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Nuts & Bolts—Inside a Democratic campaign: Knowing less than nothing about rural America (/stories/2022/10/23/2130269/-Nuts-amp-Bolts-Inside-a-Democratic-campaign-Knowing-less-than-nothing-about-rural-America)



Christopher Reeves (/users/christopher reeves) for *Daily Kos* (/groups/main)
Daily Kos Staff

2022/10/23 · 17:00

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Welcome to *Nuts & Bolts*, a guide to Democratic campaigns. I've helped write this series for years, using information from campaign managers, finance directors, field directors, trainers, and staff, responding to questions from Daily Kos Community and Staff members, and addressing issues that are sent to me via kosmail through Daily Kos.

Recently, the *Washington Post* ran an analysis on why rural voters trend Republican (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/10/20/midterms-rural-urban-divide-representation/>?

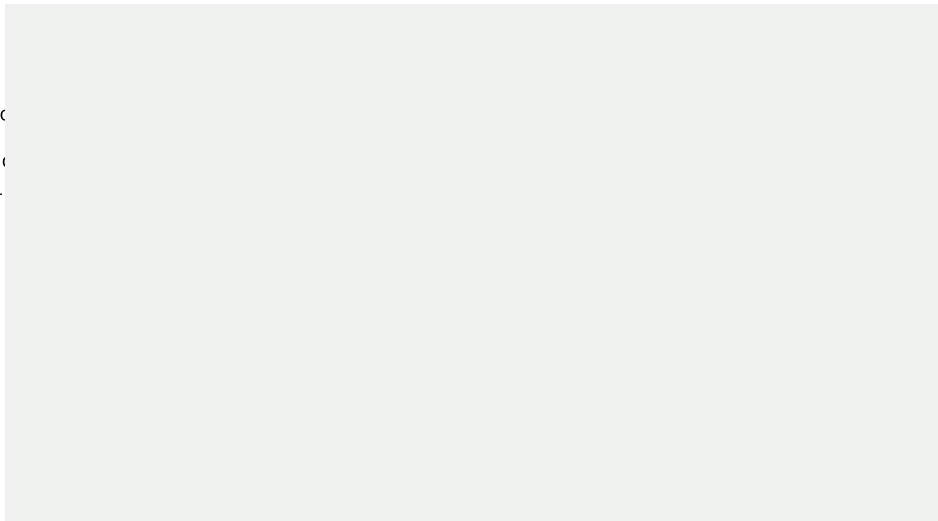
utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=wp_monkeycage). Part of their assessment is that rural voters believe that they are overlooked, receive fewer benefits, and are taken advantage of, and that because of these factors, they turn further and further to the Republican party, which plants this message and brings those voters into the fold. Over the last several years, I've written about rural organizing efforts in Kansas, Utah, Texas, and elsewhere that face trying to hit turnout numbers in counties where the goal is not to win that county or district but to contain the bleeding. If a county can be held at a 60/40 margin instead of an 80/20, Republicans simply could not survive the incoming votes from metro communities. Reading The Washington Post analysis, however, we need to recognize that when someone who has not lived in, or organized within rural communities makes claims about what drives rural voting, monumental mistakes can be made that lead to conclusions that can best be summed up with a shoulder shrug. So, how, exactly, can we talk to rural voters as we move forward?

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Democratic voters in rural communities are some of your most loyal supporters

During the recent Vote No campaign in Kansas, I knew things would be an incredible night the moment small counties began to come in. As these small county results came in it was obvious that Democratic voters had turned out. They had turned out in one of the most difficult elections for their community I can remember. I sat at a county fair in Atchison, Kansas, where the number of voters was relatively small, and women sat in the stands with “Vote No” signs below them. These were farmers, ranchers, and women who wore their beliefs out in public. These, in many cases, are the most loyal Democratic voters we will ever have.

I hate to say this, but it is relatively easy to vote Democratic in a city or metro where you will rarely face pushback from someone who can directly confront you. In a rural community the pushback can be immediate and not at all friendly. You wear your politics on your sleeve. So those voters who back you? They will go out and get you every vote possible they can bring to the polls. That doesn't mean you will win their county, it just means that if you provide them with targets that are possible, and candidates who can inspire, they will work as hard as any campaign field director can ask.

We also make the mistake of assuming all rural communities are white-only. This is not true. More than 24% of rural communities are non-white (<https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/growing-racial-diversity-in-rural-america>), and they are voters we need in order to win elections.

The big mistake the Washington Post and most outsiders make

In their article, the Washington Post makes this statement:

Political scientist Katherine Cramer defines rural resentment (https://www.amazon.com/Politics-Resentment-Consciousness-Wisconsin-American-ebook/dp/B01BWMDZS8/ref=sr_1_1?crid=4B141KXHWPIC&keywords=The+Politics+of+Resentment+Rural+Consciousness+in+Wisconsin+and+the+Rise+of+Scott+Walker+Katherine+J.+Cramer&qid=1666252885&qu=eyJxc2MiOilwLjc3IiwicXNhIjoic2wMCIsInFzcCI6IjAuMDAifQ%3D%3D&prefix=the+politics+of+resentment+rural+consciousness+in+wisconsin+and+the+rise+of+scott+walker+katherine+j.+cramer%2Caps%2C200&sr=8-1) as focused on three things. First concerns redistribution, or the belief that rural areas don't receive their fair share of government resources and benefits. Second is representation, or the perception that most politicians ignore rural residents. And third, a sense of being culturally overlooked, that rural lifestyles and cultures don't get the same respect as those of urban and suburban communities.

