



# FIRST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT REPORT

ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS  
CD1 SPECIAL COMMITTEE



## SPECIAL COMMITTEE

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## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
1. Overview of the Big First .....	6
2. County Level Overview .....	21
3. State Party Infrastructure & Opportunities.....	39
4. Rural Communication Ecologies, Cultural Habits, & Deep Canvassing Opportunities ..	46
5. Policy Platform Recommendations .....	63

# Executive Summary

The following report constitutes over a year's worth of effort from volunteers across the Big First. The volunteers composing the Big First Special Committee come from across the congressional district. We have varying expertise, ranging from union organizing to data collection and analysis to policy analysis and advocacy, to campaign management, and local party management. We are united in a desire to flip the Big First blue. And we have taken the first step towards what will be a multi-stage, multi-year process of flipping the Big First.

The first step in any campaign to win over a congressional district, or even a local district, is to conduct research. This report issues the initial results of the research conducted by the Big First Special Committee. As the committee continues, it will add, subtract, and revise this report, its methods, and its recommendations as variables and conditions change.

In summary, we find that flipping the Big First is an ambitious and challenging goal. As the first chapter will explain, the Big First Democratic Party needs to expand its base. The Northeast region of the district will most likely be the easiest to recruit and persuade potential voters to join the party. However, even if every single voter in the Northeast region of the district voted for the Democratic Party, Democrats would still lose the district by 4%. Therefore, we recommend focusing on the Southwest region, whose demographics have not been activated by either party and whose political challenges, including rural development and water, pose opportunities for media attention and political struggle.

The second chapter will provide a county overview of the Big First. Nearly 50% of the counties within Big First do not have an active party presence. Those that do, often have missing contact and communications information. Many county chairs have not appointed their Precinct Committee Persons (PCP), and if they have, the chair has not appointed the total number of PCPs they could appoint. Consequently, the fund-raising infrastructure and communications infrastructure

necessary to sustain a campaign across such a wide geographic area is not present. We recommend utilizing existing county parties to create a presence at large social events, such as county fairs, festivals, markets, and other local events. Using QR codes and cards can help target the youth to mid-30s vote.

The third chapter analyzes the state of the Kansas Democratic Party and its ability to support efforts in the Big First, given the challenges identified in the data at the district and county levels. Given current constraints, and economic changes that have offloaded what once was party responsibilities onto third-party contractors, 501(c)3s and 501(c)4s, we recommend the KDP begin an assessment of their strategic priorities in the Big First to county chairs. Once county chairs understand the party's strategic priorities in the district for any given year, we believe county chairs can begin filling in the gaps to complement party work. This may involve the creation of new Political Action Committees (PACs) and/or 501(c)3s and 501(c)4s. As always, the creation of new entities risks competing for funding from various nonpartisan and partisan sources, as well as competing against other nonpartisan and partisan organizations. While KDP cannot help discover new sources of funds for independent organizations, as that would be a violation of election law, KDP can help the Big First by helping individuals network with out-of-state individuals and organizations who may be able to help in some way.

The fourth chapter breaks from analyzing data and party infrastructure. Instead, it provides both a general understanding of the cultural logic dominant in the western rural areas of the Big First, as well as a strategy to assess, identify, and turn voters towards the Democratic Party and its policies. We advocate for developing a regionalized deep canvassing strategy that begins in January after an election year and continues over the next two years. We believe such a strategy will interrupt a cultural cycle of victim-blaming and self-blaming that disempowers voters writ-large but is particularly intense in rural areas. Unfortunately, such a strategy is both labor-intensive and expensive. However, we strongly believe the investment, if deployed strategically, will pay off over time.

Finally, we issue a few recommendations for candidates running in the district, broadly speaking. While we acknowledge major differences between federal and state-level candidates, both can campaign on, and experiment with, similar policy platforms. We suggest a focus on modern monetary theory and anti-trust as well as rural development.

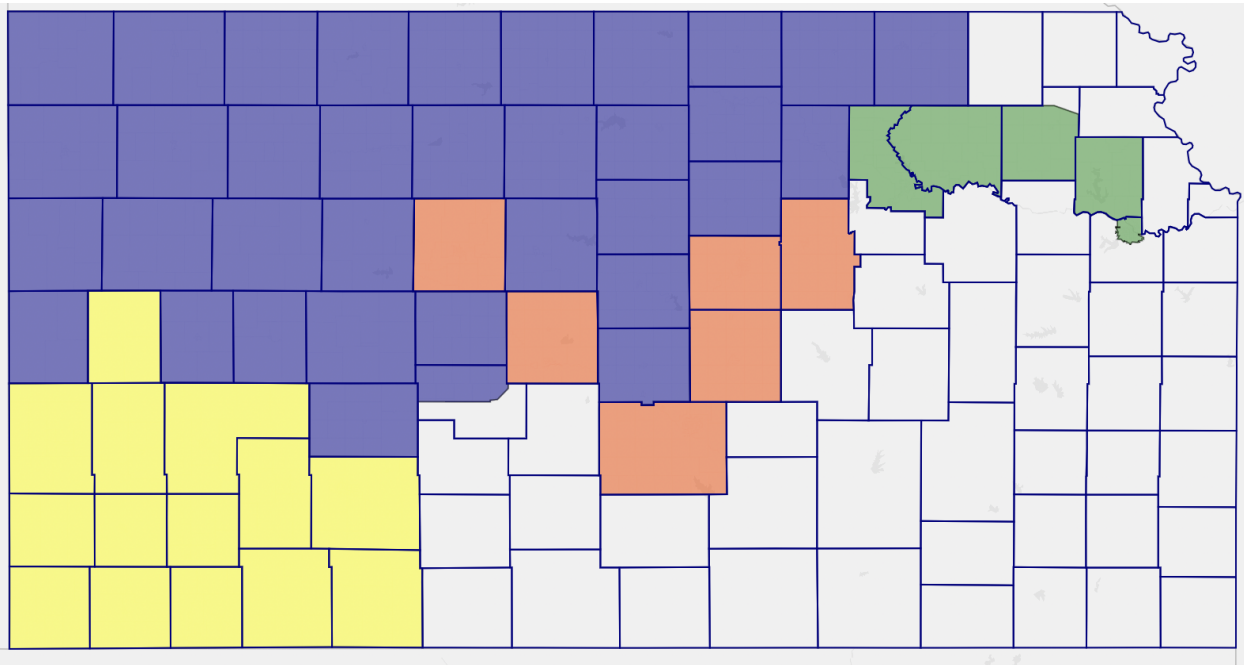
The information contained within these chapters is primarily intended for a candidate running for the US House of Representatives in Kansas' first congressional district, as well as candidates running for the state's House of Representatives in the Big First. Secondary audiences include the Kansas Democratic Party (KDP), county chairs, and local organizers.

Future versions of this report will include state senate district data, social media strategy, and media market analysis. Further refinement of the policy platform for potential candidates will also be necessary. Nonetheless, this first version of the report constitutes the Big First's best attempt (so far) at providing a roadmap and strategic recommendations for flipping the Kansas' First Congressional District.

# 1. Overview of the Big First

The Big First is the largest congressional district in Kansas, encompassing the western third of the state, north-central Kansas, and a corridor connecting the Lawrence portion of Douglas County to the district. Redistricting after the 2020 decennial census saw the Republican-controlled legislature remove Emporia and Junction City from the First Congressional District and added Lawrence to dilute the voting power of the most liberal county in the state<sup>1</sup>. This report will discuss the economic, demographic, and geographic profile of this district.

The First Congressional District is a large and extremely diverse district. To simplify our analysis, we will begin simplifying the district into four general categories—the Kaw Valley (green), the Meatpacking Triangle (yellow), Medium-Sized Cities (orange), and finally the Rural Great Plains (blue). Then, we will consider district-wide information.



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<sup>1</sup> Carpenter, “KSSC Affirms Congressional Map”.

## **The Kaw Valley**

Following the course of the Kaw along the far eastern part of our district lies our first region. Five counties—Douglas, Jefferson, Jackson, Pottawatomie, and Riley—comprise the Kaw Valley portion of CD1. Together, they are almost a third of the population of the entire district, primarily concentrated in two counties: Riley and Douglas counties. These counties are notable for having the two largest universities in the state, bringing large, transient student populations. K-State and KU—and the cities they reside in—greatly influence the economies and politics of their surrounding region.

Compared to Kansas as a whole, this region has lower rates of housing ownership, partially due to its younger population. The median cost of houses in this region is also higher than the state average, especially in Riley and Douglas counties. In fact, the median house in Douglas County costs almost 40% more than the median house in Kansas. This trend of high cost of living is true for severe housing cost burden, childcare cost burden, poverty rates, and more. The economy of the Kaw Valley is highly diverse, with no single sector dominating the job market<sup>2</sup>. However, reliance on K-State and KU to bring in workers, consumers, and jobs could pose a risk to economic sustainability.

Regarding education, this region has a high percentage of college graduates thanks to the skilled workers employed at K-State and KU. However, enrollment at both universities declined dramatically in the last few years. Between the academic years 2017 and 2022, enrollment declined 14% at K-State<sup>3</sup> and 5% at KU<sup>4</sup>. Decreased state aid, falling enrollment, rising costs, and changing demographics led state universities to fall behind on deferred maintenance for buildings. In 2022, state universities in Kansas were cumulatively \$1.2 billion behind on “mission critical” deferred maintenance; K-State is roughly \$425 million behind on deferred maintenance—the highest in the

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<sup>2</sup> Becker et al., “Douglas County Economy,” 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Kansas Board of Regents, “K-State Institution Profile”, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Kansas Board of Regents, “KU Institution Profile”, 72.



state—while KU and KU Medical Center are \$340 million behind on deferred maintenance<sup>5</sup>. Recent legislation should help clear the backlog but consistent funding has been shaky in the past<sup>6</sup>.

Riley County is also home to a portion of Fort Riley, a military installation that dates back roughly 150 years<sup>7</sup>. Fort Riley supports nearly 35,000 soldiers, family members, and civilian employees<sup>8</sup>. Military training contaminated the soil, groundwater, and surface water in, and around, Fort Riley<sup>9</sup>. A superfund site, established in the 1990s, has cleared most of the problems but there are still environmental concerns regarding water contamination<sup>10</sup>.

Demographically, this region has roughly a similar percentage of the population that is non-Hispanic white as Kansas and the rest of CD1 but the counties along the Kaw have disproportionately few Hispanic residents and a much higher percentage of Indigenous residents. Of the 734,000 residents of CD1, about 30% of them live in this region.

On the local level, important minority communities stand out. The first is young people. K-State and KU bring more than 45,000 students to this region—not including the many more thousands that come to Manhattan or Lawrence for reasons other than academics. Many of these young people

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<sup>5</sup> Kansas Board of Regents, “2022 University Facilities Report”.

<sup>6</sup> Alattid, “Legislature Acts on Deferred Maintenance”.

<sup>7</sup> US Department of Defense, “Fort Riley Base Overview”.

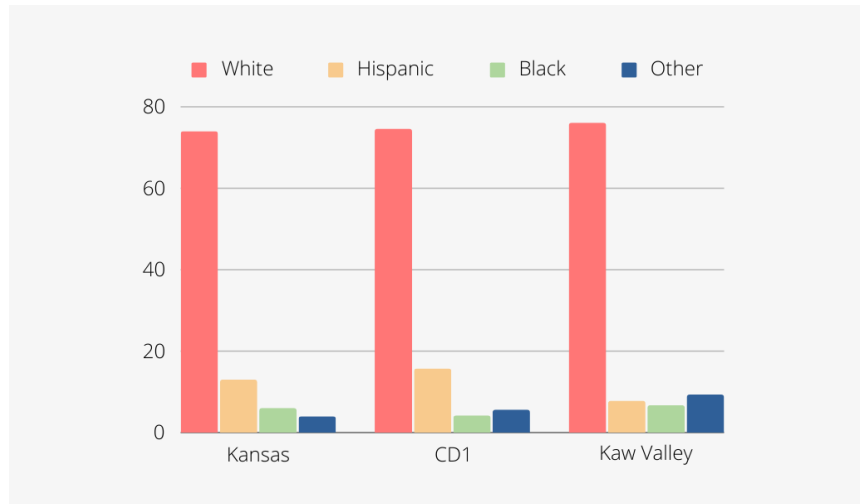
<sup>8</sup> US Department of Defense, “Fort Riley Base Overview”.

<sup>9</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency, “Fort Riley Superfund Site”.

<sup>10</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency, “Fort Riley Superfund Site”.

are unregistered, do not know how to vote, or are uninvolved in politics. They move often and use different forms of media than traditional campaigning.

Jackson County is home to the federally recognized Prairie Band of the Potawatomi Nation Reservation, where 1,500 people live<sup>11</sup>. In 1849, the former reservation of the Prairie Band, the Shab-eh-nay Reservation in DeKalb County, Illinois, was illegally sold to force the Prairie Band to relocate<sup>12</sup>. In



2006, the tribe bought a portion of their land back but bipartisan legislation in Congress that would have helped the tribe repurchase the land seems to have stalled<sup>13</sup>.

Lawrence is home to the Haskell Indian Nations University, serving Indigenous students from around the country. Haskell has long been underfunded and underserved by political leaders. The South Lawrence Trafficway, built over the objections of Indigenous activists, goes through the sacred Wakarusa wetlands. Haskell’s portion of the Wakarusa wetlands receives very little funding from the state or local government.

### **The Meatpacking Triangle**

On the southern edge of CD1, where shortgrass steppes intermix with sand prairies along the Arkansas and Republican Rivers, lies our second region of CD1. The southwest part of CD1 is composed of 14 counties, though 70% of this region lives in the three counties of the Meatpacking

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<sup>11</sup> US Census Bureau, “Potawatomi Nation Census Profile”.

<sup>12</sup> Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, “Shabehnay”.

<sup>13</sup> US Congress, “H.R. 3144”.

Triangle–Seward, Finney, and Ford—which we will focus on. These three counties are home to the three largest cities in the region as well, Liberal, Garden City, and Dodge City. Southwestern CD1 is home to less than 20% of the total district population.

Meatpacking and food processing is the primary economic engine for this region. In Finney County, for example, meatpacking alone added \$1.5 billion to the local economy and more than 3,000 jobs. The agricultural sector adds more than \$3.4 billion and 7,400 jobs to Finney County through direct and indirect effects. Despite these benefits, employment at meatpacking plants is often low-paying, part-time, and dangerous. Unsurprisingly, workers at meatpacking plants are disproportionately immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants.

