The Heterogeneous Associations of Rural Consciousness and Political Preferences

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Abstract: Although rural Americans' sense of place-based consciousness has been an influential explanation for their right-wing politics, recent studies have often found rural consciousness is weakly associated with Republican partisanship and conservatism. Analyzing the 2020 American National Election Study and reanalyzing three recent studies of rural consciousness, I show this incongruity is explained by heterogeneity in how rural consciousness is associated with political preferences. For politically engaged Americans, rural consciousness is associated with right-wing partisan-ideological identification and economic conservatism. For disengaged Americans, however, rural consciousness is associated with left-wing identification and economic liberalism. This heterogeneity emerges due to the downweighing of instrumental concerns among politically engaged citizens relative to symbolic, identity-based concerns. Thus, how rural consciousness is translated into political preferences is contingent on citizens' relative weighting of competing instrumental and symbolic motivations, which push the rurally-conscious in opposite directions in terms of partisanship, ideological identification, and economic policy preferences.

Key Words: Rural politics, political engagement, political identity, public opinion, ideology

As America's urban-rural political schisms have drastically widened in the 21st century, there has been increasing attention to the politics of place among political scientists (Gimpel et al. 2020; Mettler and Brown 2022; Scala and Johnson 2017). Polarization along the urban-rural continuum came to a dramatic head in 2016 when stark rightward rural shifts secured Donald Trump's Electoral College victory despite his lackluster national performance. In the wake of this ongoing rural realignment, a core question animating recent studies of rural politics is: why do rural voters, who on average have lower incomes, weaker employment prospects, and worse health than those in other geographies, support right-wing candidates, parties, and policies that stymie social welfare provision and economic redistribution?

An influential resolution to this puzzle can be found in Cramer's (2016) theory of "rural consciousness." Cramer argues that rural Americans are, in fact, considering economics in their political behavior, but that their material grievances become intertwined with political and socio-cultural grievances. Rural Americans perceive themselves as victims of distributional injustice, political underrepresentation, and cultural marginalization; their perceptions of "who gets what" drive opposition to redistributive economic policies that rural Americans believe take from rural citizens to benefit suburbanites and urbanites. Thus, rural Americans' conservative politics are explained by a wedding of multi-faceted rural grievances that have become increasingly acute amidst globalization, diversification, and rural depopulation (Hochschild 2018; Wuthnow 2018).

Cramer's (2016) theory would resolve the paradox of right-wing rural politics. However, Cramer relies on qualitative interviews to generate her theory of rural consciousness, and recent quantitative tests offer mixed findings. Rural consciousness is certainly prevalent (Munis 2020), and this form of group consciousness should be politically consequential (Miller et al. 1981). Yet studies using national surveys have not found strong associations between rural consciousness

and Republican partisanship (Munis 2020; Trujillo and Crowley 2022; but see Jacobs and Munis 2022), conservative identity (Trujillo and Crowley 2022), or economic conservatism (Nelsen and Petsko 2021)—three outcomes Cramer (2016) finds go hand-in-hand with rural consciousness.

Recent quantitative studies have cast doubt on Cramer's qualitatively-derived theory of rural consciousness. I argue, however, that accounting for one crucial but overlooked difference between qualitative and quantitative studies can reconcile their findings—the varying levels of *political engagement* in the samples analyzed. Cramer (2016) interviews a cross-section of rural Wisconsinites who are older, more socially involved and, in turn, *more politically engaged* than the broader rural populace.[1] Recent quantitative studies, by contrast, have analyzed surveys that draw in more representative samples, thus including many *politically disengaged* citizens. These diverging distributions are consequential for identifying rural consciousness's effects on political preferences because politically disengaged and engaged citizens bring fundamentally different concerns to bear when forming preferences (Johnston et al. 2017; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022).

In this paper, I join Cramer's (2016) theory of rural consciousness with existing theories of instrumental and symbolic political behavior to explain why rural consciousness has appeared so weakly related to partisanship, ideology, and economic attitudes in recent quantitative studies. Specifically, I argue that politically disengaged citizens give greater weight to instrumental, self-interested concerns, while politically engaged citizens are motivated by symbolic, identity-based concerns. Politically disengaged, rurally-conscious Americans tend to view themselves as better served by Democratic representation and economic liberalism to alleviate material deprivation; politically engaged, rurally-conscious citizens, by contrast, view their symbolic, identity-based

[1] To be clear, Cramer (2016) is forthright about the various differences between her interviewees and the broader rural populace.

interests as better served by identification with the Republican Party and, in turn, the adoption of conservative economic views. Thus, I propose the relationships between rural consciousness and preferences are moderated whereby rural consciousness is associated with left-wing preferences for politically disengaged rural citizens, but right-wing preferences for politically engaged rural citizens. Examining the 2020 American National Election Study (ANES) and reanalyzing data from three previous studies (Nelsen and Petsko 2021; Trujillo and Crowley 2022; Munis 2020), I find support for these expectations. Rural consciousness is strongly associated with right-wing preferences for politically engaged citizens, but left-wing preferences for disengaged citizens.

I also offer evidence for one mechanism by which politically engaged rural citizens adopt conservative economic preferences—attention to polarized elite-level discourse. For the majority of economic issues (e.g., healthcare, redistribution) attention to elite-level discourse will promote economic conservatism for the rurally conscious since (1) politically engaged, rurally conscious citizens largely sort into the Republican Party; (2) Republican elites espouse more conservative economic positions than Democratic elites; and (3) politically engaged citizens are attentive to and willing to incorporate economic views consistent with their ingroup, even if such economic views are at odds with their material interests (Zaller 1992). But when this sequence breaks at step two on the small set of economic issues where Republican elites are *less* conservative than Democrats—e.g., trade policy under Trump—we would expect for politically engaged, rurally conscious citizens to adopt *liberal* (i.e., protectionist) preferences. Indeed, I find trade is the only economic issue where rural consciousness is associated with *liberal* preferences for the engaged. These divergent associations are consistent with theories of opinion formation that suggest many symbolic-minded citizens adopt specific economic positions from elites, not consistently pro- or anti-market ideological orientations (Ollerenshaw and Johnston 2022; Johnston et al. 2017).

This study makes several important contributions. Primarily, this study supports Cramer's (2016) claim that many rural Americans' support for Republicans and economic conservatism is rooted in symbolic motivations. But my findings offer an important extension to Cramer's theory by demonstrating that for rural citizens primarily motivated by instrumental concerns, *rural consciousness exhibits the exact opposite associations with political preferences*. These results help explain why recent quantitative studies have often found weak associations between rural consciousness and right-wing preferences (Munis 2020; Nelsen and Petsko 2021; Trujillo and Crowley 2022); reanalyzing these studies, I find the associations of rural consciousness are moderated by engagement in every case. My findings thus affirm the key moderating role of political engagement (or "sophistication") in preference formation (Federico and Malka 2018; Malka et al. 2014), especially when material interests and identities conflict (Johnston et al. 2017; Johnston and Wronski 2015; Ollerenshaw 2022). Finally, this study has implications for understanding urban-rural polarization since this schism is partly maintained by the low levels of political participation among the rural citizens who are most open to Democratic representation.

Rural Consciousness and the Politics of Place

In classic accounts of American politics, such as Key's (1949) *Southern Politics in State and Nation* and Campbell et al.'s (1960) *The American Voter*, geography was taken as a primary ingredient structuring mass politics. Attention to political geography renewed in the 21st-century as rural areas became increasingly dominated by Republicans (Gimpel and Karnes 2006; Rohla et al. 2018). Frank's (2004) *What's the Matter with Kansas?* arguably reinvigorated the study of place and politics, popularizing the theory that rural Americans supported the Republican Party, despite their material interests being more aligned with the Democrats, due to rural affinities for moral traditionalism. Although Frank's account is fiercely contested (Bartels 2006), the question

of why rural Americans support Republicans has remained central to recent inquiries into rural politics, especially after Donald Trump's upset victory in the 2016 election on the backs of rural voters (Gimpel and Karnes 2006; Kelly and Lobao 2019; McKee 2008; Wuthnow 2018).

Perhaps the most influential theory of rural politics in the 21st-century is Cramer's theory of *rural consciousness* (2012; 2016). Group consciousness—i.e., identifying with a group and believing the group's interests should be advanced via collective action—has long been a leading explanation for political participation (Miller et al. 1981), but its application to rural politics is recent. After interviewing hundreds of Wisconsinites, Cramer developed a theory of *place-based* consciousness to explain why rural Americans support Republicans and economic conservatism. Cramer theorizes rural consciousness captures three interrelated beliefs (or grievances) among rural Americans: (1) rural citizens' needs are overlooked by policymakers; (2) rural citizens are overtaxed and see fewer government benefits than urbanites; and (3) rural citizens have distinct values and lifestyles that have become objects of contempt among urbanites. In Cramer's (2016) account, rurally-conscious citizens make political decisions, such as which candidate to vote for or whether to support a particular policy, through the lens of rural consciousness. And, in recent years, Republicans have capitalized on these grievances by tapping into rural citizens' feelings of neglect in a globalizing, urbanizing, and diversifying United States.

While Cramer's (2016) theory is compelling, recent quantitative tests have offered mixed support for the claim that rural consciousness meaningfully shapes political preferences. Nelsen and Petsko (2021), for example, find that rural consciousness is insignificantly associated with Trump approval and only weakly associated with conservative economic views after controlling for racial resentment. Trujillo and Crowley (2022) also find their 14-item rural consciousness scale is insignificantly associated with partisan-ideological identity, and Munis (2020) finds rural

resentment (a conceptually similar measure to rural consciousness) is insignificantly associated with partisanship. Finally, although Jacobs and Munis (2022) do find that rural resentment is significantly associated with voting for Republican candidates, they also find rural resentment is inconsistently related to affective ratings of parties. To summarize, recent quantitative studies suggest rural consciousness is often weakly associated with right-wing political preferences.

Instrumental vs. Symbolic Politics and the Role of Political Engagement

How can we reconcile qualitative studies that argue rural consciousness is central to rural Americans' political thinking with quantitative studies that show rural consciousness is weakly associated with the political preferences rural consciousness was forwarded to explain? In this section, I review instrumental and symbolic theories of political preferences, and contend that citizens' relative weighting between these competing instrumental and symbolic concerns are consequential for understanding how rural consciousness is translated into political preferences.

Instrumental theories of politics take citizens' political behavior as being, to a significant extent, rooted in their desire to maximize *material interests*. Often, instrumental political theories emphasize the importance of an individuals' economic circumstances as central to their political preferences. Meltzer and Richard (1981), for example, model citizens' support for redistribution as a function of citizens' place in the income distribution and their expectations regarding the disincentive effects of taxation on other citizens (see also Alesina and La Ferrara 2005; Rueda and Stegmueller 2019). Other examples of self-interest at work include workers in occupations with higher unemployment being more supportive of redistribution (Rehm 2009); lower-income senior citizens being more active in support of Social Security (Campbell 2002); and Americans worried about their medical expenses being more supportive of public healthcare (Henderson and

Hillygus 2011; Chong et al. 2001). In general, instrumentally-minded citizens should support the parties, candidates, and policies they believe would advance their interests in government.

Though self-interested motivations are often important determinants of political behavior, the paradox of participation is that there are seemingly few instrumental incentives to participate in politics at all. Learning about politics takes a considerable expenditure of time, and citizens who participate are unlikely to be pivotal (Downs 1957). To resolve this paradox, scholars often point to *expressive* motivations, such as reaping psychosocial benefits from voting as a civic duty, as key determinants of participation (Fiorina 1976; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Extending this logic beyond the decision of whether or not to vote, proponents of symbolic politics theories contend instrumental motivations for political behavior are often dominated by expressive, *identity-based* considerations (Sears 1993; Sears et al. 1979). Symbolic politics proponents argue citizens' political preferences hinge less on how supporting a given candidate, party, or policy will affect them in a material way, and more on how political preferences reflect who they are as a person—in particular, the groups with which they identify. Politics thus primarily serves as a way for citizens to adopt, reinforce, and signal social identities. In symbolic accounts, partisan identity does not primarily serve an instrumental purpose (e.g., a tally of material benefits to be gained by supporting one party; Fiorina 1977); instead, partisanship fulfills a psychological need to have positive distinctiveness between one's ingroups and outgroups (Green et al. 2004; Huddy et al. 2015; Mason 2018; see Devine 2015 for similar conclusions about ideological identities).

Few political scientists are strict proponents of symbolic or instrumental theories; most agree both material and identity-based interests influence political preferences. Instead, ongoing debates mostly regard identifying for which citizens instrumental versus symbolic motivations matter most, and why. Some theories contend it is those *most* attentive to politics who behave

instrumentally since they presumably better understand how their interests could be forwarded via political action (Carpini and Keeter 1996; Chong et al. 2001). Recent psychological studies, however, often find citizens' weighting of instrumental motivations *decreases* with engagement (Federico and Malka 2018; Johnston et al. 2017; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022).[2] Because the instrumental benefits of political engagement are low (and usually negative), but its expressive benefits can be substantial, politically engaged citizens tend to be those who prioritize symbolic concerns. Indeed, the engaged are sometimes likened to sports fans since their participation does not emerge from the belief that participation is likely to be pivotal, but out of the enjoyment from rooting for political teams (Hersh 2020; Krupnikov and Ryan 2022; Mason 2018). Citizens' political motivations thus typically shift from being primarily instrumental at low levels of political engagement to primarily symbolic at high levels of political engagement.[3]

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[2] For example, Johnston et al. (2017) find a 0.53 correlation between political engagement and agreement with the statements: "My political attitudes and beliefs are an important part of my self-image," and "My political attitudes and beliefs are an important reflection of who I am."