There is a mistake made within this analysis that can only be made by someone who has lived in and still is directly connected to rural communities. When we look only from the outside in, the assessment is to believe that "rural resentment" actually is about any of these factors. When it comes to practice, rural resentment does not look anything like this, and you can tell it when you look at state legislatures. When you ask rural communities who overwhelmingly elect Republican state legislatures, often in Republican majority state governments, they don't say they receive poor representation. In fact, even though Republican leadership in their state most often comes out of the metros because of caucus voter strength to get them that position, a Republican speaker of the house in any midwestern state is more than welcome in almost any rural farm district. So, do the rural Republicans feel as though they are not being represented? In my experience, in numerous states, I seldom hear people say they are not represented. Instead, they often blame other states, not their own. I like my legislator, I just don't like yours.

How have Republicans encouraged this thought process?

Republicans have used a mix of racism, stigma, and strawmen to create villains to blame for all of your problems. Did your crop fail to come in? Blame Nancy Pelosi. You hear that more people in the city are getting welfare, and you attack them, even if it means that their funds come right back to American farms who need that bill to pass, and need those funds to survive. Republicans use this by framing cities and metros in ways that are often code words for a more racist or more secular community, and one they feel disconnected from, and, therefore, unwilling to want to help.

Fox News makes a living using statements meant to confuse their own viewers into feeling as though major cities are burned to the ground and run as though they are post-apocalyptic nightmare worlds. I know of a few places that, if I asked, I might be able to find more than a few people that would tell me every night in Portland antifa burns buildings and gets high while keeping police officers locked into bunkers out of fear. There is almost no reasonable Democratic feedback that says something like: "Thank you to XYZ major city for being one of the top consumers of American poultry. Buy American, our farmers thank you." We need reminder campaigns every day with our friends that continue the dialogue that we are all in this together. Even during a direct campaign, we can point out successes by identifying how well-supported our rural areas are by the consumption of a product that comes through urban areas.

Rural communities have reasons to complain; they lose hospitals and resources, often because Republicans refuse to expand Medicaid or provide infrastructure improvements. Before we go on the attack, we can build the discussion by finding common ground.

I have seen campaigns accomplish exactly this by going into communities and paying attention and listening. The rural-urban divide exists most often through the lens of television producers who want it to exist. It can be overcome by supporting the people who live there, and when we recognize the power of their support, we can win a lot of statewide races that are otherwise off the table.

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greblos (/users/greblos)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:12:37 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793810#comment_84793810)

Yeah.

“Working Class” should not be code for white. But it tends to be used as a synonym for uneducated white male.

“Rural” should not be code for white. It also tends to be used as a synonym for uneducated white male, and sometimes uneducated white female.

Many of our voters are either or both working class and rural. No, I have an idea how to get them all to vote. The methods that work in cities don't scale to large distance between homes or the kind of irregular living conditions migrant workers, or say folks who commute into the city, live in their car during the week for their service job and return to their rural home face.

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Nonlinear (/users/nonlinear) ▶ greblos

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:23:12 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794261#comment_84794261)

Under 35 the majority of the working class are non-white. In some rural regions this is glaringly obvious. Visit a meat processing plant. It would be rare to see a white face on the floor.

There are no unread comments at this time.

In rural areas over the last 30 years the kind of work the working class do has also changed. Montana is typical. Service jobs far out number mining, forestry, and manufacturing.

In ranching and farming the areas I know best my workers are typical. We speak Spanish among ourselves. I don't employ seasonal workers and that is unusual but I am guessing Spanish is the majority language on many agricultural operations in the United States.

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sfinx (/users/sfinx)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:14:03 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793817#comment_84793817)

This is so important. Thank you for all your posts on this topic. I have family in rural areas of several different states, and what you say rings true to me.

(It seems to me like something is not right with the sentence immediately following the block quotation. Maybe check it?)

↩ Reply

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Christopher Reeves (/users/christopher reeves) AUTHOR ▶ sfinx

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:44:32 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793995#comment_84793995)

Will check. Probably a me error !

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Christopher Reeves (/users/christopher reeves) AUTHOR ▶ sfinx

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:51:16 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794042#comment_84794042)

I may be having brain fry. Do you mean this: In their article, the Washington Post makes this statement:

?? Let me know I'm trying to think of the error here

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Nonlinear (/users/nonlinear) ▶ Christopher Reeves AUTHOR

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:52:29 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794469#comment_84794469)

There is a mistake made within this analysis that can only be made by someone who has lived in and still is directly connected to rural communities.

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RainJustRain (/users/rainjustrain) ▶ Christopher Reeves AUTHOR

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:36:11 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795053#comment_84795053)

There are no unread comments at this time.

I noticed the problem that Nonlinear mentions, too. There is a grey block quotation after the sentence you mention in your comment, Chris. The sentence that you wrote immediately following the grey block is the problem. I think the meaning is reversed.

I'm nit picking because the rural issue baffles me.

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cminus (/users/cminus) ▶ Christopher Reeves AUTHOR

Oct 23, 2022 at 10:40:30 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795432#comment_84795432)

Nonlinear has put the finger on the spot — to put it more bluntly, I think a NOT is missing, as in: “someone who has NOT lived in ...” (and the commenter who said “meaning is reversed” had that in mind, too, I suspect). Other than that, excellent diary! I am reminded of Danica Roem’s campaign, unseating some long term incumbent — she talked potholes and constituent service. But your point about messaging to counter the demonization of cities is a bigger one, you are right that this is an area where no D campaigns have a primary interest, so it gets neglected.

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Major Kong (/users/major kong)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:14:21 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793819#comment_84793819)

“Fox News makes a living using statements meant to confuse their own viewers into feeling as though major cities are burned to the ground and run as though they are post-apocalyptic nightmare worlds.”

Imagine my surprise on my last Portland layover when I realized it wasn't the post-apocalyptic Mad Max dystopia I was promised.

Apparently I dressed like this for nothing. Not that anyone in Portland seemed to notice.



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There are no unread comments at this time.



RainJustRain (/users/rainjustrain) ▶ Major Kong

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:44:58 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795080#comment_84795080)

I'm sorry we disappointed you.

