

Many rural voters rejected school vouchers and protected abortion rights at the ballot box

BY LANE WENDELL FISCHER
The Daily Yonder

In the 2024 election, rural voters in several states backed Donald Trump by wide margins, yet broke with the Republican platform on key ballot measures — rejecting school vouchers and protecting abortion rights. These results highlight a more complex rural voter than broad political narratives often suggest.

“[Voters] are much more complex than is often portrayed,” said Nicholas Jacobs, assistant professor of government at Colby College and co-author of *The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America*. “Voters are thinking about what they want and are not in some cult ... they’re more sophisticated than pundits and consultants like to treat them.”

Rural voters reject school vouchers...again

Republican-led state houses across the country continue

to push for universal school voucher programs, which would allow taxpayer-supported education funding to flow into private schools through tuition credits. However, voters have historically rejected such measures, and Election Day 2024 was no exception.

In Kentucky, a state where Trump received about 65% of the votes for president, but only 35% of voters supported a constitutional amendment that would allow taxpayer dollars to be used for private school attendance.

In rural counties, where over 78% of voters backed Trump, just 35% supported school vouchers — a margin of 43 percentage points. This margin was much larger than in urban and suburban areas, which saw margins of 8 and 13 points, respectively.

In Nebraska, voters repealed an existing state voucher program, despite 78% of rural voters supporting Trump. Only 45% of rural voters backed the voucher repeal, resulting in a 33-point margin.

In Hayes County, all but 4% of voters supported Trump, but 60% rejected the state voucher program.

Even in Colorado, where support for vouchers was higher, voters still rejected a constitutional amendment paving the way for school choice. In rural counties, 52% backed vouchers, compared to 55% who voted for Trump, resulting in a modest margin of 3 points.

In comparison, urban Colorado voters swung in the opposite direction. While only about 20% of major metro voters backed Trump, close to 40% of voters supported the school voucher amendment.

Such margins stem from rural voters’ deep consideration of how policies affect their local communities, Jacobs said in an interview with the Daily Yonder.

“Republicans at a national level sort of buy into a certain ideological way of thinking about school choice,” Jacobs said. “But at a local level, you’re

sitting there thinking about how this is going to affect your community, your local school, maybe the school your children go to, and people will make a different choice.”

Smaller, but notable, rural support for abortion rights

A similar pattern emerged on ballot measures related to abortion rights in nine states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New York, and South Dakota. While rural voters were more likely than urban voters to support restrictions on abortion, they voted in greater numbers for Republican Trump than for the Republican platform of limiting access to abortion.

On average, 61% of rural voters supported restricting abortion, compared to 49% in medium-sized metros and 37% in large metro areas. However, there was a gap between support for Trump and support for abortion restrictions: while 73% of rural voters in the nine states

supported Trump, only 61% supported abortion restrictions — a 12-point margin.

This pattern was consistent across county types, from rural areas to major cities. Suburban counties in large metros were 11 points more likely to support Trump than to support abortion restrictions. Medium metro suburbs had a 12-point gap between support for Trump and support for abortion restrictions. An small metro counties had a 13-point gap. Large and medium metropolitan core counties saw smaller margins at 8 and 9 points, respectively.

“All voters are complex,” Jacobs said. “People voted for [Trump], even if they wanted more access to reproductive care or were disappointed that a national standard was lifted by the courts. They believed him when he said, ‘I’m not coming for it [abortion access],’ and states gave them an opportunity to enact a policy that was closer to their belief.”

Hunting guide ordered to pay \$44,000 to state wildlife

BY TOM LATEK
Kentucky Today

Muhlenberg County District Court judge has ordered a local hunting guide to pay \$44,000 in restitution to the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR), following the guide’s conviction on multiple hunting violations.

This past spring, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Law Enforcement Division Game Wardens discovered that a local outfitter, Timothy Smithwick, 59, of Drakesboro, was operating an illegal guide service on his property in Muhlenberg County.

Second District Game Wardens, including Lt. Scott McIntosh, along with the division’s Special Investigations Unit, conducted a joint investigation into Smithwick guiding hunters without proper licensing and for illegally baiting his property for turkey.

After months of investigation, which included the execution of three search warrants, Second District supervisors Lt. McIntosh, Sgt. Tracy Bell, Sgt. John Jackson and Wardens Cody Fox, Tyler Hanna, Nathan Tapp and Trevor Lowe conducted compliance checks at the outfitter’s property on May 4, 2024.

