



Rural Voters May Make the Difference in South Carolina

Lost in the media's preferred storyline of gender vs. race in the 2008 Democratic primary is the massive increase in the number of rural voters and the steady migration of these voters away from the Republican party.

In Iowa, Barack Obama's caucus win was fueled by heavy turnout in rural districts. In contrast, Hillary Clinton's superior GOTV effort in urban areas of New Hampshire and Nevada overwhelmed Obama's sizable mobilization of new and independent rural voters, resulting in narrow Clinton wins in both states. All three states saw record rural turnout far exceeding that of the Republican party.

With 55% of South Carolina's electorate living in rural areas, look for rural voters to continue to play a decisive role as we move into Saturday's Democratic primary and beyond.

To those of us who work in the field, the mobilization of rural America comes as no surprise.

The last decade has seen Wall Street grabbing the lion's share of the economic "boom" while rural Americans endlessly waited for the promised benefits of "free trade" to manifest. Rural America is now ground zero in the war to consolidate global corporations, with the corrosive spread of big box retail threatening the fabric of rural communities.

And with the disproportionate number of troops in Iraq coming from rural Reserve and National Guard units – many of whom served in critical roles at home as volunteer fire fighters, police officers and paramedics – rural America has paid more than its fair share in blood and treasure.

With the massive shift in wealth and resources away from rural America, it's no wonder rural voters are motivated for change. Conditions may be in place for a Democratic wave in 2008 driven by dramatic increases in rural voting. The question is, are the Democrats ready to ride it?

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