspaper, The New Orleans Times-Picayune newspaper, WRKF and WWNO radio stations. These were chosen because they cover the majority of the population of Louisiana and some of the areas of Mississippi that border Louisiana. The source of the past news articles was NewsBank, a news database that archives newspapers for libraries. It was accessed through the East Baton Rouge Parish library website, of which the thesis author is a cardholder and can be accessed abroad from Finland. The overall archive for each newspaper was individually accessed, then an advanced search was done with the specific time frame and keywords. The period searched was January 1 to March 31, 2020, using the different variations of "coronavirus." Iyengar's description and analysis to determine if an article is episodic or thematic was used (Iyengar, 1996, 61).

As an academic method, Guetterman (2016, 315-316) gives an overview of the main components of a media review. The first is an introduction to the media being reviewed, which usually includes basic background information. The next component is a summary of the type of media content being reviewed to orient the reader. The final component is the critique of the media itself, which includes the good and bad aspects but remaining open enough to allow readers to judge its value on their own.

Table 1 Total articles found by month and publication (2020)

	January	February	March	Total
Publication				
WRKF radio	0	6	30	36
WWNO radio	8	4	94	106
Baton Rouge Advocate	0	5	405	410
New Orleans Times-Picayune	1	11	589	601

2.4 Media Framing

To evaluate the articles used in the media review, media framing (Iyengar, 1990, 21-22) was used to evaluate each article. Framing in the media context is described as using certain terms and concepts to present a subject and options. The terms and concepts are a stimulus that directs the attention to a certain way of thinking about the subject or option.

Media coverage was determined by Iyengar to mainly have two dominant frames: episodic and thematic. These frames were determined through sociological analysis of news production. The analysis found that for many Americans, news reports are one of the primary methods they use to define or understand political issues. He stated that personal views can be based on causal thinking, which looks at the past, while treatment thinking focuses on problem solving and seeks to be future-oriented to prevent the recurrence of a previous outcome. The flaw being that treatment may not review past errors. The flaw of causal thinking is that it may focus on fixing a flawed past policy and not necessarily be open to discarding it completely.

Thematic framing presents information on general trends, where the subject of the coverage is abstract or impersonal. This allows the topic to be placed in some context, such

as historical, geographical, or political, to provide background. Episodic framing focuses on personal experience, using a family or individual's situation. Issues are shown in terms of one specific instance as an illustration of one version of the topic. It is understood that most articles are not strictly episodic or thematic but in doing a content analysis, one predominant frame is identifiable (Iyengar, 1996, 61).

The total number of articles meeting these criteria were 1153 as seen in Table 1. Of those, 1100 were classified as episodic and 53 were classified as thematic. The newspapers had a larger number of articles, overall and both had articles with thematic and episodic frames as seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Total articles found by media frame per publication and per month (2020)

	January	February	March	Total
WRKF				
Episodic	0	5	26	31
Thematic	0	1	5	6
Total	0	6	30	36
WWNO				
Episodic	6	3	91	100
Thematic	2	1	3	6
Total	8	4	94	106
Baton Rouge Advocate				
Episodic	0	3	396	399
Thematic	0	1	9	10
Total	0	5	405	410
New Orleans Times-Picayune				
Episodic	1	10	559	570
Thematic	0	1	30	31
Total	1	11	589	601

2.5 Future Scenarios

A scenario, as defined by Glenn, et al., (2009, 2) is a narrative with plausible cause and effect links that connects a future condition with the present, while illustrating key decisions, events and consequences through a narrative to help generate long-term policies. The method was first developed and utilized by Herman Kahn, considered the founder of scenario construction, who defined scenarios as “narrative descriptions of the future that focus attention on causal processes and decision points, (Glenn, et al., 2009, 4)” with a key measure being the scenario’s ability to help a variety of officials develop policy and not to focus on whether the scenario turns out right or wrong. Scenarios for the most part are used either to describe a snapshot in time or to show the state of key variables at a certain time in the future or to describe a state of being as the evolution from present conditions to one of several futures.

Construction of scenarios requires that you first define the area of interest and to identify key variables, which are reviewed and usually narrowed down to determine a qualitative and quantitative range for each scenario. This range should include key policies, forces and trends in the environment. A good introduction to a scenario is to begin with a description of the current state of a system or issue being explored (ibid, 5-6). For this thesis, a literature review was used to determine key policies and trends related to social issues in Louisiana in the lead up to the coronavirus pandemic. The media review is then used to determine what policy changes, if any were made, in the long or short term as well as any that existed in the lead up to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Louisiana. Instead of creating “most likely” scenarios, they will instead identify a range of feasible outcomes based on the information gathered from the academic literature and local media reviews (ibid, 12).

In an attempt to take the first steps of developing a scenario user guide, Börjeson, et al. (2006, 726) discussed the applicability of various techniques for developing scenarios. Applicable to this thesis, predictive scenarios are distinguished by the conditions they

place on what will happen. Strategic scenarios aim to describe a range of possible consequences of strategic decisions and focus on internal factors and take external factors into account (Börjeson, et al., 2006, 728).

Some of the strengths of using scenarios is that the methodology helps develop plans that are viable over a wide range of possible outcomes as the plans and processes help to manage the uncertainty that is inherent in any planning, regardless of the number of specialists involved. The scenario development process is beneficial to decision-makers in that it helps them develop a better awareness of future possibilities and to be open to being more flexible.

A weakness in scenarios is that, when given to non-participants, they may see the scenarios as the official plan for possible futures and not just as a guide. Glenn says this is where the scenario producers should be mindful of how their worldview may be transferred to the reader, depending on how the information is presented or framed (ibid, 18-19).

Examples from the literature review where scenarios related to social issues were developed, include Bhaduri, et al., (2018, 72-73) in which they crafted scenarios on how local farming knowledge in Sub-Saharan Africa can be incorporated into government policies to increase food security. They specifically focused on elder farmers who may have been dispossessed of land due to colonial seizures. This target group was chosen because this function of colonialism, of removing them from historically locally owned and farmed land, also served to cut future farmers off from their experiential knowledge about farming practices that are less industrialized. These elder farmers had historical knowledge from pre-colonial times on how to handle droughts and other farming-related blights that have become more prevalent due to climate change, mostly with the use of less water and no reliance on synthetic fertilizer.

Tapio and Varho (2013, 615-616) combined qualitative and quantitative materials into a Futures Table to create scenarios on transport and climate change. This paper provided insight into the important aspects of the methodology of developing scenarios for this study. They used an expertise matrix to decide what sources to use and chose to look outside of industry experienced professionals and tried to have variety as far as gender and age, which allowed new viewpoints to emerge.

2.6 Media Sources

2.6.1 Baton Rouge Advocate and New Orleans Times-Picayune

The Baton Rouge Advocate and New Orleans Times-Picayune are owned by Georges Media Group, which is owned by Louisiana businessman John Georges. His other businesses include real estate, import and export logistics and a minority stake of the New Orleans Saints American football team. A minority stake means the person owns a small percentage of the team. For example, when The Los Angeles Clippers American basketball team was sold for \$2 billion USD, \$632 million was paid by a separate group of people for them to be a stakeholder of the company. The New Orleans Saints are estimated to be worth \$3.57 billion and Georges is estimated to be worth \$350 million USD.