Throughout the 20th century, most meatpacking plants were located in cities but by the 1990's processing centers moved to rural areas to be close to cattle, reducing transportation costs<sup>14</sup>. To further lower costs, new plants primarily opened in right-to-work states to avoid negotiating with unions<sup>15</sup>. New technology replaced the need for high-skilled laborers with less-skilled workers, lowering wages<sup>16</sup>. Between 1960 and 1990, meatpacking wages dropped from 15% above the national average for manufacturing workers to 20% below<sup>17</sup>. Meatpacking plants rely on minorities and new immigrants who desperately need work to staff the floor, even then, the turnover rate can exceed 6% per month<sup>18</sup>. Often, meatpacking plants hire refugees to benefit from a federal program that covers half the wages of these workers for 90 days. After 90 days, these refugees are often fired because the government no longer pays half of the employee's wage. Growing concern about the influx of foreign-born workers led to increasing racial tensions and even a domestic terror plot.

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<sup>14</sup> Stull, "Meatpacking's Consequences for Communities".

<sup>15</sup> Stull, "Meatpacking's Consequences for Communities".

<sup>16</sup> Stull, "Meatpacking's Consequences for Communities".

<sup>17</sup> Stull, "Meatpacking's Consequences for Communities".

<sup>18</sup> Stull, "Meatpacking's Consequences for Communities".

Because these towns are so reliant on one sector, they are extremely vulnerable to industry disruptions. When a meatpacking plant in Garden City burned, 2,300 people found themselves suddenly unemployed<sup>19</sup>. The cities that host meatpacking plants often feel betrayed by the industry for not hiring local residents and failing to pay workers well.

Housing costs are slightly lower than the state average and median income is also below the state. The percentage of people who are in poverty is roughly in line with Kansas as well. Educational attainment is rather low in the meatpacking triangle, roughly 75% of people are high school graduates compared to 92% statewide; similarly, only 15% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 35% statewide. Additionally, the rate of uninsured people is about twice the state average<sup>20</sup>.

The three main counties of the meatpacking triangle are all much younger than the state as a whole—roughly 30% of residents are under 18 years old, compared to 24% statewide<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, roughly 12% of residents are over 65 years old compared to 17% statewide. The Meatpacking Triangle is the only region of our district to be majority-minority, nearly 50% Hispanic, 44% white, 3% Black, and the remainder is Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Indigenous. Immigrants make up a very large portion of the population in the Meatpacking Triangle, between 22% and 29%, compared to only 7% statewide. Unsurprisingly, between 45% and 59% of residents speak a language other than English at home, compared to 12% statewide<sup>22</sup>.

There are a couple of important groups within this region. The most obvious is the Hispanic population. Many potential voters are new citizens, unreached by either party or unsure how to vote. Spanish language material is crucial when organizing in southwest CD1; in Seward County, for

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<sup>19</sup> Broadway and Stull, “Meat Processing and Garden City”.

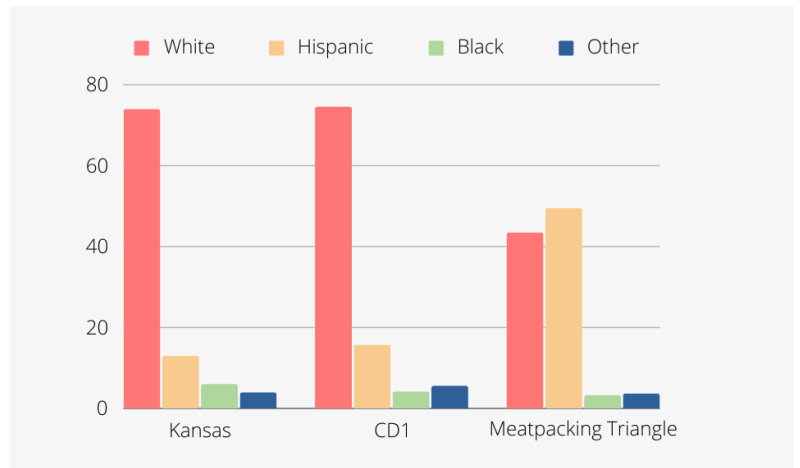
<sup>20</sup> US Census Bureau

<sup>21</sup> US Census Bureau

<sup>22</sup> US Census Bureau

example, a majority of residents speak Spanish as their primary language<sup>23</sup>. There are some pockets of Laotian and Vietnamese speakers but these are between 1% and 2% at most<sup>24</sup>.

Turnout in southwest CD1 is far below the rest of Kansas. In 2016, turnout in the three counties of the Meatpacking Triangle was between 50% and 55%, far below 67% statewide<sup>25</sup>. Only 49.7% of voters in Seward County turned out, the lowest in the state<sup>26</sup>. Large disparities persist in turnout, even within Southwest



CD1. In Gray County, where nearly 80% of residents are white, 70% of voters turned out compared to 50% in Ford County, where only 37% of residents are white<sup>27,28</sup>. Republican lawmakers move polling places out of cities to dilute the voting power of primarily urban minorities and use discriminatory electoral systems to preserve their power<sup>29</sup>. Dislodging these lawmakers and ensuring free and fair elections should be a major priority in this region.

### Medium-Sized Cities

As the tallgrass prairies of the eastern part of our state give way to shortgrass plains of the west, we meet our third region of CD1—the Mid-Sized Cities. Six counties in central Kansas comprise

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<sup>23</sup> Language Map Data Center

<sup>24</sup> Language Map Data Center

<sup>25</sup> Kansas Health Matters, “Voter Turnout Community Dashboard”.

<sup>26</sup> Kansas Health Matters, “Voter Turnout Community Dashboard”.

<sup>27</sup> US Census Bureau

<sup>28</sup> Kansas Health Matters, “Voter Turnout Community Dashboard”.

<sup>29</sup> McGreal, “Dodge City Polling Place Debacle”.

this region: Ellis, Barton, Reno, McPherson, Saline, and Dickinson. The cities they contain are Hays, Great Bend, Hutchinson, McPherson, Salina, and Abilene respectively. Together, the six counties are 30% of the population of CD1.

The economy of this region is rather diverse compared to the Meatpacking Triangle. Retail, services, healthcare, education, and some manufacturing and agriculture. Because these cities are the largest in the region, they are regional commercial hubs, drawing customers from surrounding counties. In this regard, healthcare and education—industries that require a significant skilled workforce—are especially important for regional well-being. Economic diversity in Medium-Sized Cities means it is difficult to identify specific economic concerns.

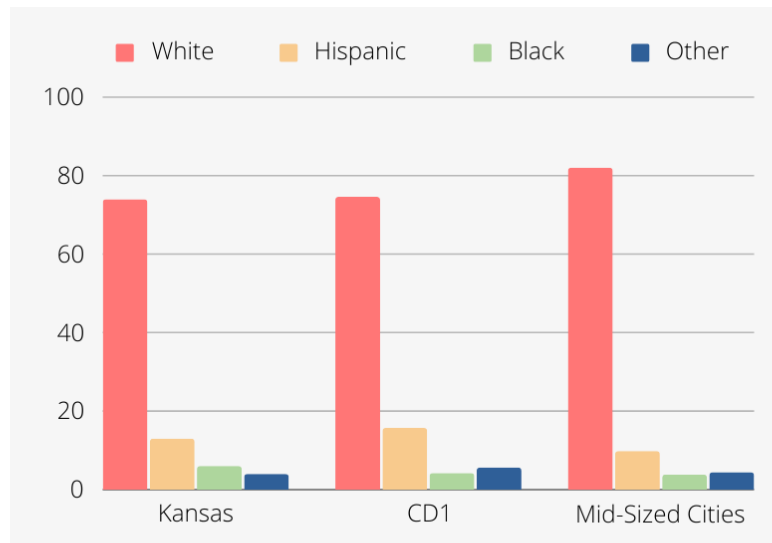
High school education attainment is slightly higher in Mid-Sized Cities than statewide but college degree attainment tends to be lower than in the state. A major exception to the latter point is Ellis County, home to Fort Hays State University. FHSU is the largest university in western Kansas, attended by 13,000 students. Barton County Community College and Hutchinson Community College serve a combined 10,000 students.

Demographically, this region tends to be whiter than Kansas as a whole; between 80% and 90% of the population is white, compared to 74% of Kansans. The largest minority population is Hispanics, ranging from 5% in McPherson County to 17% in Barton County. Very few residents of

these counties are foreign-born but between 3% and 9% of the population speak a language other than English at home—normally Spanish.

Although all of western Kansas faces water scarcity issues, two sites in this region deserve particular attention. Internationally recognized, Cheyenne Bottoms, the largest wetland in the interior United States, is located in Barton County, northeast of Great Bend. Migratory birds use this wetland

as a stopover throughout the year<sup>30</sup>. Nearly half of all migratory shorebirds on the continent pass through Cheyenne Bottoms in the Spring<sup>31</sup>. Over-appropriation of water rights, runoff, encroaching agriculture, and invasive species threaten the sustainability of this crucial ecosystem.



The Quivira National Wildlife Refuge is another important wetland in this region. Quivira is located primarily in Stafford County, in Congressional District Four, but with a small section in Reno County. Quivira, like Cheyenne Bottoms, is a major habitat for migratory waterfowl, one of the few remaining large inland wetlands in Kansas<sup>32</sup>. Irrigation upstream diverts water away from the wildlife area and farmers have defied Kansas water law in doing so<sup>33</sup>. Conservation of Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira are part of larger debates over water rights, the benefit of environmental conservation, and the role of government in protecting the public good.

<sup>30</sup> Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reservation Network, “Cheyenne Bottoms”.

<sup>31</sup> Kansas Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway, “Cheyenne Bottoms”.

<sup>32</sup> US Fish and Wildlife Service, “Quivira”.

<sup>33</sup> Giessel and Moffat, “Water Rights at Quivira”.

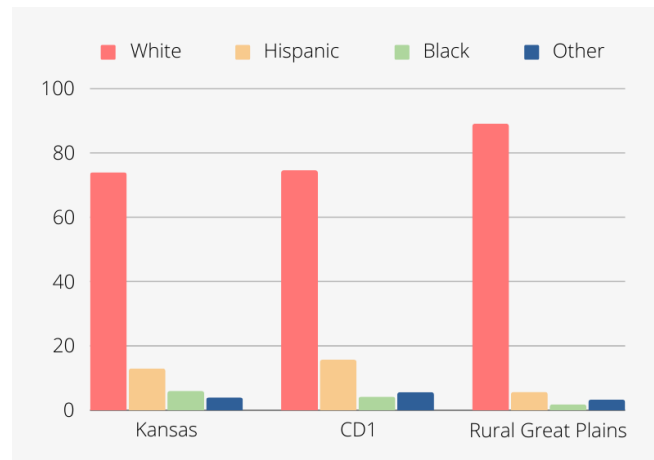
## The Rural Great Plains

As we drive along I-70 past Manhattan, we enter Smoky Hills and watch as tallgrass prairies yield to shorter grasses and shrubs, we enter the largest region of our district—the Rural Great Plains. Spanning 35 counties from the border of Colorado to east of Manhattan, the Rural Great Plains only contains a fifth of the district’s residents.

Deep, nutrient-rich soil created by prairies supports the abundant agriculture Kansas is known for—and the Rural Great Plains is no exception. Grain farming and cattle ranching are major industries in this region, supporting thousands of jobs and billions in economic output. However, changes in agricultural commodity prices, commercialization of agriculture, and drought can devastate rural communities. The cost of living in these rural counties tends to be well below the rest of the state however income is also lower. Poverty levels in the Rural Great Plains are roughly the same as statewide.

This region is nearly 90% white, far more than the rest of the state. The largest minority population is Hispanic Americans, who are spread throughout the region but concentrated in the southwest and urban cores. Although African Americans make up only a small portion of this region, it is important to recognize their historic role.

In the 1870s, hundreds of freed slaves moved to Graham County as part of the Exoduster movement, founding homesteads and eventually the town of Nicodemus<sup>34</sup>. Today, Nicodemus is home to only 14 residents but remains an important historical monument, refuting the myth that only white Americans came to the West.



<sup>34</sup> Kansas Historical Society, “Nicodemus, Graham County”.



Important political issues in this region are the closure of rural hospitals, declining and aging populations, lack of broadband internet access, and water depletion. Since 2005, 10 rural hospitals in Kansas have closed, the third highest in the nation<sup>35</sup>. Of the 102 remaining rural hospitals, 84 hospitals have decreased services in the same time period. The population of rural areas tends to be older and less healthy than urban areas, meaning access to healthcare is especially important<sup>36</sup>.

Between 2010 and 2020, no county in the Rural Great Plains experienced population growth over 5%, and only 9 of its 35 counties had any population growth<sup>37</sup>. Six counties in this region lost more than 10% of their populations. Rural areas disproportionately rely on births—instead of migration—to increase population. As young people move to suburban and urban counties for education and jobs, rural counties lose population and thus taxpayers, consumers of goods, and employees.

In an increasingly digital world, access to high-speed, reliable internet is incredibly important; the COVID pandemic made this blatantly obvious. A recent study by KU found that less than 45% of Kansans live in areas with broadband upload speeds above 100 mbps, refuting misleading Federal Communication Commission data claiming that 86% of Kansans live in areas with broadband upload speeds above 100 mbps<sup>38</sup>. Areas in western Kansas and rural communities disproportionately lack broadband access. In urban areas, the average download speed was over 100 mbps, compared to 40 mbps outside of cities; non-urban areas are twice as likely to report dissatisfaction with broadband access than urban areas.

Western Kansas receives much less rain than eastern Kansas thanks to the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Thankfully, the High Plains aquifer—a complex of underground water-bearing

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<sup>35</sup> Condon, “States with the Most Rural Hospital Closures”.

<sup>36</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “About Rural Health”.

<sup>37</sup> Lysen, “Rural Kansas Population Decline”.

<sup>38</sup> Kansas Institute for Policy and Social Research, “Kansas Broadband Executive Summary”.

rock that includes the Ogallala aquifer, Great Bend Prairie aquifer, and the Equus Beds—lies under western and south-central Kansas. The Rural Great Plains region mostly relies on the Ogallala. Rapid water withdrawal to irrigate farms and water cattle has caused water levels in the aquifer to drop by more than 100 feet in some areas, meaning farmers need deeper wells and stronger pumps just to irrigate crops<sup>39</sup>. In many areas, the aquifer is completely depleted already. To curb overuse, limits on groundwater withdrawal and subsidies to encourage conservation may be necessary. Listening to the concerns of farmers will be very important as our community navigates this crisis.

