



## TDS STRATEGY MEMO:

**SAYING THAT DEMS NEED TO “SHOW UP” IN SOLIDLY GOP DISTRICTS IS A SLOGAN, NOT A STRATEGY.  
WHAT DEMS ACTUALLY NEED TO DO IS SERIOUSLY EVALUATE THEIR MAIN STRATEGIC ALTERNATIVES.**

BY  
ANDREW LEVISON



**TDS STRATEGY MEMO:**

**SAYING THAT DEMS NEED TO “SHOW UP” IN SOLIDLY GOP DISTRICTS IS A SLOGAN, NOT A STRATEGY.**

**WHAT DEMS ACTUALLY NEED TO DO IS SERIOUSLY EVALUATE THEIR MAIN STRATEGIC ALTERNATIVES.**

ANDREW LEVISON

As the 2024 election approaches a predictable set of articles about Democratic prospects in rural/working class and solidly GOP/Red State districts will appear.

One type of article will be reviews of recent polls and prior election results. A second will be journalistic reports from small towns and rural areas and personality profiles of new and promising Democratic candidates. A third will be historical reviews of how Red State areas became so deeply Republican and a smaller number of articles will present debates between the advocates who argue that progressives and Democrats need make more aggressive efforts to win back Red State districts versus opponents who dismiss any efforts of this kind as a complete waste of time.

What will very rarely if ever appear, however, are articles that carefully evaluate and specifically compare the alternative political objectives and political strategies that are available for dealing with solidly Republican districts and areas. Even the advocates of greater efforts in these areas usually do not delve into systematic comparisons of the alternative strategies that exist.

## Objectives vs. Strategies

In fact, many progressives and Democrats do not even clearly distinguish between political **objectives**, on the one hand, and political **strategies** on the other. Advocates will state that “*our political strategy in this election is to register and mobilize larger numbers of young voters*” or “*Our groups’ political strategy is to focus on persuading voters who are unenthusiastic about either candidate.*”

**Yet in fact, neither of these two statements are actually political *strategies*. They are political *objectives*** and the difference between the two concepts is important. *A political objective is the goal that one seeks to achieve; a political strategy is the method or methods that one selects to achieve it.*

---

Andrew Levison is the author of *The White Working Class Today: Who They Are, How They Think and How Progressives Can Regain Their Support*. He is also a contributing editor of *The Democratic Strategist*.

In military affairs this distinction is well understood. A group of generals standing around a map table will select a particular city or other location as the **objective** of a particular campaign and then debate alternative **strategies** for achieving it i.e. which military units should be assigned to the task and which geographic route or routes they should take to approach the destination.

The importance of making this distinction becomes clear when it is applied to developing democratic strategy in solidly GOP districts and areas because there are actually two very distinct political objectives that can be pursued – distinct objectives that as a consequence require employing substantially different political strategies to achieve them.

## The first objective

*The first political objective, which many Democrats automatically assume to be the only conceivable one, is simply to increase the number of Democratic candidates elected in these areas. Many discussions simply assume this goal as self-evident.*

There are two strategies that are generally proposed to seek this objective:

1. **Recruiting, Identifying and providing support to promising Democratic candidates.**
2. **Rebuilding local Democratic party infrastructure and facilities.**

### 1. Identifying and Supporting Democratic Candidates

Since the shock of Trump's 2016 victory a variety of organizations have emerged that direct money and resources to solidly Red State areas to support Democratic candidates. For example:

Organizations like [No Dem Left Behind](#) attempts to encourage and recruit candidates to run in Republican districts.

*Note: All links to the organizations mentioned can be found in a sidebar at the end of this memo.*

Political Action Committees like [Rural Vote](#) and [The 134 PAC](#) channel funds and other resources to Democratic candidates.

Organizations like [Movement Labs](#), and [Rural Power Labs](#) provide research and consulting in communications, campaign building and other areas.

The level of support for Democrats in solidly GOP Rural/Red State districts is still far from adequate in relation to the tremendous scope of the problem but a beginning has been made.

