

This is the most recent, comprehensive look at rural America and provides many unique insights into the views of rural Americans.

- This presentation seeks to give insights into the bigger findings around the economy, rural values, the role of government, policy preferences, and briefly on language that works.
- Rural America is united on a set of values about the future for themselves and their children, protecting and investing in a valuable way of life, and feeling ignored by politicians.
- Rural Americans have divided views about the role of government and have populist views about big institutions.
- Rural Americans support a broad, proactive agenda of investment in job training, education, renewable energy, and infrastructure.
- They also support cutting taxes and regulation.
- Rural America wants the government to be more efficient and effective.

**Rural America is an important value and lifestyle, and they want it to survive:** Rural Americans are a proud and diverse group of people. They value their way of life and want to pass those values on to their children. They sadly believe the rural way of life may be fading and they want to stop it, reverse it, and revitalize rural America. They believe they can, and they think the American Dream is more attainable in rural

America than it is in bigger cities. Lastly, they believe they are being ignored by politicians and place blame on government for the state of the rural economy because the government ignores rural Americans.

•**Rural Americans have a lot on their minds – as do Americans in big cities.** And, for the most part, they have the same overall concerns, mainly the rising costs of every day items and the increased costs around health care (this is similar to what we have seen among other Americans). Ironically, they are less stressed about losing their jobs or increased rent and mortgage payments (this is different than data we see among other Americans). Ironically, it is younger rural Americans who worry about saving enough for retirement. Rural women worry most about rising costs of everyday items.

**Rural Americans are frustrated that the economy has grown stagnant, but are optimistic:** They feel they have too little control over their own economic situation and feel worse off now than four years ago. With that said, they are optimistic that things will get better (especially younger rural Americans) but not overwhelmingly convinced that it will. They want more stability, especially now that they lack control over their own economic situation, and want to be able to count on something at a time right now when there is little to count on. They believe that the fabric of America is being weakened by the growing gap between the rich and families struggling to make ends meet.

•**Rural Americans are divided on the role of government, but neither current ideological perspective (conservatives or progressives) has it right.** On the one hand the language around lower taxes, smaller government, and fewer regulations is attractive (the highest testing

message). On the other, policies that call for more job training, increased infrastructure investments, more technology, and better preschool options clearly require a role for government if things are to improve. It is too simplistic to believe rural America is anti-government and that there is nothing for progressives to say, nor is it possible to say that rural America wants bigger government and more spending. They want tax breaks but they also support increased loans and grants to help people gain skills and open small businesses.

- They want more efficient and effective government and view much of public policy as a fairness issue in which rural America has not received fair treatment.

**Rural Americans remain populist Americans.** They have distrust for big farms, big cities, big banks, and big government. They believe the gap between rich and poor is increasing and harms America. They believe they are being ignored in favor of people in the cities. They think it is easier to live in the cities than to live in rural areas. They think their way of life is fading because these groups are getting ahead and they are not. They are protective of their way of life, but are also more proactive about it than conventional wisdom would suggest.

- **Rural Americans are entrepreneurial.** Many want to own their own small businesses. They want government structured to help small businesses and first time farms get started. Even then, we must be careful because they have a complicated relationship with the farm bill and farm subsidies. They do not want to see them cut. They may want them better directed and more strategic and focused, but the worst testing language in the poll talked about diverting farm subsidies to

other rural priorities. . They did, however, support reducing the amount of subsidies going to big and mega farms to pay for increased investments in rural America. This will be a complex path forward.

Their populism is driven by a distrust of all big institutions.

- While they recognize the unfairness of farm subsidies, rural Americans understand and appreciate the multiplier effect of farm jobs.

- Language matters, but values matter more.** Rural Americans tip toward supporting government involvement in some areas when the language is based on values. They tend to tip against government solutions when it goes to spending, and particularly taxes. Rural America is still very tax-sensitive. The strongest message highlights “smaller government” but the next strongest is anchored on “investing more” to bring technology to rural America and getting business started. They respond to positive, aspirational language more than negative statements. They want to invest in the future of rural America and to develop a strong rural economy for their children and grandchildren.