Political donations, which are public record in the United States, show that John Georges, with matching New Orleans, Louisiana addresses to his businesses, have publicly donated \$35,500 to various Republican candidates, Republican affiliated Political Action Committees and the Republican National Party in the last 10 years (U.S. Federal Election Commission). This would not include money donated to non-profit groups, which have a specific political leaning, but do not affiliate with a specific candidate. These organizations do not have a maximum limit a person can donate and the amounts do not have to be publicly reported as per the 2010 Supreme Court Citizens United decision on so-called “dark money” (Brennan Center for Justice). Over those same ten years, \$5,800 in donations with matching addresses but listing both John and his wife Dathel Georges were also donated to Democratic candidates.

This is important information as studies have determined that the unwritten rule of the “invisible wall” between the corporate side of a media organization and reporters, allowing them editorial independence, has rarely been followed (Sjovaag, 2013, 156-157,160-161), which may speak to the possible conservative or liberal lean of a paper, what and how topics are covered and what is ultimately published and with how much detail.

2.6.2 WWNO and WRKF

WWNO, based in New Orleans and WRKF, based in Baton Rouge, are radio station affiliates of National Public Radio (NPR). They can be described as the American equivalent of the BBC in the United Kingdom, with about five percent of its funding coming from the federal U.S. government and the remaining being from sustaining members, or donors. Mostly based around the local affiliates, a sustaining member agrees to have a monthly donation automatically charged to a card or deducted from their bank account, with the lowest amount usually being \$5 USD per month. For full disclosure, the author of this thesis is a sustaining member of WRKF and a former print and radio journalist who left the industry in 2011 and was born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I chose to incorporate a media review as I agree Iyengar's (1990, 21-22) assessment that people's views are heavily shaped by what they see in print, TV and radio news media outlets and the way it is framed deserves close consideration. I chose my hometown because during the entire 10 years of my print and radio journalism career, I never worked in or near my hometown.

The stations collaborate to produce a daily show called "Louisiana Considered," which covers regional topics and provides more in-depth coverage of state news with interviews from journalists who have covered the topics for other outlets. They are also part of the Gulf States Newsroom which is a collaboration between the above listed radio stations, as well as NPR affiliates WBHM, based in Birmingham, Alabama and Mississippi Public Broadcasting, based in Jackson, Mississippi. Gulf States is a term used for states that have the Gulf of Mexico as their southern border. These two radio stations in Mississippi and Alabama follow the same funding model with sustaining members being the majority of funding. Businesses can "advertise" by becoming underwriters. The "advertisement" by an underwriter follows a standard script of "(insert station name) is underwritten by (insert company name, address and phone number)." Some allow the company to have a slogan or short description of services read. The scope is determined by management at each separate radio station.

Along with the respective media outlet's websites and social media accounts, these media outlets were accessed through NewsBank, a database that compiles and stores newspaper editions in their original and text-only form. NewsBank was used to access the

text-only versions of Times-Picayune and Advocate past issues, with news reports coming directly from WRKF and WWNO's websites, as they both set up a landing page for all coronavirus coverage with news in chronological order.

3 Theoretical Framework

This thesis uses a Political Economy lens, which looks at the relationship between economic systems and political power (Dunbar, 1891, 412). According to Dunbar, Political Economy is used to explore the relationship between politics and the economy of a place and how those two intersect when forming political decisions and enacting policies or laws. While not providing a specific definition of “political economy,” in analyzing the key topics in the top three foresight and futures journals, *Futures*, *Long Range Planning* and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Roth and Kaivo-oja (2015, 19) found that the overwhelming “dominant systems” were the economy, the political system and science, which speaks to its relevance. They were followed by mass media and health in word search rankings.

Miller (1976, 138-140), specifically using a political economy lens to explore social issues and the subsequent policies around them, treats political economy itself as a system. He connects social exclusion with economic conditions and how different views affect the treatment of said social issues. As a system itself, when functioning in an optimal or dysfunctional way, it influences the creation or alleviation of social issues and any possible social reforms. Miller then used political economy to explain how views on social issues shift, leading to different and sometimes detrimental treatments of those social problems (Miller, 1976, p. 138). Writing on national development, Political Economy and neoliberal policies, Naseemullah (2023, 9) looks at how neoliberal reform has created a disconnect between capital, labor and the state and stunted equal development across societies and world economies. Taking a historical-structural approach, Naseemullah explores how this type of reform changed the relationships among a variety of collective actors: the state, business, workers and multinationals. On the multinational level, the example was free trade, which benefited countries who had industrialized earlier and locked in their advantages by preventing later developing countries from pursuing industrialization (Naseemullah, 2023, 2). The real-world multinational example was the pressure on Latin American economies in the 1930s when more developed countries required the import of a certain amount of processed goods. During this time, many countries in the region were gaining independence from European colonization, which maintained a strict policy of keeping these territories underdeveloped. The United States imposition of forced imports in lieu of internal economic development

maintained the underdevelopment of these national economies. This is seen as key for economic development and industrialization and thus avoid trap of low-value primary commodity production and export. Any attempts to the contrary by Latin American governments, and the subsequent tax base it would provide, were then framed as communism or anti-capitalist, which was the excuse used for multiple military interventions by the U.S. or “assisting with regime change” by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The most notable being Guatemala becoming a so-called “Banana Republic,” run by American businesses operating in the country (ibid, 2-5).

Some of the limitations of political economy are highlighted by Fujishiro, et al. (2021, 2). In writing about health and work equity through a political economy lens, they propose a framework based on discursive institutionalism, which focuses on dialogue, shared values and developing new types of social institutions to drive institutional change. The first limitation is that existing social institutions, which can better maintain current sociopolitical policies and thus resist changes. They cited the coronavirus pandemic, in which governments provided emergency relief funds, expanded paid leave and unemployment benefits. In the US, this increased payouts to a living wage for the first time in decades, banned evictions and utility shutoffs, but eventually rolled them back as the pandemic waned, using abstract reasoning well before the pandemic would be considered over by medical professionals (Fujishiro, et al., 2021, 3). The second limitation in using the political economy lens is that the collecting of the needed data requires long-term national and international collaboration and commitment. Linking these sources of information requires technical savvy as well as the political will to do so (Fujishiro, et al., 2021, 7).

Such approach(es) have some overlap with political ecology and at times, the terms seem to be used interchangeably. Political ecology is defined by Moragues-Faus and Marsden (2017, 276), as “empirical, research-based explorations to explain linkages in the condition and change of social and environmental systems, with explicit considerations of relations of power.” As political ecology takes a longer-term approach, the theory used for this thesis will be political economy because it is more suited for presenting a snapshot with some added context.