### 2. Rebuilding Local Democratic Party Infrastructure and Facilities.

In their perceptive book *Rust Belt Union Blues* Lainey Newman and Theda Skocpol accurately define what must be done:

Democrats have to establish an ongoing presence in states and districts where electoral wins seem impossible in the near term. Indeed, the meaning of electoral success itself should be redefined to include running locally attuned candidates in every contest and at every level, doing community outreach everywhere and aiming to improve democratic electoral margins even in defeat.

To do this at the local, state and regional levels Democrats cannot just send in operatives from afar every four years for presidential contests. There must be an ongoing progressive presence through credible local voices. This means building the party even in regions of the country that have become solidly red like many of the western Pennsylvania counties. It also means finding candidates and party leaders who represent the workers of a region not simply recruiting members of the intellectual elite.<sup>1</sup>

Mike Lux, a democratic strategist who specializes in small factory towns, is more specific:

One of my top recommendations is that the national Democratic Party and progressive non-profits should invest in hiring regional organizers based in targeted Factory Town counties. They should be assigned to build local committees and volunteer structures in these counties. Democratic and progressive organizations and campaigns should work with these organizers to host community events that are not just about issues and politics, but that bring people together for fun and community building. Progressive groups and politicians should be organizing or sponsoring job fairs, health events where people can talk to health care professionals, and Chautauqua-style events with music and comedy.<sup>2</sup>

Union organizers who work in political campaigns add further detail to this perspective. They note that a real-world “clubhouse” is the anchor that can unite the democratic supporters in a community together. All sorts of places can play this role—restaurants, bars, bookstores, libraries, churches, community centers and often people’s living rooms. The fundamental fact is that keeping grass roots political networks alive and growing requires regular personal contact and socializing. It is the friendships that are made during activities and the connections and camaraderie that results that create the bonds that cement and holds together a grass roots Democratic campaign organization after an election is over.

Successful local Democratic organizations used to include a steady flow of purely social events. In small, old-fashioned towns these included picnics, bowling tournaments, street fairs, barbecues, square dances and family fishing tournaments.

This social element of grass roots organizations is the key to success. Churches, of course, have always had social events, and the Christian Right uses those gatherings as central organizing targets in their campaigns.

---

<sup>1</sup>Rust Belt Union Blues

<sup>2</sup><https://www.americanfamilyvoices.org/post/a-strategy-for-factory-towns>

---

The benefits of seeking to increase both candidate support and local Democratic organizing are basically self-evident. As American Prospect editor Robert Kuttner notes “If Democrats can improve rural performance by even a few points several purple states would become a lot bluer and more Democrats would get elected to Congress in red states.”

Democrats do not have to win a majority of the votes in rural areas and districts. Senator John Fetterman, for example, didn’t win in rural Pennsylvania outright in 2022 but drove up his margins by 3-4 or 5%, enough to win the state.

At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that focusing entirely on strengthening Democratic campaigns and local organizations has several inherent limitations.

First, local democratic campaigns and organizations invariably have brief periods of action followed by longer periods of inertia. In a typical electoral cycle there are generally six active months that precede an election followed by eighteen months during which there are relatively few tasks and activities to perform. Keeping permanent staff on salary in local campaign offices and generating grass roots activity during this period is often impossible.

Second, in strongly GOP districts the existence of a local democratic campaign committee gives the GOP and the MAGA extremists a clear target to isolate and attack. It allows them to stereotype any candidate supported by the committee as a representative of the national Democratic party rather than of the “grass roots” citizens of the district.

Third, direct identification of Democratic Party supporters as Democrats subjects local advocates and activists to both intimidation and social ostracism. The first cannot be dismissed lightly. A large number of the journalistic articles about small town and rural politics describe unpleasant experiences and encounters rural Democrats experience when they openly display their identification. More subtle social ostracism is an even more difficult problem for Democrats because in small towns where there are not a variety of different social circles that one can join, getting along with one’s neighbors is vital.

To a large extent these difficulties and drawbacks are unavoidable and are not an argument against Democratic organizing. But in comparing different Democratic strategies in solidly GOP areas they should be clearly recognized rather than ignored.