Seriously, the number of shootings has gone waay up here in east Portland, and the homeless camps are pretty damn horrible. Did you go along Marine Drive then south on 33rd? Whether the trash is from the RVs parked along 33rd or from the not-homeless population taking advantage and dumping garbage and construction trash, the trash piles were huge, and the RVs dystopian, indeed. It might have gotten cleaned up recently. I think the crime and urban camps in Portland might cost us (D's) the Governor's office.

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RainJustRain (/users/rainjustrain) ▶ RainJustRain

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:46:15 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795088#comment_84795088)

PS — You look very nice.

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RainJustRain (/users/rainjustrain) ▶ RainJustRain

Oct 23, 2022 at 09:07:11 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795159#comment_84795159)

Tho' a little up-market for my neighborhood.

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Chibsy (/users/chibsy) ▶ RainJustRain

Oct 23, 2022 at 09:09:04 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795166#comment_84795166)

Pretty sure a Republican governor won't have any solutions for the problems you cited. Unless moving it to someone else's neighborhood or even state is a solution. That probably is an answer for a Republican voter but shouldn't be for us. I'd like to think we'd engage in finding real answers to problems.

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EngineerScotty (/users/engineerscotty)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:18:15 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793833#comment_84793833)

While this is an important issue... it does beg a question:

The complaint seems to be about (largely urban) Democratic activists being ignorant of, or even contemptuous of, rural views, positions, and issues.

But what of the other direction? The example of "Portland burning to the ground every night" is given. This is of course utter nonsense on stilts. But there it is—for some reason, rural communities regard cities with far more contempt and hostility, I think than the other direction, for many reasons that you cite: Racism. Anti-intellectualism. Religion and sexuality. The ignorance there is profound, and willful.

Much has to do with our media, of course—the radio, still a common source of information and entertainment in those parts of the country where high-speed Internet may be less available, is these days mostly a right-wing sewer.

And there are a few specific policy (as opposed to cultural) issues that are problematic for Democrats (I'm not suggesting we change these, but listing them is useful). "Gun control" is endlessly demagogued, but firearms are important and useful tools for rural residents (hunting, pest control), whereas in the cities they are mainly used against weapons against other people. And many rural economies thrive on resource extraction, and for that reason environmentalism is perceived as a threat. And people tend to prioritize more immediate threats over distant future ones, so "I need to put food on the table" naturally gets treated as more important than "global warming may turn this fine farmland into a desert", and that's even assuming someone believes in the science behind global warming.

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bryyce (/users/bryyce) ▶ EngineerScotty

Oct 23, 2022 at 07:23:05 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794711#comment_84794711)

I grew up in a town on the suburb/rural ring around Portland. Our town's high school included kids from a rural area some distance from us. What struck me the most was how much more religious the rural kids were, and it sometimes popped up as a distrust of The City as a corrupting influence.

I've wondered about the "urban democrats don't understand rural folks' views, positions, and issues" concern. I imagine it must be something like underfunded hospitals, or legislation relating to farm ownership, or thus and such. But digging into the studies, interviews, and documentaries, invariably the main resentments expressed are social issues — LGBTQ+ fears, abortion, BLM protests, homelessness, woke entertainment, immigration, CRT in schools — that don't directly affect them in any way shape or form. Yet they harbor a lot of resentment and distrust to democratic governance. I can't help but hear it echoing back to my schoolmates' general distrust of "decadent city-folk" with their rock and roll and dungeons and dragons and men wearing earrings!

So, I kind of wonder if their problem is less about democratic candidates not delivering on their specific policy needs, and more about this religion-based cultural distrust of urbanism in general.

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Nonlinear (/users/nonlinear) ▶ bryce

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:23:55 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795006#comment_84795006)

The answer to your last question depends on where in rural America you are and who you are talking to. Rural America is not monolithic. The difference between living in Havre and Whitefish in Montana is astonishing. From Montana to Appalachian Kentucky is like visiting two separate countries. There is no one size fits all “rural America”.

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Berkeley Fred (/users/berkeley fred) ▶ EngineerScotty

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:58:30 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795125#comment_84795125)

Thanks to explicit and implicit biases in the U.S. constitution, rural / low-population states and parts of states have disproportionate political power — no need to rehash how here. Therefore, in most parts of the country Republicans can more easily ignore/vilify urban voters without hurting their chances. And while we are the majority overall, because it is divided unequally in different states, and within states, our coalition is harder to harness and hold together. And I haven't even started discussing the role of race.

The federal government is the greatest force for wealth redistribution in the country, which is why rich Republicans of all stripes hate it so much. Ironically, if we really ran our domestic economic policy the way they fantasize, whole swaths of Red America would be much worse off economically.

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Chinton (/users/chinton)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:23:47 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793856#comment_84793856)

Sometime ago when a Goldy was still at The Stranger (<https://www.thestranger.com/slog>) or maybe before then when he as active at HorsesAss (<http://horsesass.org/>) he created a spread sheet that detail how tax dollars were raised and distributed across the state. It was the definitive answer to this notion that our rural tax dollars paid for the floating bridge in Downtown Seattle when of course most of the time cities pay for the rural investments made by government.

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Berkeley Fred (/users/berkeley fred) ▶ Chinton

Oct 23, 2022 at 09:05:12 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795151#comment_84795151)

“From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.”

There's a reason rich people everywhere hate and fear Marx so much! But if rural Americans are so invested in the GOP because they really want pure unadulterated capitalism...

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• **Himmy2018 (/users/himmy2018)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:28:15 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793882#comment_84793882)

Most of these rural towns are shit holes, run by Rethuglicans for decades. A lot of corruption, short-sited funding priorities and let's face it, the idiot city manager probably cannot event spell federal grant. #1 argument should be, what in the hell do you have to lose with a Democrat on your side?