[3] Prior research has assessed the relationships between political engagement and instrumental vs. symbolic political motivations with national US samples. In Appendix 7, I validate that political engagement proxies the relative weighting of instrumental vs. symbolic political considerations for rural Americans, specifically. I conduct three sets of empirical tests. First, I show that among rural citizens, material interests are decreasingly associated with related economic preferences as functions of political engagement (for similar tests in national samples, see Johnston et al. 2017 and Ollerenshaw 2022, Appendix 7). Second, I show partisan-ideological orientation is stronger among, and more important to the identities of, engaged rural citizens. Third, I show political identities are weakly associated with economic preferences among disengaged rural citizens, but

The Heterogeneous Effects of Rural Consciousness

In the context of rural consciousness and political behavior, Cramer (2016) argues both self-interested and symbolic considerations matter. Specifically, Cramer contends Republicans' recent appeals to rurally-conscious citizens' feelings of political neglect and their sense of socio-cultural marginalization have attracted rurally-conscious Americans to Republican partisanship and conservative identity. And because the rurally-conscious understand economic redistribution as a cause of, rather than a solution to, rural areas' material deprivation, as well as a violation of widely-held norms of individualism, they also adopt conservative economic views. Per Cramer, rurally-conscious citizens' understandings of their material and symbolic interests both generate right-wing political preferences like voting for Republicans and opposing social welfare policies.

My contention, however, is that rural consciousness will *not* have uniform effects among instrumentally- vs. symbolically-motivated citizens.[4] In recent years, Republicans have sought to

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highly associated with economic preferences among engaged rural citizens. What is true in the national populace also holds for rural citizens; engaged rural citizens prioritize political identities in their preferences, while politically disengaged rural Americans prioritize material interests.

[4] Trujillo and Crowley (2022) similarly theorize that instrumental and symbolic motivations push the rurally-conscious in opposite directions politically. Trujillo and Crowley (2022) recommend separating rural consciousness into its economic (distributional), political (representational), and cultural (way of life). In Appendix 6, I show that although the associations of rural consciousness do vary across facets, each facet is conditionally associated with political preferences in the same ways. Strikingly, I find rural citizens who agree "people living in small towns and rural areas get less than they deserve from the government" (i.e., distributional grievances) support economic liberalism at low engagement, but economic conservatism at high engagement. This is consistent

cultivate rural support by appealing to rural Americans as a people left behind in a globalizing, urbanizing, and diversifying country. Democrats, on the other hand, have often tried to appeal to rural Americans by emphasizing how their policies would advance their material interests. For instrumentally-minded rural Americans, Democrats' proposals to alleviate rural deprivation should be more attractive than Republicans' identity-based appeals. Conversely, rural Americans who prioritize symbolic concerns should be willing to eschew material benefits from Democratic representation for the symbolic benefits of right-wing identification. The upshot is that I expect rural consciousness to have heterogeneous associations with political identities based on citizens' weighting of instrumental and symbolic motivations. And because this weighting is proxied by political engagement, I derive my first hypothesis (H1): *rural consciousness will be associated with Democratic partisanship and liberal identity for politically disengaged rural citizens, but Republican partisanship and conservative identity for politically engaged rural citizens.*

Although H1 accounts for why politically engaged, rurally-conscious citizens adopt right-wing identities, it does not yet account for their economic conservatism—that is, why would the rurally-conscious eschew economic liberalism as they adopt right-wing identities? In line with Johnston et al. (2017), I argue economic policies are often interpreted symbolically for politically engaged citizens because economic issues become associated with specific groups and identities through polarized political discourse. Today, US elites are so ideologically well-sorted that, on almost any economic issue, politically attentive citizens can learn (or infer) where Democratic

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with my theory that the *application* of rural consciousness to political preferences depends on an individual's relative weighting of instrumental and symbolic considerations. Inferential gains can be made examining rural consciousness facets separately (Trujillo and Crowley 2022), but doing so does not obviate the need to account for heterogeneity as a function of political engagement.

and Republican elites will fall on the issue (Abramowitz 2010; Hetherington 2001). Politically engaged citizens are more attentive to polarized elite-level discourse, more willing to assimilate policy views from ingroup elites to reinforce their identification with partisan-ideological groups (Carsey and Layman 2006; Layman et al. 2010; Zaller 1992), and, as I hypothesize in H1, better sorted. I thus expect politically engaged, rurally-conscious Americans to adopt conservative economic preferences because these preferences are almost always symbolically associated with Republican partisanship and conservative identity (Lenz 2012; Tesler 2015). I derive a second hypothesis (H2): *rural consciousness will be associated with economic liberalism for politically disengaged rural citizens, but economic conservatism for politically engaged rural citizens.*

The caveat to the above account, of course, is that I only expect rural consciousness to be increasingly associated to conservative economic preferences for issues where Republican elites have staked out a more conservative position than Democratic elites. Although elites have mostly polarized this way, at least one issue remains where Republicans have often found themselves to the left of Democrats: trade. Specifically, since Trump became the 2016 Republican nominee, he and other Republicans have espoused stridently anti-trade views. And while anti-trade views are still found among Democratic elites, in the recent 2016 and 2020 elections, Trump attacked his Democratic opponents (Clinton and Biden) over their past support for free trade agreements. My theory proposes symbolically-motivated rural Americans' economic views reflect those adopted to maintain congruence with political ingroups (Zaller 1992). Thus, although I generally expect engaged, rurally conscious Americans to adopt conservative economic views, on trade, I expect the opposite because elite cue-taking will pull the rurally-conscious in a left-wing (protectionist) direction (for similar uses of trade's atypical elite-level polarization vis-à-vis other economic issues, see Johnston et al. 2017 and Ollerenshaw and Johnston 2022). My third hypothesis (H3)

is: *rural consciousness will be associated with protectionist trade preferences, and increasingly so with increased political engagement.*[5]

Data

To test H1-H3, I primarily use the 2020 American National Election Study (ANES). The 2020 ANES is an ideal dataset because it is a probability-based cross-section of voting-eligible Americans.[6] Based on my theory, it is especially important to utilize a probability-based sample because imbalances correlated with political engagement, which are common in non-probability samples (Kennedy et al. 2016), could skew the inferences drawn about rural consciousness. In total, 7,449 respondents completed both the pre-election and post-election ANES surveys. In line with the recommendations of Nemerever and Rogers (2021) for operationalizing rurality, I subset the sample to the 3,154 respondents who identify as "rural" or "small-town" in a survey question. For brevity, I collectively refer to rural and small-town Americans as just "rural." This operationalization is appropriate because rural consciousness exists among citizens not *presently* living in rural areas or small towns, but who consider themselves to be "rural/small-town people" (Johnson and Scala 2022; Trujillo 2022). However, for those who would prefer analyses of only those residing in rural areas or small towns, my findings replicate when imposing this restriction (Appendix 4). I exclude 50 respondents who reported not taking the survey at all seriously or who refused to report how seriously they took the survey because the 2020 ANES was primarily self-administered, a mode which lends itself to a degree of trolling and inattentiveness (Lopez

[5] I focus my analysis on partisan-ideological orientation and economic preferences since these have been the primary outcomes under ongoing debate in recent studies of rural consciousness.

[6] All estimates are weighted. For sampling methodology details, see Appendix 1.

and Hillygus 2018), but my findings are not at all driven by the exclusion of these respondents (Appendix 4). After these exclusions, the 2020 ANES sample includes 3,104 rural Americans.

Analysis

H1-H3 posit the associations of rural consciousness with the three outcomes of interest are conditioned by political engagement. I test these hypotheses with multiplicative interaction linear models that include as independent variables: rural consciousness, political engagement, the interaction of rural consciousness with political engagement, covariates, and the interactions between each covariate and political engagement to address any omitted interaction bias. Here, I outline how these variables are constructed (but see Appendix 2 for full question wordings).

Rural Consciousness: Rural consciousness is assessed with three items, each tapping one facet of rural consciousness. The first question probes perceptions of rural Americans having too much, too little, or about the right amount of political influence. The second probes perceptions of rural Americans getting less, more, or about what they deserve from the government. Finally, the third item probes perceptions of rural Americans getting less, more, or about the right amount of respect. The three items are combined into an additive scale (α=0.69) ranging from 0 to 1, where values above 0.50 indicate rural consciousness, values at 0.50 indicate rural non-consciousness, and values below 0.50 indicate something like anti-rural consciousness. The distribution of rural consciousness is shown in Figure 1. Few rural Americans are anti-rural (5.7 percent), the modal share locate at the non-conscious midpoint (19.9 percent), and a large majority exhibit at least some rural consciousness (74.5 percent). Although fitting models while including the anti-rurally conscious could in theory cause issues since they have outsized leverage, in practice, none of my results hinge on anti-rural respondents. Folding the anti-rurally conscious into the non-conscious midpoint or excluding them altogether gives near-identical results (Appendix 4); i.e., the results

are *not* merely an artifact of extrapolation into a region of rural consciousness that lacks support (Hainmueller et al. 2019).[7] I therefore opt in main text to analyze the full sample, but calculate marginal effects from the scale's midpoint (.5) to maximum (1) (i.e., from rurally non-conscious to conscious) to represent a more typical effect than shifting from anti-rural to rurally conscious.

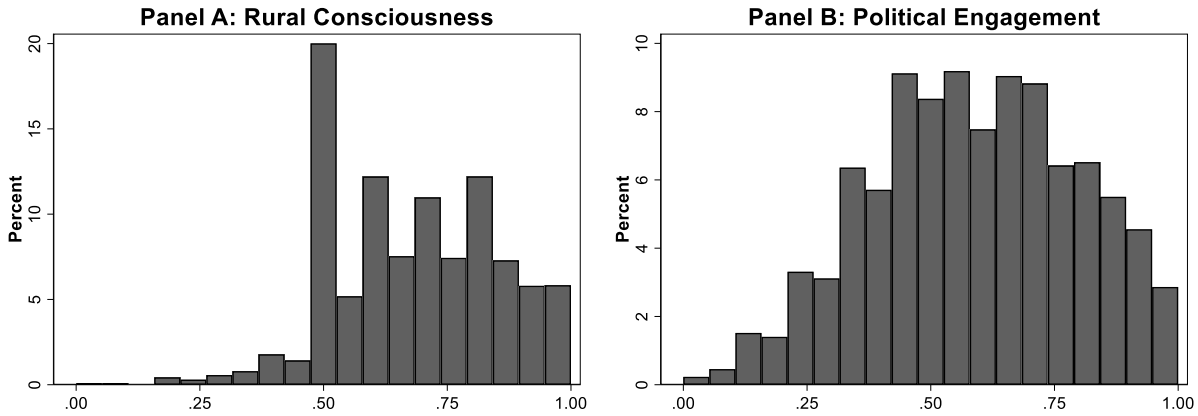

Figure 1—Distributions of Rural Consciousness and Political Engagement. Data weighted. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Political Engagement: Although there is no universally agreed upon measure for political engagement (sometimes referred to as "political sophistication"), I follow Johnston et al. (2017) and Ollerenshaw (2022) who assess political engagement as an equally-weighted sum of political interest and political knowledge subscales. The political interest subscale is comprised of four ANES items that assess self-reported attention to political events, campaigns, and news (α=0.83). The political knowledge subscale is the average of correct answers to eight political knowledge questions: one about Senators' term lengths, two about partisan control of Congress, and five office recall questions about major political figures (α=0.70). Political engagement is constructed from these two subscales, equally weighted, with values between 0 and 1. For those with strong

[7] In Appendix 5, I verify the linearity assumption of multiplicative interaction models holds with a binning estimator (Hainmueller et al. 2019).

preferences between subjective interest and objective knowledge for measuring engagement, all findings also hold across individual subscales (Appendix 4). In Figure 1, I show the distribution of political engagement, which is only weakly correlated with rural consciousness (r=0.09).

Partisanship and Ideology: To test H1, I use six partisan-ideological orientation variables. My primary measure of partisanship is the standard 7-point partisan identity scale, recoded to range from 0 (strong Republican) to 1 (strong Democrat). As additional measures of partisanship, I also assess the difference in 101-point thermometer ratings of the Democratic and Republican parties, dichotomous two-party presidential candidate preferences (Biden/Trump), and 101-point ratings of Biden vis-à-vis Trump, all coded so that higher values indicate Democratic partisanship. My primary ideological orientation measure is the standard 7-point ideology scale coded between 0 (extremely conservative) and 1 (extremely liberal). Those who indicate having not thought much about their placement on this scale are recoded to the middle category ("Moderate"). As a second ideological identification measure, I examine respondents' 101-point ratings of "Liberals" vis-à-vis "Conservatives" where higher values indicate pro-liberal warmth.

Economic Policy: To test H2 and H3, I use the 16 economic policy items on the 2020 ANES. These items span issues of redistribution, social welfare, healthcare, taxes, regulation, and trade. Using factor analysis (see Appendix 2), I show 14 of these economic items load well onto a first factor that explains 45 percent of the variation across items, with the second factor explaining just 7 percent more variation. I generate an additive index of economic policy preferences using these 14 items (α=0.90). This index ranges from 0 (economic conservatism) to 1 (economic liberalism). Not unexpectedly, the two items that do *not* load well onto the first factor tap trade preferences (preferences regarding import restrictions and free trade agreements). Thus, I test H2

using the 14-item economic policy index and its constituent items, and test H3 by scaling the two trade items recoded to range between 0 (pro-trade) and 1 (anti-trade).

Controls: I control for respondent age, gender, education, income, race/ethnicity (six-categories, white non-Hispanic as the baseline), and whether the respondent is a parent, married, in a union, unemployed, or residing in the South.[8] I also control for racial stereotyping since recent work contends rural consciousness is partly confounded by views of urban Blacks, specifically, as being violent and lazy (Nelsen and Petsko 2021).[9] Anti-Black stereotyping is assessed as the difference in ratings of Blacks and whites on two dimensions: hardworking-lazy and peaceful-violent. Finally, following Blackwell and Olson's (2022) recommendations for avoiding omitted interaction bias, I interact all covariates, including racial stereotyping, with political engagement.

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[8] Although some studies non-Hispanic whites' rural consciousness, I include all racial/ethnic groups in my analysis. Rural consciousness is associated with political preferences in similar ways for non-Hispanic whites and racial/ethnic minorities (Appendix 4). However, rural whites are more politically engaged, on average, than rural minorities (μ_{White}=0.60, $\mu_{Minority}$=0.55) and more rurally consciousness (μ_{White}=0.70, $\mu_{Minority}$=0.66).