## The Alternative Political Objective

More important, it is critical to recognize that there is an important alternative political objective to consider, one that is only to some degree compatible with the first.

*This alternative political objective is to create campaigns, movements and organizations that seek to challenge and weaken the profound social and cultural domination that GOP/MAGA ideology now exercises in red state districts.<sup>3</sup>*

The problem in red state districts today is not simply that voters in these areas overwhelmingly vote for Republicans. It is that major elements of GOP and specifically MAGA ideology have become so pervasive and familiar in everyday life that many voters—even if they disagree with certain particular ideas—simply cannot imagine that there is any sensible political alternative to voting for candidates who espouse the GOP and MAGA perspective. For many Republican voters this view has become synonymous with what they feel all “normal” or “sensible” people should view as acceptable. In the past non-conformists like Marxists and Atheists in many small towns and rural areas were considered literally “crazy”. Now essentially all Democrats are also seen in this way – many people in red state areas genuinely feel that “no sensible person could really support all that crazy stuff that Democrats believe”.

Moreover, in the past deeply conservative people in small towns and rural areas who firmly rejected Democratic candidates nonetheless still considered local Democrats to be their neighbors and co-workers, their children’s schoolteachers and little league coaches, shopkeepers on main street and so on. This is increasingly no longer the case.

The pervasive current view of Democrats as completely “alien” or “crazy” in many Red State districts now stands as a profound roadblock to even the most preliminary attempts to develop a Democratic presence in these areas. It empowers a political “race to the bottom” as GOP candidates, freed from the need to debate with moderates to win GOP primaries, compete instead to “*out-extreme*” each other. Having successfully placed all non MAGA ideas as outside the pale of reasonable debate within the local GOP, political competition among Republicans becomes debased to who can be most theatrical in their demonization of the Democratic “enemy.”

There are two distinct political strategies by which this GOP/MAGA ideological domination can be challenged by forces other than the Democratic Party.

1. By creating nonpartisan groups that tackle local problems in a non-ideological way but which at the same time inherently challenge elements of the GOP/MAGA perspective.
2. By running independent candidates who compete against GOP candidates or running candidates in GOP primaries who dispute elements of MAGA/GOP orthodoxy.



This Resource Directory includes more than 130 organizations that are either rural-based, rural-focused or significantly include rural concerns among their priorities.

It is a joint project of the Rural Urban Bridge Initiative (RUBI) and The Democratic Strategist (TDS).

[https://thedemocratic-strategist.org/\\_projects/Directory%20-%20RUBI\\_V7\\_](https://thedemocratic-strategist.org/_projects/Directory%20-%20RUBI_V7_)

<sup>3</sup>The sociological term for this kind of powerfully dominant view in a particular culture is ideological hegemony. The theory is complex but the term can be simply defined as describing an outlook that is so pervasive among a group of people that members of the group simply cannot imagine that there is actually any “reasonable” or “sensible” alternative.

The first approach can be to a large extent compatible with separate efforts to build Democratic support in Red State districts and areas. The second and third approaches are significantly less so.

Let us consider them in turn.

## 1. Developing Nonpartisan Groups that Deal with Local Problems and Issues

These groups can create a space where people with a range of different political views collectively try to solve local social problems. To the extent that these groups attempt to solve problems that the local GOP does not address they can act as a foundation for the expansion of alternative political perspectives and networks of collaboration.

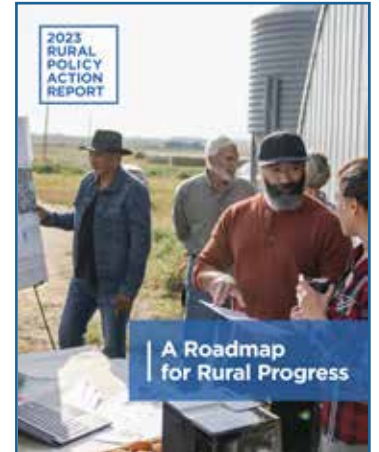
**People's Action** is a national network of 38 member-based organizations in 29 states with more than a million members and tens of thousands of national volunteers. Their perspective on nonpartisan groups is expressed as follows:

The brand of the Democratic Party in rural communities is deeply damaged. The deep distrust of government in marginalized working-class communities in rural and small town America requires that community organizations be at the center of any engagement strategy. Community organizations and non-elected community leaders must be the 'tip of the spear' as progressives seek to engage. Investing in independent and trusted community organizations that have credible community-driven endorsement processes will be crucial to any strategy to build progressive political infrastructure in rural areas and small-towns.