Smithwick was subsequently arrested on a bench warrant for numerous fish and wildlife charges that included eight counts of illegal take of turkey, eight counts of illegal guiding, trapping violations, resident hunting/trapping without a license and convicted felon in possession of a firearm.

In addition to Smithwick, five hunters: Jason Johnson, 39, of Perry, Georgia; Colby Stancil, 26, of Jasper, Georgia; James Stancil, 64, of Jasper, Georgia; Joseph Todd, 30, of Lyons, Georgia; and Charles Jones, 51, of Jasper, Georgia; were cited for various charges, including hunting without licenses/permits, hunting with unplugged shotguns and the illegal take or pursuit of turkey. In addition, Colby Stancil was arrested after fleeing into a wood line to hide an unplugged shot-

gun, electronic turkey calls and illegal drugs, in addition to hunting over bait.

An unplugged shotgun is a shotgun with a plug removed that is used to prevent the weapon from holding more than three shells, which is a violation of federal law.

KDE joins partnership with U.S. Army for statewide JROTC office

BY TOM LATEK
Kentucky Today

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has announced the establishment of a partnership with the U.S. Army Cadet Command to start a pilot program for a statewide Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) office.

The JROTC program prepares high school students for leadership roles while making them aware of their rights, responsibilities and privileges as American citizens. Its goal is to serve as a stimulus for promoting graduation from high school, and it provides instruction and rewarding

opportunities that will benefit the student, community and nation.

As part of the new statewide office, Colonel (Ret.) Tim McDonald has been hired as the state Director of Army instruction (DAI). “I am truly honored to be named to this important role for the Commonwealth of Kentucky,” he said.

McDonald and his office will provide administrative and logistics management for U.S. Army JROTC programs through organized supervision for military matters, approved educational instruction and integrated systemic processes. McDonald’s primary role also includes oversight of the 97 JROTC host programs already operating in Kentucky

schools and serving as Kentucky’s representative and advocate in JROTC matters.

McDonald was born in Fort Eustis, Va., and raised in Killen, Ala. He was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in the infantry through the U.S. Army ROTC in 1994 and served on active duty for more than 30 years. His most recent assignment was command inspector general for the U.S. Army Cadet Command.

McDonald said the purpose of the DAI office will be to enhance all JROTC programs through state-level leadership and partnerships with KDE, the U.S. military, local administrators, educators, organizations and community members.



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In FY24, the Kentucky Lottery generated sales of more than \$2.098 billion. From this number, \$405.4 million was earned for the Commonwealth.

Since inception, the Kentucky Lottery has earned more than \$7.2 billion for the Commonwealth on more than \$28.9 billion in sales. Players during this period won more than \$18.4 billion.



Kentucky Lottery Corporation
Statement of Revenues, Expenses and Changes in Net Position
For the year ended June 30, 2024 (dollars in thousands)

PRESIDENT/CEO and BOARD of DIRECTORS (As of 6/30/24)	
Mary R. Harville - President and CEO	Total operating revenues \$ 2,097,891
Dr. Tom Abell - Chair	Prize expense 1,516,794
Cammie Grant - Vice Chair	Payments to retailers 87,384
Mark Metcalf - Kentucky State Treasurer	Draw game and iLottery vendor expense 36,161
John Stovall - Director	Instant ticket costs 14,912
Mark Kleiner - Director	Total direct costs 1,655,251
Jack Porter - Director	Operating revenues net of direct costs 442,640
David Figg - Director	Operating expenses 40,367
Derrick Helm - Director	Operating income 402,273
	Non-operating expense
	*Payments to the Commonwealth of Kentucky (405,415)
	**Other non-operating income 2,753
	Total non-operating expense (402,662)
	Change in net position (389)
	Net position at beginning of year 16,936
	Net position at end of year \$16,547

* Payments to the Commonwealth of Kentucky include both payments made and payments accrued for transfer to the Commonwealth as of June 30, 2024.

**The Corporation has adopted GASB Statement 72, which requires investments to be presented at fair value, resulting in a decrease in income of approximately \$389, when compared to the historical cost method.

The above financial information was derived from the annual audited financial statements. The financial audit for the year ended June 30, 2024 was performed by Cherry Bekaert LLP. A copy of the complete annual report can be obtained at kyllottery.com or by writing: Kentucky Lottery Corporation, PR Dept., 1011 W. Main Street, Louisville, KY 40202 or by calling 502-560-1574. The Kentucky Lottery has provided the above information in accordance with KRS 154.130(6).

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