To summarize, Political Economy interrogates how political decisions are influenced by the distribution of power, resources and wealth in a community or society and the resulting outcomes as determined by those in power. In the context of the media and literature review for this thesis, it will be used to explore coverage or lack thereof of social issues, Louisiana in this instance and on the national level in the United States. The media review was used to determine the main topics or themes that are covered during the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, how often and how in-depth they are covered. In this thesis, political economy is the lens used to gain insight into the complex dynamics of political and economic systems by reviewing how they are presented in the media. The history of the media outlets and its ownership are also considered. Because of this complexity, for transparency, this thesis attempts to explore and present only a snapshot of the society and actions during a specific time frame in Louisiana, January 1 to March 31, 2020.

4 Louisiana History (Brief overview)

Louisiana is a state with a population of 4,657,757 (2020 US Census). It is located along the southern Gulf Coast of the United States of America, which consists of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. This area of the U.S. was initially inhabited by a variety of indigenous groups. In its early statehood, the area would gain financial superiority through the large-scale enslavement of Africans and subsequently African Americans. The state passed laws that decreed that all offspring of enslaved people, African Americans, would also remain enslaved to maintain their source of free labor. Slavery would end at the culmination of the American Civil War, which took place from 1861-1865, when the slave-holding southern U.S. states lost. The immediate post-Civil War era was called Reconstruction and featured a series of laws and processes that were put in place by the U.S. Congress and then signed by President Abraham Lincoln. These set up schools and social aid through the government agency, The Freedmen's Bureau, for newly freed African Americans. It ended with Lincoln's assassination and brought Andrew Jackson to the presidency next. Jackson would repeal all programs and protections enacted for the newly freed African Americans. Allowing for the creation of systems and laws that pushed many of the formerly enslaved people into a land debt peonage system called sharecropping that was very similar to slavery and left them unprotected from violence that followed the end of Reconstruction policies.

In the Gulf South, this would evolve into Jim Crow laws that prevented African American from voting in elections, not allowing them and white people to use the same facilities such as bathrooms and water fountains or attending the same schools or required African Americans to sit at the back of any public transportation or be denied use of the services. Schools designated for African Americans were underfunded or not at all. Louisiana, also having Native American, Mexican and Chinese populations, usually lumped them into the laws that applied to African Americans. Some Chinese and Mexican residents brought lawsuits to attempt to be classified as white, with mixed results. Funding for infrastructure or upkeep of facilities designated for African Americans was actively withheld from building and city infrastructure budgets in the neighborhoods people of color would be restricted to due to "redlining" of cities. Civil rights organizations existed during and after slavery was abolished. The short period of functional Re-

construction allowed some to gain political office, but many were killed or extrajudicially deposed from their positions when Reconstruction ended. The Civil Rights movement, growing to a larger scale in the 1940s-1970s, took on various forms depending on the region of the U.S., overturned some discriminatory policies, while some evolved into unwritten policies of gerrymandering voting districts to use political power to defund infrastructure in areas with mostly populations of people of color or over policing of these areas with more punitive punishments enacted by judges on this same population (Blackmon, 2009). By many workers' rights groups, it is believed that this history is the cause of a lack of union representation and living wages throughout the southern United States.

Cases would increase exponentially throughout the state over the month of March and past that. On March 1st, there were no known cases reported. By March 15, there were 103 confirmed cases with two deaths (WRKF, March 15, 2020). Officials struggled with getting enough tests and getting the results as all samples were sent to the CDC in Atlanta to be tested at the time. University Medical Center of New Orleans chief medical officer Dr. Nirav Patel said in an interview that he felt the state was unprepared for what would become a pandemic as they were not very proactive, not working in alignment with public health departments nor were they mobilizing other resources to manage these sorts of outbreak situations (NOTP, March 10, 2020).

Infectious disease specialists announced that "covid came to Louisiana during Carnival" with contact tracing now showing people in other states reported visiting New Orleans for Carnival or on a cruise within two weeks of testing positive (NOTP, March 12, 2020). Louisiana's economy is heavily dependent on tourism and the oil and gas industry. An estimated 23.3% of the jobs in the New Orleans metropolitan area are in the four sectors that were heavily affected by the pandemic: oil, gas and mining, transportation, temporary workers and independent contractors (ex: food deliveries and ride hailing services) and hospitality and leisure. There were an estimated 91,700 leisure and hospitality jobs in New Orleans. About 14% of Baton Rouge jobs were in these heavily affected categories (BR Advocate, March 21, 2020). The Economic Policy Institute estimated that with federal stimulus, Louisiana would still lose more than 70,000 jobs by summer in the private sector from actions to stem the spread of the coronavirus and still may have to contend with an active hurricane season (BR Advocate, March 22, 2020).

5 Coronavirus Timeline in Louisiana

Coverage of the coronavirus pandemic started slowly across most American media outlets. In Louisiana, the selected media sources all had little to no coverage until the end of January, when the first U.S. case was discovered in Washington state. This first case was a businessman who had recently returned from Wuhan, China, the suspected ground zero of the virus (WWNO, Jan. 21, 2020). Louisiana health officials announced that the risk was low for the state, but they had basic plans to quarantine any affected residents. At the time, Louisiana Department of Health officials said they were more worried about the thousands of out of state Mardi Gras visitors bringing in the flu and that they were currently trying to respond to five concurrent outbreaks of infectious diseases in Louisiana: seasonal flu, hepatitis A, mumps, norovirus and chicken pox (NOTP, Feb 26, 2020) as well as having the fourth highest rate of new HIV infections and about 20,000 residents living with HIV (WRKF, March 23, 2020). Lack of access to healthcare and food insecurity, two historic issues in Louisiana, created a history of many residents having pre-existing health issues, making them more susceptible to coronavirus as seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Pre-existing health issues in Louisiana, as reported in the media.

Obesity	25%
Chronic Kidney Disease	23%
Cardiac diseases	21%
Pulmonary diseases	12%
Neurological diseases	6%
Immunocompromised	4%
Chronic Liver diseases	2%

Source: WRKF, March 30, 2020

Officials expressed worry about an uptick in domestic violence, since Louisiana already ranked fifth in the nation for women killed by men. They referenced 2017, when many residents of the Baton Rouge region were recovering from catastrophic floods the previous year. In 2017, there were 14 domestic violence-related homicides in East Baton Rouge Parish (WRKF, March 30, 2020). Data showed that there were at least 61 homicides related to domestic violence in 2021, 55 adults and six children, a significant increase (BR Advocate, April 13, 2022).

February is when the Louisiana specific, and Catholic religion-related holiday, Mardi Gras or Carnival takes place. In 2020 it took place on February 25th. This marks the beginning of Lent and culminates in a series of parades and balls (Mardi Gras club's parties). While it is celebrated throughout the state, the largest in size and number of celebrations take place in New Orleans and usually features the largest number of visitors from outside of state (NOTP, Feb. 14, 2020). The beginning of Carnival Season started on 12th Night, Jan. 6, 2020. This event occurs twelve days after Christmas. The one variation being that some churches start the count on Christmas Day and some the day after. Most weekends feature parades and street parties, with the most widely known area being along Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, one of the oldest parts of New Orleans, founded in 1718 when Louisiana was a French territory.

