

Executive Summary
ELECTION 2002: RURAL VOTERS AND RURAL ISSUES

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Election 2002 saw a solidification of the rural vote for Republican candidates, a trend that started in 1994 and continued throughout the rest of the 1990s.

- **The vote.** The GOP won rural voters by a 24-point margin, 60 to 36 percent in 2002, a margin that has grown considerably since the early 1990s when Democrats and Republicans were competitive in rural areas.
- **Partisanship.** Forty four percent of rural voters call themselves Republican compared to 38 percent nationally. But Republican rural strength was bolstered by the defection of rural Democrats, particularly men, to Republican candidates in this election. Sixteen percent of rural Democrats voted for Republican candidates compared to only 7 percent of rural Republicans who supported Democratic candidates.

Despite the fact that rural voters expressed deep concern about the economy and domestic issues such as Social Security, their continued strong support for Republican candidates was based largely in their strong support for President Bush and the war against Iraq and their continued conservatism on cultural issues.

- **Support for Bush.** Rural voters approved of Bush's job performance by a 47-point margin compared to a 32-point margin in the country as a whole. Among voters who approved of Bush's job performance, a generic Republican candidate beat a generic Democratic candidate by 58 points, 78 percent to 20 percent.
- **Support for Iraq.** Rural voters were more likely than non-rural voters to vote to support the President on the war in Iraq. Sixty one percent of rural voters took this position compared to 53 percent nationally.

- **Abortion.** By an 8-point margin, rural voters prefer a “right-to-life” candidate over a “pro-choice” candidate.” In contrast, suburban (9-point margin) and urban (8-point margin) prefer a pro-choice candidate to a pro-life candidate.
- **Guns.** Rural voters are significantly more likely than non-rural voters to own guns and support the National Rifle Association. Over half of rural voters own a gun or a rifle compared to 34 percent of the nation as a whole. Forty-two percent of rural voters describe themselves as strong supporters of the NRA, compared to only a quarter of suburban and urban voters.

Despite this Republican dominance, Democrats are competitive in individual races. Democrats won statewide races in rural states such as Oklahoma, Wyoming, South Dakota, Iowa and Arkansas. However, these Democratic victories are based on support from urban centers in their rural states rather than the rural regions in these rural states.

- **Democratic competitiveness.** In rural states, there are 6 Democratic Governors and 7 Republican Governors, 11 Democratic Senators and 14 Republican Senators, and 11 Democratic House members and 20 Republican House members.

There has been a persistent gender gap in national elections since 1980. Interestingly, however, there was very small gender gap among rural voters in this election, meaning that rural men and rural women were nearly equally as likely to support Republican candidates.

- **Gender gap.** Rural women supported Republicans by a 12-point margin, while rural men supported Republicans by a 16-point margin resulting in a 4-point gender gap. In contrast, there was a 14-point gender gap in suburban areas and a 22-point gender gap in urban areas.
- **Rural women.** Rural women are actually stronger GOP partisans than their male counterparts, are more supportive of conservative religious groups, are more conservative than non-rural men on self-reported ideology, and are the only group that holds a net positive in their support of right-to-life candidates.

Methodology

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (GQR) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) are pleased to present some key findings from an analysis of rural voting and voters. The analysis specifically focuses on post-election research conducted by both firms with actual 2002 voters, plus a look at previous national post-election data from 1998 and 2000.

The analysis relies specifically on two POS post-election national surveys with a combined sample size of 1,600 2002 voters and two GQR post-election surveys with a combined

sample of 1763 2002 voters. All four of these surveys were conducted on November 5-6, 2002. In addition, the analysis relies on a POS Pfizer RGA post-election national survey with a total of 800 2002 or 2000 general election voters conducted November 12-14, 2002. Finally, the analysis employed a National Public Radio/POS/GQR study of 890 2002 voters conducted November 5-6.