The following are several examples of organizations that foster the development of independent community organizations:

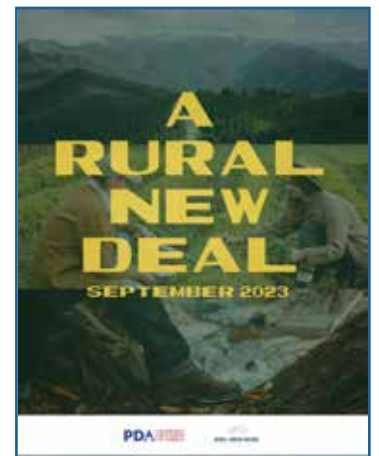
**Working America** – Based on a traditional trade union approach to community organizing, Working America combines grass roots campaigns on community issues with political advocacy during election years, while also building a long term base through a membership program. During the COVID epidemic, for example, it devoted a major effort to assisting thousands of its members in accessing the wide range of government resources and programs that had become available.

**The Rural Urban Bridge Initiative** (RUBI) Community Works Teams determine their activities based on local needs assessments. Projects are then undertaken in collaboration with local civic, church, school and community groups. Activities have included road and river clean-ups, home repair, food distribution, diaper drives, and kids' art classes and crafts activities at a Community Recreation Center and Farmers Market. RUBI provides each Community Works pilot county with resources to launch the program, hire a part-time local coordinator and help pay for rent and supplies.



Rural policy action report

<https://ruralpolicyaction.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-rural-policy-action-report.pdf>



RUBI Rural New Deal report

<https://static1.squarespace.com/...>

**Down Home North Carolina** – One chapter of the organization started a mutual aid working group -- a group of people who will attempt to ensure that local people who need housing, domestic violence support or other aid will have access to a local group whose job is connecting people to the available resources for assistance.

The organization **Rural Organizing** provides a “community needs assessment toolkit” that helps local groups to define local needs.

**Rural Democracy Initiative** – Through a network of over 125 groups and leaders, the group engages in community based organizing.

It is important to note that this nonpartisan approach in many cases can operate in parallel with efforts to build explicitly Democratic local organizations. The distinct approach of running independent candidates or “insurgent” candidates in GOP primary campaigns, on the other hand, is not able to do this.

## **2. Supporting Independent Political Campaigns or GOP Primary Challenges.**

It is necessary to begin by noting that many Democrats will immediately reject both of these strategies because they divert resources from explicitly Democratic organizing and require potentially Democratic voters to consider candidates with views that depart from various national Democratic positions.

Both of these objections will be discussed below but before doing so it is necessary to first define the way that these strategies can weaken GOP/MAGA ideology.

On the one hand independent candidates in Red State districts who offer some mixture of progressive and conservative views and who run as independents rather than “moderate” Democrats have one inherently useful effect. They replace ordinary voters’ default vision of politics as being simply a choice between a Democrat and a Republican with a three way division between Democratic, Republican and Independent candidates that forces them to consider specific platform planks and positions on different issues. This necessarily breaks down the simplistic Republican stereotype of the two parties as representing “good versus evil” and forces voters to consider more complex choices and alternatives.

In contrast candidates who run in GOP primaries but challenge various aspects of GOP ideology can have a distinct useful effect – they can disrupt the “race to the bottom” between competing extremist candidates and inject actual differences on issues into GOP primary campaigns.

Both these strategies tend to undermine the broad ideological consensus in many deep red primary contests that reduces politics to simply a choice between virtuous Republicans and perfidious Democrats.

The arguments in favor of these strategies depend on recognizing that beneath the apparent ideological uniformity of GOP voters there are actually significant ideological divisions that can be exploited.