The spread of coronavirus throughout the U.S. picked up quickly with the first case determined to be through community spread being found in California (WRKF, Feb. 26, 2020) and Louisiana politicians lamenting the news that the Federal Public Health Emergency Fund had been empty or well below the \$30 million USD it was supposed to have. The reason was that there was no law or tax ever set up to keep it properly funded. As of March 1, 2020, there was about \$50,000 in the fund.

At the beginning of March, Louisiana governor John Bel Edwards began instructing schools to cut short any overseas trips that were currently happening as covid was spreading through Europe at a rapid rate (WWNO, WRKF, March 3, 2020). Baton Rouge Mayor Sharon Weston-Broome said, "We do expect cases here in Louisiana sooner or later" (BR Advocate, March 2). Task forces related to public health compiled more detailed plans and those returning to Louisiana were required to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Hospitals began restricting visitations and screening patients. Public health specialists said they believe "it is highly possible coronavirus is already in New Orleans (NOTP, BR Advocate, March 6, 2020) and began encouraging general hygiene practices such as frequent hand washing. Officials announced that they were deep into planning how to handle possible canceled sporting events, the 400 upcoming festivals throughout Louisiana and how to help the homeless population. About 91% of the estimated 1,400 homeless people in Louisiana live in New Orleans (NOTP, March 19, 2020).

The first coronavirus case in Louisiana was detected on March 9th and contact tracing determined it was through community spread (NOTP, March 9, 2020). The next case connected to New Orleans was from an out of state person who had recently attended a journalism convention in New Orleans. All upcoming parades and conventions were canceled by New Orleans Mayor Latoya Cantrell, with Mayor Broome in Baton Rouge doing the same later that day. Governor Edwards instructed all public schools and universities to prepare for possible online teaching, which would become an executive order to close on March 30th as well as banning gatherings of over 50 people until April 13th (BR Advocate, March 14, 2020). The ban on gatherings caused all bars to close and restaurants were only allowed to sell food for take away.

As cases grew, the financial toll to the state, as they waited for approval of federal aid, was outlined in many news articles:

- Tourists spend an estimated \$9 billion a year in New Orleans on hotels, restaurants, shopping and the like (BRAdv, Mar 4, 2020)
- Festivals and tourism bring in almost \$1 billion to New Orleans every year:
 - Jazz Fest: \$300 million
 - Cruise ship travel: \$300 million
- New Orleans has about 100,000 hospitality workers, most without paid sick leave and making minimum wage, which is below a living wage (NOTP, March 12, 2020)
- Ernest N. Morial Convention Center accounts for about 3% of the greater New Orleans area economy (2018 economic impact study by the University of New Orleans)
- For Louisiana's large oil and gas industry, for every \$1 drop in price of oil per barrel, the state loses \$11 to \$12 million in direct tax revenues (BRAdv, Mar 10, 2020)
- 80% of New Orleans Regional Transportation Agency's budget is from sales taxes made from tourists (WWNO, March 14, 2020)
- Sales taxes makes up roughly 30% of New Orleans' \$721.8 million city budget (WWNO, March 14, 2020)

Louisiana unemployment claims triple while it has the lowest payout in the country at \$247 per week for 26 weeks. Only about 11% of unemployed workers are approved for unemployment insurance because of restrictions on who qualifies (NOTP, March 23, 2020)

Along with the financial hit, the two largest cities, New Orleans and Baton Rouge, began planning how to get school lessons and meals to students unable to physically attend public school. The non-profit Broadband Now estimated that about 10% of Louisiana residents don't have access to broadband internet and about 5% have no internet provider at all. In New Orleans, 84% of public school students are considered economically disadvantaged and for some the breakfast and lunch at school are their only healthy meals each day (NOTP, March 11, 2020). In Baton Rouge, 71% of public

school students come from economically disadvantaged families (BR Advocate, March 14, 2020). At the time, Louisiana had about 719,000 public school students while the state as a whole had one of the lowest rates of households with internet access in the nation: 69% (BR Adv, March 16, 2020). This “digital divide” led the New Orleans school board to purchase 5,000 hotspots and 10,000 Chromebook laptops to distribute among families (WWNO, March 19, 2020). Other smaller school districts would hand out printed materials on a weekly basis at the meal pickup locations and Louisiana Public Broadcasting TV stations began broadcasting science and social studies lessons for elementary and middle school grade levels to help students without internet access at home (WRKF, March 23, 2020).

Other issues included Baton Rouge and New Orleans police having to break up large gatherings as residents ignored stay at home orders (WWNO, March 15, 2020). This included one pastor who was ticketed six times before being arrested for holding church services of up to 200 people after the ban was in place. Alabama, Florida and Texas governors had to close beaches as college students still tried to congregate in large groups and issued quarantine orders as Louisiana and residents from other southern states decided to come to their second homes in the coastal areas of the state (NOTP, March 19, 2020). The Louisiana ACLU and non-profit bail funds began advocating for state jails to release anyone being held for non-violent offenses. Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate per capita in the United States, with one out of every 86 adults incarcerated, and regularly faces issues of overcrowded jails and prisons. This included people sentenced to a certain amount of time in prison or being held on a bail amount they could not afford to pay. Prisoner deaths from covid would be very high later in the year (BR Advocate, March 26, 2020).

The month ended with Louisiana having continued testing delays, overcrowded hospitals and struggling to acquire personal protective equipment for staff and ventilators for patients. They would use empty hotels and convention centers to house homeless and recovering coronavirus patients (WRKF, March 25, 2020). As of March 31, Louisiana had 5,237 cases and 239 deaths, the highest per capita numbers after New York City. Meaning that in the early days of the covid pandemic, the entire state of Louisiana had the second highest per capita numbers behind a densely populated metropolitan city in first place.

6 Social Issues in Louisiana

The goal of this thesis was to evaluate how an added stressor, the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, on a historically precarious economic structure and the social issues caused by this design are covered in the media, with Louisiana as the focus. The information was then used to craft future scenarios. The scenarios serve to give projections of how changes in various factors could affect the population and future pandemics, which most infectious disease specialists have predicted is very likely in the future (Marani, M., 2021). A political economy lens is used here as a majority of the needed changes are political and economic and they concern power dynamics and inequality. A literature review was conducted to find and understand the state of Louisiana and its social issues before the coronavirus pandemic began.

Social issues that were identified through a literature review were food insecurity (Fitzgerald, 2018), obesity (Laraia, et al., 2004), chronic illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure, lack of a living wage for workers (Adams, et al., 2005), climate change in the form of hurricanes increasing in severity (Colbert, 2022), which causes internal displacement of residents (Larrance, et al., 2007) and economic staples that are easily disrupted by natural disasters and climate change: tourism and the oil and gas industry.

6.1 Food insecurity

According to Feeding America's "Hunger in America 2014" report, Louisiana has the 2nd highest rate of food insecurity with the New Orleans and Baton Rouge Metropolitan Areas among the top 10. An estimated 783,400 Louisiana residents, out of 4.6 million, struggle with hunger, with about 258,630 of them being children. The report used the USDA definitions of food security. High food security is having no issues accessing healthy food. Marginal food security is being concerned about having and keeping an adequate supply of food in a household but not making any drastic changes to the household diet. Low food security is a reduction in quality, variety, or desirability of diet (Fitzgerald, 2018, 5-7). They use the USDA definition of a food desert, which is defined as places with a lack of healthy and affordable food options, such as full-service grocery stores and/or farmers markets within a convenient travel distance. Convenient travel distance is defined as one mile for urban areas and ten miles in rural areas.