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<sup>39</sup> Wheeler, “Ogallala Water Management”.

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## 2. County Level Overview

The Kansas Democrats face significant challenges at the county level in the Big First. About half of the counties in the First Congressional District do not have chairs. Additionally, Western counties tend to have smaller population centers, more geographically isolated and distant populations, and fewer Precinct Committee People (PCPs) than anywhere else in the state. From a strategic standpoint, it makes less sense to dedicate in-person and financial resources to this area of the state when defending other areas that are more likely to yield significant electoral results. Nonetheless, a narrow strategic focus that excludes the Big First from significant investment every two years ignores the significant grassroots progress being made by existing county chairs and the potential for third-party activists to promote progressive policy in the region over the long term.

This chapter provides county-level data for state and federal candidates, including contact information for county chairs, missing data on the more rural parts of the region, and recommendations for chairs and candidates on how to spread the message of the Democratic Party. This data can be used in a variety of ways, ranging from scheduling visits with local parties, to collecting event information, and to developing a social media strategy.

Additionally, the data in this chapter develops an Organized Rating for each county. In this election cycle, this rating can be used a quick hand to determine which counties have the greatest chance of getting out the vote based on their existing infrastructure. The problem with such ratings, however, is that they can give an illusion that a smaller county by population may have less infrastructure than a larger county by population. While we will work to refine this rating system in the future, it gives a federal candidate in the Big First a sense of where infrastructure may need to be improved. Depending on the strategic priorities of a candidate in the 2024 cycle, it may be prudent to use resources to develop counties with a low OR or develop counties that have no OR at all. This will maximize campaign resources as part of a broader initiative to flip the Big First over the next 10 years.

The following will describe an algorithm to assign each of the KS CDC 1 counties an Organized Rating (OR). The users can weigh the algorithm depending on the desired information. If, in the future, additional data elements are identified that can be differentiated between counties, they could be added to the algorithm. The following data elements have been identified to date:

1. Total County Population
2. Each County Chair and the associated information: Is there a county chair, is there an email for the county chair, is there a phone number for the county chair, is there a Democrat County website, is there a recurring meeting for the County Democratic party?
3. Education has the following 3 data elements: Number of Teachers in the county, number of Full-time Public Students in the county, and number of people in the county over 25 years of age with a bachelor's degree.
4. Registered Voters: Unaffiliated in the county, Democrats in the county, Republicans in the county
5. Percentage of no-vote votes by county for the August 8, 2022, "Kansas No State Constitutional Right to Abortion and Legislative Power to Regulate Abortion Amendment."

See the appendix database diagram for a multitude of other data elements that could be incorporated into the algorithm.

Factors invoked in calculating the OR could be determined by data such as: the existence of a County Chair and other Democratic politicians in the county, the amount of contact information for each, and the response to any attempted contact with them could go into the scoring. The same data comparing Republicans to Democrats could be used to determine a county OR score. For example, those that have a republican chair, but no democratic chair for that county would decrease the score. Another example, those that have neither Republican nor Democratic chairs could still be represented by PCP or other politicians in that county could have an impact on the score.

Precinct Committee Persons – The PCP data element is precarious. Few county PCP lists can be found on the internet, at times one must contact the County Chair (if there is one) to get a list of PCP for that county. The KS Secretary of State has not responded to multiple requests for this list. If the PCP along with other political positions in the county were to be added, it would significantly improve reliability in the OR.

Other political office positions, such as County Commissioners, Treasurers, and Mayors represent a smaller potential dataset than the PCPs but like the PCP would increase the quality of the OR. The work here does not include positions like PCPs, County Commissioners, Mayors, or any other elected official.

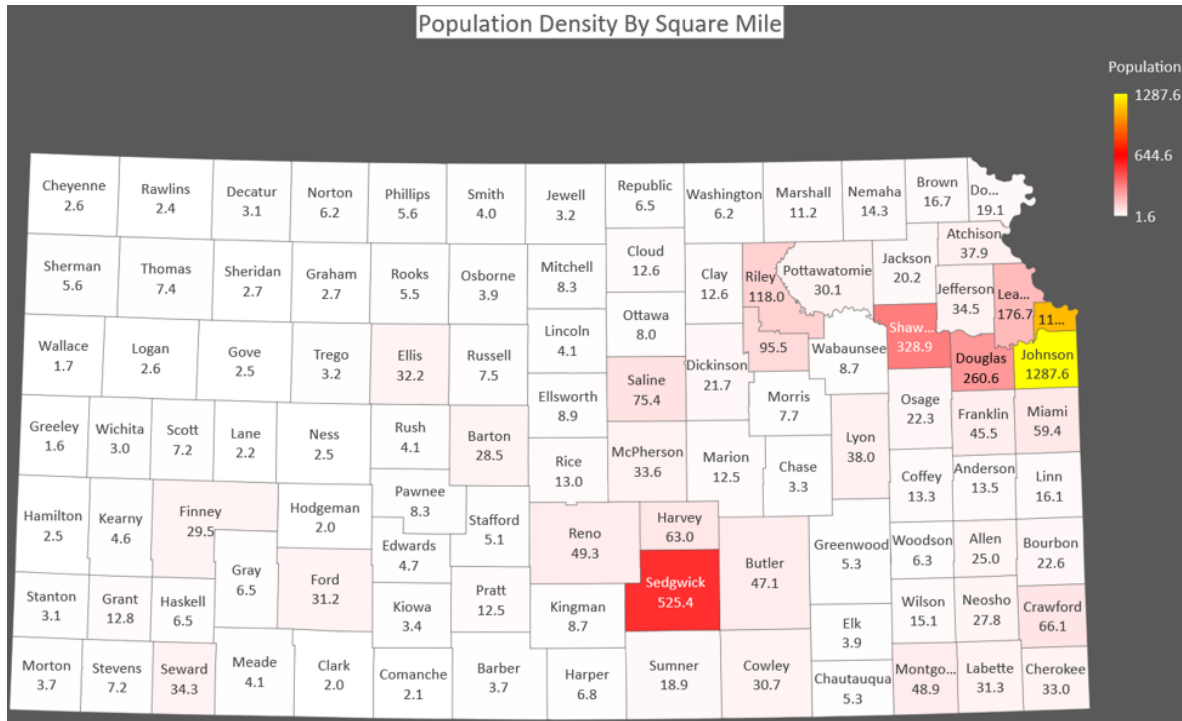
**County Chairs** – Approximately 50% of the counties do not have a Democratic Chair. The following information was obtained at <https://kansasdems.org/county-parties> . Also, some of the current contacts are missing information such as website, email, physical address, and reoccurring party meetings, which impacts the OR for that county.

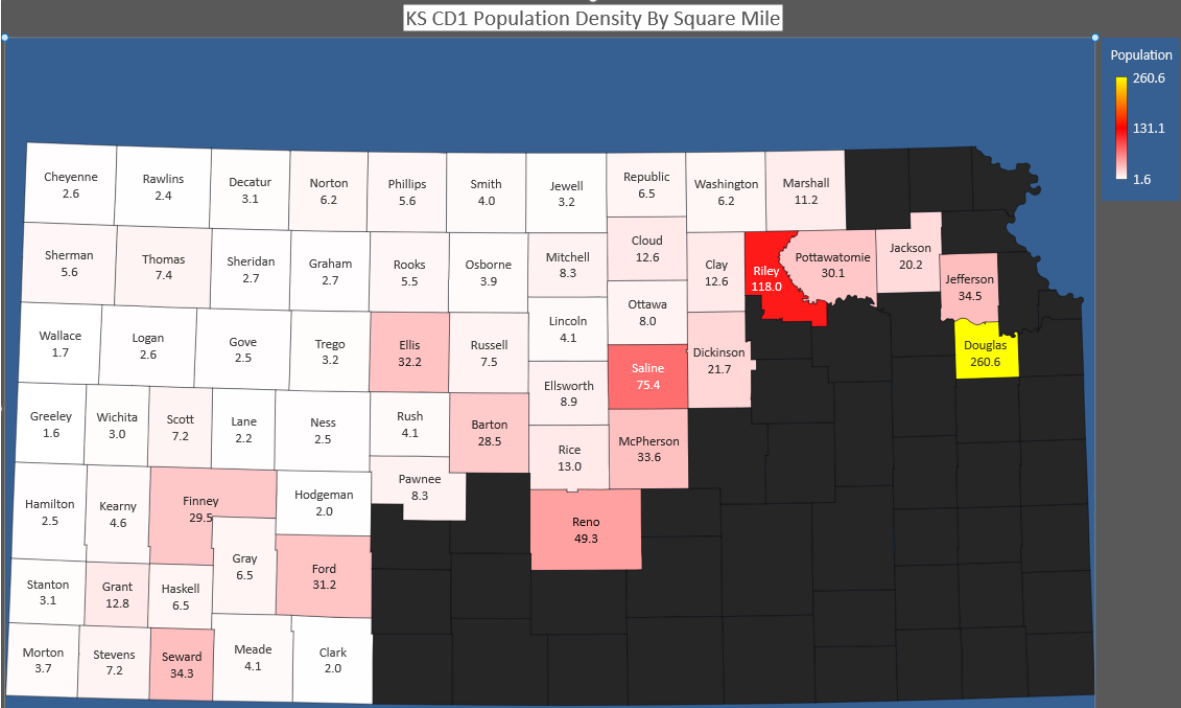
County	Chair	email	phone	Website
Barton	JoAnn Roth	joannroth@embarqmail.com	(620)282-4053	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Barton-County-Democratic-Party-1251787584913158/?ref=br_rs">https://www.facebook.com/Barton-County-Democratic-Party-1251787584913158/?ref=br_rs</a>
Clark	Hilary Foster	<a href="mailto:hilaryfstr21@gmail.com">hilaryfstr21@gmail.com</a>	(620)635-0307	
Clay	Arllyss Vathauer	backyardbbq@twinvalley.net	(785)632-0753	
Cloud	Paula Roegge	proegge@gmail.com	(785)614-4041	
Dickinson	Beki Perkins	bekiperkins@gmail.com	908-419-2194	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/dickinsonsdemocrats/">https://www.facebook.com/dickinsonsdemocrats/</a>
Douglas	Melinda Lavon	melindalavon0107@gmail.com	(785)979-2477	<a href="http://www.douglascountydemocrats.org/">http://www.douglascountydemocrats.org/</a>
Ellis	Trina Powell	powelltop@ruraltel.net	(785)625-4716	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/elliscountydemocrats/">https://www.facebook.com/elliscountydemocrats/</a>
Ellsworth	Virginia Hoffman	phoffman@shhlawyers.com	785-625-4716	
Finney	Jimmy Beard	jimmybeard91@gmail.com	719-209-9774	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/finneycountydemocrats/">https://www.facebook.com/finneycountydemocrats/</a>
Ford	Greta Clark	gmsclark@gmail.com	(620)255-3413	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/fordcountydemocrats/">https://www.facebook.com/fordcountydemocrats/</a>
Gove	tri-county party	info@kansasdems.org	(785)234-0425	<a href="https://kansasdems.org/county-parties">https://kansasdems.org/county-parties</a>
Graham	tri-county party	info@kansasdems.org	(785)234-0425	<a href="https://kansasdems.org/county-parties">https://kansasdems.org/county-parties</a>
Jackson	Janet Bair Carpenter	jbcku85@gmail.com	(785)364-7482	<a href="http://jacoksdems.org/">http://jacoksdems.org/</a>
Jefferson	Don Schaeffer	dandj69lizzie@yahoo.com	(785)250-8206	<a href="http://jeffcocksdems.org/">http://jeffcocksdems.org/</a>
Lincoln	Phyllis Winckler	PPWinckler@Gmail.com	(785)658-2258	
Marshall	Jim Swim	jlswymj@gmail.com	(785)562-8390	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/democratsofmarshallcounty/">https://www.facebook.com/democratsofmarshallcounty/</a>
McPherson	Carmalee Winebringer	cwwforkscitizens@gmail.com	(620)931-7213	
Reno	Jeff Stroberg	joinjeff4kansas@gmail.com	(620)259-0993	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/RenoCountyDemocrats/">https://www.facebook.com/RenoCountyDemocrats/</a>
Rice	Katelyn Mattson	katelynmattsonlevy@gmail.com	816-809-0233	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100084806703728">https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100084806703728</a>
Riley	Carl Reed	chair@rileycountydemocrats.org	785-770-7716	<a href="http://www.rileycountydemocrats.org/">http://www.rileycountydemocrats.org/</a>
Rooks	Mark Schaukowitch	rookscodemks@outlook.com	913-634-2641	
Saline	Gerrett Morris	gerrett.morris34@gmail.com	785-643-3268	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/SalineCountyDemocratsKs/">https://www.facebook.com/SalineCountyDemocratsKs/</a>
Seward	Kay Burtzloff	KayBurtzloff@Gmail.com	(620)629-0203	
Sheridan	Paulette Feldt		785-675-2397	
Thomas	Connie Davis	conniesmithdavis@gmail.com	(785)443-2655	
Trego	tri-county party	info@kansasdems.org	(785)234-0425	<a href="https://kansasdems.org/county-parties">https://kansasdems.org/county-parties</a>



**Population Sparsity** - 23% of counties in KS CDC 1 have less than 3 people per square mile.

The challenge of Face-to-Face contact in more sparsely populated areas decreases the effectiveness of door knocking when compared to the success of the counties with vastly higher population density due to the amount of time to travel and successful contact made.