[9] I prefer controlling for racial stereotyping over racial resentment because racial resentment has been shown to better tap sympathy for Black Americans among liberals than the specific anti-Black attitudes thought to confound rural consciousness (Carney and Enos, n.d.; Feldman and Huddy 2005). In addition, racial resentment is sometimes argued to tap conservative values and principles (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986); because conservatism is often my outcome of interest, including racial resentment as a covariate risks attenuation bias. Racial stereotyping, by contrast, directly assesses beliefs about Blacks' purported laziness and violence. However, acknowledging its ubiquitous use, in Appendix 4, I replicate tests of H1-H3 controlling for racial resentment.

Rural Consciousness, Partisanship, and Ideology

I begin my analysis by testing H1, which posits rural consciousness will be conditionally associated with political identities. In Figure 2, I display the conditional marginal effects of rural consciousness from its midpoint to maximum on the six partisanship-ideological orientation items. Beginning with the standard 7-point partisan identity measure, I find rural consciousness has a 22-point association with Democratic partisan identity at the lowest level of political engagement ($p=0.005$), but a 33-point association with *Republican* partisan identity at the highest level of engagement ($p<0.001$). This 55-point difference in the association of rural consciousness to partisan identity as a function of political engagement ($p<0.001$) supports H1. Similar results emerge for the party ratings measure; rural consciousness is associated with 24-points relatively warmer ratings of the Democratic Party vis-à-vis the Republican Party at the lowest level of engagement ($p<0.001$), but 33-points relatively colder ratings of the Democratic Party at the highest level of engagement ($p<0.001$)—a 57-point difference ($p<0.001$).

Turning to presidential candidate preferences, I find rural consciousness is associated with a 28-point greater predicted probability of preferring Biden over Trump at the lowest level of political engagement ($p=0.005$), but a 43-point greater probability of preferring Trump at the highest level of engagement ($p<0.001$)—a 71-point difference ($p<0.001$).[10] In terms of ratings of Biden and Trump, rural consciousness is associated with 24-points greater relative warmth towards Biden at the lowest engagement ($p<0.001$), but 39-points greater warmth towards Trump at the highest engagement ($p<0.001$)—a 63-point difference ($p<0.001$). Whether assessed using party identity,

[10] I use a linear probability model to estimate predicted candidate preferences. I include non-voters who reported preferring either Trump or Biden, but exclude third-party voters and non-voters without a preference between Biden and Trump.

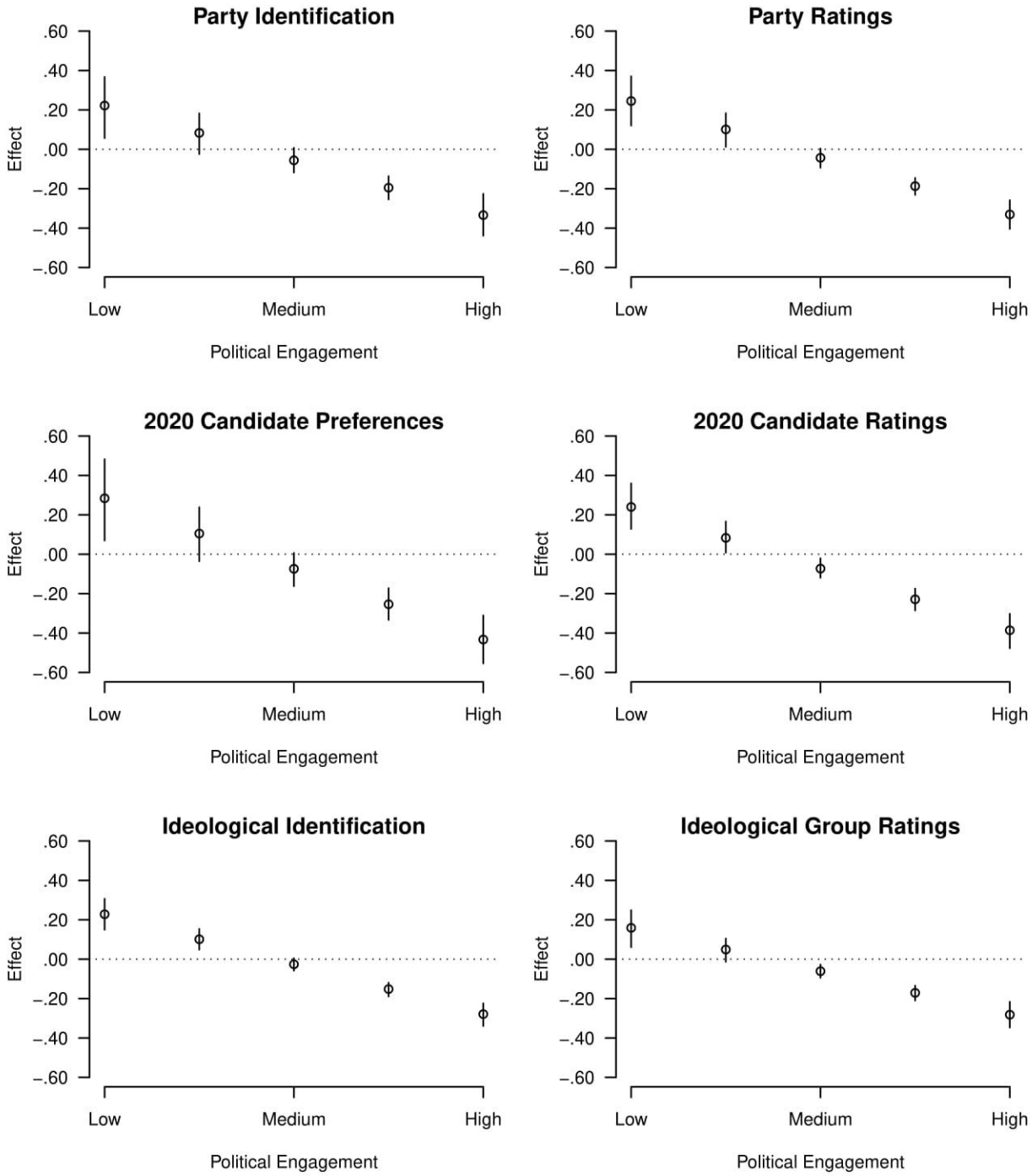

Figure 2—Conditional Associations of Rural Consciousness to Partisan-Ideological Orientation. Marginal effects of rural consciousness (midpoint to maximum) with 95 percent confidence intervals. Positive values indicate associations with left-wing orientations. Data weighted. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

party ratings, candidate preferences, or candidate ratings, rural consciousness is associated with Democratic preferences among the disengaged, but Republican preferences among the engaged.

Finally, I examine whether the conditional associations for partisanship are also reflected in ideological orientation. Looking first at the standard 7-point ideological identity scale, I find rural consciousness has a 23-point association with liberal identity at the lowest level of political engagement ($p<0.001$), but a 28-point association with conservative identity at the highest engagement ($p<0.001$)—a 51-point difference ($p<0.001$). Turning to ratings of liberals vis-à-vis conservatives, similar associations emerge; rural consciousness is associated with 16-points more warmth towards liberals at the lowest political engagement ($p=0.001$) but 28-points more warmth toward conservatives at the highest engagement ($p<0.001$)—a 44-point difference ($p<0.001$).

To illustrate why interactions are necessary to discern the relationships between rural consciousness and partisan-ideological orientation, in Table 1, I show the main (unconditional) associations of rural consciousness with each partisanship/ideology measure. On average, rural consciousness is associated with 11-points greater Republican partisanship, 10-points warmer ratings of the Republican Party, a 15-points greater probability of preferring Trump to Biden, 13-points warmer ratings of Trump, 7-points greater conservative identity, and 10-points warmer ratings of conservatives. These weak associations are similar to those in recent work correlating rural consciousness to political identities (Munis 2020; Trujillo and Crowley 2022), party ratings (Jacobs and Munis 2022), and related attitudes like Trump approval (Nelsen and Petsko 2021).

Partisan Identity	Party Ratings	Candidate Preferences	Candidate Ratings	Ideological Identity	Ideological Ratings
-0.106 (0.024)	-0.095 (0.020)	-0.151 (0.036)	-0.130 (0.023)	-0.071 (0.014)	-0.101 (0.015)
N=2,877	N=2,827	N=2,466	N=2,787	N=2,877	N=2,823

Table 1—Main Associations of Rural Consciousness to Partisan-Ideological Orientation. Marginal effects of rural consciousness (midpoint to maximum). Standard errors in parentheses. Positive values indicate associations with left-wing orientations. Data weighted. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Rural Consciousness and Economic Ideology

In this section, I address a core question of rural politics: why do rural Americans, who would generally benefit from economic redistribution and social welfare programs, often support less of these things? I theorize there is a contingent relationship between rural consciousness and economic preferences predicated on citizens' relative prioritizations of material versus symbolic political motivations. Though material interests should lead rurally-conscious citizens to be more favorable to redistribution and social welfare provision, I hypothesize politically engaged, rurally conscious citizens will adopt economic attitudes consistent with right-wing elites due to identity-based motivations (H2). I thus expect the association between rural consciousness and economic liberalism to flip from positive at low engagement to negative at high engagement.

Atop Figure 3, I show the conditional marginal associations between rural consciousness and the 14-item economic policy scale. At the lowest level of engagement, rural consciousness is associated with 24-points greater economic liberalism ($p<0.001$). Rural consciousness is, in fact, associated with support for policies that would materially benefit poor rural citizens; however, this association only emerges among politically *disengaged* citizens. At the highest engagement, rural consciousness is associated with 30-points greater economic conservatism ($p<0.001$). This 64-point interaction ($p<0.001$) supports H2. For comparison, rural consciousness has a weak 8-point unconditional association with economic conservatism (Table 2).

Political engagement moderates the associations between rural consciousness and all 14 constituent policy items used to create the economic policy scale. While it would be repetitive to discuss all 14, several policies are worth discussion because they tap the core grievances raised by Cramer's (2016) rural interviewees: unemployment, poor schools, healthcare, and taxes. In Figure 3, I plot support for a federal job guarantee, federal education spending, public healthcare

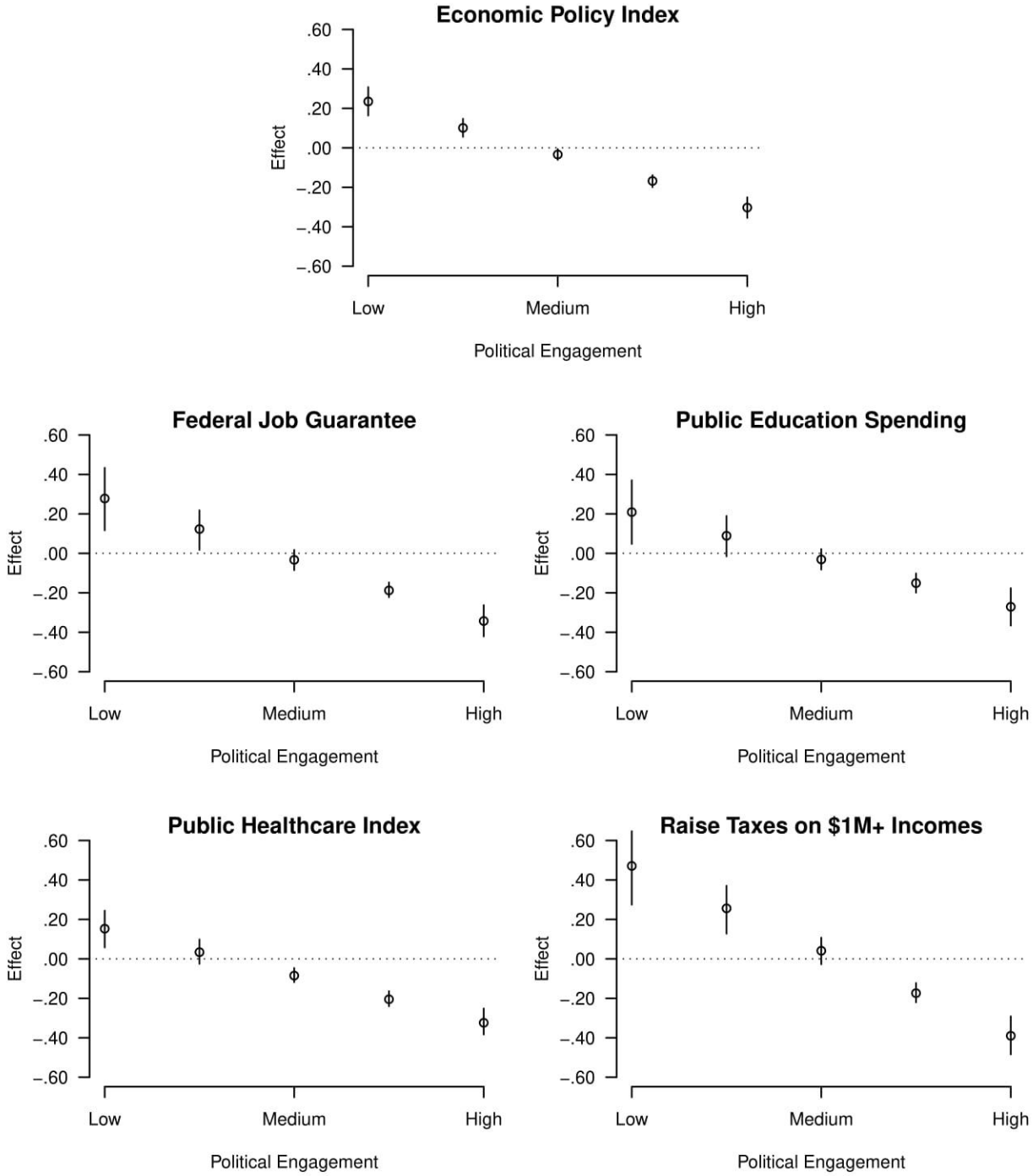

Figure 3—Conditional Associations of Rural Consciousness to Economic Preferences. Marginal effects of rural consciousness (midpoint to maximum) with 95 percent confidence intervals. Positive values indicate associations with liberal preferences. Data weighted. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

provision (a three-item scale), and raising taxes on incomes above $1 million. At the lowest level of engagement, rural consciousness is associated with 28-points more support for a job guarantee ($p<0.001$), 21-points more support for education spending ($p=0.007$), 15-points more support for public healthcare ($p=0.001$), and 47-points more support for progressive taxation ($p<0.001$). Not all rurally-conscious citizens hold economic preferences seemingly at odds with their material interests; indeed, politically disengaged, rurally-conscious Americans are quite economically liberal. At the highest level of political engagement, however, rural consciousness is associated with 34-point less support for a job guarantee ($p<0.001$), 27-points less support for education spending ($p<0.001$), 32-points less support for public healthcare ($p<0.001$), and 39-points less support for progressive taxation ($p<0.001$). These results further support H2. And, again, as shown in Table 2, the main associations of rural consciousness with these outcomes are weak.