## The Conservative but Non-MAGA Republicans

Many Democrats today tend to view all GOP voters as ideologically right wing extremists because they are willing to vote for Donald Trump. But, in fact, there are several deep and profoundly important divisions within this group. There are many conservative voters who vote for GOP candidates but who do not fully share the profound racial, religious and social intolerance of passionate Trump/MAGA supporters, their contempt for democratic institutions or their view of society as basically divided between a condescending liberal elite and all ordinary Americans.

There are, for example, many deeply religious voters who actually accept one of the many varieties of more compassionate Christianity that are still common in working class churches. Although this point of view is generally unfamiliar to the highly educated, Jimmy Carter is a distinct example of this “liberal” variety of small town/working class Christian faith. Religious voters of this kind will vote for the GOP in preference to the Democrats but are at the same time sincerely troubled by the deep intolerance and moral cynicism of the religious right.

There is also a significant sector of working class Republican voters who hold a basically “class conscious” perspective rather than the MAGA view of society as divided simply into ordinary Americans versus a liberal elite. There is a deep sense among this sector of working class GOP voters that it is not just “woke liberals,” college graduates or Democrats who ignore working class needs but “the system” as a whole that is unfair to the “little guy.” There is a firm conviction that ordinary people always get screwed by both political parties.

*(Note: This distinct group is discussed in greater detail in the memo: “The culturally traditional but non-extremist working class voters: who they are, how they think and what Democrats must understand to regain their support.”)<sup>4</sup>*

## The Rural Small Town Class Structure

To grasp how this “class conscious” perspective in particular can be exploited, it is necessary to recognize that small towns in rural areas have a very distinct and powerful class structure.

As an article in The U.K. Guardian noted:

A class of local elites owns the valuable land that surrounds a typical rural small town, which is home to a post office, public schools, a grocery store, and sometimes a hospital... the owners of physical assets—fast food franchises, apartment complexes, car dealer ships—make up the rest of this scaled-down hierarchy. They sit on local non-profit boards, run the chamber of commerce, and are influential members of their churches. They often hold elected office and are disproportionately responsible for the political constitution of rural areas....

---

<sup>4</sup>[https://thedemocraticstrategist.org/\\_memos/tds\\_SM\\_levison\\_culturally\\_traditional\\_WWC\\_voters\\_v2.pdf](https://thedemocraticstrategist.org/_memos/tds_SM_levison_culturally_traditional_WWC_voters_v2.pdf)

"In recent years this rural gentry has expanded its wealth. [Often] just a few farmers own most of the farmland that surrounds the town with holdings that swell to tens of thousands of acres. These families get the sweetest federal contracts call the shots on covid protocols in the church and tend to rotate in and out of local positions of power in government."<sup>5</sup>

Another description of this local elite expands on their characteristics:

This kind of elite's wealth derives not from their salary but from their ownership of assets. They could be a bunch of McDonald's franchises in Jackson, Mississippi, a beef-processing plant in Lubbock, Texas, a construction company in Billings, Montana, commercial properties in Portland, Maine, or a car dealership in western North Carolina. Even the less prosperous parts of the United States generate enough surplus to produce a class of wealthy people. In some places, they have an effective stranglehold over what gets done; in others, they're important but not all-powerful.<sup>6</sup>

Beneath this rural elite there are a wide variety of working class occupations, ranging from farm and ranch workers and foremen to truck drivers, feedlot, storage facility and warehouse workers, mechanics and repairmen and regional concentrations of lumber workers, fishermen, oil pipeline and refinery workers, strip mine and open-pit mine workers, forestry employees, firefighters and others.

These two groups do not have the same interests or outlook.

In many cases the leading candidates in local GOP primaries in Red State districts are relatively well-to-do businessmen and women who protect and defend the interests of the local business and financial elite rather than the districts working class citizens. In many places private developers will prod local governments to block public access to adjacent public lands or rezone formerly communal property. GOP representatives will reject federal funds for Medicaid despite the fact that this leads local hospitals to close and primary care doctors to leave the area. Former Montana governor Steve Bullock notes that in parts of Rural America 1 in 8 citizens lacks health care, there are 9 infants and toddlers for every daycare slot and over half of people's income goes to rent. Lax control over the use of agricultural chemicals pollutes local water sources on which local residents depend.