Moragues-Faus (2017, 98-99) shows that media coverage, depending on the framing, can have a positive or negative effect on policies related to food security. In reviewing eight British newspapers' coverage of food banks, she discovered different ways in which food security is defined, with most not focusing on causes of food inequality and insecurity. This fits into the U.S. context with the UK framing being similar to the U.S. as they are also seeing continued increases in diet related diseases, more reliance on food banks and the increase in the number of food banks with a simultaneous decrease in government intervention in the issue of food insecurity.

6.2 Obesity

Dinour et al. (2007) in a literature review on the Food Insecurity-Obesity Paradox coined the term "food insufficiency" which is defined as "inadequacy in the amount of food intake because of a lack of money or resources that provide access to enough food." This is usually people buying more calorie dense, but not necessarily healthy food because it is cheaper, allowing them to "stretch" the limited money they have but also contributing to food-related health issues. Kantor (2001) focused on the need for food security and government programs to focus more on underlying social, economic, and institutional factors within a community that affect the quantity, quality, and affordability of food. From community-level initiatives, community-based programs working in tandem with government food assistance programs were shown to increase quality food intake. Examples include allowing food stamp users to double the amount they can purchase at farmer's markets and with fresh foods, as well as nutrition education programs that make themselves available in poorer areas. This included scheduling programs during off-peak hours as people tend to be working multiple jobs because one does not pay a living wage and may need to attend said meetings at irregular times.

6.3 Chronic Illnesses

This Food Insecurity-Obesity Paradox is referenced in the media review with it resulting in highlighting a variety of conditions that are prevalent in Louisiana: Obesity, Chronic Kidney Disease, Cardiac, Pulmonary and Neurological issues, being Immunocompromised because of illnesses like diabetes and Chronic Liver Disease (WRKF, March 30, 2020), seen in Table 3.

Exploratory research on the quality of healthcare, compared U.S. and European countries' healthcare systems highlighted a lack of connection between healthcare and social care in the U.S. system (Ciasullo et al., 2020, 2). Specifically, highlighting that European countries with nationalized healthcare (or single payer) systems have accepted the connection between overall environment, economics and health outcomes. They first define a healthcare system as a set of obligations that a nation or society 'invests' in the health of its citizens, as distinguished from other concerns."

In reviewing multiple countries' health systems, the authors determined five key aspects to a system. These the financial and human assets allocated health-related services, a public-private mix of health services, a set criterion for granting access to care, is health and health policy connected to the performance of the health system in terms of health protection and health promotion. They do note that this has not led to widespread equality as far as treatment by healthcare professionals but that European systems have reduced the barrier to access because of affordability (Ciasullo et al., 2020, 3-6). The system that was determined to be most effective was described as "a performance- and primary-care-oriented public system, which is dominated by public sector (tax dollars) financing and strictly regulates access to care."

6.4 Population Aging

Population aging is currently and will continue to cause an epidemiological transition in how services are administered and what specific services are most needed. This lack of adaptation has strained the delivery capacity of healthcare organizations and systems (ibid, 2020, 10).

6.5 Lack of a Living Wage

Adams and Neumark (2005, 178) researched living wage campaigns, focusing on failed or derailed initiatives. This applies to Louisiana, as much of the poverty is attributed to a lack of living wages in a variety of service and hospitality sectors, which are a large part of the state's tourism industry. Heavy lobbying by the restaurant industry has caused state politicians to continually vote against said increases despite evidence to its overall benefits to the state economy and in the reduction of inequality. Louisiana does not allow citizens to file a petition to get a law onto a state election ballot for a vote. Other listed reasons campaigns failed in other states were failed ballot initiatives in

which citizens voted against it or the law was passed but overturned by a judge, following a lawsuit. The authors found that the same problems, mainly having a decent quality of life with their current wages, among low-wage workers existed in the cities that passed and didn't pass living wage laws with political will being the biggest barrier (ibid. 179). The other finding was that cities where a living wage initiative failed, allowed them to estimate the effects more directly, by tracking the consequences of changes that accompany living wage campaigns. In some cases, when the living wage initiatives failed, it allowed unions more leeway to organize, thus taking a more indirect path to improving wages, at least in the specific sector (Adams and Neumark, 2005, 200).

6.6 Climate Change

Louisiana's location along the Gulf Coast puts it at risk for yearly hurricane damage. A hurricane is defined by the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or NASA, as a large, rotating storm that requires tropical conditions to form. A hurricane is characterized by strong winds, drenching rain, storm surge and sometimes tornadoes. Storm surge is defined as an abnormal rise in sea level during a storm. Hurricane season takes place from June 1st to November 30th every year. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, notes that while characteristics of a hurricane have stayed the same, climate change has caused conditions that allow them to be stronger. As the planet warms, there is more moisture in the air, leading to more intense rainfall (Colbert, 2022, 2-3). This moist air is drawn in by hurricanes, which require moist air and warm bodies of water to form. NOAA models show that while the number of hurricanes each year will stay the same, more will reach very intense levels because warming conditions allow it (Colbert, 2022, 5).

Another issue that became evident during the literature review was the widespread consensus that crop production is decreasing and will continue decreasing because of climate change. This includes the quantity and quality of crops, livestock and fisheries. Because of a lack of access, livestock currently are and will continue to be fed lower quality feeds. Pest and disease prevalence will increase because of habitat destruction and marine systems will continue to change because of warming of bodies of water and damage caused by overfishing of marine ecosystems. This will affect countries' ability to feed their own populations and eventually strain countries that import large quantities

of the food (Campbell et al., 2016, 37-39). For western countries, tackling food waste will be critical. Technological changes in transportation and food preservation and processing currently focus on the convenience for residents and not how to reduce transportation distances, which contributes to food waste. This would require changes on government and corporate levels (Campbell et al., 2016, 39-41).

7 Discussion

The information discovered in the literature review and the media coverage of the coronavirus were used to craft two future scenarios to provide projections of future outcomes in the state. This media coverage, which was mostly surface level coverage of social issues, or episodic news as opposed to thematic, was found not only across the media outlets used in the media review for the thesis, but also during the literature review. Articles that analyzed media coverage were found to lack in-depth coverage of social issues. This could have been caused by a variety of reasons. For both newspaper and the radio stations, paywalls or required subscriptions were removed for all news related to the coronavirus pandemic for over a year, starting at the beginning of 2020. This led to more articles that were shorter in nature. Examples include specific news not only from the two largest cities, Baton Rouge and New Orleans, but also separate articles on the same topics for their largest suburbs of Gonzales and Kenner. The pandemic being an evolving situation may have been another reason why articles were shorter. News may have been posted as soon as a journalist learned of it for the sake of sharing information quickly in a rapidly changing situation with a virus where only the basics were known.