Notably, the items in Figure 2 were selected because of their substantive importance, not because only these items support H2. In Appendix 3, I show interactions emerge for: government spending/services levels, aid to the poor, welfare, Social Security, government actions to reduce income inequality, minimum wage levels, government regulations, and universal basic income.

Economic Policy Index	Federal Job Guarantee	Public School Spending	Millionaire Taxes	Public Healthcare Index
-0.081 (0.012)	-0.088 (0.018)	-0.074 (0.021)	-0.035 (0.026)	-0.128 (0.015)
N=2,880	N=2,876	N=2,877	N=2,878	N=2,880

Table 2—Main Associations of Rural Consciousness to Economic Preferences. Marginal effects of rural consciousness (midpoint to maximum). Standard errors in parentheses. Positive values indicate associations with left-wing economic preferences. Data weighted. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Elite Cues and Economic Preference Formation: The Case of Trade Policy

One of my core theoretical claims is that rurally-conscious, politically engaged citizens adopt conservative economic views because: (1) they have right-wing identities; (2) Republican-conservative elites are generally more conservative on economics than Democratic-liberal elites;

and (3) engaged citizens have identity-based motivations to align their economic views with their political identities. It is thus the interaction of elite position-taking and citizens' attention to these cues that generates conditional associations between rural consciousness and economic attitudes. Thus, where elite signals flip from their typical alignment, I would expect rural consciousness to be associated with *left-wing* economic preferences, especially for the engaged. Specifically, with an anti-trade Republican as president, I expect rural consciousness to be increasingly associated with *liberal* (i.e., protectionist) trade preferences as a function of political engagement.

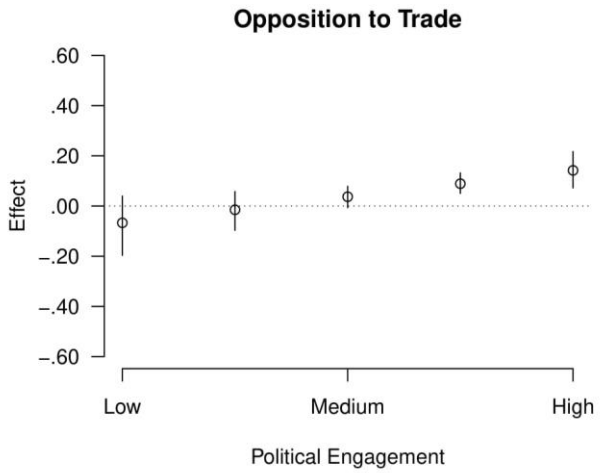

Figure 4—Conditional Associations of Rural Consciousness to Trade Preferences. Marginal effects of rural consciousness (midpoint to maximum) with 95 percent confidence intervals. Positive values indicate associations with anti-trade preferences. Data weighted. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

In Figure 4, I plot the conditional association between rural consciousness and support for protectionism. At the lowest level of political engagement, rural consciousness exhibits a 7-point association with support for trade (p=0.220). This null at low engagement contradicts H3; I had expected rural consciousness to be associated with opposition to trade for the disengaged, and for these anti-trade views to be even stronger for the engaged. One possible explanation for this null is that disengaged rural Americans are uncertain about how they would be materially affected by trade, as trade is a hard issue area for citizens to parse their own interests (Scheve and Slaughter

2001). Johnston (2013), for example, finds low political sophistication predicts non-response on trade items. For whatever reason rural consciousness is not associated with trade preferences for disengaged citizens, the expected association with protectionism emerges among the engaged. At the highest level of engagement, rural consciousness has a 14-point association with opposition to trade ($p<0.001$). Consistent with H3, there is a 21-point interaction such that the association between rural consciousness and trade opposition is stronger with greater political engagement.

Importantly, the relationships between rural consciousness and political engagement differ for trade relative to other economic issues. Testing the differences in interactions for the economic policy index vs. trade index, I reject the null of coefficient equivalence ($p<0.001$). For one of the few economic issues where Republican elites take positions to the left of Democratic elites, rurally conscious, engaged Americans notably exhibit left-wing economic preferences.

Replications with Different Samples and Rural Consciousness Measures

My analyses of the 2020 ANES support the claim that rural consciousness's associations with political preferences are conditioned by engagement. The 2020 ANES has many advantages for testing my hypotheses; it is a large, probability-based sample with an expansive questionnaire for addressing potential confounds. However, the ANES analysis cannot directly demonstrate that the relatively weak associations in other recent studies of rural consciousness were due to heterogeneity as a function of political engagement in these studies. Further, other studies have used different rural consciousness measures than those on the 2020 ANES; my findings would therefore be bolstered if they were replicable across samples and rural consciousness measures.

In this section, I replicate my analyses using: the 2019 ANES Pilot and its four-item rural consciousness analyzed by Nelsen and Petsko (2021); a 2018 CES module from Munis (2020) with his four-item rural resentment measure; and a 2018/2019 Lucid sample from Trujillo and

Crowley (2022) with their 14-item rural consciousness measure. Table 3 outlines the key features of each sample analyzed. A few points are worth noting. First, no sample has all the controls available in the 2020 ANES, so confounding is likely a concern. Second, these samples include more politically engaged respondents than the 2020 ANES, which is consistent with research that has shown the politically engaged are overrepresented in non-probability surveys (Kennedy et al. 2016). Third, the samples are smaller than the 2020 ANES, which introduces power concerns (especially at low levels of engagement). Despite these limitations, the diversity of these samples makes them useful for testing the robustness of my results across reasonable analytic approaches.

	Munis 2020 (2018 CES)	**2019 ANES Pilot**	**Trujillo and Crowley 2022 (2018/2019 Lucid)**
N (Rural Identifiers)	266	1,310	1,627
Rural Consciousness	Four-Items	Four-Items	14-Items
Political Engagement	Political Interest (1) Political Knowledge (2)	Political Interest (1) Political Knowledge (3)	Political Interest (2) Political Knowledge (5)
Partisanship-Ideology Scale Items	Trump Approval, 7-pt Partisan Identity, 7-pt Ideological Identity	Trump Approval, Biden-Trump Ratings, 7-pt Partisan Identity, 5-pt Ideological Identity	2016 Presidential Vote, 7-pt Partisan Identity, 7-pt Ideological Identity
Economic Policy Items	ACA, Banking Regulation, Deregulation, Education Spending, Income Tax (3), Healthcare Spending, Medicare-For-All, Minimum Wage, Sales Tax Hike, Tax Cuts, Welfare	Free College, Government Reductions of Inequality, Medicare-for-All, Student Loan Cancellation, Tax Hike on Households Over $10M, UBI, Universal Pre-K	None
Trade Policy Items	Tariffs on China Tariffs on Steel/Aluminum	None* (Note: the survey gauges beliefs about trade, but not policy preferences)	None
Controls	Age, Education, Gender, Income, Married, Parent, Race/Ethnicity, South, Unemployed	Age, Education, Gender, Income, Married, Parent, Race/Ethnicity, South, Unemployed	Age, Education, Gender, Income, Race/Ethnicity, Sample-Year Fixed Effect

Table 3—Sample and Modeling Details for Replication Tests.

Figure 4 depicts replications of the conditional associations of rural consciousness with partisan-ideological orientation, economic preferences, and trade preferences. All six tests offer support for H1-H3 (respectively). Rural consciousness is associated with left-wing partisan-ideological identification and liberal economic preferences among the politically disengaged, but

right-wing identification and economic conservatism among the politically engaged. As was the case in the 2020 ANES, rural consciousness is insignificantly associated with trade preferences at low political engagement, but significantly associated with opposition to trade at high political engagement. Taken together, these results consistently support my claim that rural consciousness is heterogeneously associated with political preferences as a function of political engagement.

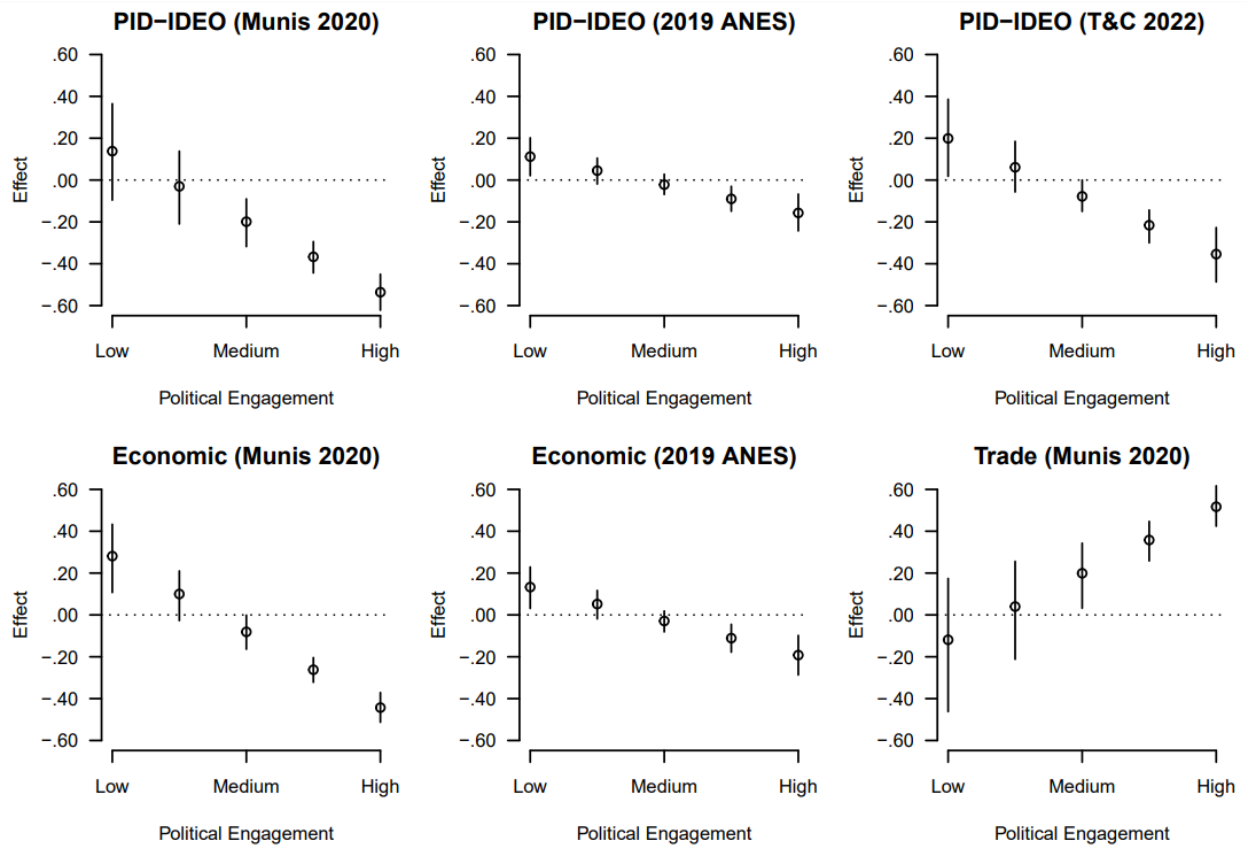

Figure 4—Replications of Conditional Associations Between Rural Consciousness and Political Preferences. Marginal effects of rural consciousness (midpoint to maximum) with 95 percent confidence intervals. Positive values indicate associations with left-wing identity or liberal economic preferences. Data weighted. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2018 CES (Munis 2020), 2019 ANES Pilot, 2018/2019 Lucid (Trujillo and Crowley 2022).

Discussion

Drawing on theories of instrumental and symbolic politics, in this paper, I hypothesized rural consciousness would be heterogeneously associated with political preferences. Specifically, I hypothesized that for politically disengaged citizens, rural consciousness would be associated

with Democratic partisanship, liberal identity, and economic liberalism. For politically engaged citizens, however, I hypothesized rural consciousness would be associated with Republican partisanship, conservative identity, and economic conservatism. Analyzing the 2020 ANES and three other previously published datasets, I found consistent support for these expectations. I also assessed how political engagement conditioned the associations of rural consciousness with trade preferences—a unique issue where Republican elites have recently taken positions to the left of Democrats. Unlike other economic issues, for trade, rural consciousness was associated with *left-wing* preferences for the politically engaged. These results are consistent with top-down theories of opinion formation that argue engaged citizens adopt economic preferences from ingroup elites (Johnston et al. 2017; Zaller 1992), but could also show how elites like Trump have tailored their economic platforms to appeal to ideological inconsistencies in rural citizens' economic outlooks.

Although I find support for my hypotheses across multiple datasets, I examine cross-sectional data; my analyses thus have limitations worth explicitly addressing, especially towards sustaining any claims that rural consciousness is causally related to political preferences. The foremost threat to inference with this study design is the possibility that rural Americans adopt or reject rural consciousness due to their political identities. My theory assumes politically engaged, rurally-conscious citizens sort into the Republican Party for symbolic reasons, and that sorting coupled with attention to polarized elite discourse leads these individuals to adopt conservative economic preferences. Alternatively, however, these conditional associations could indicate rural consciousness is endogenous to political identities due to its symbolic associations with the right. Specifically, Republicans' anti-urban/pro-rural rhetoric might actively stoke rural consciousness among their supporters and/or lead Democratic voters to disassociate from rural consciousness.

It is likely unreasonable to assume rural consciousness is entirely exogeneous to political identities. As geographic polarization grows, and appeals to rural grievances have become more one-sided, rural consciousness may itself serve to signal political identity. An important question then is which causal pathway dominates: rural consciousness to political identities, or political identities to rural consciousness? Extant data precludes a direct answer to this question. Trujillo (2022) shows rural *identity* is unrelated to changes in partisanship, but it is unclear whether this result extends to rural *consciousness*. However, the 2024 ANES plans to reinterview 2020 ANES respondents; if rural consciousness appears on the 2024 questionnaire, future work could use this panel to assess whether political identities predict changes in rural consciousness. Additionally, experiments testing whether political identity primes influence rural consciousness could prove fruitful. For now, however, given the lack of direct evidence on causal ordering between rural consciousness and political identities, my findings here should be taken as strictly associational.

Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrated the associations between rural consciousness and political behavior are contingent on political engagement. For politically disengaged Americans, rural consciousness is associated with Democratic partisanship, liberal identity, and economic policy liberalism. For politically engaged citizens, however, rural consciousness is associated with the exact opposite preferences: Republican partisanship, conservative identity, and economic policy conservatism. My findings offer new insight into the psychological bases of political preferences for rural Americans, which has for decades presented a vexing puzzle to be solved. My findings also support recent theories that argue politically disengaged citizens prioritize instrumental, self-interested concerns in their political preferences, whereas politically engaged citizens prioritize symbolic, identity-based concerns (Johnston et al. 2017). For instrumental-minded Americans,

rural consciousness is associated with preferences that would increase left-wing representation and economic redistribution; but for symbolically-motivated Americans, rural consciousness is associated with right-wing identity and, in turn, opposition to economic redistribution. These heterogeneous associations can offset on average, particularly in representative samples that use surveys to draw in politically disengaged rural citizens (Trujillo and Crowley 2022; Munis 2020; Nelsen and Petsko 2021). In samples that overrepresent engaged rural citizens, however, rural consciousness will appear to be strongly and exclusively associated with right-wing preferences.

These results imply a slight amendment to Cramer's (2016) original conceptualization of rural consciousness. Cramer interviewed a sample of rural citizens more politically engaged than representative (p. 41; 2016). This skew is relevant since political engagement shapes how rural consciousness relates to political preferences. To be clear, my analyses offer much support for Cramer's (2016) theory: on average, rural consciousness is related with Republican partisanship, conservative identity, and economic conservatism. Further, my findings bolster Cramer's claim that rural citizens' economic conservatism "is more about identity than principle" (p. 140) since rural consciousness is only associated with economic conservatism for symbolically-motivated citizens. But it is important to keep in mind that not all citizens bring symbolic concerns to bear on political preferences. For instrumentally-motivated citizens, rural consciousness is associated with *left-wing* identification and economic preferences. By considering the different processes by which rural consciousness is translated into political preferences, we can expand Cramer's theory of rural consciousness and reconcile it with quantitative research that has often not found strong associations between rural consciousness and the preferences it was first forwarded to explain.

The popular face of rural consciousness today is found on the right. This portrayal is not surprising because political engagement is correlated with visible forms of political participation,

such as voting, making political donations, discussing politics, attending political events, and contacting elected officials. The preferences of rural Americans who high in rural consciousness but low in engagement risk being overlooked by journalists who tend to report on very engaged citizens (Krupnikov and Ryan 2022), researchers who have heretofore averaged over disengaged citizens, and politicians who have few incentives to substantively represent disengaged citizens. As rural areas trend right (Hopkins 2017; Mettler and Brown 2022), a challenge for democratic representation involves not only addressing polarization along the urban-rural divide (Brown et al. 2021; Gimpel et al. 2020; Scala and Johnson 2017), but also figuring out how to represent the millions of politically disengaged rural Americans who have preferences that are entirely at odds with the policy agendas being forwarded by their increasingly conservative representatives.

Although raising political participation can be difficult, to the extent presently disengaged rural Americans can be mobilized, my findings suggest that such efforts could disproportionately benefit Democrats and progressive economic causes, reversing ongoing trends towards an urban-rural schism. Indeed, while Trump won rural voters in the 2020 ANES by 24-points, Trump was preferred by just 5-points among rural non-voters. If Democrats wish to contest Republican rural dominance, this study suggest one path forward lies in appeals to the distributional grievances of disengaged rural Americans. Unfortunately, Democrats' rural mobilization efforts have collapsed post-2020 as the party abandoned meaningful rural organizing in the 2022 midterms (Montellaro and Schneider 2021). Such rural disinvestment bodes poorly for Democrat's electoral prospects given the steep structural advantages conferred by rural dominance in the US. More importantly, Democrats' inability (or unwillingness) to make inroads with rural America does a disservice to the millions of rural citizens who desire and would benefit from greater economic redistribution.

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Appendix Material: The Heterogeneous Associations of Rural Consciousness and Political Preferences

[BLINDED]

Contents

Appendix 1—2020 American National Election Study (ANES) Data Description

Target Population: The target population of the 2020 ANES is non-institutional U.S. citizens 18 years or older as of November 3rd, 2020 living in the 50 US states or the District of Columbia.

Field Dates: The pre-election wave was fielded between August 18, 2020 and November 3, 2020. The post-election wave was fielded between November 8, 2020 and January 4, 2021.

Sample Recruitment: Westat, Inc collected the sample. "Selected addresses were sent a series of letters to recruit one household member to go online to complete a survey. The invitation letter included $10 in cash and promised $40 for completing a survey online. Household members following the invitation link were taken to a screening instrument to randomly select one person from among the adult U.S. citizens living at the address to complete the ANES questionnaire. Upon completion of the screener, the selected respondent was invited to complete the survey based upon the mode of their assigned group" (2020 ANES Codebook, pg. 4).

Interview Modes: Responses were mostly collected via self-administered online surveys, with small samples who completed live video or telephone interviews. Interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish.

Response Rate: The response rate (AAPOR RR1) for the 2020 ANES pre-election wave was 40.9 percent. Of those who completed a pre-election interview, 90 percent went on to complete a post-election interview.

Weights and Sample Design Effects: To accurately represent the target population, I utilize the weighting variable V200010b, the strata variable V200010d, and the cluster variable V200010c.

Sample Subset: The total post-election sample was 7,449. I subset to the 3,154 respondents who identified themselves as "rural" or "small town" Americans when asked the question (V202356): "Regardless of where you currently live, do you usually think of yourself as a city person, a suburb person, a small-town person, a country or rural person, or something else?" I also drop 50 respondents who answered (V201650): "We sometimes find people don't always take surveys seriously, instead providing funny or insincere answers. How often did you give a serious response to the questions on this survey?" with "Never Serious" or those who skipped this item. The final sample includes 3,104 respondents.

References:

American National Election Studies. 2021. ANES 2020 Time Series Study Full Release [dataset and documentation]. July 19, 2021 version. www.electionstudies.org.

Appendix 2—Question Wordings and Measure Constructions

Rural Identity (V202356): "Regardless of where you currently live, do you usually think of yourself as a city person, a suburb person, a small-town person, a country or rural person, or something else?"

Rural Consciousness: The rural consciousness scale is generated from three items (α=0.69).

1. (V202276x): "Compared to people living in cities, do people living in small towns and rural areas get more, the same, or less than they deserve from the government?... Do they get a great deal [more/less], moderately [more/less], or a little [more/less] than they deserve from the government?"
2. (V202279x): "Compared to people living in cities, do people living in small towns and rural areas have too much influence, too little influence, or about the right amount of influence on government?... Do they have much too [much/little], somewhat too [much/little], or a bit too [much/little] influence on government?"
3. (V202282x): "Do people living in small towns and rural areas get too much respect, too little respect, or about the right amount of respect from people living in cities?...Do they get much too [much/little], somewhat too [much/little], or a bit too [much/little] respect from people living in cities?"

Political Engagement: The political engagement scale is generated from two equally weighted subscales: political interest and political knowledge.

1. Political Interest (α=0.83)
    a. (V201005): "How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics?"
    b. (V201006): "Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been [very much interested, somewhat interested or not much interested/ not much interested, somewhat interested or very much interested] in the political campaigns so far this year?"
    c. (V202406): "How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you (very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, or not at all interested / not at all interest, not very interested, somewhat interested, or very interested)?"
    d. (V202407): "And how closely do you follow politics on TV, radio, newspapers, or the Internet? (Very closely, fairly closely, not very closely, or not at all / Not at all, not very closely, fairly closely, or very closely)?"
2. Political Knowledge (α=0.70)
    a. (V201644): "For how many years is a United States Senator elected - that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?"
    b. (V201646): "Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington?"
    c. (V201647): "Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. Senate?"
    d. (V202138y): "What job or political office does Mike Pence now hold?"
    e. (V202139y1): "What job or political office does Nancy Pelosi now hold?"
    f. (V202140y1): "What job or political office does Angela Merkel now hold?"
    g. (V202141y1): "What job or political office does Vladimir Putin now hold?"
    h. (V202142y2): "What job or political office does John Roberts now hold?"

2020 Presidential Candidate Preferences: Presidential candidate preferences captures preferences for Biden or Trump, including non-voters, excluding those who preferred neither or supported a third party.

1. (If voted for president, V202073). "Who did you vote for? [Joe Biden, Donald Trump/Donald Trump, Joe Biden], Jo Jorgensen, Howie Hawkins, or someone else?"

2. (If did not vote for president, V202079x). "Did you prefer one of the candidates in the November election for President?... Who did you prefer? [Joe Biden, Donald Trump/Donald Trump, Joe Biden], Jo Jorgensen, Howie Hawkins, or someone else?"

2020 Presidential Candidate Ratings: Presidential candidate ratings are assessed as the difference in ratings given to Joe Biden and Donald Trump on 101-point feeling thermometers.
1. (V201151). "How would you rate: Joe Biden."
2. (V201152). "How would you rate: Donald Trump."

Ideology (V201200): "Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"

Ideological Group Ratings: Ideological group ratings are assessed as the difference in ratings given to liberals and conservatives on 101-point feeling thermometers.
1. (V202161). "How would you rate: Liberals."
2. (V202164). "How would you rate: Conservatives."

Partisanship (V201231x): "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as [a Democrat, a Republican / a Republican, a Democrat], an independent, or what?... Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat / Republican] or a not very strong [Democrat / Republican]? Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?"

Party Ratings: Party ratings are assessed as the difference in ratings given to the Democratic Party and the Republican Party on 101-point feeling thermometers.
1. (V201156). "How would you rate: the Democratic Party."
2. (V201157). "How would you rate: the Republican Party."

Economic Policy Index: The economic policy index is constructed from the following 14 items (α=0.90). A principal component factor analysis provided later in this section shows that these 14 items load well onto one factor, and that the two trade items do *not* load onto this same factor.
1. ACA (V202328x): "Do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove of the Affordable Care Act of 2010, sometimes called Obamacare?... Do you [approve/disapprove] of that a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little?"
2. Aid to Poor Spending (V201320x): "Should federal spending on aid to the poor be increased, decreased, or kept the same?... Should it be [increased / decreased] a lot or a little?"
3. Government Healthcare (V201252): "There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some people feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses for everyone. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1. Others feel that all medical expenses should be paid by individuals through private insurance plans like Blue Cross or other company paid plans. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"
4. Healthcare Spending (V202380x): "Do you favor an increase, decrease, or no change in government spending to help people pay for health insurance when they can't pay for it all themselves?...Should it [increase/decrease] a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little?"
5. Government Spending and Services (V201246): "Some people think the government should provide fewer services even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1. Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at

points 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"

6. Income Inequality Reduction (V202259x): "Next, do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the government trying to reduce the difference in incomes between the richest and poorest households?... Do you [favor/oppose] that a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little?" [1. Favor a great deal 2. Favor a moderate amount 3. Favor a little 4. Neither favor nor oppose 5. Oppose a little 6. Oppose a moderate amount 7. Oppose a great deal]
7. Job Guarantee (V201255): "Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"
8. Millionaire Taxes (V202325): "Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose increasing income taxes on people making over one million dollars per year?"
9. Minimum Wage (V202377): "Should the federal minimum wage be raised, kept the same, lowered but not eliminated, or eliminated altogether?"
10. Regulation (V202256): "Would it be good for society to have more government regulation, about the same amount of regulation as there is now, or less government regulation?"
11. School Spending (V201305x): "Should federal spending on public schools be increased, decreased, or kept the same?... Should it be [increased / decreased] a lot or a little?"
12. Social Security (V201302x): "Should federal spending on Social Security be increased, decreased, or kept the same?... Should it be [increased / decreased] a lot or a little?"
13. Welfare (V201314x): "Should federal spending on welfare programs be increased, decreased, or kept the same?... Should it be [increased / decreased] a lot or a little?"
14. UBI (V202376x): "Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose establishing a federal program that gives all citizens $12,000 per year, provided they meet certain conditions? This program would be paid for with higher taxes… Do you [favor/oppose] that a great deal, a moderate amount, or a little?"

Free Trade (V202361x): "Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the U.S. making free trade agreements with other countries?... How strongly do you [favor/oppose] it?"

Import Restrictions (V202231x): "Some people have suggested placing new limits on foreign imports in order to protect American jobs. Others say that such limits would raise consumer prices and hurt American exports. Do you favor or oppose placing new limits on imports?... Do you [favor/oppose] placing new limits on imports strongly or not strongly?"

Racial Stereotyping: Racial stereotyping is constructed from two difference measures, one for ratings of violence and one for ratings of laziness, each constructed from two items (α=0.78). Values at 0.50 indicate equivalent ratings of Blacks and whites, values above 0.50 indicate anti-Black stereotyping, and values below 0.50 indicate anti-white stereotyping.

1. (V202521/V202522): "On this scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means peaceful and 7 means violent, where would you rate [whites/blacks] in general on this scale?"
2. (V202515/V202516): "On this scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means hard-working and 7 means lazy, where would you rate whites/blacks in general on this scale?"

Factor Analyses for Partisan-Ideological Orientation and Economic Policy Indices

For brevity, throughout the appendix, when I test H1, I will use a six-item measure of partisan-ideological orientation from all six items analyzed separately in the main text (α=0.94). These items all load well onto the first factor in a principal components factor analysis (Table 2a).