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• **Shishkabugs (/users/shishkabugs) ▶ Himmy2018**

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:07:48 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794166#comment_84794166)

Oh Himmy, the irony of your misspelling in the sentence denigrating the spelling ability of rural voters... **There are no unread comments at this time.**

The reason those rural towns look like shit holes is because they are economically dead. There has been an out migration from rural to urban areas for 100 years. Instead of taking a horse and wagon 4 miles to town for supplies, rural residents drive 20+ miles to the closest regional hub. It has nothing to do with the abilities or politics of local town councils.

As to what they have to lose by electing Democrats? Well, Democrats in California are trying to legislate how to raise animals. And every time agriculture comes up in an online forum, commenters are crying about how farmers are ruining the land and killing the climate with cattle.

Farmers and ranchers are the most influential environmentalists on the planet. If we got rid of our domestic ruminants, wild ruminants would just take their place.

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• **bgblcklab1 (/users/bgblcklab1) ▶ Himmy2018**

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:32:24 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794318#comment_84794318)

And you just illustrated the problem perfectly. You are the problem. Maybe you should buy a clue.

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• **TexasTom (/users/texastom) ▶ Himmy2018**

Oct 23, 2022 at 09:24:26 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795219#comment_84795219)

When you dismiss folks as living in "shit holes", my guess is that you'll never even get to your #1 argument, as you've already alienated the target voters.

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• **sierramimi (/users/sierramimi) ▶ TexasTom**



Oct 23, 2022 at 11:01:23 PM
(/comments/2130269/84795483#comment_84795483)

I can't tell you how many times I've heard the terms ignorant hick and rube aimed at the local service industry employees while dining in local fine dining locales and resorts from tourists. I am a local. My partner is a local. I'm a retired engineer and he is an energy economist, a graduate of the London School of Economics, a Phd. We don't say a word because we need your tourists dollars for our communities. This is personal and most of our tourists are liberal Bay Area folks. Knock off YOUR bigotry and the folks in the Sierras might rejoin you politically.

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sierramimi (/users/sierramimi) ▶ sierramimi

Oct 23, 2022 at 11:04:48 PM
(/comments/2130269/84795493#comment_84795493)

This is a comment in total agreement with you folks that are offended by the 'shithole' comment.

There are no unread comments at this time



Truffle2022 (/users/truffle2022)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:30:38 PM
(/comments/2130269/84793898#comment_84793898)

Jessica Piper is a rural, progressive Democrat running for state representative in Missouri. Here is the link to her page:

jessicapiperformissouri.com

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PrahaPartizan (/users/prahapartizan)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:31:03 PM
(/comments/2130269/84793899#comment_84793899)

The reason that rural voters don't understand the benevolence of Democrats is that, when Democrats get put in charge, the Democrats don't savage the programs which rural voters rely on so much that it has become welfare. Just think about some programs managed through the Department of Agriculture. The US government funds farms supports because it values keeping a steady supply of food inside some semblance of a price balance provided by a variety of suppliers. Part of that effort also involves trying to keep some floor under the least advantaged in our society by providing direct funding for their buying food, as with the SNAP program. The Republicans get into office and among the first things they did was cut SNAP benefits and eligibility. Of course that didn't hurt rural voters so much as urban voters, but it also didn't cut expenditures on food support programs which actually went up. So, the US treasury got plundered to support rural voters and urban voters got squat. If the Democrats would learn that you need to show why rural voters should be voting for Democratic candidates because otherwise that welfare for rural voters was going to go away, it might get their attention. Right now, rural voters sneer at urban voters and the politicians those voters send to Congress. It's time the feeling be reciprocated with interest.

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KYTom (/users/kytom) ▶ PrahaPartizan

Oct 23, 2022 at 11:41:25 PM
(/comments/2130269/84795563#comment_84795563)

So your answer is for urban voters to sneer back at rural voters? What a great way to win friends and influence voters.

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KUDem (/users/kudem)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:38:25 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793946#comment_84793946)

FDR brought electricity. Ike brought roads. How difficult is it for Biden/Pelosi to say, "I'm going to bring you a hospital?" I will contend to the end of time that Hillary would be president if she had run a diners and truck stops campaign. I'm sure there are areas in Kansas that haven't seen a live Democrat in a decade or more. Democrats need to talk about their religion more. Not because rural voters are more religious, but because they can accept differences if there are some basic culture connections.

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DeathBySalad (/users/deathbysalad) ▶ KUDem

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:23:07 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794260#comment_84794260)

As I recall, she did. Rode around in a van with a couple of Secret Service guys, a couple of campaign staffers, and hit small towns. But she didn't get credit for that, of course.

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TexasTom (/users/texastom) ▶ KUDem

Oct 23, 2022 at 09:26:04 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795227#comment_84795227)

How are Biden and Pelosi going to bring a hospital to a rural area when that rural area is in a state that refuses the Medicaid expansion? Yeah, you can build another hospital, but it will just go broke.

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KUDem (/users/kudem) ▶ TexasTom

Oct 23, 2022 at 10:15:27 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795366#comment_84795366)

You start by not saying expanding Medicaid. You say, I can bring you a hospital, but your governor and legislature have to do their part.

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blue aardvark (/users/blue aardvark)

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:40:25 PM

(/comments/2130269/84793961#comment_84793961)

I think progress could be made by framing this as "working people with jobs, either in cities or in towns, against billionaires who move jobs overseas".

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BarryLasVegas (/users/barrylasvegas)



Oct 23, 2022 at 05:51:05 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794038#comment_84794038)

Despite their “beliefs” , these “rural” areas get more than their share of federal resources. Their hospitals close because they vote for people who don’t fund them. They don’t get benefits because they vote for people who demand state participation and then they vote against their states participating.

why are we always blamed? Let’s be realists. They are willing to suffer so others can’t get their share. That’s been GOP propoganda for years. Try to counteract that! Beliefs always win out.