Another issue is the steady decline in full-time news staff in both print and radio, which has been taking place across United States media outlets for about the past 25 years. This has been through a combination of layoffs for the sake of cost cutting, layoffs when newspapers are purchased by a larger company and consolidated as well as journalists leaving the industry because of the resulting overwork and historically low wages.

A final possible issue could be management or ownership encouraging their preferred view or priorities. As outlined in previous sections, the supposed invisible wall between editorial and ownership or management is not very strong and, in some instances, non-existent. Therefore, articles may have been shorter because while the pandemic had to be covered, there could have been a push for less detailed explanations of systemic issues that may implicate the owner or the journalists simply didn't have the time to do the research and present more details because of above mentioned structural issues in the journalism industry.

The research shows that the social issues plaguing Louisiana, while well known, in the main media outlets, the causes and solutions are not presented in detail. The main hindrance is a lack of political will, which remains in place because of lobbying by local business associations that would prefer to keep wages low for the sake of their profits. The lack of a living wage is propped up with social services such as Medicare, Medicaid and food stamps (or SNAP), which people working full-time require as their salary is not sufficient for an adequate quality of life as defined in the Methods and Materials section.

Social issues that were in existence before the pandemic in Louisiana included food insecurity and health disparities caused by the lack of access to healthy food. These were initially exacerbated by the pandemic, then later waned with the addition of federal government aid. Trends that were discovered included the disproportionate number of minority deaths, later determined to be caused by disproportionate health care provided based on levels of insurance and attention to care by medical professionals, which runs along racial lines. This may be tied to a history of depriving minority groups of access as well as dysfunctional systems which are used in hospital systems and by health insurance companies on a national level. The listed social issues are not specific to Louisiana but were explored in the context of how it affected Louisiana residents during the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

8 Limitations

Time Frame served as a limitation as a longer term media review would have provided more details about how the pandemic was covered in Louisiana over a longer time frame. But as noted, the short time frame was meant to provide a snapshot of the situation in a specific state. The goal was to explore, however briefly, how the local media covered events, including the state of Louisiana's social issues and policies toward said issues. While the literature found many instances of media reviews that focused on a specific country, everyone also focused on a specific social issue, whether it be food security or health disparities. None connected the two. The most common was the prevalence of food banks and food insecurity and their role in society as compared to the government and its policies.

Using a specific state and its overall social issues as the focus of the case study was not a limitation per se but in the literature review, there was not a large body of work where this angle was used. In the majority of the academic literature, a specific state was the focus but with one social issue or topic being explored in the review, without connecting it to other social issues. For example, Larrance, et.al., (2007), explored how internal displacement affected the health outcomes of residents in Louisiana and Mississippi. Casey, P., et al., (2005), looked at overall food insecurity in Louisiana, using anonymized medical data. None looked at media perception around the issues or how a lack of a living wage contributed to this. When the media review was conducted and framing was used, it was specific to the prevalence of food banks, over a period of years and how media coverage evolved.

Given that Iyengar presented sociological analyses that the media asserts a heavy influence on its viewership, I felt that this approach would warrant at least a cursory exploration. Therefore, while exploratory and rudimentary, the approach served as a starting point from a unique angle while also providing enough information for the production of scenarios.

9 Future Scenarios

The scenarios draw from information gathered during the literature and media review and were crafted using a political economy lens and presented via a PESTLE analysis. Political economy looks at the relationship between economic systems and political power and how they intersect when forming policies and laws. PESTLE is an abbreviation for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental and is an organizing tool for key issues and information.

The literature review provided a long-term view of systemic social issues in Louisiana, as well as information about attempts at reform and reasons for changes or not. The goal of the scenarios is to further explore possible future Louisiana state government policies, based on the trends uncovered during the literature and media review, given the heavy influence of media based on sociological analyses by Iyengar (1990).

The scenarios are entitled “Laissez-faire: It’s All Connected,” and “A More Perfect Union: Tokyo Drift.”

The Laissez-faire scenario takes place about 30 years in the future, or around 2052. It is a French term meaning “business as usual,” which was pulled from Louisiana’s time as a French colony, called New France, from 1682 to 1762. This scenario covers possible outcomes for Louisiana with no changes to current policies. The current state of Louisiana comprises about 51,885 square miles and is quite rural. The Louisiana Territory, as part of New France, was about 828,000 square miles or all land in the contiguous United States that comprised the Mississippi River basin. In modern times, this area includes the states of Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama. Because of its large size, this area was never heavily developed by France and was considered a “Wild West” of sorts during this time. France never committed more than 1,000 soldiers to the colony and the majority of the population consisted of 35,000 Native Americans from various tribes. But because of the size, it still brought in wealth and raw materials, mostly through trading posts, which were fortified around any settlements that developed within the vast area. But, in general, there was very little regulation over such a large territory by its colonial power, France, which was more than 4,800 miles away. So if wealth in the form of goods still flowed to the colonial power, it was “business as usual.”

“A More Perfect Union” scenario takes place in the year 2052. It is a phrase from the preamble of the United States Constitution. The full sentence states “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” The U.S. Constitution is usually taught in high school, where students are between the ages of 14 and 18 years old. A common assignment is to have students read the preamble and interpret what they think the original writers meant. In the case of the thesis authors' American History class, it was assigned after contextualizing the socio-economic status and positions of the original writers. This particular field of history as an academic study is called Historiography, which is the study of the writing of history and of written histories. The goal was to explore not only what the original writers may have been thinking, but how that affected the people under this new constitution and its lasting effects in the present day. In the case of the signers of the Constitution, the vast majority owned an average of 300 enslaved human beings. In 1787, the year the Constitution was signed, you were considered upper middle class if you owned about 20 enslaved people. Therefore, the majority of the signers of The U.S. Constitution would have been part of the wealthiest class of people in the newly minted country. This scenario covers possible outcomes for Louisiana from the standpoint that the preamble is stating that to be a prosperous country, we should do what is necessary to “promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” In other words, if the goal was to ensure quality of life for all citizens and residents of the United States from a current political standpoint and at a rapid pace through political and economic policies, hence Tokyo Drift. In American political history, sometimes there is a disconnect between politicians and the people they represent as in modern times, many politicians tend to be generationally wealthy. One of those disconnects being that liberal and conservative politicians constantly argue for gradual changes to laws. In contrast, economists have said the need for drastic changes to laws and policies is required to prevent further large-scale economic issues and to prevent the loss of life due to slower change or complete inaction. For Louisiana, the main two dangers are lack of proper hurricane mitigation and food security.

9.1 Laissez-faire: It's All Connected

The "Laissez-faire: It's All Connected" scenario covers possible outcomes for Louisiana with no changes in current policies. While the scenario is broken down through PESTLE topics, the overlap of these issues quickly becomes evident.

In the year 2037, Louisiana is seen to be at a tipping point economically and politically. Extensive gerrymandering of voting districts brings another round of ultra conservative politicians to the state legislature, resulting in the following scenario.