Table 2A—Partisan-Ideological Orientation Factor Analysis. Principal components factor analysis. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
1	4.790	4.335	0.798	0.798
2	0.455	0.177	0.076	0.874
3	0.278	0.048	0.046	0.920
4	0.230	0.068	0.038	0.959
5	0.162	0.077	0.027	0.986
6	0.086	.	0.014	1.000

Variable	Factor 1	Uniqueness
Partisan Identity	0.906	0.906
Party Ratings	0.942	0.942
Candidate Preferences	0.872	0.872
Candidate Ratings	0.935	0.935
Ideological Identity	0.829	0.829
Ideological Group Ratings	0.872	0.872

Table 2B—Economic Policy Factor Analysis *with* Trade Items. Principal components factor analysis. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
1	6.369	5.056	0.398	0.398
2	1.313	0.342	0.082	0.480
3	0.971	0.035	0.061	0.541
4	0.935	0.173	0.059	0.599
5	0.762	0.103	0.048	0.647
6	0.660	0.008	0.041	0.688
7	0.652	0.046	0.041	0.729
8	0.605	0.016	0.038	0.767
9	0.589	0.032	0.037	0.804
10	0.557	0.030	0.035	0.838
11	0.527	0.065	0.033	0.871
12	0.461	0.016	0.029	0.900
13	0.445	0.024	0.028	0.928
14	0.421	0.038	0.026	0.954
15	0.384	0.034	0.024	0.978
16	0.349	.	0.022	1.000

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
Affordable Care Act	0.766	-0.232	0.359
Government Health Insurance	0.731	-0.101	0.455
Public Healthcare Spending	0.675	-0.035	0.543
Government Spending/Services	0.740	0.118	0.439
Federal Job Guarantee	0.733	0.023	0.462
Aid to Poor Spending	0.688	0.160	0.502
Public School Spending	0.562	0.237	0.628
Social Security Spending	0.355	0.560	0.561
Welfare Spending	0.692	-0.007	0.521
$1+ Million Income Taxes	0.597	0.015	0.644
Income Inequality Reductions	0.727	-0.034	0.470
Minimum Wage	0.604	0.160	0.610
Government Regulations	0.665	-0.024	0.557
Universal Basic Income	0.696	-0.034	0.514
Free Trade Agreements	-0.129	0.617	0.602
Import Restrictions	-0.346	0.655	0.451

Table 2C—Economic Policy Factor Analysis *without* Trade Items. Principal components factor analysis. Rural and small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
1	6.270	5.231	0.448	0.448
2	1.040	0.115	0.074	0.522
3	0.924	0.209	0.066	0.588
4	0.716	0.052	0.051	0.639
5	0.663	0.052	0.047	0.687
6	0.611	0.020	0.044	0.730
7	0.591	0.027	0.042	0.773
8	0.564	0.033	0.040	0.813
9	0.530	0.053	0.038	0.851
10	0.477	0.031	0.034	0.885
11	0.446	0.018	0.032	0.917
12	0.429	0.040	0.031	0.947
13	0.388	0.038	0.028	0.975
14	0.350	.	0.025	1.000

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
Affordable Care Act	0.758	-0.230	0.373
Government Health Insurance	0.729	-0.184	0.435
Public Healthcare Spending	0.676	-0.006	0.543
Government Spending/Services	0.743	0.073	0.442
Federal Job Guarantee	0.735	-0.091	0.451
Aid to Poor Spending	0.693	0.338	0.406
Public School Spending	0.568	0.318	0.576
Social Security Spending	0.370	0.745	0.308
Welfare Spending	0.692	0.167	0.494
$1+ Million Income Taxes	0.601	-0.208	0.595
Income Inequality Reductions	0.731	-0.257	0.400
Minimum Wage	0.610	0.001	0.628
Government Regulations	0.666	-0.138	0.538
Universal Basic Income	0.697	-0.110	0.502

Appendix 3—Economic Policy Results by Item

In Table 3A, I decompose the 14-item economic policy index and 2-item trade policy index into their constituent items and replicate tests of H2 and H3 with each item. For the full regressions including results for all covariates, see the reproduction files.

Economic Policy Item	***Marginal Effect (Low Engagement)***	***Marginal Effect (High Engagement)***	***Main Effect***	***N***
Affordable Care Act	0.148 (0.064)	-0.411 (0.044)	-0.181 (0.021)	2,876
Government Health Insurance	0.201 (0.078)	-0.339 (0.041)	-0.117 (0.025)	2,878
Public Healthcare Spending	0.107 (0.063)	-0.222 (0.038)	-0.087 (0.019)	2,860
Government Spending/Services	0.298 (0.057)	-0.337 (0.032)	-0.076 (0.022)	2,878
Federal Job Guarantee	0.278 (0.073)	0.343 (0.039)	-0.088 (0.018)	2,876
Aid to Poor Spending	0.237 (0.072)	-0.243 (0.037)	-0.045 (0.020)	2,866
Public School Spending	0.209 (0.074)	-0.271 (0.045)	-0.074 (0.021)	2,877
Social Security Spending	0.210 (0.070)	-0.141 (0.043)	0.003 (0.021)	2,867
Welfare Spending	0.228 (0.082)	-0.325 (0.047)	-0.097 (0.026)	2,869
$1+ Million Income Taxes	0.471 (0.093)	-0.390 (0.046)	-0.035 (0.026)	2,878
Income Inequality Reductions	0.358 (0.068)	-0.371 (0.042)	0.071 (0.026)	2,876
Minimum Wage	0.265 (0.052)	-0.236 (0.041)	-0.030 (0.019)	2,864
Government Regulations	0.097 (0.056)	-0.336 (0.040)	-0.158 (0.018)	2,875
Universal Basic Income	0.193 (0.076)	-0.278 (0.042)	-0.084 (0.024)	2,870
Anti-Free Trade Agreements	-0.078 (0.067)	0.043 (0.038)	-0.006 (0.023)	2,865
Import Restrictions	-0.048 (0.072)	0.236 (0.044)	0.119 (0.023)	2,823

Table 3A—Associations of Rural Consciousness with Economic Preferences by Item. Table entries are the marginal effects of rural consciousness as a function of political engagement and main effects of rural consciousness with standard errors in parentheses. Positive values indicate associations with liberal economic preferences. Opposition to trade is coded as a liberal economic preference. Data weighted. Rural/small-town Americans only. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Appendix 4—Robustness Checks

A. Rural/Small-Town Self-Identification vs. Rural/Small-Town Location

In the 2020 ANES, 72 percent of those who self-identify as rural/small-town Americans also report living in a rural area or small-town, while 28 percent do not. 78 percent of those who live in a rural area or small-town identify as rural or small-town folk, while 22 percent do not. In Table 9A, I show rural consciousness does display conditional associations with the three outcomes of interest across both classifications of "rural/small-town", as well as when requiring respondents be both rural identifiers and live in a rural location.

H1 DV: Partisan-Ideological Orientation	**Rural Identification (Main)**	**Rural Location**	**Rural Identification and Location**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.222 (0.043)	0.170 (0.050)	0.233 (0.051)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.337 (0.035)	-0.326 (0.042)	-0.327 (0.049)
Observations	2,880	2,691	2,024
H2 DV: Economic Policy Preferences	**Rural Identification (Main)**	**Rural Location**	**Rural Identification and Location**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.235 (0.034)	0.184 (0.044)	0.220 (0.042)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.303 (0.026)	-0.259 (0.030)	-0.267 (0.031)
Observations	2,880	2,691	2,024
H3 DV: Anti-Trade Policy Preferences	**Rural Identification (Main)**	**Rural Location**	**Rural Identification and Location**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	-0.067 (0.054)	-0.087 (0.062)	-0.117 (0.069)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	0.142 (0.033)	0.161 (0.034)	0.149 (0.041)
Observations	2,876	2,688	2,021

Table 4A—Effects of Rural Consciousness by Rural Sample Subset. Entries are marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. Rural/small-town Americans only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

B. Dealing with Anti-Rurally Conscious Respondents

In Figure 1, I showed few respondents gave responses to the rural consciousness items that put them in the anti-rural range. This arguably introduces an issue of support for the multiplicative interaction models. Thus, I test whether my conclusions hold excluding anti-rural respondents from the sample or folding them in with the non-conscious at the scale's midpoint and restricting the analyses to a range of rural consciousness that has strong support (0.5 to 1). In Table 4B, I display the marginal effects of rural consciousness across these three ways of dealing with the anti-rurally conscious, and find very similar results.

H1 DV: Partisan-Ideological Orientation	**Including Anti-Rural (Main)**	**Folding Anti-Rural into Non-Conscious**	**Excluding Anti-Rural**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.222 (0.043)	0.244 (0.051)	0.188 (0.051)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.337 (0.035)	-0.354 (0.043)	-0.275 (0.045)
Observations	2,880	2,880	2,726

H2 DV: Economic Policy Preferences	**Including Anti-Rural (Main)**	**Folding Anti-Rural into Non-Conscious**	**Excluding Anti-Rural**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.235 (0.034)	0.246 (0.039)	0.193 (0.042)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.303 (0.026)	-0.310 (0.031)	-0.242 (0.033)
Observations	2,880	2,880	2,726
H3 DV: Anti-Trade Policy Preferences	**Including Anti-Rural (Main)**	**Folding Anti-Rural into Non-Conscious**	**Excluding Anti-Rural**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	-0.067 (0.033)	-0.068 (0.061)	-0.037 (0.063)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	0.142 (0.033)	0.161 (0.038)	0.129 (0.042)
Observations	2,876	2,876	2,722

Table 4B—Effects of Rural Consciousness Addressing Anti-Rural. Entries are marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. Rural/small-town Americans only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

C. Racial Stereotyping vs. Racial Resentment

I control for racial stereotyping rather than racial resentment for a few reasons. First, it is my view that the racial stereotyping measure directly captures the anti-Black beliefs thought to confound rural consciousness—the beliefs that Blacks, who are associated with urban areas, are lazy and violent. Further, to the extent that racial resentment is confounded by non-racial content like conservative values, racial resentment is partly the outcome I want to explain, especially in H1. Controlling for racial resentment thus risks attenuation bias. However, acknowledging there are competing views about racial resentment, some which strongly argue the construct does not tap conservatism, here, I control for racial resentment. I find support for H1 and H2 across both models; rural consciousness is associated with left-wing orientation and economic liberalism at low engagement, but right-wing orientation and economic conservatism at high engagement. I find support for H3 controlling for racial stereotyping, but not racial resentment (p=0.064).

H1 DV: Partisan-Ideological Orientation	**Racial Stereotyping (Main)**	**Racial Resentment**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.222 (0.043)	0.096 (0.041)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.337 (0.035)	-0.121 (0.030)
Observations	2,880	2,910
H2 DV: Economic Policy Preferences	**Racial Stereotyping (Main)**	**Racial Resentment**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.235 (0.034)	0.134 (0.035)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.303 (0.026)	-0.134 (0.023)
Observations	2,880	2,910
H3 DV: Anti-Trade Policy Preferences	**Racial Stereotyping (Main)**	**Racial Resentment**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	-0.067 (0.054)	-0.029 (0.054)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	0.142 (0.033)	0.064 (0.034)
Observations	2,876	2,906

Table 4C—Effects of Rural Consciousness by Racial Attitude Controls. Entries are marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. Rural/small-town Americans only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

D. White Non-Hispanic vs. Racial Minority Subsample Analyses

Although rural consciousness is sometimes studied specifically for white non-Hispanics, the trait exists among racial/ethnic minorities. In the 2020 ANES, mean rural consciousness is 0.70 for white non-Hispanics and 0.66 for people of color. However, it does not necessarily follow that rural consciousness correlates with political preferences in the same ways across groups, so I test H1-H3 separately for white non-Hispanics and people of color. Due to the small samples of each minority group, I pool racial/ethnic minorities into one sample consisting of all who are not non-Hispanic whites (28 percent Black, 31 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian, 11 percent Native, 23 percent multiracial). I see near-identical results across groups; for both, rural consciousness is associated with left-wing partisan-ideological orientation and economic liberalism at low levels of engagement, but right-wing orientation and economic conservatism at high engagement. For trade, I find similar results across groups at high engagement—rural consciousness is associated with trade opposition. At low engagement, rural consciousness is associated with trade support for racial minorities, but unrelated to trade views for non-Hispanic whites.

H1 DV: Partisan-Ideological Orientation	**White Non-Hispanic**	**Racial/Ethnic Minority**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.204 (0.048)	0.259 (0.076)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.345 (0.046)	-0.308 (0.064)
Observations	2,340	540
H2 DV: Economic Policy Preferences	**White Non-Hispanic**	**Racial/Ethnic Minority**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.234 (0.041)	0.210 (0.071)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.304 (0.031)	-0.286 (0.059)
Observations	2,340	540
H3 DV: Anti-Trade Policy Preferences	**White Non-Hispanic**	**Racial/Ethnic Minority**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	-0.029 (0.067)	-0.191 (0.080)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	0.130 (0.037)	0.197 (0.063)
Observations	2,337	539

Table 4D—Effects of Rural Consciousness by Racial/Ethnic Groups. Table entries are marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. Rural and small-town Americans only. Data are weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

E. Dealing with Trolling/Disengaged Respondents

The 2020 ANES was primarily self-administered online. This mode lends to inattentiveness and outright trolling (Lopez and Hillygus 2018). The 2020 ANES includes a question to help identify trolls: "We sometimes find people don't always take surveys seriously, instead providing funny or insincere answers. How often did you give a serious response to the questions on this survey?" The response options were: 1. Never 2. Some of the time 3. About half of the time 4. Most of the time 5. Always. I removed respondents who did not indicate they at least took the survey serious "some of the time." In theory, such individuals can add noise and possibly attenuation bias onto the estimated associations of interest. In practice, I see no difference excluding the likely trolls.

H1 DV: Partisan-Ideological Orientation	**Full Sample**	**w/o Likely Trolls (Main)**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.220 (0.042)	0.222 (0.043)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.334 (0.033)	-0.337 (0.035)
Observations	2,922	2,880
H2 DV: Economic Policy Preferences	**Full Sample**	**w/o Likely Trolls (Main)**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.238 (0.035)	0.235 (0.034)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.302 (0.025)	-0.303 (0.026)
Observations	2,922	2,880
H3 DV: Anti-Trade Policy Preferences	**Full Sample**	**w/o Likely Trolls (Main)**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	-0.063 (0.053)	-0.067 (0.054)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	0.138 (0.032)	0.142 (0.033)
Observations	2,918	2,876

Table 4E—Marginal Effects of Rural Consciousness by Trolling Subset. Entries are marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. Rural/small-town Americans only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

F. Measuring Political Engagement as Interest vs. Knowledge

There is no universal measure of political engagement (or "sophistication"). For those who have strong preferences between using subjective interest in politics vs. objective political knowledge to gauge engagement, in Table 4F, I replicate my findings across both engagement subscales and find support for my hypotheses whether using a combined interest/knowledge measure or using only one or the other interest/knowledge subscales.