The table below shows registered voters in KS CDC 1.

county	Republican	000Republican
Barton	10,033	6246
Cheyenne	1,473	493
Clark	1,074	465
Clay	4,032	1708
Cloud	3,736	2156
Decatur	1,505	627
Dickinson	8,336	5484
Douglas	21,053	61145
Ellis	10,363	9163
Ellsworth	2,441	1589
Finney	8,936	12444
Ford	6,653	9159
Gove	1,414	475
Graham	1,299	482
Grant	2,380	1380
Gray	2,133	1150
Greeley	706	145
Hamilton	914	458
Haskell	1,527	810
Hodgeman	952	338
Jackson	4,811	4335
Jefferson	6,713	6531
Jewell	1,571	591
Kearny	1,425	812
Lane	870	257
Lincoln	1,519	607
Logan	1,371	508
Marshall	3,893	3148
McPherson	11,184	7753
Meade	2,294	1079
Mitchell	2,880	1280
Morton	1,391	611
Ness	1,410	519
Norton	2,350	959
Osborne	1,694	960
Ottawa	2,937	1449
Pawnee	2,378	1408
Phillips	2,907	1023
Rawlins	1,508	534

Reno	21,338	20436
Republic	2,507	982
Rice	3,857	2571
Riley	15,392	23611
Rooks	2,695	955
Rush	1,531	695
Russell	3,116	1473
Saline	17,567	19129
Scott	2,414	1024
Seward	4,496	6423
Sheridan	1,380	463
Sherman	2,594	1153
Smith	2,016	737
Stanton	760	326
Stevens	2,389	857
Thomas	3,666	1632
Trego	1,385	712
Wallace	923	208
Washington	2,869	702
Wichita	887	476

From the high numbers of Republican registered voters, 2 observations can be made. First, the communicative ecologies, especially in rural areas, make it difficult for the Democratic Party's message to resonate. Please see Chapter 4 for more information. Second, families are likely to inherit and maintain their political party affiliation even after substantial changes in platform and policy preferences.\*

The number of Childcare and daycare centers in each area could be used to influence the OR score if that is the purpose of addressing that county. Would we want to address counties with a higher population of children under 5 compared to the available Day Care Centers? This may come into play given the recent legislation focused on the need for increased availability of childcare. Similarly, identifying populations with elderly in need of daycare could be another factor at play in the OR.

Education influences the OR by gauging the number of teachers in each county, the population 25 years old or older that have a bachelor's degree, and the number of those with less than a 9<sup>th</sup> education.

One of the challenges to organizing political groups includes bringing awareness to the general population on issues that affect their daily lives as well as their neighbors. Another challenge is identifying ways of increasing awareness and membership to address the issues such as resources needed, both monetary and people costs, with such things as are associated with operating a phone bank, maintaining appropriate office and contact information, advertising costs, and resource list for TV, newspapers, and radio stations in each county. Democrats should aspire to increase participation with members, registered voters, and candidates.

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\* Please see: Samuel Bazzi et al, "The Confederate Diaspora," NBER Working Paper (2023), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31331> – This data demonstrates how the Confederate Diaspora following the Civil War impacts Kansas. One possible inference is that the culturally conservative positions held by Western, rural Kansas have been inherited from their Confederate ancestors. This correlates with the activism of different ideological parts of the Republican Party, and the dominance of the Paleo-Libertarian-Capitalist Anarcho wing of the Kansas Republican Party.

## **Recommendations**

Candidates should tailor their campaign messages to meet various demographics if they want to overcome the odds of party affiliation. This does not mean “tacking towards the middle.” Please see the Chapter 5 for why.

Using data results from the August 2022 abortion issue vote to identify populations with a high percentage of “Vote No” respondents to drive support for future agendas. Further study as to why these populations voted no on the amendment needs to be done. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that messaging campaigns from Kansans for Constitutional Freedom that emphasize the incursion of state criminal surveillance into women’s healthcare resonates with the values held by a large number of people in the First Congressional District.

Another example might be to identify the populations of daycare-age children or populations needing other types of daycare (K - 12 age children) or Food Stamp recipients. Using the OR in each county, the candidates could focus on the campaign speaking points mostly to bring awareness to the people in that county (Childcare, Education, Poverty, Abortion, etc.). A development message could be refined that sees these populations as potential economic drivers, revitalizing the local economies. A federal candidate who understands the USDA loan and grant programs could become a powerful messenger if they pledge to work with local officials to get resources to address these areas of concern.

Critically, for these recommendations to work, any CD1 candidate must make physical appearances at events in district counties. Appearances demonstrate the candidate’s sincerity and authenticity, while also creating an opening to share their campaign agenda and the Democratic Party’s message. Candidate should consult with county chairs on the following venues for appearances:

1. County Fairs– County Fairs are known to pull communities together to support youth and socialize as a community. Utilizing the efforts usually put into door-knocking might be better suited by time and representation spent at a county fair where the community comes

together for various activities. Every County participates in a County or District 4-H fair and paid resources can be contacted for information and schedule of events. A specific strategy of approach should be developed and trained by the interests of the county/community. District fairs yield a higher population of people attending due to the organization of including multiple counties within a district.

2. High School academic awards ceremonies (HSAAC) – HSAACs can be seen by the community as a huge source of support for the county youth and involvement by a political party when awarding scholarships from the Democratic party in the amount of \$500 minimum to high school seniors. This can be accomplished by contacting the high schools in the county to promote this opportunity. Recipients would be picked by their essays on topics such as what the political process means to me or what the right to vote means to me.

3. 4-H Achievement Banquets – 4-H Achievement Banquets are another event where county groups come together and are venues for the Democratic party to be present to show support for the achievements of youth in our counties. The introduction of potential candidates with an agenda of future name recognition even if in a nonpartisan manner could benefit the Democratic Party in that county.

4. Other festivals, Markets, conventions, etc. (summer, fall, or back-to-school festivals) are other possible venues for promoting issues that would impact the county and creating awareness of our candidate's agenda. Many of these festivals include parades or vendor fairs. CD1 Democrats could be represented and contact communities in these avenues. Candidates for federal office could improve their notability by working to build their network of support and staffers by working with and recruiting from known community support centers such as educators, school boards, church groups, daycare centers, medical and mental health providers, and student organizations.

The following tables break down the educational attainment of each county's population. This data can be used to target specific populations, at the risk of feeding into an educational elitist

narrative (that exists nationwide). What is potentially more useful is the number of educators in a region. Demonstrating support for public education and public school is more likely to be a source of recruitment for canvassing and community support.

County	Teachers	PUBLIC SCHOOL	2021 25+ Bach	LessThan9thGrd
Douglas	1073	13,675.90	20,103	679
Riley	774	7,800.70	9,852	512
Reno	482	8,831.90	5,838	1063
Saline	459	7,793.00	6,735	706
Rice	280	1,614.00	895	107
Finney	271	7,831.30	2,587	3614
McPherson	238	4,382.40	4,089	912
Ellis	221	3,805.60	4,254	290
Ford	185	7,489.10	2,627	3292
Seward	160	5,075.40	1,041	2415
Jefferson	143	3,342.20	2,080	188
Dickinson	130	3,568.50	2,325	228
Barton	124	3,979.10	2,550	676

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Cheyenne	12	447.00	314	27
Morton	12	1,669.70	226	94
Haskell	12	604.40	227	451
Stanton	11	404.00	136	87
Logan	11	493.40	310	86
Wichita	11	373.80	219	34
Lane	9	275.50	145	0
Sheridan	8	603.70	287	33
Gove	6	477.70	289	36
Wallace	6	282.30	242	33
Greeley	4	227.00	152	72
Hodgeman	2	284.00	295	53

CD1 Democrats should advertise by investing in local media such as: Newspapers, Radio (AM and FM), and TV. Democrats should use these popular media types to gain awareness of their candidates and their campaign messages/agendas.

Radio	county			TV	county
KHOK FM	Barton				
KVGB AM/FM	Barton				
KBGL FM	Barton				
KZLS FM	Barton				
KNNS AM	Barton				
KGTR FM	Barton				
KBDA FM	Barton				
KRTT FM	Barton				
KFRM AM	Clay				
KCLY FM	Clay				
KNCK AM	Cloud				
KCKS FM	Cloud				
KVCO FM	Cloud				
KFNF FM	Decatur				
KABI AM	Dickinson				
KSAJ FM	Dickinson				
KBMP FM	Dickinson				
KJRL FM	Dickinson				
KNBU FM	Douglas				
KANU FM	Douglas				
KLWN AM	Douglas				
KKSW FM	Douglas				
KMXN FM	Douglas				
KJHK FM	Douglas				
KAYS AM	Ellis				
KHAZ FM	Ellis				
KJLS FM	Ellis				
KKQY FM	Ellis				
KFIX FM	Ellis				
KPRD FM	Ellis				
		newsPaper	County		
		The Salina Journal	Saline	KWKS TV	Thomas
		The Manhattan Mercury	Riley	KWKS TV	Thomas
		The Hutchinson News	Reno	KUPK TV/13	Finney
		The Hays Daily News	Ellis	KUJH LPTV/14	Douglas
		The Garden City Telegram	Finney	KSWK TV/3	Kearny
		Russell County News	Russell	KSNK TV/8	Decatur
		Phillipsburg Herald	Phillips	KSNG TV/11	Finney
		Norton Telegram	Norton	KSNC TV/2	Barton
		McPherson Sentinel	McPherson	KOOD TV/9	Russell
		Liberal Leader & Times	Seward	KOOD TV/9	Ellis
		Leoti Standard	Wichita	KOCW TV/14	Barton
		Lawrence Journal-World	Douglas	KLBY TV/4	Thomas
		Kearney County Advocate	Kearny	KLBY TV/4	Finney
		Great Bend Tribune	Barton	KDGL-TV	Haskell
		Dodge City Daily Globe	Ford	KDCK DTV/21	Ford
		Concordia Blade-Empire	Cloud	KDCK DTV/21	Ford
		Colby Free Press	Thomas	KBSL TV/10	Sherman
		Abilene Reflector Chronicle	Dickinson	KBSD TV/6	Ford
				KAAS TV/18	Saline
				BSH TV/7	Ellis



County fairs and area rodeos also offer opportunities for advertising and sponsorship options by printed business or club banners, advertising in project or activity programs, buying animal(s) at the auction, horse show sponsor award(s), participate in the parade and maintain a booth with prepared discussion and literature.

county	location	phone	contact
Cheyenne	St Francis	7853323171	
Rawlins	Rawlins Co Fairgrounds (Atwood)	7856263192	
Decatur	Oberlin	7854758121	
Norton	Norton County Fairgrounds	7858775755	
Phillips	Phillipsburg	7855436845	
Smith	Smith Center	7852826823	
Sherman	Goodland	7858904880	
Thomas	Thomas county Fairgrounds	7854604582	
Sheridan	Sheridan County Fairgrounds Hoxie	7856753268	
Graham		7854213411	
Rooks	Stockton	7854256851	
Osborne	Osborne Fairgrounds	7853462521	Kim Naber
Wallace	Sharon Springs	7858524285	Melinda Daily
Logan	Logan County Fairgrounds	7856713245	
Gove	Gove County Fairgrounds	7856734805	
Trego	Trego County Fairgrounds (WaKeeney)	7857436361	
Ellis	Hays	7856289430	
Russell	702 Fairway Dr Russell 4-H Bldg	7854833157	
Greeley		6203764284	
Wichita	Leoti	6203752724	
Scott	Scott County	6208722930	Carol Ann Crouch
Lane	Dighton	6203972806	
Ness		7857983921	
Rush	Rush County Fairgrounds	7852222710	
Barton	Expo Grounds West of Great Bend	6207931910	
Hamilton		6203845225	
Kearny	Lakin	6203556551	
Finney		6202723670	
Hodgeman	Jetmore	6203578321	DeWayne Craghead
Pawnee	400 E 18th St Larned	6202856901	Kyle Grant
Stanton		6204922240	
Grant		6203561721	
Haskell	Haskell County Fairgrounds - Sublette	6206752261	
Gray		6208553821	
Ford	Ford County Fairgrounds Dodge City	6202274542	
Morton		6206972558	
Stevens	Hugoton	6205444359	
Seward	Liberal	6206245604	
Meade	Meade	6208738790	
Clark	Ashland	6206352811	

Social media has become commonplace to be able to share information. The Democrats should be visible with candidates, campaign agendas, and activities on social media such as Facebook, TikTok, and others with reliable moderators/content creators.

Another campaign that is increasing in popularity is a QR campaign capturing the following: A QR code can be established to gather data relating to various issues. These QR codes can then be posted/presented, and people scan these codes; it connects them to a Google form and or website where they complete the form, and the gathered information is entered into a database to be later queried for data use. A record will be created regardless of whether they complete the Google Form or not.

utm Parameter	Required	Example	Description
id	No	KSCD1_1	Used to identify which ads campaign this referral references. Use <u>utm_id</u> to identify a specific ads campaign.
source	Yes	google	Use <u>utm_source</u> to identify a search engine, newsletter name, or other source.
medium	Yes	<u>hardCard</u>	Use <u>utm_medium</u> to identify a medium such as email or cost-per-click.
campaign	No	vote2024	Used for keyword analysis. Use <u>utm_campaign</u> to identify a specific product promotion or strategic campaign.
term	No	<u>reconnectDems</u>	Used for paid search. Use <u>utm_term</u> to note the keywords for this ad.
content	No	<u>donkeyScan</u>	Used for A/B testing and content-targeted ads. Use <u>utm_content</u> to differentiate ads or links that point to the same URL.

A UTM URL QR code is a solution that can embed a link with UTM codes. UTM codes are snippets of text attached to the link to improve online and offline campaign tracking. These codes contain five query parameters that can help you precisely track your campaign: source, medium, campaign, content, and term.

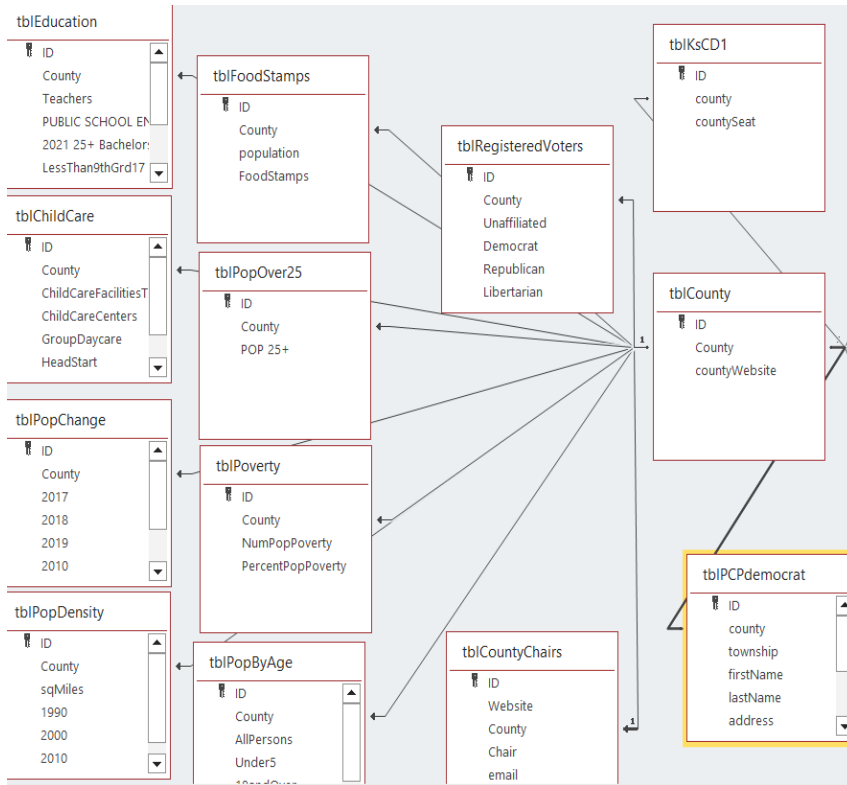
In closing, there are numerous challenges to organizing political groups that face the counties in KS CD1. These challenges include the general population's understanding or lack of information on the issues, the low number of registered Democratic voters, low Democratic candidate rates, and identifying ways of increasing awareness and membership. In increasing awareness, CD1 needs to identify public events and locations to be used as venues to share the campaign message and introduce potential future Democratic leaders. Democrats need to maintain an accurate list of political offices and contact information. Democrats need to recruit members to be staffers and support staff for political campaign positions.