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**Maynard G Krebs (/users/maynard g krebs)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:53:56 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794064#comment_84794064)

Proudhorn cried “it’s the peasants that betrayed us” when the 1848 revolution failed. Peasants were > 80% of the population and they were taken for granted.

There are no unread comments at this time.

Urbanites have options rurals don’t, or they reject like moving to a city. It pisses them off when we say “why don’t you just...”

Reply

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**CyberLady1 (/users/cyberlady1)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 05:54:30 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794070#comment_84794070)

My husband grew up on a family farm in eastern Colorado. We married when he was serving in the military, and he always saved up his leave so that we could go to his family’s farm for harvest.

The head of the house (the father) was the boss of the enterprise, and he paid his sons just as he did his other farm hands. The mother did the bookkeeping, and she calculated every cent, going in or out, very carefully. And as business owners, they considered themselves the equals of anyone, even that guy Donald Trump in “The Apprentice.”

The rule in the house was that the father registered as a Democrat and the mother as a Republican, so they got information from all the candidates. On Election Day they voted together as they thought best.

The point of all this is that many farmers consider themselves independent business owners, and Trump appeals to that.

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**WaryLiberal (/users/waryliberal)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:10:35 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794186#comment_84794186)

Why would Trump appeal to "independent business owners", especially farmers? Trump routinely stiffes independent business owners who did hard, back-breaking work for him. He is a city slicker from New York City, and a serial adulterer on top of that. I really think these people would rather suffer than vote for a Democrat because they think Trump hates the same people they do!

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Somchai (/users/somchai) ► WaryLiberal



• Oct 23, 2022 at 07:32:38 PM
 (/comments/2130269/84794765#comment_84794765)

20% write off didn't hurt. Right off the top. Anyone who figures out schedule C for themselves at the kitchen table knows that.

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• **TRPChicago (/users/trpchicago)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:21:43 PM
 (/comments/2130269/84794252#comment_84794252)

Wisconsin's Door County, the peninsula that juts out into Lake Michigan, is an amalgam of farming and water-side vacation areas. Towns are small, there's a lot of community-mindedness in business websites and this fall, campaign signs are everywhere. My favorite is the one that reads:

Vote for Democrats. They vote for us.

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There are no unread comments at this time.



• **Liberal Thinking (/users/liberal thinking)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 06:32:27 PM
 (/comments/2130269/84794319#comment_84794319)

It would greatly help for the Democratic Party to have at least one good policy for rural America, and then regularly talk about it.

And there is one. One good policy the Democratic Party backed was actually a part of ACA. In that package (and at the insistence of Sen. Bernie Sanders), rural healthcare was given a significant boost. As a result, one of the rural counties where I lived a while back (in the state of Washington) received significant funds that allowed that community to build a new healthcare center and hire additional staff. It greatly improved access to healthcare in that county and the surrounding area.

So, are people in rural communities getting the message? Not unless we hear President Biden and other Democrats get on the airwaves and the cable waves and start talking about rural communities.

There are other things the party could do for rural communities. For example, we could initiate some policy changes around the kinds of insurance the federal government subsidizes that would help free farmers from the tyranny of the big corporations. Those corporations effectively enslave small farmers with effective monopolies on seeds and pesticides on the one hand, then as the middleman between farmers and consumers on the other. This is an area ripe for antitrust, as well as regulatory reform (meaning, good regulation to replace the bad regulation we have).

The Democratic Party should do everything in its power to turn small farmers into a Democratic constituency, as well as small business owners into another Democratic constituency. The Republican Party is wholly bought and paid for by big national and international businesses. We could make hay, so to speak, if we just mounted a strategic campaign to represent the rural and small business population.

It wouldn't hurt to remember that the progressive movement came in part at least out of rural communities in places like Minnesota. That's because it is natural for the small guy to band together to stop exploitation. The Democratic Party might want to consider its role in the world, and certainly stopping exploitation is a strong part of that role.

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DeathBySalad (/users/deathbysalad)



Oct 23, 2022 at 06:33:14 PM
(/comments/2130269/84794326#comment_84794326)

I have lived for most of my 56 years in rural Iowa, and I am an ardently liberal, even leftist, person. Farming has changed enormously in that time, and I feel that it has contributed to the rightward turn of the rural electorate. I have a lot of thoughts about this, and I feel increasingly moved to write a diary here on the subject. It would be my first since joining the site earlier this year, though I have been a reader for many years before. I'm a little nervous; there is a high standard of writing here.

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Stude Dude (/users/stude dude) ▶ DeathBySalad
Oct 23, 2022 at 06:48:57 PM
(/comments/2130269/84794438#comment_84794438)

Which part of Iowa? I'm originally from Soldier in Monona County.

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DeathBySalad (/users/deathbysalad) ▶ Stude Dude
Oct 23, 2022 at 07:08:11 PM
(/comments/2130269/84794621#comment_84794621)

I was born in Des Moines, and have lived around there all my life. We (I cohabitate with my 85-yo mom; my father has been gone since 2005) currently live in NW Marion County, at the western end of Lake Red Rock. It's a Red county by 2:1, but apart from the political signs, not a lot of rabid MAGAts here.

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Makemnoiga (/users/makemnoiga) ▶ DeathBySalad
Oct 23, 2022 at 06:56:34 PM
(/comments/2130269/84794515#comment_84794515)

Looking forward to reading it. Jump on in; as far as I have seen there is a, (ahem), range of "standards" here, you will do fine!

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arealmc (/users/arealmc)
Oct 23, 2022 at 06:47:37 PM
(/comments/2130269/84794429#comment_84794429)

What does it say about the effectiveness of the media in rural areas that all 3 of the main components of "rural resentment" are bald-faced lies? The possible exception might be culture, but even here you could make the argument that rural areas are incredibly overrepresented in some ways.

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kamarvt (/users/kamarvt)
Oct 23, 2022 at 06:56:13 PM
(/comments/2130269/84794511#comment_84794511)

Vermont rural denizen here. Piping up to say that not one of the generalizations made on this diary or comments rings true in this very rural, very progressive state.