9.1.1 Political

The Louisiana legislature, or state parliament, declines again to raise the minimum wage to a living wage or make regulatory changes that mandate that large business owners pay a fair amount into the state unemployment fund. This means that it remains underfunded during the inevitable hurricane seasons that disrupt Louisiana's large tourism sector and leave thousands of citizens without an adequate safety net while they are unable to work. Because they were also not being paid a living wage, very few have adequate savings in reserve to use during these hurricane seasons, which will continue to increase in severity. The people who benefit the most from being paid a living wage are people in the lowest socioeconomic status. Louisiana's large tourism industry consists of many of these service workers such as waiters and waitresses, restaurant cooks, hotel staff such as cleaners and bellhops, rideshare drivers and food delivery services.

On a national level, the U.S. Congress again refuses to renew a Child Tax Credit. The initial trial year was in 2021. As part of the American Rescue Plan, parents would receive monthly payments, based on income submitted through past tax returns and the dependents, or children and disabled family members. It lowered the income thresholds to make more families eligible. This had excluded about one-third of U.S. children, mostly from Black and Hispanic households. The expansion helped an estimated 61.2 million children and child poverty and food insecurity dropped about 30%, putting it at the lowest in decades. It was not renewed the next year, but many democratic congress members have continued trying to bring the bill back up with no avail because of the

opposition of the republican majority in Congress. The United States remained the only “developed” country with high rates of childhood food insecurity.

Child hunger, which Louisiana has one of the highest rates of in the United States, increases as well as low wage workers' reliance on government assistance in the form of food stamps and rental assistance. Both of these programs are historically underfunded. This means the monthly allotments tend to be based on the estimated number of applicants for the fiscal year and not the realistic amount of assistance a family may need. The digital divide continues. United States President Joe Biden’s Investing in America Act, passed at the beginning of 2023, allocated \$40 billion USD to pay for the installment of infrastructure for high-speed internet for poorer families and in the most rural areas of the United States. When the money is distributed to the various states, Republican politicians constantly block the money going to poorer or rural districts in their state. The vast majority of these districts consist of mostly non-white residents, continuing the historical trend of deliberately blocking infrastructure funding.

9.1.2 Economic

The state government declining to raise the minimum wage to a living wage and allowing the state unemployment fund to remain underfunded, keeps the tax base low, while being burdened with full time workers who also need food stamps or subsidized housing. Tax base is the term for the amount of income and sales tax a state collects to use as its budget. Lower wages mean less income and less money to spend on goods and services that bring in sales taxes. People using food stamps do not pay sales tax. This leaves less money for natural disaster mitigation such as updating and repairing pump stations, maintaining canals to divert flood water, updated sewer systems to handle the increased flow and reclaiming coastal areas lost to coastal erosion. This, along with the U.S. Congress’ refusal to renew a Child Tax Credit trial, child hunger, which Louisiana has one of the highest rates of, continues to increase. It also increases low wage workers' reliance on government assistance in the form of food stamps and rental assistance as the year with the child credit had allowed them to independently purchase healthy food and lowered both the state and national rate of childhood food insecurity to its lowest in decades.

9.1.3 Social

The state government declining to raise the minimum wage to a living wage and allowing the state unemployment fund to remain underfunded further fuels poverty. The people who benefit the most from being paid a living wage are people of the lowest socioeconomic status. Louisiana's large tourism industry consists of many of these service workers such as waiters and waitresses, restaurant cooks, hotel staff such as cleaners and bellhops, rideshare drivers and food delivery services. Lack of being paid a living wage causes a plethora of problems, the two main issues being finding affordable housing and being able to afford to buy healthy food. This leads to the underpaid person, and their direct family, to be more socially excluded as they live in poorer, more crime ridden areas, which may also be food deserts and have poorly funded schools. Buying more calorie dense foods, which are cheaper but not healthier, leads to more health problems for those in poverty. Common chronic illnesses such as diabetes and obesity remain high. Historically, this lack of funding or withholding funding has been deliberate and would continue in this scenario. With state and federal funding being drained by welfare, this leaves less money for natural disaster mitigation, causing more flood and wind damage and more internal displacement of residents. These are usually the poorest residents.

9.1.4 Technological

The digital divide continues in rural or poorer areas of the United States. The digital divide is the gap in broadband internet access or any internet connection between poorer and more affluent Americans. This includes poorer people not owning a smartphone with internet access, a tablet, laptop or personal home computer. Typically, internet companies will decline to lay broadband cables or offer any internet connection in rural or poorer areas or offer much slower internet speed options in these areas. United States president Joe Biden's Investing in America Act, passed at the beginning of 2023, allocated \$40 billion USD to pay for the installment of the infrastructure for high-speed internet in rural and poorer urban areas. Conservative politicians have since actively tried to block any of the money going to poorer, non-white neighborhoods or areas of their states. It is explicitly written that the \$40 billion USD is for bridging the digital divide. A continuation of this, leads to the children of poorer parents unable to fully take advantage of improving their education as schools now require students to have laptops

and most assignments are accessed through Moodle-like online portals. Students suffering under the digital divide will only be able to access their assignments and send them in while at school as they would not have a laptop or tablet and no internet access while at home. This would also prevent parents from contacting teachers via email or a teacher's assistant via live chat in a timely manner.

9.1.5 Legal

Police continued to be heavily funded, with no policy or behavioral reform. This continues over policing of minority neighborhoods and extrajudicial killings of minority residents by police. Funding for proper resources such as adequate infrastructure and health and social services, which economists and sociologists have determined is the true way to reduce crime, continue to be withheld from these areas. Poorer schools continue to have metal detectors and a heavy police presence, continuing the school to prison pipeline mainly for minority children.

9.1.6 Environmental

Continued corporate welfare leaves less money for natural disaster mitigation, contributing to more coastal erosion. Tourism and the connected service industry will continue to be regularly disrupted by hurricanes, which are increasing in severity due to climate change. As of 2023, the government agency NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, estimates Louisiana is losing the equivalent of up to one football field per hour of marshes, swamps, and barrier islands along its coast. This would continue, causing widespread forced migration of the state's population. The coastal areas, when protected, serve as breakers for hurricanes moving toward land, reducing their severity.

9.2 A More Perfect Union: Tokyo Drift

The "More Perfect Union: Tokyo Drift" scenario covers possible outcomes for Louisiana from the standpoint that the preamble of the United States Constitution, stating that to be a prosperous country, we should do whatever is necessary to "ensure domestic Tranquility, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." This would mean that all policies are based on specific studies or facts and politicians are not able to be influenced by corporate financing in the form

of political donations and lobbying, which have been described as legal bribes. It does factor in that the majority of American politicians come from generationally wealthy families and suffer from some disconnect from the working class citizens they are elected to represent.

In the year 2037, Louisiana has seen an increase in union membership, each of which lobby their state politicians to enact more liberal policies such as a living wage, expanded and cheap or free public transportation and proper funding for the state unemployment fund. While some change their political stances, this also leads to more liberal candidates running for state office and winning, creating the following scenario.