**Appendix**

O R	county	popu lation	Chair	em ail	pho ne	recur Meeti ng	We bsit e	perce ntNo Votes	Non- Rep ublic an	Rep ublic ans	Tea che rs	SCH OOL (FTE)	2021 25+ Bach elors
10 9	Dougla s	1190 94	Melind a Lavon	Y	Y	Y	Y	81.50 %	600 72	2105 3	107 3	13675 .9	2010 3
75	Jeffers on	1838 7	Don Schaefer	Y	Y	Y	Y	55.40 %	638 8	6713	143	3342. 2	2080
75	Saline	5416 0	Gerret t Morris	Y	Y	N	Y	55.30 %	186 70	1756 7	459	7793	6735
70	Reno	6188 1	Jeff Stroberg	Y	Y	Y	Y	49.40 %	199 54	2133 8	482	8831. 9	5838
69	Jackso n	1327 4	Janet Bair Carpe nter	Y	Y	Y	Y	52.10 %	425 1	4811	84	2273. 5	1186
69	Finney	3818	Jimmy	Y	Y	Y	Y	47.80	121	8936	271	7831.	2587

		7	Beard					%	73			3	
69	Riley	7210	Carl	Y	Y	Y	Y	68.40	228	1539	774	7800.	9852
		5	Reed					%	37	2		7	
67	Marsha	1001	Jim	Y	Y	N	Y	42.00	310	3893	43	1752.	794
	ll	4	Swim					%	5			9	
67	Ellis	2892	Trina	Y	Y	Y	Y	42.10	894	1036	221	3805.	4254
		1	Powell					%	2	3		6	
63	Dickins	1849	Beki	Y	Y	Y	Y	45.90	535	8336	130	3568.	2325
	on	2	Perkins					%	4			5	
62	Seward	2194	Kay	Y	Y	N	N	49.80	626	4496	160	5075.	1041
		2	Burtzloff					%	3			4	
58	Osborne	3493	N	N	N	N	N	32.20	941	1694	19	332.1	410
	e							%					
57	Ford	3421	Greta	Y	Y	N	Y	48.00	897	6653	185	7489.	2627
		2	Clark					%	4			1	
57	Meade	4019	N	N	N	N	N	31.60	105	2294	23	419	379
								%	6				
54	McPherson	3008	Carma	Y	Y	N	N	46.00	751	1118	238	4382.	4089
		5	lee					%	5	4		4	

			Wineb rinner										
54	Trego	2798	Dem tri county party	Y	Y	N	Y	35.00 %	696	1385	16	369.2	383
54	Ellswor th	6374	Virgini a Hoffm an	Y	Y	N	N	44.30 %	156 6	2441	23	1623. 8	636
53	Ottawa	5768	N	N	N	Y	N	39.00 %	140 3	2937	46	1200. 9	623
53	Rice	9441	Kately n Mattso n	Y	Y	N	Y	41.60 %	229 1	3857	280	1614	895



Most of the data in the above database diagram was obtained from

<https://ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/ksah/portalTable.shtml>.

### 3. State Party Infrastructure & Opportunities

Historically, Kansas has long been identified as a solidly Republican state. We have not elected a Democrat to the US Senate since 1939 (the worst record in the country for either party). While Kansas has had divided party representation in the US House (currently 1 Democrat out of 4 seats in the US House), success has primarily occurred in more urban districts. In rare occasions where a Democrat was elected to the US House from a rural area, those occasions occurred before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the ensuing party realignment.

At the state level, Democrats have achieved some measure of success, but have not been able to acquire control of either state-level legislative body for very long. Combined, Democrats have only controlled a single chamber for 12 years, total, since statehood.

In the current political moment, the state-level office should be achievable. Ethics filings show the state Republican Party is low on funding. State Republican leadership is reportedly abysmal. Statewide organization is reportedly weak. Nonetheless, the Kansas Republican Party (KRP) voters are ideologically committed. Republican-aligned PACs and 501(c)4s, funded by billionaires, inject money into campaigns against Democratic challengers. Local media is largely framed in conservative terms, reinforcing conservative economic and ideological dogma.

While the ideologically static nature of the electorate poses a significant challenge to the Kansas Democratic Party (KDP), opportunities are starting to emerge. The abortion amendment vote in August of 2022 demonstrates that conservative paranoia over the value of freedom and the government surveillance apparatus can be co-opted. The constant, repetitive messaging cycle of “freedom” from right-wing ideologues is beginning to be stretched to the breaking point. Whether it is legislative tactics denying expert testimony on legislation or “gut and go” strategies to pass unpopular policies, the electorate is starting to see a disconnect between the value of freedom, as articulated by Republicans, and the Kansas Republican Party’s policy agenda.

The question being posed by this chapter, then, is whether the Kansas Democratic Party can take advantage of the emerging electoral and messaging opportunities. The answer to this question partly depends on how long the Kansas Republican Party continues to operate in disarray and continues to fail at fundraising. Given that the longevity of the KRP’s disarray could evaporate at any moment, we should not rely on their inoperativity. Instead, we should plan strategically, anticipating a return to strength at any moment. Additionally, the answer also partly depends on whether the failures of the Kansas Republican Party open new doors for the Kansas Democratic Party. It is deeply unclear, and may even be undesirable, to convert formerly active Republican Party members to the Democratic Party, as they have the potential to drag the party further ideologically to the right and



may not yield new funding sources. Clearly, a distinction must be noted between “active” and “inactive” members of the party. By “active” we mean members of the apparatus that engage in politics and not the casual local news watcher who votes Republican because that’s what they have always done. Further, the answer depends on how Democratic infrastructure, broadly conceived, is funded and deployed over the next few years. This chapter will attempt to illuminate the existing Kansas Democratic Infrastructure and suggest supplements to intensify KDP and Democratic Party messaging in Kansas. Ideally, a stronger and more intense messaging strategy should be able to penetrate the ideological hold the Republican Party has on the electorate and set the stage for stronger Democratic victories.

### **Party Responsibilities**

The responsibilities of the state party include:

- Communication
- Fundraising
- Fielding and supporting candidates
- Ensuring fair elections
- District research

Strategically, the KDP has focused most of its energy, budget, and research resources on defending candidates in “winnable” and “defendable” areas, which tend to be considered wealthier, more educated, younger, less religious, and more unionized. While the definition of what is and is not “winnable” or “defendable” has oscillated from election to election, the geography in which these elections appear never changes. Counties west of Shawnee, almost all considered “rural”, are rendered “unwinnable” in some shape or form.

Broadly speaking, the selection of “winnable” and “unwinnable” counties by the party follows a national trend to prioritize more urban spaces over rural spaces. National Democratic Party messaging and policy tend to favor these areas over rural. At the national level, this prioritization has backfired. Before the 2020 election, most state legislatures were Republican for almost 10 years. This allowed the Republican party to block or delay federal policy at the state level, depopularizing the Democratic Party agenda, and delegitimizing the Democratic Party. Worse, this allowed for extreme gerrymandering which assisted in the election of Donald Trump to the presidency.

Justifications for ceding rural can be summarized as overly simplistic and victim blaming. Rural people have a long history of being blamed for particular voting patterns when a political party does nothing to appeal to them, which in turn, enables the other party to have a near monopoly on the rural vote. Resistance begins to emerge when the party winning the rural vote obviously

victimizes rural voters by exploiting them for tax subsidies (school vouchers) or attempting to strip their rights and freedoms (abortion).

In these cases, opportunities arise to cast a different story and flip voters from one party to another. However, the National Democratic Party has repeatedly failed to take advantage of these opportunities. Instead, they default to defending the status quo, preserving institutional and legal structures that invariably cause suffering due to their historical inheritance. The ghosts of racism, sexism, and static gender norms haunt both institutional and legal structures within our government. In part, this result has been due to the insistence of New Democrats on using neoliberal policy for liberal ideological ends. However, neoliberalism is an extremely conservative world view – as will be explained in the next chapter. In part, reimagining and recreating governmental institutional structures is an extremely demanding task. For example, it's well known that townships do not serve their original purpose, but many counties have struggled for 50+ years to eliminate these anachronistic holdovers from English colonization. Eliminating townships would make taxing more efficient, but explaining the Russian nesting doll tax system to voters is ridiculously hard. Therefore, such simple structural reform actions appear impossible.

The Kansas Democratic Party follows these national trends. This is not to “blame” the party and its leadership, but it is to identify that there is a disconnect between what the national party identifies as best practices and what best practices fit for winning the rural state of Kansas. Consequently, the KDP is not in a financial situation where it is capable of deploying the organizing teams or purchasing the media buys to successfully take advantage of the emerging opportunities West of Shawnee County.

Currently, only one of CD1's counties is considered “winnable” (Riley County), four counties are in the top ten most populous counties in Kansas: Douglas, Riley, Reno, and Saline. Another two – Ford and McPherson – are in the top twenty, and six more – Ellis, Franklin, Pottawatomie, Barton, Dickinson, and Jefferson – fall in the top thirty. Nonetheless, these potentially “winnable” elections based on local data will probably be ignored in favor of defending existing seats so as not to risk putting the party in a worse legislative position. County chairs West of Shawnee feel demoralized when promoting candidates, but have little in terms of support from the party. Cycles of blame can ensue after losses, which in turn, increases the difficulty of the party to expand West.

The following identifies specific problems with how KDP struggles to meet certain responsibilities during elections and tries to offer solutions. We acknowledge that our recommendations will take time to implement and may be controversial. However, we believe any controversy is an opportunity for internal debate, and those internal debates are both healthy and necessary for the party to grow.

## **Communication**

Kansas Democrats lack a clear identity. This can be attributed to the “moderation” of the party’s most publicly visible elected officials who choose to distance themselves from the party and legitimize parts of the Republican agenda or message, even when they disagree on substance, to receive statewide votes. Implicitly, such strategies legitimize Republican attacks on the party and make it difficult for Democrats to challenge those attacks. Explicitly, it demoralizes the party faithful for being “too radical,” even when their policy priorities and values are not particularly transformative. The KDP needs to gain some level of party messaging discipline over all candidates that creates a public identity for the party and energizes grassroots activists, especially in rural areas.

Creating a party identity will create a publicly visible messaging platform that can address the Democrats living in the Big First who are unaware of the state party’s existence. Half the counties in CD1 lack county chairs, and no registered Democrat receives any regular communication from KDP – not county chairs, not state committee members, not district committee members – excluding fundraising texts and emails from the state chair, which tend to focus on events and fundraising. Without regular communication, Democrats are lost without community and state identity. Washington Days and Demofest are excellent places to both feel and focus messaging but have little effect on those who cannot afford to attend or those who do not know those events occur in the first place.

To be fair, KDP seems to be improving with the executive director hired last year. He has begun an e-newsletter, which hopefully will be distributed regularly. State Chair Jeanna Repass sends emails, although not regularly. The KDP website is improving, and the Governor’s office is now distributing weekly talking points. All of this goes a long way to giving aid and comfort to Democrats who feel alone, and hopefully, communication will continue to improve.

Additionally, the national party has offloaded much of the messaging responsibility to third-party vendors and 501(c)4s. Kansas Democrats need to invest in such organizations, and in turn, such organizations need to be active and steadfast in ideological messaging that both appeals to rural audiences and directs new audiences to the party. Fundamentally, this means the KDP does not have total control over its identity and must affirm that loss of control is a good thing. The KDP should affirm and joyously embrace a clear identity, even if certain members are reluctant.

## **Fundraising**

KDP is working hard to raise funds for KDP, and understandably so, but few of those resources are returned to the counties. Indeed, we are often viewed as competing organizations by our county members who have limited budgets and must choose where to make their contributions. There is an

annual opportunity for grant funding from the state committee, restricted to counties that have worked at the state fair.

Financial information has been hard to come by in recent years. There is usually a brief financial report at the semi-annual state committee meetings, but there's no discussion of finances, perhaps due to the horrendous situation KDP found itself in a few years ago with failure to report that resulted in huge fines. There was also confusion from the lack of transparency in the "coordinated" campaigns run by top statewide candidates in 2022.

Greater transparency would be helpful, but if KDP has a long-term fundraising strategy, that would be news to most of us. The strategy should be developed with input from county chairs so that they could encourage their local Democrats to support it.

Broader, national trends could also be intensified by party faithful. While the KDP must defend existing legislative seats and try to justify its investments in seats that are "winnable" to donors, Republicans have not faced rural challenges. With local parties severely underfunded, creating a PAC to explicitly fund the unwinnable races and county parties could help the KDP by forcing Republicans to divert resources from otherwise strong candidates, forcing errors and creating openings. Every State Blue could be a model, however, they come with a high price tag and could compete for party funding. We need to explore out-of-state funding and create out-of-state networks with big-dollar donors to implement this strategy.

The explicit upside would be guaranteeing county parties a sizable bi-yearly donation and guaranteeing a Democratic candidate a minimum amount of money to run against a Republican in races where they are likely to lose. However, such campaigns introduce the KDP message and the platform to new audiences, setting the stage for future success over the long term.

### **Fielding and supporting candidates**

In a critical year for county and state elections, KDP has offered some candidate training, which is great. However, most counties are on their own when it comes to outreach to find candidates, and are caught in an endless loop of "no one will run because there's no one running." A text campaign to registered Democrats in each county would be incredibly helpful in finding potential candidates, and specific office training (county and state level) would be excellent.

Additionally, several third-party resources for training candidates and county chairs are available from these sources (which focus on rural).