Stop assuming we are all farmers, for starters. Less than 1% of Vermonters farm for a living. Most of us work in the service industry, many servicing city folk on a getaway.

And we have internet, ffs. And satellite radio. Smartphones everywhere. Lack of varied information sources is not the problem.

I wish there was a magic bullet answer for why Vermont bucks the stereotype, but our existence belies the idea that rural necessarily = right wing.

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Kangaroo (/users/kangaroo)

Oct 23, 2022 at 07:04:13 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794584#comment_84794584)

"...Republicans use this by framing cities and metros in ways that are often code words for a more racist or more secular community..."

Chris could you elaborate on this and state examples of those "ways"?

There are no unread comments at this time.

I am an all-of-the above, rural, small town, big city guy. I was born in Houston, lived in San Antonio at ages 9-18, and lived in a small town my father was from ages 2-9. I lived in San Antonio in my early 20s and in the Houston Metro region ages 32-43. I lived briefly in Karnes City, Texas (population 3,000) two years in my twenties, and in Army towns from age 43-65 and for the last six months again, and in Helena, Arkansas, from ages 65-70.

A couple of anecdotes:

In Karnes City, my wife had a 30-day charge account at a local general store. There, once, a clerk initially refused to cash a check for me, saying, "I don't know you." I said, "That's okay. I don't know you either." That summarizes how relationships work in such places.

In rural East Texas, I lived there while working across the Louisiana line at Fort Polk. Once, there was a brouhaha over sectarian prayers at football games. I was the only public speaker against violating the Constitution in this manner. A fundamentalist preacher who led the vast majority addressed me as "Mr. Mason [not my name, but I was wearing a Masonic ring]." This led to name calling of our daughter afterward.

I would highly recommend the book "Deer Hunting with Jesus" by the late Joe Baegant from rural Virginia. It should be required reading for everyone engaging in rural progressive organizing.

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RunawayRose (/users/runawayrose) ▶ Kangaroo

Oct 23, 2022 at 07:14:21 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794663#comment_84794663)

Thanks for the recommendation! I put the book on my shopping list.

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snowball2015 (/users/snowball2015) ▶ Kangaroo

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:45:03 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795081#comment_84795081)

Did you see the stories about the science teacher not too far away from there in Sabine Parish? Case (<https://www.laaclu.org/en/cases/lane-v-sabine>)

 Reply

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Kangaroo (/users/kangaroo) ▶ snowball2015

Oct 23, 2022 at 11:03:07 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795489#comment_84795489)

No, I didn't see it, but I'm not one bit surprised.

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ElimuNzuri (/users/elimunzuri)

Oct 23, 2022 at 07:31:20 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794757#comment_84794757)

This article explains the reasons that I, a very urbanized Angeleno, make loose-change donations to United Rural Democrats. I also support the Biden's debt relief program for farmers, so they can save their farms. I would imagine people in rural areas would be concerned about pollution, since it affects their health. I would also like to imagine that people in rural areas are concerned about man-made global climate change, since they ~~There are more read arguments at this time~~ caused by man-made global climate change than I — albeit I must find all sorts of ways conserve water. I will also add that to help bring down the price of gasoline, I rely on the LA Metro for most of my transportation needs. Common ground? Perhaps. But then I cannot speak for people in rural America.

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sierramimi (/users/sierramimi) ▶ ElimuNzuri

Oct 23, 2022 at 09:51:55 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795304#comment_84795304)

I grew up in rural Northern California, left for the coast until I retired and returned to the mountains. When I grew up here there were lumber mills in almost every small town. Greyhound buses came from Chico through these towns and on into Reno. The buses left the north every 2 hours and from the south every 2 hours. The US Forest Service hired college students to thin and clear the forest floors and permanent employees to supervise the crews..

The mills closed in the late 90's and without the lumber mills the train stations were closed and the train jobs moved to Reno. The Greyhound lines stopped running. Tom McClintock was head of the Ag Committee and he killed the budget for forest maintenance. Now we have fire storms instead of forest fires. Property values dropped because there were too many homes on the market and people quickly were underwater on their mortgages. The only option was to work in Reno and commute 50 to 80 miles to Reno for employment.

This once blue area turned red over these 2 issues, gas tax for mass transit in urban areas and a prison closure. Those long commutes are becoming more and more expensive. Small town streets are crumbling and we have no money to repair them. We have been begging for that mass transit money to repair those streets to no avail. So the area Sierra, Plumas and Lassen Counties have turned red. Now the biggest employer in the tri-county area, High Desert Prison, just got put on the chopping block this year.

I vote democrat because they keep rural hospitals going, keep our schools afloat and lastly because I am a woman and that's always a good reason. Each rural area has their own unique issues and democrats need to learn this.

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• **Shishkabugs (/users/shishkabugs)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 07:39:46 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794795#comment_84794795)



As someone raised on a farm and living in the Little Apple, I appreciate your article on rural voters.

Media in rural communities was mentioned in the article, but I feel it is the 10,000 pound elephant in the room. Conservatives have worked hard to dominate the radio airwaves, especially in rural areas. In talk radio, 90% *labels itself* conservative, 2% labels itself liberal, and the rest is probably NPR. And that liberal 2% probably only plays in large metropolitan areas.

Talk radio is the hook.

Driving provides plenty of uninterrupted listening time. It can be hypnotic watching the dotted lines go by. Seriously. If you are in a hypnotic state, you are easier to influence.

Rural citizens drive a lot.

And then they naturally gravitate to other conservative media. That is the root of the problem with rural politics. Garbage in, garbage out.

There are no unread comments at this time.

Yes, we need to get a better message out to rural areas. But how? Let's step back a bit. Is it really a rural issue? There are plenty of urban citizens that drink the kool-aid. This is a media issue.