A New York Times article gives one notable example:

Rural Ground Game  
<https://www.ruralground-game.org/>

Rural Voter Institute  
<https://www.ruralvoterinstitute.com/>

No Dem Left Behind  
<https://nodemleftbehind.com/>

Rural Vote  
<https://www.ruralvote.org/>

The 134 Pac  
<https://www.the134pac.org/>

Movement Labs  
<https://movementlabs.com/>

Rural Power Labs  
<https://ruralpowerlab.soap-boxx.com/landing>

People's Action  
<https://peoplesaction.org/wp-content/uploads/PA2019RuralVoterReport.pdf>

Working America  
<https://workingamerica.org/>

The Rural Urban Bridge Initiative  
<https://ruralurbanbridge.org/our-work/community-works>

Down Home North Carolina  
<https://downhomenc.org/>

Rural Organizing  
<https://ruralorganizing.org/resources/toolkit/toolkit-rural-community-needs-assessment-surveys/>

Rural Democracy Initiative  
<https://ruraldemocracyinitiative.org/>

*Continued next page.*

<sup>5</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/22/us-politics-rural-america>

<sup>6</sup><https://patrickwyman.substack.com/p/american-gentry>

In Arizona's deeply conservative La Paz County, the most urgent issue facing many voters is not inflation or illegal immigration. It is the water being pumped from under their feet.

The Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party  
<https://dfl.org/>

Giant farms have turned Arizona's remote deserts about 100 miles west of Phoenix as green as fairways — the product of extracting an ocean of groundwater to grow alfalfa for dairy cows. Water experts say the pumping is sinking poor rural towns. The ground in parts of La Paz County has dropped more than five feet during three decades of farming. Pipes and home foundations are cracking. Wells are running dry...Even as political battles over abortion consume Arizona's Capitol, Democrats have seized on water as a life-or-death election issue that they hope gives them an opening — however slight — to reach out to rural voters who abandoned the party<sup>7</sup>

National Farmers Union  
<https://nfu.org/>

National family farm coalition  
<https://nffc.net/>

Working class populist candidates who run as independents or compete in GOP primaries can focus on these local economic issues and use them to divide the GOP electorate.

One example of the disruptive role that such candidates can play is suggested by Dan Osborn, the union leader who is currently running for the Senate in Nebraska as an independent.

At his campaign kick-off last fall, independent candidate Dan Osborn denounced “the monopolistic corporations... that actually run this country” and pledged to “bring together workers, farmers, ranchers and small business owners across Nebraska around bread-and-butter issues that appeal across party lines.”

“Our U.S. Senate is a country club. It's full of millionaires, business execs and lawyers. Working-class people just aren't represented. I think it's time to change that. It should be we the people” representing us, not just the country club politicians.

I'm an independent, and I've been an independent since 2016. I was a Democrat before, but I feel like both parties have stopped listening to working people and have stopped working for them. They're all more aligned with corporate interests, especially my Republican opponent, Deb Fischer. She takes a tremendous amount of money from the railroad industry, from pharmaceutical companies, and she votes accordingly. If people don't already know that, then they need to be informed of it. This is why I say that Washington is broken, and we need to roll up our sleeves and fix it.”

Osborn's platform combines culturally traditional stances on issues like guns, immigration and crime with a strong class conscious perspective. As a New York Times article notes:

Mr. Osborn, who said he was a Democrat until 2016, wants to run on a narrow platform with what he hopes is extremely broad appeal: legalize marijuana (at least for medical use), raise the minimum wage nationally, secure abortion rights, protect gun rights and expand laws to facilitate union organizing. He condemns the inflation of the Biden era, but blames corporate greed and price gouging. He speaks of the U.S. border in distinctly Republican ways.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/18/us/politics/nebraska-union-senate-race.html>

<sup>8</sup><https://barnraisingmedia.com/dan-osborn-nebraska-senate-labor-right-to-repair-working-class-agenda/>

The Nebraska Democratic Party is not fielding a candidate in the election and seems willing to passively support Osborn as preferable to the GOP incumbent.