## Rural Organizing Resources

Organization	Website	State / National	Description
RuralOrganizing.org	<a href="https://ruralorganizing.org">https://ruralorganizing.org</a>	National	A collection of groups focused on progressive change. RuralOrganizing Education Fund is a 501c3 that works to educate network members on how to access federal resources for rural development. RuralOrganizing.org is a 501c4 that works to train rural activists for political activity. Includes research and data on rural voting patterns. Offers toolkits and Zoom training for rural organizers. Ruralvote.org is the SuperPAC.
Indivisible Rural Caucus	<a href="https://indivisible.org/campaign/rural-caucus">https://indivisible.org/campaign/rural-caucus</a>	National	501c4 working to turn out the vote. Rural caucus focuses on state and federal elections. Offers training and toolkits.
State Innovation Exchange	<a href="https://stateinnovation.org">https://stateinnovation.org</a>	National	Progressive candidate and legislator support for economic development programs. Offers guides, network support (across states, parties, legislatures, and grassroots orgs) to pass and defend policies.
Farm Action Fund Farm Action	<a href="https://farmactionfund.us">https://farmactionfund.us</a> <a href="https://farmaction.us">https://farmaction.us</a>	National	501c4 and 501c3 working to advance progressive farm policy. Offers guides and toolkits on state-level and national-level farm issues from the campaign trail to the legislature.
Rural Policy Action	<a href="https://ruralpolicyaction.us">https://ruralpolicyaction.us</a>	National	The research arm of Rural Democracy Initiative. Issues a yearly report on progressive rural issues and how to advance at the state and federal levels.
People's Action	<a href="https://peoplesaction.org">https://peoplesaction.org</a>	National	501c4 power-building organization. Offers training.
Dirtroad Organizing	<a href="https://www.dirtroadorganizing.org">https://www.dirtroadorganizing.org</a>	National	501c4 specializing in rural organizing and deep canvassing. Offers training.
Rural Democracy Initiative	<a href="https://ruraldemocracyinitiative.org">https://ruraldemocracyinitiative.org</a>	National	An investment and communications hub for building party infrastructure. Offers help with grants and developing capital stacks.

### Ensuring fair elections

Election security is the Secretary of State's responsibility, but many levels of election fraud are usually at the level of county clerks not enforcing election laws or enforcing them at will. In many CD1 counties, election workers are all Republicans. While this is often due to a lack of Democrats who are willing to work the polls, many county clerks are resistant to placing them equally at polling

sites as directed by law. KDP offers no training in election law and does not have an election law attorney on staff or retainer. While this may not affect individual elections, the overall impact depresses Democrat participation and imposes a significant election obstacle.

A solution is unclear. Without additional financial support, the party may need to default to a vendor in the list provided above.

### **Research**

Due to a lack of resources, KDP has devolved to a policy of supporting candidates only in winnable districts, which is defined by KDP as any spot that Joe Biden carried in 2020. While financially prudent, this policy makes it even more difficult for those of us in “non-winnable” districts to field and support candidates.

Even without direct financial assistance, however, the KDP could offer support to our candidates in these ways:

- Research on past elections and data to show voting patterns
- Polling to help candidates determine winnable issues
- Closer interaction with county chairs and Governor and LG so that the party is promoted when they are in the county
- Branded materials for mail and in-person distribution– postcards, flyers, etc.

### **Conclusion**

Democrats in CD 1 are lacking many financial and information resources, and the KDP needs to reach out to county chairs to determine what they need. While financial assistance may not be forthcoming for years, support in the form of information could be incredibly valuable. The KDP is improving its outreach to county chairs, but there is a long record of lack of communication to overcome.

The most needed resource in CD 1 is also the least expensive, and that is a spirit of optimism and hope. It's difficult to be a Democrat anywhere in America these days, but there is a special kind of loneliness in being a Kansas Democrat. Sending the message that “you are not alone” is a great place to start, but we need regular updates on victories and voting trends that encourage us.

Once the Congressional campaigns begin in earnest, the Democratic candidates can do much with outreach and encouragement and increase the reach of KDP. This will benefit the entire Congressional district.

## 4. Rural Communication Ecologies, Cultural Habits, & Deep Canvassing Opportunities

### **Moral Exchanges**

During an off-season canvas in Phillipsburg, Kansas, a rural canvasser encountered a couple in their late 60s, just about ready to retire. As the canvasser turned the block to enter their driveway, the gentleman of the house immediately greeted them, just as the puppy he carries escapes his hands. Waving, the canvasser greets the homeowner as the black Labrador pup leaps towards them. Kneeling to embrace the small lab, the canvasser mumbles a few affirming words to the incredibly friendly dog. Taking the tiny lab into their arms, the canvasser shouts across the driveway how much they love the homeowner's dog. Once the canvasser got close enough, they hand the puppy over and promptly introduce their self. The canvasser declares that they were from a different town and canvassing Phillipsburg to see what the town's needs are and how state policy might help. The gentleman immediately invited them inside to introduce his wife and have what he called a "proper" conversation after a long day's work.

Over the course of the next hour, the canvasser and the couple would discuss all the problems of the world. The canvasser begins the conversation by asking about local problems, starting with the city's downtown preservation and renovation efforts. Was the couple satisfied with the progress? What are the struggles local restaurant owners experiencing? Does the couple feel the county or state could contribute in some way to help alleviate stress? The couple did not "really pay attention to" local politics or downtown; rather, they preferred state and federal politics.

When asked about what they felt the state could do to help improve their lives, the couple began to complain. "Taxes are too high," and "they don't allow farmers to use public easements." Seizing on the use of public easements, the canvasser inquires about a local issue where a hog farmer illegally used public easements to dump hog manure on another farmer's land. Their local state representative wanted to make the dumping of hog manure on others' land through the private use of public easements legal. The canvasser asks, "How would relaxing the rules on the private use

of public easements stop or prevent abuse? And how would allowing greater private access to public easements affect EMS service?” The couple immediately begins to reply by retreating from their desire to open public easements for private use and noting that all the trouble surrounding the local commotion about easements must come from a state house representative who, “Must be a Democrat.” Their representative is not a Democrat. Their representative is a Republican.

When the canvasser brought up the fact their state representative is a registered member of the Republican Party, the couple attempts to pivot away from party affiliation and towards what they felt was the real source of their tax burdens – poor people. “You’re from a small town, you know those people. They don’t work!” The canvasser had heard this claim many times over the last 40 years, despite the complete absence of any empirical evidence to substantiate the claim. In fact, labor statistics at the time revealed that Kansas had a historically low unemployment rate.<sup>1</sup> With strong labor demand, came higher wage offerings. But higher wage offerings did not appear in rural Kansas. Higher wages appeared in urban, eastern Kansas.<sup>2</sup> Migration from rural areas to urban areas could be correlated to the appearance of higher-wage jobs in these areas.<sup>3</sup> Labor shortages had appeared in rural areas as a result.<sup>4</sup>

The canvasser replies with these facts. “Well, so and so is getting welfare. I don’t know how else they could do it. We have to yank that. We need to give them motivation to work, and damn it, if not having money to pay for food creates motivation, then let’s do it!” the homeowner’s wife replies. The inductive logic projecting the economic struggles of one person onto the experience of everyone participating in the welfare system, regardless of whether or not there is evidence that a single person is gaming the welfare system, is infuriating to most Democrats. This canvasser, however, does not take the bait. Instead, they ask the couple to explain how welfare benefits work in Kansas.

The couple are stunned that someone is not immediately agreeing. The couple exchanges a couple of glances, and then the gentleman of the house replies, “We cannot.” The canvasser calmly explains a family of 5 would need to be making less than about \$46,000 per year and both parents would need to be applying for at least 3 jobs per day.<sup>5</sup> Realizing that it would be nearly impossible to



be receiving welfare, own a house, raise 3 kids on \$46,000 per year, and not have a full-time job, or at least multiple low-wage jobs, the couple fell silent for a moment. Then the homeowner insisted, “Well, they have to be gaming the system somehow.” The canvasser replies, “In all honesty, the state doesn’t have a welfare problem. On average people spend 6 months on unemployment or less.<sup>6</sup> Only about 73,000 out of roughly 3 million citizens in Kansas are on welfare.<sup>7</sup> It’s tracked pretty closely for fraud and abuse. Why does this matter so much to the both of you?”

This last question, articulated in a polite and genuine tone, was not received as being confrontational. It was received as intended, as an inquiry into what the couple values and how that value was connected to a set of programs like unemployment insurance, TANF, and Medicaid expenditures. The gentleman’s wife thought for a moment, looked at her husband, who gently nodded, and began to reply in a matter-of-fact voice. “We are Christians. We value work for our fellow man. From our work, comes our dignity.”

Immediately upon hearing the word “dignity,” the canvasser knew this couple had the potential to become Democrats. Instead of defending welfare or trying to logically prove how welfare works to preserve the dignity of those using it, the canvasser takes a different route of engagement, a route seldom used by canvassers. The canvasser asks the couple how someone becomes dignified in their religion. What follows is an honest exchange about how their commitment to a set of Christian religious beliefs informs how the couple votes. By further probing those beliefs, the canvasser and the couple were able to jointly conclude that welfare recipients were not to blame for the labor shortage. What should be blamed is the attempt, by both parties (although to a much more intense degree with Republicans) to make as much of life as possible into the form of a competitive market, and how fostering so much competition was drawing labor, and dignity, away from rural towns. The couple agreed they would vote for a Democrat, even convert parties if the Democrats produced results, in the form of work that could lead to dignified lives for the poor, in rural areas like Phillipsburg.

This scene reveals a lot. At the surface, this scene reveals the power of properly trained deep canvassers to probe stalwart conservatives for common ground. The scene also demonstrates the power of deep canvassing to discover a core set of political commitments that need to be changed. A promise to change those core political commitments could inform a rural Democrat's platform when running for state House or state Senate.

At a deeper level, however, this scene reveals a set of disciplinary commitments made by both the canvasser and the couple being canvassed. The canvasser is deeply committed to being affirmative, by which I mean both taking seriously and positively the values of those they interact with. By not dismissing the couple's religious beliefs, or being demeaning to the couple's lack of data-informed views; and instead, trying to identify the core ethical or moral principle that motivates the couple, the canvasser affirms that the couple is more than likely good people who want the best for their community and that the couple wants to discover how problems in their community could be addressed by policy. Fundamentally, the canvasser does not believe the couple is stupid or that their logic or religious beliefs should be dismissed.

At the same time, the couple being canvassed reveals their disciplinary commitments to their religion and an interpretation of their religion's value of work. Probing their interpretation of their religion's importance of work reveals a desire for everyone to live with "dignity." Discovering the pursuit of dignity to be the motivating principle for the couple's voting habits, the conversation can now be understood in terms of how the couple sees people around them, who may or may not have the same religious commitments, become dignified through work. In this case, the canvasser understands how state policy works to create competitive markets in urban areas, but not very competitive markets in rural areas, resulting in communities where some people can appear to this couple as not living with dignity. It simply becomes a question of how the canvasser can assist the couple in discovering how political commitments to competitive markets, embodied in policy, can create the illusion that certain (rural) people live without dignity, and therefore, are the reason for a community's lack of success broadly defined.

The wager of this chapter is that this scene can function as a synecdoche (a part that represents the whole) for rural First Congressional District voters (and perhaps, conservative voters writ large). If our canvassed couple works a relatively accurate representation of a rural voter, then Democratic Party canvassers need to have similar disciplinary commitments as the scene's canvasser to successfully win over rural voters in the Big First over the next 10 years. Simultaneously, the Democratic Party needs to understand the results of deep canvassing are not reducible to data. Nor do the results of deep canvassing necessarily reveal a (broadly persuasive) technocratic policy platform. Deep canvassing, properly conducted, reveals systemic patterns, intensified (or de-intensified), by policy. The articulation of these patterns may or may not be very sophisticated. Someone's inability to discuss policy or procedure at a high level is not an indicator of their intelligence, it simply means their focus and expertise are different from our own. This difference demands respect, which is something Democrats do not always realize they are not providing, which creates a barrier to building connections with voters. Democrats need to understand that a citizens' narrative needs to be placed within a wider framework to make sense. When asked, citizens articulate their experience(s) (or not) with the effects of systems designed to (re)distribute public resources. Their narratives have the potential to be a measure of the legitimacy of a system. Reading these measures correctly has the potential to reveal a common language for candidates and voters to communicate in and develop policy platforms together.

We will proceed in 2 parts. First, we will analyze the cultural scene of "conservative," rural Kansas. We contend that canvassing efforts in rural areas can easily be reduced to a "market competition," which squanders opportunities for the Democratic Party to build legitimacy with rural voters over time. Democratic Party culture is partially to blame. Holding technical and policy expertise and education above local knowledge at the interpersonal level and advancing market-based solutions for rural economic issues work together, muddying the party's appeal. We need to break these bad habits. At the same time, market-based solutions and deregulation for rural problems have intensified, rather than alleviated, long-standing rural anxieties, regardless of party.

Consequently, we need to be conscious of how policy effects interpersonal bad habits and how those habits effect rural culture. Second, based on our analysis, we make the case for developing a deep canvassing plan for the Big First. Using our recommendations, we believe policy platforms will emerge that broadly challenge market-based solutions. If deep canvassing is properly deployed, the technique has the potential to generate a legitimate communications network that short-circuits both local communication ecologies and the echoes of conservative media within those ecologies. We believe the result will make the Democratic Party appear legitimate in the Big First and help the party deploy a policy platform that resonates with rural voters, intensifying the party's newly acquired legitimacy.

### **Bad Habits**

Returning to our introductory scene, the first revelation the canvassed couple provides is the brand status of the Democratic Party<sup>8</sup>, and more specifically, the brand status of the Kansas Democratic Party. Nearly immediately, the couple being canvassed assume the illegal use of public easements and the attempt to subvert a court ruling on damages must come from a Democrat. If we pause on their assumption, it tells us two things about how the party is perceived in rural areas. First, Democrats are not perceived as acting in the public interest. Second, if Democrats do not act in the public interest, their actions are not legitimate.

A typical gut reaction might be to dismiss what the couple is saying out of hand as "tribalism." After all, the facts speak for themselves. Democrats typically defend public institutions and services and usually seek to expand public institutions and services. Setting aside the obvious racist implications of labeling something "tribal,"<sup>9</sup> a partisan defensive response would be to "punish" the couple for not staying informed through some kind of admonishment. If the canvasser were to respond, "Well, Democrats work to preserve public goods and institutions. They fight to preserve public easements. Do you not know that?", the couple would be framed implicitly as being "stupid." Regardless of the tone or delivery, the couple being canvassed now must either accept a measure of guilt for not performing their civic duty to remain informed or reject the label and punish the

canvasser for daring to imply they are “stupid” after having invited them into their home. Either way, the canvasser would have undermined their credibility, and by extension, the legitimacy of the Democratic Party. The conversation would have ended immediately.