H1 DV: Partisan-Ideological Orientation	**Political Interest and Knowledge (Main)**	**Political Interest**	**Political Knowledge**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.222 (0.043)	0.110 (0.042)	0.166 (0.034)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.337 (0.035)	-0.264 (0.033)	-0.312 (0.030)
Observations	2,880	2,880	2,880
H2 DV: Economic Policy Preferences	**Political Interest and Knowledge (Main)**	**Political Interest**	**Political Knowledge**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.235 (0.034)	0.170 (0.033)	0.151 (0.031)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.303 (0.026)	-0.256 (0.022)	-0.261 (0.024)
Observations	2,880	2,880	2,880
H3 DV: Anti-Trade Policy Preferences	**Political Interest and Knowledge (Main)**	**Political Interest**	**Political Knowledge**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	-0.067 (0.054)	-0.028 (0.045)	-0.049 (0.048)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	0.142 (0.033)	0.120 (0.029)	0.130 (0.032)
Observations	2,876	2,876	2,876

Table 4F—Effects of Rural Consciousness by Political Engagement Measure. Entries are marginal effects with standard errors in parentheses. Rural/small-town Americans only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Appendix 5—Binned Estimates of Moderated Regression Models

To confirm assumptions of multiplicative interaction models hold, I use *interflex* (Hainmueller et al. 2019) to estimate the marginal effects of rural consciousness at the medians of binned terciles of political engagement. Note that these estimates are twice the magnitude of those in the main text since I cannot calculate effects from the midpoint to maximum of rural consciousness with the binning estimator; the underlying model is the same, however. **Common Support:** One key assumption of multiplicative linear models is that there is support for estimates along the range of the moderator. Looking at the stacked histograms of engagement in Figure 5A, it is apparent that the only region in which support is a potential cause for concern is at the very low end of engagement. While extremely disengaged respondents are a relatively small share of the sample, estimates in this range are not purely extrapolated. Between 0 and 0.33 engagement, inclusive, there are 284 respondents. The common support assumption appears to hold across the range of engagement. **Linearity:** To evaluate whether the linear interaction assumption holds, I calculate the marginal effects of rural consciousness at the median value of each binned tercile of political engagement (i.e., the default *interflex* estimator). Per *interflex*, "[i]f the treatment/marginal effect estimates from the binning estimator sit closely to the estimated treatment/marginal effects from the linear estimator, then the [linear interaction effect] assumption likely holds." In other words, we would like to see the binned estimates (red) fall approximately on the linear estimator (black). As shown in Figures 5A-5C, all binned estimates fall almost perfectly along the linear estimates.

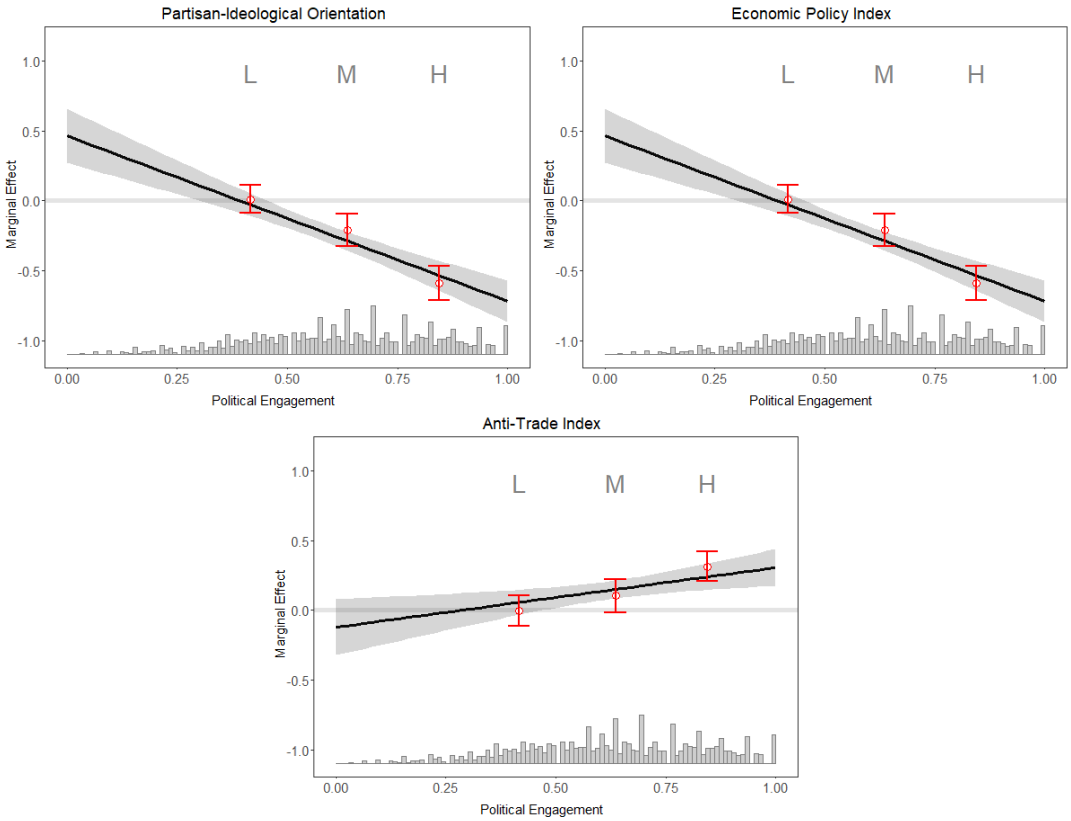

Figure 5A—Binning Estimator Tests. Point estimates are the marginal effects of rural consciousness evaluated at the medians of binned terciles of political engagement. Lines are estimates of linear effects of rural consciousness. Histograms are distributions of political engagement. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Appendix 6—Replication of Findings by Rural Consciousness Facets

In this appendix, I replicate tests of H1-H3 with each individual rural consciousness item. Rural consciousness was theorized by Cramer (2016) to be rooted in three interrelated facets of rural grievance: *economic* grievance about perceived distributional injustice; *political* grievance about perceived underrepresentation; and *cultural* grievance about perceived disrespect for rural ways of life. Trujillo and Crowley (2022) argue that these facets can point the rurally-conscious in different political directions. Trujillo and Crowley (2022) find the cultural facet is associated with Trump support and conservative identity, though not partisanship; however, they also find the economic facet is unrelated to these outcomes. (Trujillo and Crowley do not test how rural consciousness is related to economic preferences). That rural consciousness has heterogeneous associations across facets offers one plausible explanation for why it often seems weakly related to political preferences in studies utilizing unidimensional rural consciousness measures.

Trujillo and Crowley (2022) recommend analyzing rural consciousness by its facets. My theory is that the effects of rural consciousness may vary by facet, but also by citizens' weighting of instrumental and symbolic motivations. One key distinction is I argue economic grievances that seem instrumental *become* symbolic for politically engaged citizens; similarly, feelings of cultural and political marginalization may be rooted in instrumental concerns for the politically disengaged (Johnston et al. 2017). As such, there will still be heterogeneity in the effects of rural consciousness by facets that is not addressed by separating "material" rural economic grievances from ostensibly "symbolic" ones. To test whether breaking apart rural consciousness scale into three facets accounts for heterogeneity in its effects on political preferences as a function of political engagement, I replicate tests of H1-H3 with each of the three rural consciousness items. These items span the three facets of rural consciousness; thus, if they have similarly conditional associations, this will support my contention that each facet captures instrumental *and* symbolic concerns, which are weighted differently for politically disengaged vs. engaged rural Americans.

Methodology: Using an otherwise identical model to what was used throughout the main text, I estimate the conditional associations of cultural, economic, and political rural consciousness to partisan-ideological orientation, economic preferences, and trade preferences. I also estimate the main associations of each rural consciousness facet to each outcome to test whether Trujillo and Crowley (2022) are right that rural consciousness has heterogeneous main effects across facets.

Results: In Table 6A, I show the marginal effects of each rural consciousness facet on the three outcomes. For partisan-ideological orientation, all three facets are significantly associated with left-wing orientation at low engagement, but right-wing orientation at high engagement. The main associations of rural consciousness do vary across facets, with the economic facet having the weakest overall association with left-wing orientation. These findings are consistent with Trujillo and Crowley (2022), who also find no main association between rural consciousness's economic facet and partisan-ideological orientation. However, even economic rural grievances

are important in shaping partisan-ideological orientation, but the associations of economic rural grievances at low vs. high political engagement are offsetting in the aggregate. The results for economic preferences are near-identical to those for partisan-ideological orientation; all three facets of rural consciousness are conditionally associated with economic preferences such that at low levels of engagement, rural consciousness is associated with liberal preferences, but at high engagement, rural consciousness is associated with conservative preferences. Again, the main association of rural consciousness with conservative economic preferences is weaker for the economic facet than the cultural or political facets of rural consciousness. Though Trujillo and Crowley (2022) do not directly assess how the facets of rural consciousness are associated with economic preferences, this variation is consistent with their theoretical account. For trade, the results are slightly inconsistent across the facets, but not in particularly important ways. Across all three facets, rural consciousness is associated with anti-trade preferences at high engagement. At low engagement, I find nulls using the cultural and economic rural consciousness items, but a barely significant negative association to anti-trade preferences for the political facet (p=0.035).

Conclusion: Differences in the main associations of the rural consciousness to political behavior do emerge across facets consistent with Trujillo and Crowley (2022); however, the heterogeneity across facets is dwarfed by heterogeneities as functions of political engagement. Analyzing rural consciousness by facet does not obviate the need to account for political engagement.

H1 DV: Political Orientation	**Cultural Facet**	**Economic Facet**	**Political Facet**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.109 (0.036)	0.104 (0.038)	0.184 (0.029)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.229 (0.028)	-0.110 (0.033)	-0.269 (0.024)
Main (Unconditional) Effect	-0.090 (0.013)	-0.022 (0.015)	-0.082 (0.012)
Observations	2,869	2,853	2,867
H2 DV: Economic Preferences	**Cultural Facet**	**Economic Facet**	**Political Facet**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.154 (0.032)	0.132 (0.027)	0.145 (0.027)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	-0.210 (0.025)	-0.106 (0.024)	-0.232 (0.019)
Main (Unconditional) Effect	-0.061 (0.011)	-0.008 (0.010)	-0.077 (0.009)
Observations	2,869	2,853	2,867
H3 DV: Anti-Trade Preferences	**Cultural Facet**	**Economic Facet**	**Political Facet**
Marginal Effect (Low Political Engagement)	0.027 (0.037)	-0.066 (0.043)	-0.078 (0.036)
Marginal Effect (High Political Engagement)	0.068 (0.027)	0.078 (0.028)	0.112 (0.023)
Main (Unconditional) Effect	0.051 (0.015)	0.019 (0.013)	0.034 (0.014)
Observations	2,866	2,850	2,863

Table 6A—Marginal Effects of Rural Consciousness Across its Three Facets. Table entries are marginal effects of rural consciousness across its cultural, economic, and political facets with standard errors in parentheses. Rural and small-town Americans only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

Appendix 7—Validation of Political Engagement Measure for Rural Americans

In this appendix, I demonstrate that political engagement is a valid proxy for Americans' relative weighting of instrumental (self-interested) and symbolic (identity-based) motivations for political behavior. A longstanding debate among scholars studying political behavior is whether citizens who are more interested in and knowledgeable about politics are more or less likely to make political decisions that advance what we might consider to be their material interests (for a review, see Chong 2013). Early theories held politically engaged individuals were more capable of behaving in ways that advanced their self-interest because they had the information necessary to weigh the personal costs and benefits of different courses of political action. If political action was viewed by citizens as strict calculations of material costs vs. benefits, we would expect for engagement to enhance the associations between material interests and related economic policy preferences (e.g., support for progressive taxation as a function of income) because engaged citizens are more informed than disengaged ones (Chong et al. 2001). Alternatively, however, citizens may give weight not only to what political actions might do for them materially, but also what given political actions *says about them as a person*. Political attitudes do not exist only to forward material interests; for many, they serve to reinforce their self-concept and signal group loyalty (Green et al. 2004; Groenendyk 2013; Johnston et al. 2017). To the extent citizens hold political preferences for symbolic, identity-based reasons, we would expect political engagement to *attenuate* the associations between material interests and related economic policy preferences but *strengthen* the associations between partisan-ideological identities and economic preferences.

Throughout this paper, and in this appendix analysis, specifically, I forward a case for the latter theory: political engagement increases individuals' reliance on symbolic considerations and decreases reliance on material considerations in political decision-making, especially with regard to economic preference formation (see also Johnston et al. 2017).

To validate political engagement as proxying rural Americans weighting of material and symbolic interests, I conduct three sets of tests. First, I show that for rural citizens, material self-interests are decreasingly associated with related economic preferences as functions of political engagement (for similar tests with national samples, see Johnston et al. 2017 and Appendix 7 of Ollerenshaw 2022). Second, I show partisan-ideological identification is stronger and considered more important among engaged rural citizens. Third, I show partisan-ideological identification is weakly associated with economic preferences for the disengaged, but strongly associated with economic preferences for the engaged. My findings are consistent with the theory that engaged Americans adopt economic preferences consistent with their partisan-ideological identities, not necessarily their material self-interests, while politically disengaged Americans adopt economic preferences consistent with material interests, not necessarily their (weak) political identities.