Spreading propaganda and misinformation should have consequences. Unless you're willing to go as far as Alex Jones, there are none. Here in the States, we have constitutionally protected freedom of speech. How is speech between a group of people, or to a crowd of people different than broadcast speech? You can't talk back or heckle a broadcaster.

Broadcasting figuratively gives you the ability to effectively tape shut your listeners mouths. Isn't that a restriction on our freedom of speech? Shouldn't we, as citizens, be afforded the ability to contest statements made by broadcasters as part of our free speech rights?

The first knee jerk reaction to this idea is the imposition of government control on our media. But we are talking about lawsuits here, not government censors. We already have legal remedies if you have a million dollars to spend on protecting your reputation.

I'm thinking of something like a small claims court accessible to individuals and NGOs. The suits may just involve an on air correction. For a major misinformation source, the loss of airtime to corrections may be overwhelming.

Of course, we need to win the Midterms for any solution like this to happen.

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• **Nonlinear (/users/nonlinear) ▶ Shishkabugs**

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:02:00 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794898#comment_84794898)



This is another myth. We have satellite radio, public radio, and more than 13,500 stations that aren't hate radio. There are also competing options like podcasts. I load up on podcasts before I start driving, shows like This American Life and true crime.

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• **Shishkabugs (/users/shishkabugs) ▶ Nonlinear**

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:32:59 PM



(/comments/2130269/84795041#comment_84795041)

What's mythical? I wasn't talking about music radio. It is actually getting better in terms of choices with podcasts and satellite radio. But not everyone is willing to search out or pay for good content.

Radio s***s. That may be why talk radio is appealing. It's better than listening to an obnoxious DJ playing pathetic music. I personally listen to my phone's playlist and avoid radio altogether.

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Nonlinear (/users/nonlinear) ▶ Shishkabugs

Oct 23, 2022 at 11:06:47 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795496#comment_84795496)

I was saying the audience for hate radio is smaller than is typically assumed. It is made up not of innocents who get misled but by those looking to have their prejudice and hate reinforced.

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There are no unread comments at this time.



Nonlinear (/users/nonlinear)

Oct 23, 2022 at 07:46:25 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794819#comment_84794819)

There are many mistakes the Democratic Party makes in rural America.

Mistake #1. Assuming that rural America is monolithic. It isn't.

Mistake #2. Assuming rural voters are voting against their self interest. See #1 above. In my class, American Gentry, voting Democratic is voting against our self interests. I do it but I suffer for it.

Mistake #3. Not contesting every race for every position. Look at the political career of Jon Tester or John Fetterman. They started small and built knowledge and confidence.

Mistake #4. Assuming rural voters are stupid or ignorant. I am a cross-cutter. I have ties to both the right and left. I spend my life in rural communities in the US and Canada. There are no more stupid or ignorant people here per capita than in San Francisco or Calgary (I lived in each for many years).

Mistake #5. Thinking of rural America as agricultural. I can't tell you how common this. I run an agricultural enterprise. But agriculture is less common as a career than customer service/retail, education, health care, recreation and tourism, mining, forestry, manufacturing, construction, and shipping/distribution and I have probably missed some.

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taperwing (/users/taperwing)

Oct 23, 2022 at 07:51:05 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794847#comment_84794847)

I have lived in rural Adams Co. WI for 34 years. Before that grew up in the western suburbs of Chicago. A big driver of the republican vote here is 3 things. Abortion, guns, and racism.

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snowball2015 (/users/snowball2015)





Oct 23, 2022 at 08:02:11 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794900#comment_84794900)

I'm in a small purple dot in about a rural as area as possible. From my view there's a few small things that Democrats in rural areas can do, to help stop the bleeding in rural America.

1. For so long we let fox news be the muzak of rural America. Everywhere I went fox was on. No one pushed back on that for the longest time. Now an entire people only get their news from fox. Everywhere you go where fox is on ask for it to be changed. I've been happily surprised how happy the employees are to oblige.
2. The local Democrats I know are literally scared to go out in public, or put out any signs or bumper stickers promoting Democrats. Now all you see is a sea of red maga hats and let's go brandon bumper stickers. 99.999% of republicans are keyboard warriors and won't confront anyone in public. Wear a Biden hat in the reddest parts of America and you'll see the same. Promote Democrats everywhere you go.
3. There's a lot of local areas near me that are predominantly Black and Native American and are heavily Democratic. There is literally 0 outreach to these areas from the state Democratic Party. Accordingly turnout is usually in the low single digits. **There are no unread comments at this time.** Anyone can reach out to these folks and encourage them to vote.
4. When you do talk to rural folks talk about the one issue they care about. Family is incredibly important to rural folks. The one issue that upsets them more than anything is knowing thier kids will have to move hundreds of miles away to get a job and raise a family. This means they see their kids and grandkids maybe twice a year. Republicans have literally no answer to this issue but at least they talk about the disintegration of the family in rural areas and give empty platitudes to fixing the issue. Hammer home concrete ways Democrats are helping them on the ground and making the area more economically viable. Be it federal funding for road repair or water treatment upgrades or a grant for a local educational program.

But most importantly be a fighter (not literally). Rural folks don't care about the message as much as the way it's delivered. Don't back down and keep fighting for Democrats, be it on social media, at church, at a party or at a family gathering.

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Somchai (/users/somchai)

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:03:40 PM

(/comments/2130269/84794911#comment_84794911)

Krugman wrote about the same thing recently. It's almost as funny as people imagining what the working class might be thinking. It's like people are so ensconced in their silos that they need an interpreter to translate what rural voters think. Inevitably these things say a lot more about the people writing them and their attitudes towards people different than themselves, than the actual rural or working class voter.

kmartv two comments above pretty much said it. Just about no one farms or ranches, even in states you would think so. They are in no way jealous of city life, they choose to live country, and a lot of city people chose to join them when given the opportunity with remote work. People leave houses and cars unlocked at night, murder rates line northern europe.