Rather, by allowing the couple to continue, the canvasser disciplines his partisan ire, maintaining a calm, professional demeanor. By not defending the party, the canvasser can continue gleaning valuable information. In doing so, the canvasser has revealed the second bit of information. Canvassing is typically conducted using inductive methods, as opposed to deep canvassing which uses deductive methods. Knocking on a door, talking to the occupant for two minutes or less, and defending party values and policy prescriptions do not work in areas where the Democratic Party has no (mass) legitimacy. To be sure, regular canvassing has its place. Regular canvassing can sway undecided voters at the last minute or alert voters to a new topic. However, inductive methods of canvassing will only produce results where party credibility and legitimacy have already been established. Using inductive methods, especially in rural areas where the Democratic Party has little to no presence carries a high risk of working to undermine party credibility. Knocking on a door, becoming loosely confrontational, distributing tidbits of information, and then leaving without establishing credibility between the person who answers the door risk affirming, and repeating, predisposed biases against Democrats such as “they don’t care,” or “they are just smarter than everyone else.” The constant repetition of these biases, in already geographically isolated areas, intensified by a similar news narrative, works to undermine the legitimacy of the Democratic Party (both nationally and statewide), especially in rural areas.

Deep canvassing, which is more labor intensive and does not necessarily charge to the party’s defense, has a much stronger chance of working in rural areas precisely because its logic is not designed to make the canvasser competitive with their audience. To understand why not being competitive with the audience in rural areas is important, we must back up, zoom out, and examine the larger cultural picture of which rural Kansas is but only a part.

A tremendous amount of ink has been spilled describing the current (global) cultural moment as “neoliberal.”<sup>10</sup> In what might be the best and most simple explanation of neoliberalism, Adam Kotsko explains neoliberalism is a conservative worldview that seeks to remake as much of the world as possible into a competitive market.<sup>11</sup> While there are many implications to how policy is framed, justified, and passed, to this worldview, what is important to our discussion of canvassing is how neoliberalism is internalized at the level of the individual soul and how that is expressed in rural areas.

Neoliberal policy, enacted at both the federal and state levels – by both Republicans and Democrats – is felt with a uniquely high degree of intensity in rural areas. For example, deregulation in the agricultural space has led to strong concentrations of market power, especially in the meat industry where four companies own 80% of the market.<sup>12</sup> Consolidation among farm equipment manufacturers has led to price gauging in the tractor and farm equipment sectors.<sup>13</sup> Fertilizer and chemical manufacturers continue to consolidate, leading to high spikes in prices.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, farmers must produce more wheat, vegetables, beans, and meat to make a profit, while grocery store chains have consolidated, driving down market prices for farmers and increasing store prices for consumers.<sup>15</sup> Broadly speaking, corporate consolidation has diminished commodity prices, increased agricultural production, and decreased the profitability of family farms, making it nearly impossible for farmers to make a living wage. There is a correlation between these trends and farmer suicide rates, which have skyrocketed over the last forty years.<sup>16</sup>

One way of explaining why suicide rates among family farmers have increased is not simply the competitive difficulties of the agriculture market. While Reagan and Clinton era deregulation has made the agriculture market more difficult, additional factors are at play. Family farmers often live in rural and geographically isolated areas. Geographic isolation can lead to social isolation, where communicative systems emerge between individuals, but those systems are not necessarily the most mentally healthy.<sup>17</sup> Social media intensifies this social isolation, repeating and reproducing what an individual experiences in their limited social circle. Their success, or lack thereof, then gets coded

using gender, sexuality, and race. A farmer's self-worth is then reflected within this social cycle of repetition that genders, sexualizes, and racializes their success on an arbitrary sliding scale. Consequently, a bad year auctioning cattle for slaughter is not the result of market forces but treating the cattle too well or becoming too emotionally attached "like a woman."<sup>18</sup>

Our point is not that (simply) using sex, race, or gender as (self) disciplinary tools are (necessarily, automatically) "bad."<sup>19</sup> These categories are inherently disciplinary and inform our very identities, whether we like it or not. The emotional expression of identity categories, such as race, sex, and gender, reveal more about the affective state of the individual and how they internalize their own identity as markers of failure and success than their knowledge of how markets work. In the rural context, isolated social circles allow these identity categories to have a unique intensity that can lead to devastating, penalizing effects, while also sidestepping the issue of market policy. In other words, a bad year for the cattle market would not be understood as a policy failure. Instead, a bad year for the cattle market is almost always understood as the farmer's fault.

The self-blame being expressed in this example is arbitrarily expressed as a gendered category. But self-blame can also be expressed as religious, sexual, and racial comparisons. Regardless of how (personal) fault is expressed, self-blame doubles down. Fault is expressed as both a personal failure to be successful at business and a failure to perform one or more identity categories, such as Christian, white, and/or male. The doubling of fault results in deep internalization. A farmer's entire identity is intimately tied to their work, which is intimately tied to a "de-regulated" competitive market. This "market" is presumed to be blameless. However, markets are created, sustained, and governed by government policies. Current neoliberal policy rigs markets against the family farmer by promoting consolidation and "efficiency," which has resulted in uneven playing fields for family farms, who have less access to capital and take higher risks, and corporate agriculture, who have much greater access to capital and take much lower risks. In other words, neoliberal policy works to obscure how markets are rigged against market competitors by creating a culture of self-blame, which can have deadly consequences.

If this snapshot of a family farmer is accurate, then it becomes possible to imagine how someone who is not taking a reflective step back to examine how we behave now in a competitive market culture (neoliberalism) can no longer imagine the world not revolving around exclusively market-based competition. Neoliberal policies, across all markets, have made it virtually impossible for people *not* to become their own worst critics. Under neoliberalism, the market, and the individual's place in the market, becomes the only fair distribution mechanism and anything interfering with that mechanism becomes a moral impediment to individual self-actualization. Someone cannot fully become "dignified" if they are on Medicaid because Medicaid is health insurance that exists outside the market. Simultaneously, individuals do not have enough agency within any given market, given the deep concentrations of corporate market power, to change their situation (without engaging in significant grassroots politics). Therefore, social programs are rendered as "bailouts" for those who are not good at business or fail to hold a steady job (losers losing the market competition), but there are no "bailouts" for the family business (despite PPE loans during the pandemic). Consequently, those same social programs can be blamed for enabling "losers" at the unjust expense of the "barely winning" through to the billionaire "winners." The poor, broadly conceived, have lost the market game and should suffer the consequences, while the working individual should always win the competition, despite the odds being rigged against them. It does not matter that the rules of the competition are written in favor of those who already have far more resources than those working, which makes the odds of the working person winning a "free" market competition next to nothing.

If this description of how we all internalize our economic performances is accurate, the reader may be wondering how it remains legitimate. One factor continually contributing to the legitimacy of neoliberalism is its resonance with Christian virtue ethics.<sup>20</sup> The "invisible hand" of the market is loosely similar to the hand of God directing the Christian's fate.<sup>21</sup> Moral vocabularies praising the quality and quantity of work in Christianity resonate with national imperatives to have an internationally competitive economy and demands for individual (economic and/or political)



sacrifice.<sup>22</sup> In rural areas, one's (Christian) church is the primary location where the economic and moral discourse of neoliberalism intersects, further intensifying the message that a competitive market is the best model through which to experience social life.

Media markets further intensify the message that a competitive market is the best model through which to organize and experience social life. Sinclair media group, which was seen in the last chapter as having a significant presence in the First Congressional District, uses local news stations to promote "conservative" talking points.<sup>23</sup> These talking points include: denigrating unemployment insurance, denigrating Medicaid, denigrating public services such as the Post Office and public schools, and denigrating the working poor. Moving away from local news to America's most popular news station, Fox News, we can see the same messaging. The difference, however, is that Fox News has a stronger financial incentive to be misleading.<sup>24</sup> Fox News sells advertising to turn a profit. Intensifying the magnitude of their messaging using white nationalist talking points such as the Great Replacement Theory frames the market competition in racial terms.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, white people (or whoever counts in this frequently changing category) are always losing to the poor, the immigrants, the people of color, and people who do not neatly fit into a gendered and sexualized binary identity. The radicalness of these claims draws audiences, who leave Fox News on while ads run, generating revenue for the company. The issue of whether the news generates hyperbole for profit or whether the reporting by right-wing news stations is accurate or legitimate becomes an afterthought with isolated rural audiences. It's not that rural, "conservative" voters are stupid and do not think. It's that thinking requires a community and geographically isolated communities create social echo chambers that relieve community members of the ability to think because these echo chambers create the illusions that resonate with rural voters' deepest sense of self.

This deep internalization of neoliberalism, of the idea that the best model of life is a competitive market, is reflected in the hostility Democratic canvassers experience in deep Red areas. When election season comes around, and a short 2-minute canvass occurs, those being canvassed easily recognize the political affiliation of the canvasser because the script leads them to logically

conclude who to vote for. In other words, a canvasser is bringing another competition to the rural person's doorstep that challenges everything they believe in terms of their values and in terms of what they see as empirical reality (regardless of what they see as reality is an illusion or not). A short canvass, then, can expect to become a deeply intense exchange, bordering on a fight between an exhausted, overworked rural person who is struggling to get by and a canvasser who probably means well, but does not have the time to develop the trust necessary for those being canvassed to not react to the canvasser's presence as a hostile, competitive encounter they do not need.

### **Recommendations**

The task to win the First Congressional District, then, is to build trust. We agree with Danielle Allen's definition of trust as, "a belief that someone else's interests encapsulate one's own that that person can be expected to act with one's interests in mind."<sup>26</sup> Building trust will be a multi-year, multi-part, multi-stage project. Regardless of the project's complexity, deep canvassing should be the foundational component of any trust-building project. Unlike regular canvassing, deep canvassing is premised on a strategy of building trust between the canvasser and those being canvassed. Trust is built through an interpersonal exchange based on inquiry. The canvasser asks questions to understand the canvassed, and in doing so, recognizes the canvassed's language and the problems they try to articulate as being symptomatic of a neoliberal economic system. Using this knowledge, the canvasser asks questions that can guide the canvassed toward problems and solutions in such a way the canvassed feels as though they discovered the answer; thereby, generating a feeling of power and agency in the canvassed.

Having the canvassed discover answers works to short-circuit the cycle of self-blame and victim-blaming that neoliberalism habitually directs citizens to engage in. As seen above, self-blame and victim-blaming succeed in misdirecting voters away from policy prescriptions that could adjust the rules of market competition to be fair or by making certain markets noncompetitive by transforming those markets into public services (i.e. Medicare for All). By short-circuiting this habit, the canvasser makes the canvassed feel both recognized and respected, an essential first step in

building trust. Repeat canvasses open the opportunity for the canvassed to recognize that the canvasser's interests overlap and encapsulate their own, to such an extent, that their political allegiances also align with their own. Critically, repeat canvasses will make the canvassed feel as though they have some level of agency to effect change through their vote.

The feeling of having enough agency to change the system through policy prescription, by voting for a policy that is provided by a Democratic candidate, cannot be generated simply by deep canvassing. Nor can the feeling of agency simply be generated by having a candidate tack towards the "middle." As many academics and commentators have noted, tacking towards the middle is an incredibly risky strategy at multiple levels.<sup>27</sup> At the surface, any movement toward the middle necessarily legitimizes right-wing philosophy and policy to some degree. However, right-wing philosophy is neither morally legitimate nor is right-wing policy effective. From a rural voter's point of view, why vote for the faux candidate when they can have the real thing?

Instead, significant research from progressive groups indicates rural voters are more likely to vote hard progressive when a real progressive campaign and messaging strategy is used across radio, TV, and policy proposals.<sup>28</sup> Radio, TV, and other spaces of communication that reinforce commitments to economic and political systems (as they are or what they could be) must be penetrated by campaigns in the Big First. If a campaign uses the knowledge acquired by deep canvassers to build a policy platform, then the campaign needs to stick with that platform across communicative mediums to create resonance. Continued repetition in combination with deep canvassing will create an opening to create trust for a Democratic candidate in rural areas, and by extension, legitimacy for the Kansas Democratic Party.

Any deep canvassing strategy, however, will come at a cost. The First Congressional District is the largest congressional district by square footage in the entire United States. Rural communities are geographically distant from one another, meaning any deep canvassing effort will need more time and financial resources than an urban deep canvass. Therefore, we make the following recommendations.

First, a deep canvass needs to start in the off-year before a campaign for state house, state senate, or federal house. Starting up to a year prior allows for acceptable travel time and for canvassers to visit voters multiple times. Visiting voters multiple times helps develop a nonconfrontational and relaxing relationship before the campaign season, where shorter canvasses can be used to sustain the support that has been built over the off-season.

Second, a deep canvassing strategy needs to be developed using geographic data. This strategy needs to have four components. First, the Big First should be broken down into regions. Second, teams of trained deep canvassers need to be assigned to regions. Third, a gas budget needs to be a component of each team. Fourth, once teams and budgets are assigned, teams must map the most efficient ways to cover a canvassing area.

Third, the information gained during deep canvassing may not be about policy preferences but may be a means of coding a policy platform to appeal to rural voters. Data and cause/effect logic may not be the best way of approaching voters. Rather, allow voters to lead you towards a language and policy they see as mutually beneficial. Then use that information to evaluate and inform a candidate's policy platform. During campaign season, the message has a better chance of resonating if it is coded using local language.

Fourth, the relationship between voters and canvassers is critical to breaking through the social barriers blocking Democratic candidates from winning in rural areas. Undoubtedly, there will be struggles. But the degree of struggle can be lessened and qualified if deep canvassing is strategically used across the First Congressional District so that voters understand before the campaign voting for a Democrat is not a total rejection of their values and necessarily means abandoning their identity. This means using data to identify Democrats, establishing parties in counties where there is not one, and targeting independents and Republicans who do not vote.

Fifth, deep canvassing must be used for a least a year before a campaign, especially a campaign for state house and/or senate. The same team must continually visit the same people to build a personal relationship over time. Building trust takes time and relies on the canvasser being

properly trained and disciplined to survive the communicative struggles they will no doubt encounter. But if the canvassers survive, trust will be established. Trust can open new opportunities, including establishing county parties and creating communication ecologies that circulate and reinforce the Kansas Democratic Party message.