Methodology

For the first set of statistical tests, I (respectively) estimate the conditional associations of income and owning stock with support for means-tested redistribution, household unemployment with support for a federal job guarantee, and self-rated health with support for public healthcare provision. The means-tested redistribution scale is constructed from the welfare, aid to the poor, and government actions to reduce income inequality items (α=0.71).[1] Household unemployment

[1] The ANES item about raising taxes on incomes over $1 million also describes a clearly redistributive policy, but it is excluded from the means-tested redistribution index because very few respondents in the sample would be hit by a tax increase on incomes this high; as such, almost no respondents have a self-interested reason to oppose the policy.

is a dummy variable if the respondent or their spouse reports being unemployed. Poor health is measured with general self-rated health on a five-category scale ranging from 0 (excellent) to 1 (poor). To be explicit on two points, I am not testing the associations between the indicators of material interests and the 14-item economic policy index because I expect these indicators to be related to opinion formation only for *specific* economic policies relevant to that material interest, not general economic ideology. I also admit that I am using my own judgement about what are "closely related" economic policies to what I am considering material indicators, both of which are constrained by what is on the 2020 ANES.

For the second set of tests, I estimate the main associations of political engagement with partisan-ideological orientation strength and partisan identity importance. For partisan-ideological orientation strength, I take the absolute values of deviations from the usual six-item scale's midpoint (i.e., distance from pure independence). The absolute values are recoded where values close to 0 indicate independence and values close to 1 indicate strong partisan-ideological orientation, whether left-wing or right-wing. Partisan identity importance is a separate question assessed on a five-point response from: "How important is being [a Democrat/a Republican/an Independent] to your identity?" This item is coded to take values between 0 (not at all important) to 1 (extremely important). The point here is to show politically engaged citizens hold stronger partisan-ideological orientations, which they view as being more important to their own identity.

For the third set of tests, I estimate the conditional associations of the six-item partisan-ideological index with the 14-item economic policy index and each of the three economic policies used for the first set of statistical tests. Here, I am interested in how partisan-ideological orientation shapes economic preferences at low versus high engagement, with the expectation that partisan-ideological orientation will only be related to economic preferences for politically engaged rural citizens. For the three policies examined in the first set of statistical tests, I can directly show the associations of political identities with economic preferences are strengthened with political engagement, while the roles of closely related material interests are attenuated. This is the crux of the theory; disengaged citizens' economic preferences are drive by material interests, but engaged citizens' economic preferences are driven by identity-based motivations.

I control for age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, whether the respondent is a parent, in a union, married, or living in the South. Income, stock ownership, unemployment, and health are controlled for in every model, even when they are not the main independent variables of interest. The models are fully moderated, per usual.

Results

In Figure 7A, I plot the four conditional associations between the indicators of material interests and closely related economic preferences. Moving from the highest to lowest income is associated with 20-points greater support for means-tested redistribution at the lowest level of political engagement, but a 1-point association at the highest level of engagement. Being a stock owner relative to non-stock owner is similarly associated with 9-points less support for means-tested redistribution, but only 2-points less support at the highest level of political engagement. For household unemployment, I find a 20-point association with support for a job guarantee at the lowest level of engagement, but a 3-point association with opposition to the job guarantee at the highest level of engagement. In each of these three cases, material interests are significantly associated with related economic preferences at low engagement, but not at high engagement. Last, poor health is associated with 10-points more support for public provision of healthcare at the lowest level of engagement, but 5-points less support for public healthcare provision at the

highest level of engagement. This result is not fully consistent with expectations; although the association is positive at the lowest level of engagement, it is insignificant (p=0.185). I thus mostly find support for the theory that material interests matter when politically disengaged Americans are formulating economic preferences, but that such material interests are not very influential among politically engaged citizens (see also Johnston et al. 2017).

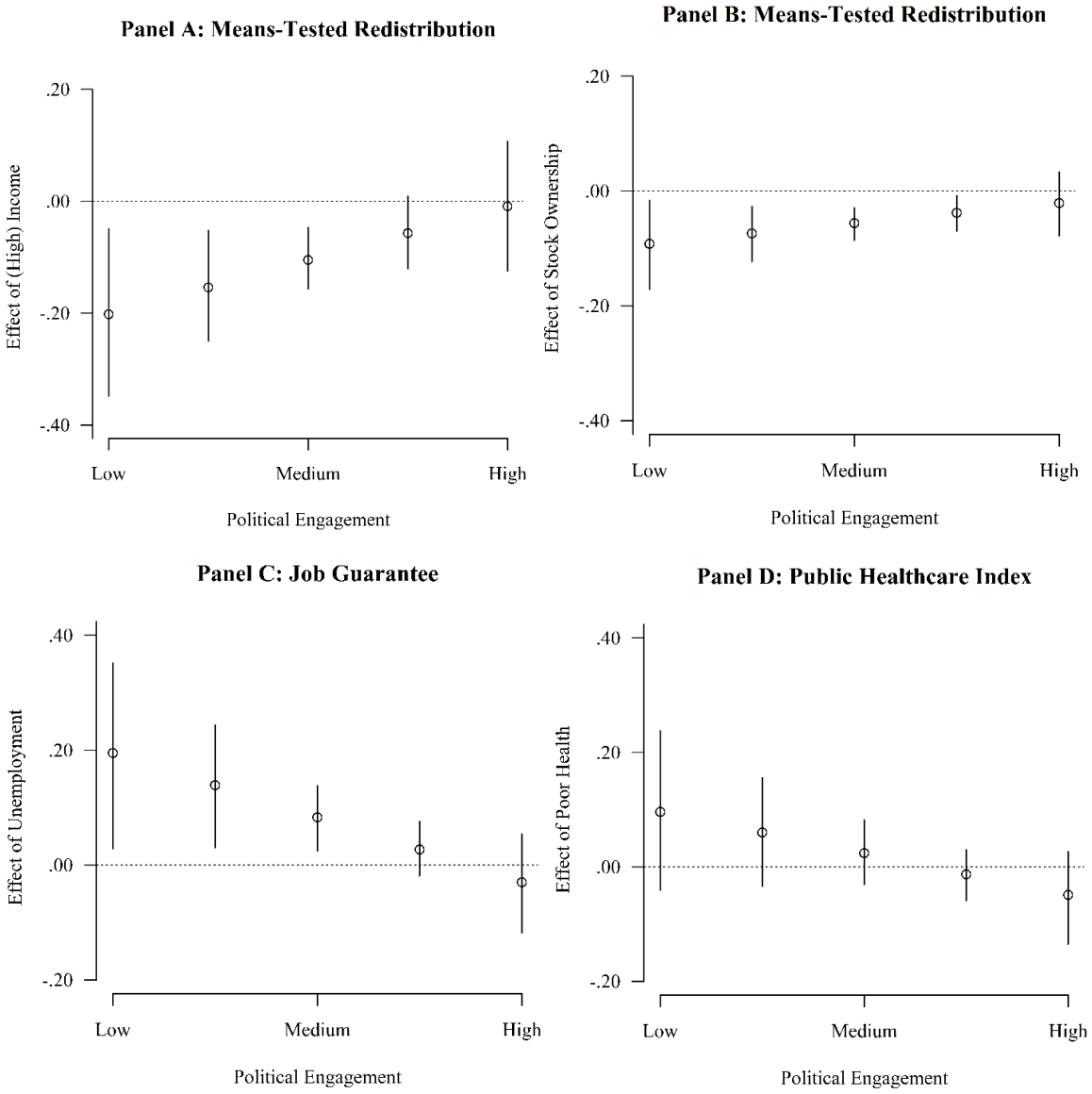

Figure 7A—Conditional Associations of Self-Interests to Related Economic Preferences. Points are associations of material interest indicators to related economic preferences as functions of political engagement with 95 percent confidence intervals. Rural/small-town respondents only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

In Figure 7B, I plot the predicted values for partisan-ideological orientation strength and partisan identity importance as functions of political engagement. Figure 7B shows very strong, positive associations between political engagement and these outcomes; on average, politically engaged relative to disengaged rural Americans are 54-points more partisan-ideological in their political orientation, and they specifically report viewing their partisan identity as 31-points more

important. Americans who consider themselves to be strong partisan-ideologues and who view their partisan identity as important tend to also be high on the political engagement measure.

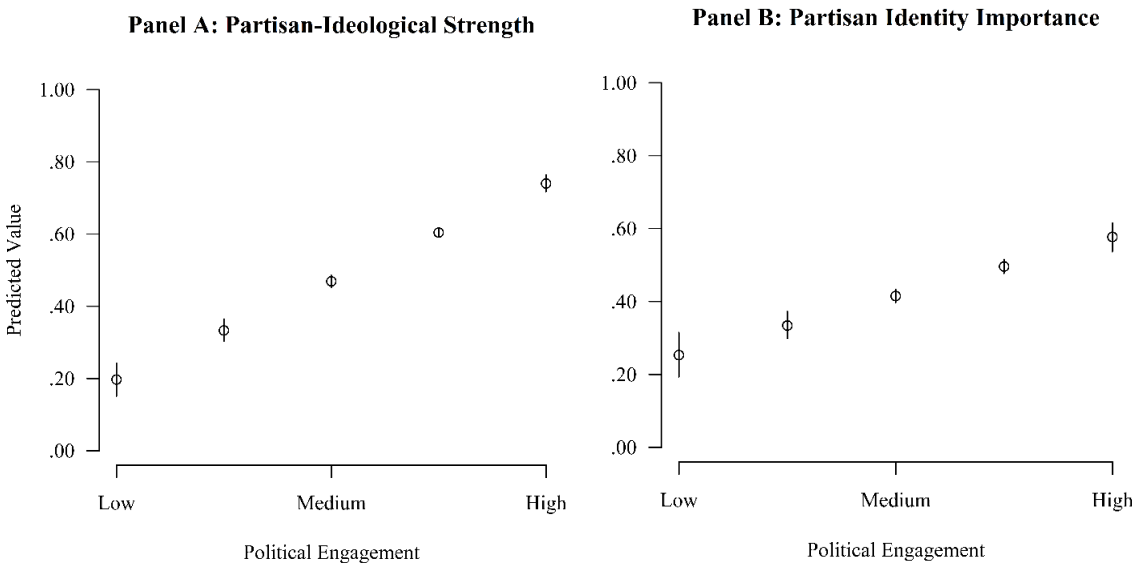

Figure 7B—Predicted Partisan-Ideological Strength and Partisan Identity Importance as Functions of Political Engagement. Points are predicted values as functions of political engagement with 95 percent confidence intervals. Rural/small-town respondents only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

In Figure 7C, I plot the conditional associations between partisan-ideological orientation and each of the economic policy preferences analyzed in the first set of statistical tests. Although the values are coded such that positive marginal effects indicate positive correlations between left-wing partisan-ideological orientation and economic liberalism, the magnitudes of these associations are what is substantively important. At the lowest engagement, partisan-ideological orientation has a 10-point association with means-tested redistribution ($p=0.134$), a 16-point association with job guarantee preferences ($p=0.102$), and a 27-point association with healthcare preferences ($p<0.001$). At the highest engagement, however, each of these associations is much stronger; indeed, partisan-ideological orientation has a 76-point association with means-tested redistribution ($p<0.001$), a 77-point association with a federal job guarantee ($p<0.001$), and a 93-point association with healthcare preferences ($p<0.001$). Whereas partisan-ideological orientation explains a small share of disengaged rural Americans' economic preferences, it explains a lion's share of engaged rural Americans'. These results are consistent with the theory that politically engaged Americans' political preferences are more determined by their political identities than politically disengaged Americans' political preferences are.

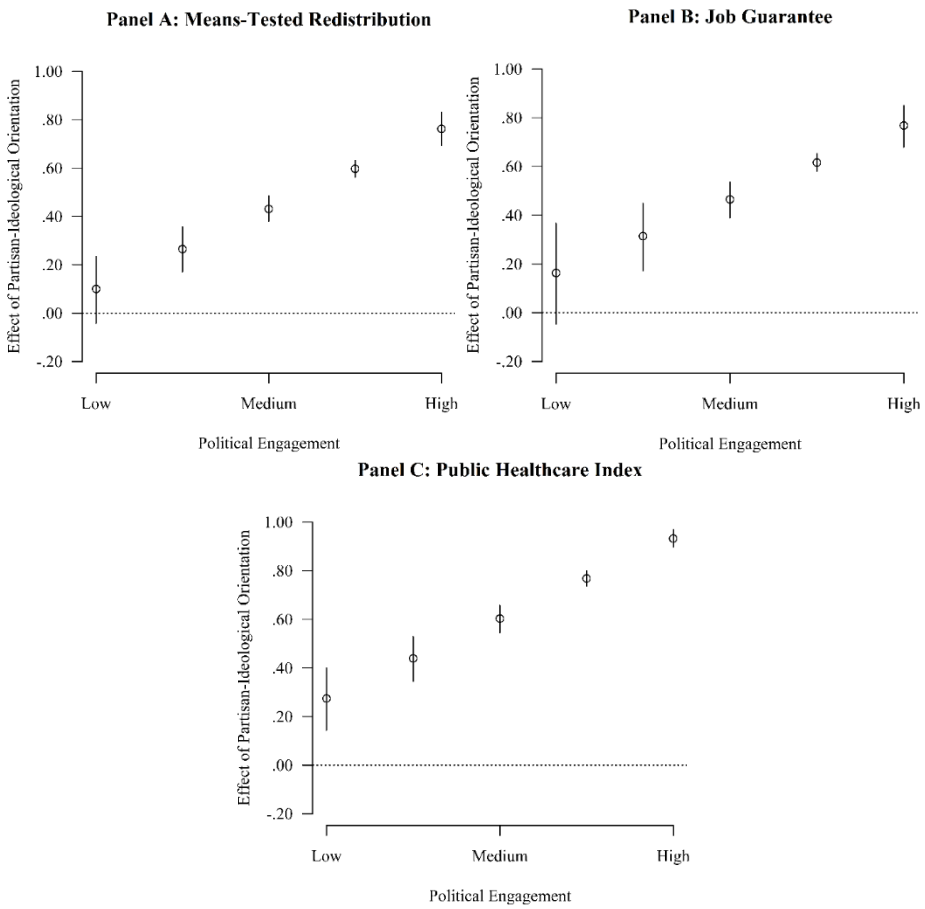

Figure 7C—Conditional Associations of Partisan-Ideological Orientation to Economic Preferences. Points are associations of partisan-ideological orientation to economic preferences as functions of political engagement with 95 percent confidence intervals. Rural/small-town respondents only. Data weighted. Source: 2020 ANES Time Series.

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