9.2.1 Political

The 2052 Louisiana legislative elections bring in a large number of liberal state senators, with them making up 63% of the legislature. Having more than 60% of a certain party, on the state or national level is called a super majority. This brings in large scale passing of laws to shift funding or increase funding to a variety of state departments and the social programs they manage. Specific examples would include requiring business owners to pay into the state unemployment fund at a percentage based on calculations of possible need. The size of the business and their yearly gross income is also factored into this calculated amount. In the case of Louisiana, these numbers are already available as the state legislature has an independent board called the Revenue Estimating Conference. It is made up of a group of independent accountants and economists who prepare estimates of tax dollars to be received by the state general fund and suggest allotments of funds for the current and next fiscal years. This is already used in many other instances to determine what other taxes would create a surplus or cause deficits at their current levels. State senators follow the Revenue Estimating Conference suggestion and raise the minimum wage from the current \$7.25/hour to their suggested \$11.33/hour for a single person. This is done gradually over a four year period, with it increasing by 25% every year. By 2057, when it reaches \$11.33/hour, inflation will have moved the accurate living way up to about \$12.08/hour. The state legislature amends the state constitution to require an evaluation of the state minimum wage every five years and that it automatically be adjusted accordingly. After this, it enacts laws that make it more difficult to amend the constitution. Given the extensive research and examples in many

cities of the benefits of a living wage, this change would be key to economic stability of the entire state economy. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act. This was a labor and consumer rights law which authorized the president to regulate industries wages and prices to stimulate economic recovery. It also established the Public Works Administration, a national public works program. In his speech, he said that no business that should exist if it doesn't pay its workers a living wage and went on to define that as pay that allows for a person to live on more than a bare subsistence level.

9.2.2 Economic

The state legislature passes new laws requiring businesses to pay their employees a living wage and to pay into the state employment fund at rates based on independent economic analysis by the Revenue Estimating Conference. While passed by the very liberal 2052 state legislature, the law does not go into effect for almost seven years as businesses and restaurant associations filed class action lawsuits that were later thrown out by the United States Supreme. During the process of the lawsuits working its way to the Supreme Court, the state legislature put the two requirements up for a popular vote by Louisiana residents, who voted overwhelmingly for the changes. By the time it reaches the Supreme Court, they decline to hear or rule on the case as it is no longer a matter of constitutionality when passed by a majority of state citizens. After a few years in effect, the state finds itself with an unprecedented surplus as the number of residents working full-time but also requiring food stamps and rental assistance steadily declines. The residents do still use Medicare or Medicaid, federally funded health insurance, which is administered by states as businesses with under a certain number of employees are not required to provide healthcare. Businesses who sued find themselves making record profits, as paying employees a living wage and them having access to paid sick leave decreases their employee turnover, previously one of the largest business costs. This severely decreases "corporate welfare," a term used for when full-time workers who are not paid a living wage also require government assistance such as food stamps and rental assistance vouchers. The term means letting the government help citizens pay for food and housing instead of the companies paying a wage that would allow them to independently afford healthy food and housing. The money the companies keep when not paying a living wage is considered corporate welfare.

9.2.3 Social

Finding the state coffers with an unprecedented surplus, state legislatures begin to reallocate the funds to renovating or rebuilding schools with the latest technology, as well as allowing every student to have a take home laptop and mobile hotspot if needed during each school year. The long standing issue of not putting air conditioning in school buses, despite Louisiana regularly having 20°C temperatures in the winter, is also corrected. Buses that can be retrofitted, have air conditioning added and buses that have been used well past their end-of-life date are taken out of commission and replaced with battery-powered buses. The transition is partially paid for with state budget surpluses and through federal environmental grants.

Poorer neighborhoods with high crime have new community centers built for after school programs for children and vacant lots are turned into community gardens with classes during unconventional hours for people who work jobs with unconventional hours.

9.2.4 Technological

The widespread availability of internet access bridges the digital divide, allowing historically poorer and neglected schools to raise test scores to levels of many private schools throughout Louisiana. Parents begin a reverse of pulling kids from public schools for private schools, further increasing public school funding as it is based on student population.

9.2.5 Legal

Police reform takes place in the form of extensive budget cuts based on over 50 years of research showing that the majority of U.S. police departments do not prevent most crimes and do not solve the majority of violent crime. The money, which is in the tens of millions even for small departments, is funneled into social programs such as after school programs and the building and staffing of neighborhood community centers. The state department of social services hires more people specifically with degrees or training in child psychology, addiction recovery or mental illness specialties who would be sent instead of police for situations with a person having a mental episode.

The most rural areas follow a slower trajectory of improvement as some areas still lacked sewer and water systems. In Louisiana, this is the case with rural areas and for some Native American reservations. As the state finally is allocating money to build and maintain basic services, those are determined to be necessary to complete before improving access to the internet and building other community assets, such as community centers and libraries.

9.2.6 Environmental

It was decided that even in the positive scenario, extensive positive climate change action would not be included as climate researchers have determined it's impossible, as of Oct 2023, to meet the two degree warming limit because of governments' refusal to make the needed large scale changes. The United Nations report showed that the world would reach between 2.5 and 2.9 degrees of warming sometime this century and this would be unavoidable even if countries carried out their current emissions-reduction pledges,

Extra funding being available through surpluses from a reduction in welfare recipients and police budgets are reallocated to coastal erosion prevention, updating or fully replacing pumping stations and sewer systems. Over a decade, this reduces the loss of coastal lands from one football field an hour to about one football field every month. The state government uses the time to hold community meetings to explain the eventual need for relocation and to learn about residents' preferred options for relocating as it will eventually be inevitable.

10 Conclusion

This thesis conducted a media review of the first three months of the year 2020, using the largest local newspapers and radio stations as the source material. The focus of the media review was coverage of Louisiana social issues, how they are connected and how the people suffering under these issues were affected by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. This was supplemented by a literature review to determine the prevalent social issues in Louisiana. The issues include food insecurity, climate change, obesity, lack of a living wage and chronic illnesses such as diabetes. The media review found cursory and surface level coverage of the most common social issues.

The most unexpected insight of the literature review was the information about the decline in the quality of crop production. In the past 20 years, farming associations have independently started to explore how to use fewer synthetic fertilizers. Agricultural experts have pushed for a reduction of the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers as the runoff has been the cause of large algae blooms in the Gulf of Mexico, causing large fish die-offs and heavily affecting the state's fishing industry.

From the information gained from the literature and media review, two scenarios were created to speculate potential futures for Louisiana, using the PESTLE table as an organizing tool. "Laissez-faire: It's All Connected" scenario explored Louisiana 30 years in the future if it were to continue with its current policies, which would see an increase in economic and social inequality as well as infrastructure degradation because of a failure to properly address climate change. The "More Perfect Union: Tokyo Drift" scenario used the same time frame, but shows policymaking being created based on evidence. As the pandemic spread, politicians such as Pramila Jayapal, who have espoused a "More Perfect Union" style government gained prominence and like-minded candidates began campaigning for office. The next round of federal and local U.S. elections is November 2024.

The hope for this thesis was to explore the complexities of interacting socio-economic issues and bring them together to speculate on the future of the state of Louisiana. Future research could be a long-term look, over the next 10-20 years since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic with a focus on how media covered a variety of topics: food

banks and food security, healthcare access and quality, government policies that contribute to or decrease social issues during the coronavirus and how that could shape the future of Louisiana.

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