This suggests the way such campaigns may run, accommodating cultural traditional views regarding issues like guns or immigration but forcefully pushing a blue collar platform. A similar approach can also be taken by independent insurgent candidates in GOP primaries.

## The Two Major Objections to these Strategies

There are two major objections to the strategy of supporting independent or GOP primary candidates:

1. That absolutely all progressive and Democratic efforts and resources should be concentrated on increasing the Democratic vote.
2. That progressives and Democrats should not support any strategy that involves compromising firm democratic positions on political issues .

Let us consider them in turn.

### **1. That Absolutely all progressive and Democratic efforts and resources should be concentrated on increasing the Democratic vote.**

If the only political objective is to increase the number of Democratic votes this would seem a superficially plausible argument. Realistically, however, every campaign inevitably faces the economic reality of diminishing returns. Beyond a certain limit additional investment in a local race produces virtually no additional votes. Opening a second campaign office in a small town might possibly be useful; opening five or six will produce no additional support. The same reality exists for the number of billboards, local radio ads, leaflets, yard signs and door to door canvassing. In addition, local resources like local volunteer time are not transferable to other districts or able to be utilized during non-campaign periods. In contrast, excess resources that cannot be used productively in Democratic political campaigns can be productively used by nonpartisan groups and other progressive grass roots organizing that has "spin-off" benefits in widening the political debate.

### **2. That progressives and Democrats should not support any candidate or group whose platform requires compromising firm Democratic positions on political issues.**

In effect this amounts to the strategic decision that the Democratic Party should operate as a firmly ideological political party with an inflexible set of positions rather than as a participant in any coalitions that require collaboration with other groups that hold different views.

This strategy has a long history in the 20 century left politics. In the 1920s and 1930s several of the major explicitly socialist parties in the U.S. and Europe rejected any compromise of the planks of their socialist platform or the creation of coalitions with other reformist parties on the grounds that this would "mislead the masses" and perpetuate the "false consciousness" that social progress could be achieved by gradual reform. After World War II this changed as

the socialist parties of western Europe developed the distinction between “*immediate objectives*” and “*long term objectives*” which made it possible for them to form political alliances and governing coalitions with moderate or reformist political parties.

Most modern left Democrats do not share a single overarching political goal like traditional socialism but are rather organized into a series of specific issue clusters around topics like race, gender, the environment and international affairs. The advocates in each of these fields, however, generally hold that there should be absolutely no dilution of the full progressive agenda in their particular area (doing so is frequently and melodramatically described as “throwing them under the bus” or “stabbing them in the back”). This once again makes strategies such as supporting moderate Democrats, nonpartisan groups, independent candidates or working class rebels in Republican primaries entirely out of the question.

It is not possible to meaningfully debate this view versus the four strategies above as it does not accept either of the two basic political objectives that these strategies are designed to achieve—electing Democratic candidates or weakening MAGA ideology—if they require compromising a group’s political platform.

## Conclusion

As this discussion has shown, there are four distinct political strategies that progressives and Democrats can pursue in solidly Red States and districts. They are:

1. **Identifying and Supporting Democratic Candidates**
2. **Rebuilding Local Democratic Party Infrastructure and Facilities.**
3. **Developing Nonpartisan Groups that Deal with Local Problems and Issues**
4. **Supporting Independent Political Campaigns or GOP Primary Challenges.**

Most progressive and Democratic discussions of political strategy, however, focus on only one or another of these strategies without reviewing their relative advantages and disadvantages or evaluating the ways that they can be coordinated. Instead, each strategy is often discussed in isolation or treated as if it is necessarily in competition with all the others.

This is a mistake. As this discussion has shown, to a significant degree the four specific strategies can support and complement each other as part of a larger progressive and Democratic strategy to reduce the Republican and MAGA domination of Red State politics. As the many organizations noted in this memo and in the associated Directory of Rural Organizations demonstrate there are important efforts being made in all four of these areas and discussions of political strategy in Red State areas should be based on seeing them as more often complementary than in conflict.