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ABSTRACT

Rural development in Alberta is a long-standing challenge, with local communities and economies often stuck between economic cycles, fiscal largesse from the Provincial Government, and a historical pattern of conservative leadership that seeks to leave the private sector unimpeded. As a result, many rural communities now face significant economic, social, political, and ecological challenges that, while not unique to Alberta, are marked by only modest innovation and a tendency to return to previous developmental initiatives. This paper is focused upon identifying the common challenges facing municipal government in the province, but also accounting for the inertial dynamics within municipal politics. Drawing from qualitative data collected from rural municipalities, it seeks to situate contemporary adaptive economic strategies and initiatives within the dominant public ideology of the province. This paper argues that while reform initiatives undertaken in the province broadly align with pragmatic municipalism as a necessary response to decades of neoliberal austerity and inertia, that pragmatism is tempered by a provincial rationality that limits, rather than enhances, the likelihood of meaningful change. This rationality, and its effects, are explained through four fallacies: home rule, agency, the Golden Age, and homogeneity.

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