



RURAL ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION IN AMERICA

Findings from Our Research

- 1 The rural/urban divide is real but it's not a divide around who cares more for the environment.
- 2 Rural Americans share several core values and strong place identity that shapes their perspectives on environmental conservation.
- 3 Attitudes toward government are a fundamental driver of the urban/rural divide on the environment.
- 4 For rural voters, it is not a contradiction to consider yourself pro-environment and yet oppose or have strong reservations about existing environmental policies.
- 5 The urban/rural divide on the environment is not a function of lack of knowledge about the environment or related policies.
- 6 Rural voters have a preference for policies that are overseen by state or local government and that allow for collaboration with rural voters and stakeholders.
- 7 The issue of climate change is highly polarized among rural voters and there is less support for government action than among urban/suburban voters.
- 8 Rural reluctance to accept the science around climate change may be based on concerns about regulations.
- 9 Rural voters place less trust in environmental and conservation groups relative to other sources of information on the environment.
- 10 Rural voters respond to messages about environmental policies that emphasize moral responsibility, acting on behalf of future generations and clean water.

Our Recommendations for Engaging Rural Voters

- There is no quick fix** ▶ The urban/rural divide on the environment is not a messaging problem that will be solved with better talking points. Bridging the urban/rural divide on the environment will require engagement and new partnerships with rural stakeholders, rethinking the design of environmental policies, and new communication strategies.
- Engage** ▶ Environmentalists, conservation groups, and policymakers should engage with rural voters and stakeholders in developing environmental policies that impact rural communities.
- Build state and local partnerships into policy** ▶ Policy strategies that partner with states and local government are likely to be more popular with rural voters.
- Collaborate** ▶ Policies that allow for collaboration with rural constituencies are more likely to be popular among rural voters.
- Create pathways for science to reach rural communities** ▶ Policymakers should focus on bolstering scientific outreach through universities, cooperative extension, and new ways to connect rural America to the nation's top scientists.
- Messengers matter** ▶ Policymakers, environmentalists, conservation groups, and others should consider engaging more with local rural stakeholders, including farmers and ranchers, cooperative extension, and others in their local area

to convey information about environmental policies.

Climate change ▶ Policies that allow for state and local partnerships, position rural stakeholders as part of the solution, and leverage rural voters' interest in clean water, farmland conservation, and other priorities are likely to be more popular among rural voters.

Economics ▶ Among forest and farmland conservation, renewable energy development, and incentives for conservation-oriented farming practices, there are ample opportunities to connect environmental policy priorities and rural economies in a way that rural residents will support.

Who will defend environmental policy? ▶ Environmentalists and many rural voters both voice skepticism about governmental environmental policy. Given that cynicism toward government is a significant barrier to rural support for environmental policy, advocates should consider strategies that find credible voices in rural communities who can point to successful policy interventions—ones that work for both rural communities and the environment—as a way to diminish skepticism toward government action on the environment.



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