Finally, if a trust-building project is to be successful, the rural areas of the Big First cannot be an afterthought to the party or its policy priorities. The Kansas Democratic Party needs to consider and research policy prescriptions that may seem radical (at first sight) to effectively improve the lives of rural people. Some policies will be discussed in later chapters. But for the purposes of deep canvassing, understanding the Russian nesting doll tax district system, how counties, townships, and cities limit each other and how they block local progress is critical to winning elections. Rather than make state-level grant funding cumbersome and competitive, we need to create systems where access to funding for municipal projects is relatively easy to access. Of 'course, this comes at the cost of award celebration and the public relations visibility of a successful grant award and project completion. So the success of local offices may need to be (initially) prioritized over state legislative or congressional district offices when inventing an overall winning strategy for the First Congressional District.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in Kansas [KSURN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/KSURN>, November 26, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Emilie Doerksen, Kansas Labor Force Data, Topeka, Kansas Department of Labor; <https://klic.dol.ks.gov/vosnet/gsipub/documentView.aspx?enc=O+qpCkhjA+v3dzYVbAEMjQ==>, November 26, 2023

<sup>3</sup> Emilie Doerksen, Kansas Labor Force Data, Topeka, Kansas Department of Labor; <https://klic.dol.ks.gov/vosnet/gsipub/documentView.aspx?enc=O+qpCkhjA+v3dzYVbAEMjQ==>, November 26, 2023

<sup>4</sup> Emilie Doerksen, Kansas Labor Force Data, Topeka, Kansas Department of Labor; <https://klic.dol.ks.gov/vosnet/gsipub/documentView.aspx?enc=O+qpCkhjA+v3dzYVbAEMjQ==>, November 26, 2023

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/1264>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/duration-of-unemployment.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <https://kansasfoodbank.org/announcing-food-assistance-and-hunger-in-the-heartland-2021-2/#:~:text=The%20study%2C%20conducted%20in%20the%20summer%20of%202021%2C,mobile%20food%20distributions%20in%20Kansas%20Food%20Bank's%20network.>

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<sup>8</sup> Lily Geismer, *Left Behind: The Democrats' Failed Attempts to Solve Inequality* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2022); Adam Kotsko, "The Parties Decide," *The Baffler* (November 16, 2020) <https://thebaffler.com/latest/the-parties-decide-kotsko>; Adam Kotsko, "The Threat to 'Our Democracy' and the Crisis Of Neoliberal Legitimacy," *Yonsei Theological Forum*, 106 (2021): 7-32

<sup>9</sup> Adam Serwer, "America's Problem Isn't Tribalism – It's Racism," *The Atlantic* (November 7, 2018), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/11/racism-not-tribalism/575173/>

<sup>10</sup> See: Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); Dotan Leshem, *The Origins of Neoliberalism: Modeling the Economy from Jesus to Foucault* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017)

<sup>11</sup> Adam Kotsko, "American Politics in the Era of Zombie Neoliberalism," *Public Culture* 32:3 (2020): 453-463

<sup>12</sup> Tom Polansek, "Explainer: How 4 Big Companies Control the US Beef Industry," *Reuters* (June 17, 2021): <https://www.reuters.com/business/how-four-big-companies-control-us-beef-industry-2021-06-17/>

<sup>13</sup> Kevin O'Reilly, "Deere in the Headlights II," *US Public Interest Research Group* (February 23, 2022): <https://pirg.org/edfund/resources/deere-in-the-headlights-ii/>

<sup>14</sup> Luke Goldstein, "The Return of the Koch Brothers," *The American Prospect* (February 1, 2024): <https://prospect.org/power/2024-02-01-return-of-koch-brothers/>

<sup>15</sup> Jon Delano, "Industry consolidation leads to higher food prices, requires sharp strategies from consumers," *CBS News* (June 5, 2023): <https://www.cbsnews.com/pittsburgh/news/industry-consolidation-leads-to-higher-food-prices/>; Jessica Cusworth, Angela Huffman, and Dee Laninga, "Retail Consolidation: Crisis Across the Food Chain," *Farm Action* (June 28, 2023): <https://farmaction.us/2023/06/08/retail-consolidation-crisis-across-the-food-chain/>

<sup>16</sup> Melanie Saltzman & Megan Thompson, "How rural communities are tackling suicide and depression crisis among farmers," *PBS* (January 14, 2024): <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-rural-communities-are-tackling-a-suicide-and-depression-crisis-among-farmers>

<sup>17</sup> Nick Levendofsky, "Kansas and the Farm Bill," public speech at the Transparent Opportunities Speaker Series (Plainville, KS: October 27, 2023)

<sup>18</sup> This is an example of what the author overheard at the bar between a couple farmers. Many others that are more offensive could easily be heard.

<sup>19</sup> For Foucault, social life is a value neutral exchange between being disciplined (i.e. becoming the master of a skill or art), which imbues social recognition and bestows identity on the subject, and punishment (i.e. the failure to master skills, arts, rules, behaviors etc.) in which the social majority's ability to penalize the subject, which also bestows an identity depending on the failure (i.e. novice, murderer, sinner, failure etc.). Gender, race, and sexuality, and social resistances to these categories, become the basis for all discipline and punishment. See: Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> Adam Kotsko, "American Politics in the Era of Zombie Neoliberalism," *Public Culture* 32:3 (2020): 453-463

<sup>21</sup> Dotan Leshem, *The Origins of Neoliberalism: Modeling the Economy from Jesus to Foucault* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017)

<sup>22</sup> Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018); Dotan Leshem, *The Origins of Neoliberalism: Modeling the Economy from Jesus to Foucault* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017)

<sup>23</sup> *PBS Newhour*, "How Sinclair Broadcasting puts a partisan tilt on trusted local news," *PBS* (October 10, 2017): <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/sinclair-broadcasting-puts-partisan-tilt-trusted-local-news>

<sup>24</sup> Clare Malone, "The Fallout of Fox News' Public Shaming," *The New Yorker* (March 15, 2023): <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-communications/the-fallout-of-fox-news-public-shaming>

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<sup>25</sup> Shannon Bond, “How Tucker Carlson took fringe conspiracy theories to a mass audience,” NPR (April 23, 2023): <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/25/1171800317/how-tucker-carlsons-extremist-narratives-shaped-fox-news-and-conservative-politi>

<sup>26</sup> Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 189

<sup>27</sup> Lily Geismer, *Left Behind: The Democrats’ Failed Attempts to Solve Inequality* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2022); Adam Kotsko, “The Threat to ‘Our Democracy’ and the Crisis Of Neoliberal Legitimacy,” *Yonsei Theological Forum*, 106 (2021): 7-32

<sup>28</sup> Aftyn Behn, “Running Rural Billboard and Radio Campaigns,” *RuralOrganizing.org* (July 5, 2023): <https://ruralorganizing.org/featured/running-rural-billboard-and-radio-campaigns/>

## 5. Policy Platform Recommendations

The Big First is an exceptionally diverse and multifaceted place. As the largest congressional district in the United States by square footage, developing a policy platform for a congressional candidate will be an exceptionally challenging task. Certain policy positions will appeal to certain demographics and not others. Calculating the tradeoffs for supporting a policy position against the net gain or loss in voters is nearly impossible with the data we currently have. Even if we did have that data, language is a slippery thing. What some in the Southwest identify as the right thing to do may be coded differently than what some in the Northwest think is the right thing to do. Identifying what people mean by specific policies, then naming that policy, getting diverse and different populations to identify with the name for that policy, beginning to use that name, and making that policy popular will be difficult, as per the prior chapter.

Therefore, our policy platform recommendations are not designed for a candidate to increase their “electability” in this election. Insofar as the chance of a Democratic candidate’s win in the Big First is calculable, it is highly unlikely that someone will be able to the district in the 2024 or 2026 cycles. However, a candidate’s campaign is likely to introduce new ideas, ways of thinking, and policies to people who are not policy wonks or invested in politics. We believe introducing new ideas, ways of thinking, and policies into electoral politics will set the stage for a potential win in 2028 or beyond. We believe these policies, and the logic behind them, must be popularized in the Democratic Party, and the public writ large, if the United States is to see positive long-term policy gains.

Furthermore, our policy platform recommendations are based on conversations we’ve had with neighbors and friends throughout the Big First. While speculative, we believe that several policies will have resonance if a Congressional candidate (and/or statewide candidate, or house district candidate) can inject these recommendations into the campaign. Based on our conversations, we believe resonance occurs when a policy directly addresses a problem being experienced by a potential voter.



Additionally, data from rural areas across the US, collected by multiple progressive organizations, strongly suggests that rural people do not like “moderate” candidates. Moderate is defined less by a candidate’s political position, and more by their communicative style. Giving legitimacy to “the other side” or ceding that some of the other side’s policy platform in the current partisan environment is widely perceived as a self-inflicted error. Voters see “compromise” as pandering, as opposed to civility. Nothing can be worse for a rural candidate than being perceived as pandering. This will be coded in a variety of ways, often with gendered and/or racialized terms, to insult the candidate behind closed doors. We strongly recommend that candidates do not back down from their policy platform to avoid this happening. Maintaining a clear difference between candidates is paramount. Rural voters will almost always prefer “the real thing” as opposed to something they see as the same, but watered down.

For these reasons, we highly recommend any candidate for US Congress in the First Congressional District of Kansas immediately read Stephanie Kelton’s *The Deficit Myth*. Kelton’s book provides an overview of Modern Monetary Theory, a description of how the monetary system operates. Given that it is Congress’ job to spend and tax, it is exceptionally important for any candidate to fully understand how money is created, destroyed, and how inflation works the limit to any particular budget. In terms of a campaign, there can be no more clearly distinguishing feature of a candidate than disagreeing with the statement the federal budget works like a household. The federal budget does not operate like a household, and a candidate for federal office must be able to explain why. All further policy recommendations stem from insight derived from modern monetary theory and how it impacts the Big First.

### **Policy Recommendations**

First, we believe that anti-trust policy must be supported by any candidate running for federal office in the Big First. Corporate consolidation, particularly in the agriculture sector, has fundamentally transformed the market from being a place where wealth could be generated by family

farms into a struggle for the family farm's very existence. Anti-trust should be advanced in the following areas:

1. Beef Industry – The 4 big meat packers, Tyson, Cargill, JBS, and National dominate the industry. Due to their regional influence, and lack of competition from smaller packers, these 4 packers effectively run a monopoly in the 4 regions where they operate across the US. This allows the meat packers to set prices for their services, which is passed on to the consumer at the grocery store, at whatever price they feel the farmer can afford. This gauges the industry.
2. Commercial Aircraft – The merger between McDonnell Douglas and Boeing in the late '90s led to the financialization of the aircraft manufacturing industry. Several issues have occurred with Boeing aircraft, most notably in terms of production quality with the 787 and 737 MAX aircraft, that have led to incredible accidents. Nonetheless, with only a single US manufacturer of aircraft of this size, airlines are forced to continue purchasing Boeing's aircraft, leading to record profits and record stock buybacks. Simultaneously, Boeing has shed operations, transforming several in-house manufacturing and design operations into third-party suppliers, cut its workforce, and artificially kept wages low. Despite foreign competition from Airbus, we believe anti-trust must be enforced and Boeing's monopoly on the US commercial aircraft design and manufacturing market be eliminated.
3. Grocery monopolies – Believe grocery monopolies are beginning to emerge. The recently proposed merger between Kroger and Albertsons would increase food prices, which would trickle down to even the smallest grocer in rural Kansas. Such mergers give the company too much power to set the price of the goods sold in store, which can lead to both shrinkflation and greedflation. Both kinds of inflation must be avoided at all costs.

Second, promoting rural development programs and easing access to low-interest rate funding from the USDA should be paramount. Rural communities throughout the Big First are

dependent on various loans and grants issued through the USDA. Plainville, for example, will be dependent on the Water Loan for a complete overhaul of its water distribution infrastructure. Plainville is also dependent on the Community Facilities Loan to save its nursing home and replace the existing facility. These programs need to become easier to access and less expensive over the term of the loan.

Third, we need to encourage regional strategic planning, especially in the Northwestern area of Kansas. This area is ripe for a transition from an oil economy towards a retirement and healthcare economy. Major investments in healthcare, and retirement services (leisure activities like golf course revitalization, parks, trails, etc.), combined with incentivizing public services to buy local can boost the regional economies. Federal funding is an essential component. Federal funding will need to come in the form of broadband access and development, transportation development, and supply chain development to make this vision a reality. Partnership with development commissions and 501(c)3s devoted to rural development will be essential.

Fourth, gaining a seat on the agriculture committee will be essential to shaping the Farm (and Food) Bill. A public commitment to acquiring a seat on this committee is essential. This committee will enable a candidate who wins to implement their anti-trust policy agenda. Furthermore, it will enable the structure and terms of grants and loans for various rural projects to be shaped in a way that is beneficial to the rural parts of the First Congressional District.

Finally, immigration is an especially hot topic. As a partisan issue, immigration has been tied to both racist and paternalist discourses to derail the identification of the actual cause of immigration, while simultaneously offering band-aids for the real issue. We are not experts in this policy domain. However, we can say any candidate must speak about each particular issue wrapped up in the border debate. Simply, building a wall will not work. The more eloquent the issue can be addressed, the better reception a candidate will have. We recommend researching how NAFTA contributes to the humanitarian and economic crisis in Mexico, as well as enabling drug cartels to smuggle illegal substances across the border.

For a statewide candidate, such as an Attorney General, we strongly recommend reviewing Kansas anti-trust law. Kansas used to be known as one of the toughest anti-trust enforcement states in the country until the 1980s. Reviewing state law and partnering with the federal government for anti-trust enforcement will be essential to a successful campaign.

For state house candidates, we recommend a development platform focusing on how to improve wages and jobs, especially for those without a college degree. Critically, rural area schools need funding parity with their urban counterparts. Obviously, the state's failure to fully fund special education and the promotion of vouchers, which robs from the poor to feed the wealthiest, will devastate our rural areas. Additionally, finding a permanent solution to high property taxes will be a necessary policy step if rural businesses continue to buck national trends and decline wage increases. Promoting regional development, similar to what a federal candidate would do, but with state resources may help in this goal.

**Final Note**

For those interested in GIS models and county-level data to help calculate win numbers, please contact Forrest Brungardt at – [forrestabrungrardt@gmail.com](mailto:forrestabrungrardt@gmail.com) -

For those interested in PCP data, please contact Jim Brooke at - [dgcodem13chair@gmail.com](mailto:dgcodem13chair@gmail.com) - and Garth Burns at - [gperson11@gmail.com](mailto:gperson11@gmail.com) -