I've yet to hear anyone complain about not getting free stuff, they mostly don't want welfare and would rather work. Speaking of which if Dems would stop importing millions of workers to compete for what jobs are left and stopped exporting all those small manufacturing jobs rural folks would probably be a lot happier voting Dem.

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**Sidney Lanier (/users/sidney lanier)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:15:54 PM

[\(/comments/2130269/84794961#comment_84794961\)](/comments/2130269/84794961#comment_84794961)

My advice is to stop the incessant press coverage of Republicans, especially Trump. I know this will reduce income for the media, but because Trump financially supports the media, he gets the coverage. Cover ideas, not personalities, and we'll have a more civilized, stronger democracy.

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**CReade (/users/creade) ▶ Sidney Lanier**

Oct 23, 2022 at 10:38:32 PM

[\(/comments/2130269/84795423#comment_84795423\)](/comments/2130269/84795423#comment_84795423)

Great advice. So who do we contact?

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There are no unread comments at this time.

**brother brown (/users/brother brown)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:22:20 PM

[\(/comments/2130269/84794994#comment_84794994\)](/comments/2130269/84794994#comment_84794994)

I can't speak to the midwest rural issue, but I moved to SW Ga in 1992, after being raised in poverty in rural N.Fla, followed by 20 years in urban areas, including Atlanta.. It was last years of the Dixiecrats in power. 25 years after Lyndon Johnson had predicted that the "Democrats had just given up the south" would come true, and the resentment began to come out. I've seen so little progress in my community, that frankly, it's obvious that the powers that be are damn happy with the inequality, and voted for Trump, and will vote for Herschel.

But, I also live in GA's "black belt" and this is a prime example of what Christopher Reeves is talking about. This area doesn't have a lot of Democratic representation in the statehouse, but it damn sure carried Warnock & Ossoff over the finish line, and has been targeted by Stacey Abrams since she lost her the last run for governor. And it's exactly why VOTE. Early voting has begun in GA. Let's do this. Thanks

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**Kinda750 (/users/kinda750)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:44:43 PM

[\(/comments/2130269/84795079#comment_84795079\)](/comments/2130269/84795079#comment_84795079)

Great discussion. I would love to read a regular DKOS feature about rural Democrats by rural Democrats in of daily MAGA clicks. I have a rural family member who is averse to partisan politics but likes to chat about what the local government is up to.

Lots of land, nature and privacy via neighbors at a distance are the obvious benefits of rural life. I think both city, country folk often encounter people who are escaping to the opposite, so it sets a poor tone for communication. Also, I do wonder if some rural voters have to register as Independent to vote D to be more anonymous.

I like the idea of more cultural exchange and appreciation between Dems. It could be a fun virtual thing to start.

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**AZboy (/users/azboy)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 08:45:19 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795084#comment_84795084)

I read stuff like this all the time, and every time I do, the very first thing that crosses my mind is “what a load of unadulterated BULLSHIT!”. I’m sorry, but I’ve lived way out in the country in rural SW Virginia. Deepest, darkest Appalachia coal country. And the Congressional rep we had until about 10 years ago was a Democrat. A Democrat who *regularly* showed up at fairs, church picnics, high school graduations, etc, etc. Literally everybody knew him. He listened and he met people where they were. The asshole Teapublican who replaced him has done none of that. He’s holed up in his giant McMansion and has not once showed up to our local ag fair. So please stop telling us how Democrats don’t know what’s going on out there, because it simply is not true.

Reply

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**CReade (/users/creade)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 10:36:23 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795414#comment_84795414)

There are no unread comments at this time.

Brilliant, as usual. Such a complicated issue. And most definitely not a new one. But it’s a universal need of all Americans, perhaps all people, to actually be heard or at least feel part of a group that is heard or seen. That, unfortunately, requires an enormous amount of effort. It’s a mental health need, like all the others, that we just do not prioritize or take seriously in this country. The New York Times did an insightful piece on this topic. It helped a few of my colleagues deal with what they see as unfathomable support for Republicans in areas that have been devastated by their policies. www.nytimes.com/... (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/23/us/politics/republican-election-objectors-demographics.html>)

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**Pyth of Samos (/users/pyth of samos)**

Oct 23, 2022 at 11:52:34 PM

(/comments/2130269/84795579#comment_84795579)

Guns.

Guns are a problem. I had a Facebook debate with my niece and her husband who farm in rural northern Iowa over this issue. There is a big gap between rural and urban Americans here.

I have family, friends and acquaintances that have been touched by some of the worst mass shootings in the US.

- family friends had lived a number of years in Newtown before the Sandy Hook shootings.
- we know another family that were very close with Christopher Michaels-Martinez, a victim of the Isla Vista shootings in 2014.
- a member of our church attended Cal Lutheran and chose that night to not to go to the Borderline Grill. Her friends did though.
- another member was in Las Vegas at the Route 91 Harvest music festival.
- my daughter lived one-block from the apartment of the San Bernadino shooter. She decided to go for her regular run that afternoon rather than hiding in fear.
- my home is less than ½ mile from Cafe Racer, site of mass shooting event that killed five.

A gun is another necessity on the farm. Their experiences is one of friends getting together in the early morning in the fall after harvest to drive deer. They know the harm that a gun can do. My niece’s father, my brother-in-law, had his arm shattered by shotgun slug while deer hunting. And I’m sympathetic knowing how financially precarious farmers are where sounder of feral pigs can wipe out profits for farmers. They live isolated and share stories of passers by checking what might be lying about farm yard to steal. They share with me the stories of the good person with a gun.

We have somewhat a truce now. I don't bring it up. And she doesn't bring it up. I'm pretty sure that we agree more than we disagree, but tribal alliance and the media narrative that creates preconceptions about what it is like to live in an urban environment keep us from having that conversation.

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