

Local Jurisdiction Website Coding: Does Rurality Matter?

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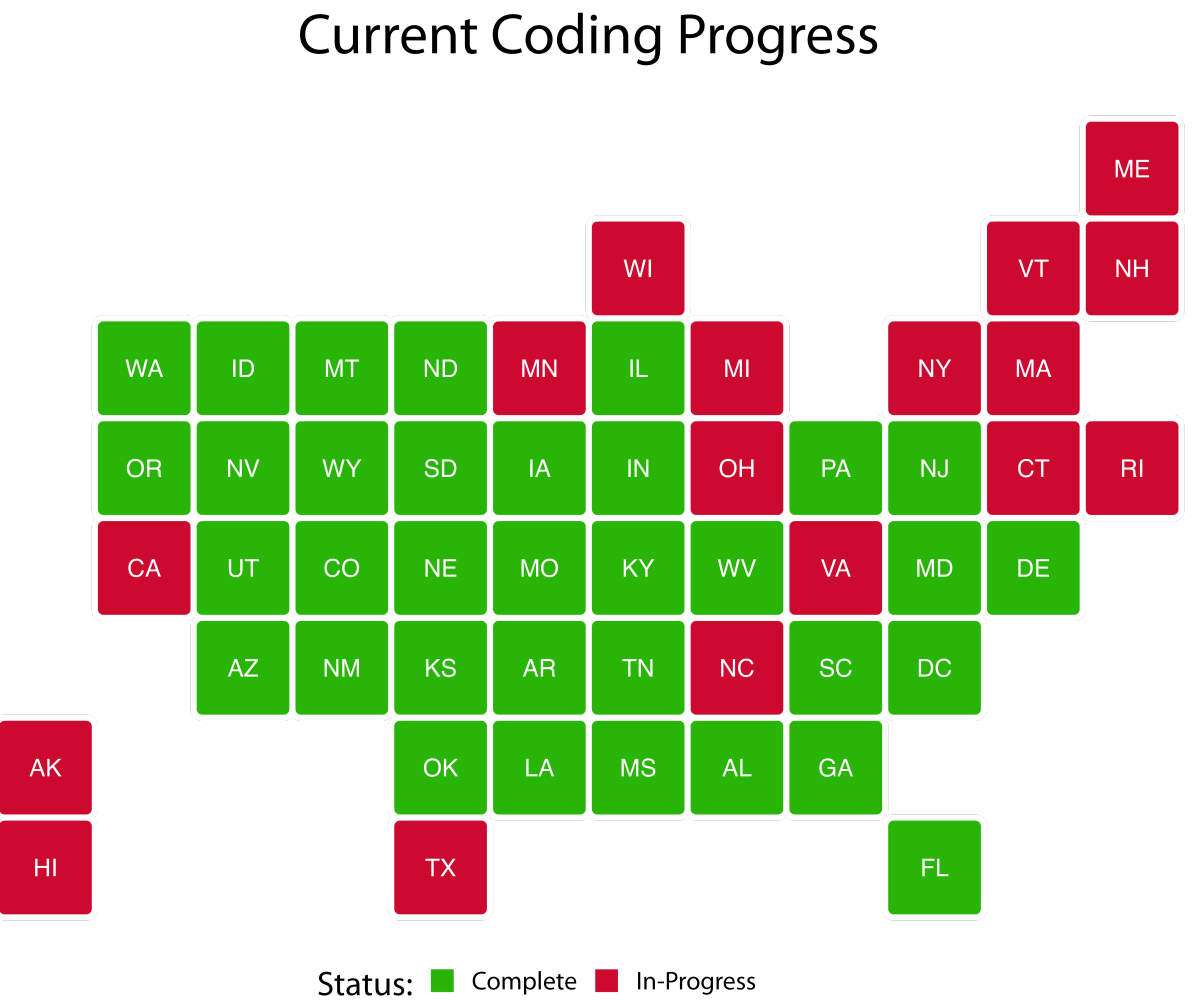
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Abstract

In this poster we present preliminary results from a local jurisdictional website coding process that will eventually cover all fifty states plus the District of Columbia. We code each website, if the jurisdiction has one, for a range of election administration outcomes. The process is similar to that for the EPI at the state level. It includes many more indicators and begins the process of allowing for a systematic examination of whether rurality affects the quality of services offered on the jurisdiction's website. The project is hosted on Github and can be tracked in real time. Scan the QR code to learn more.

Motivation & Progress

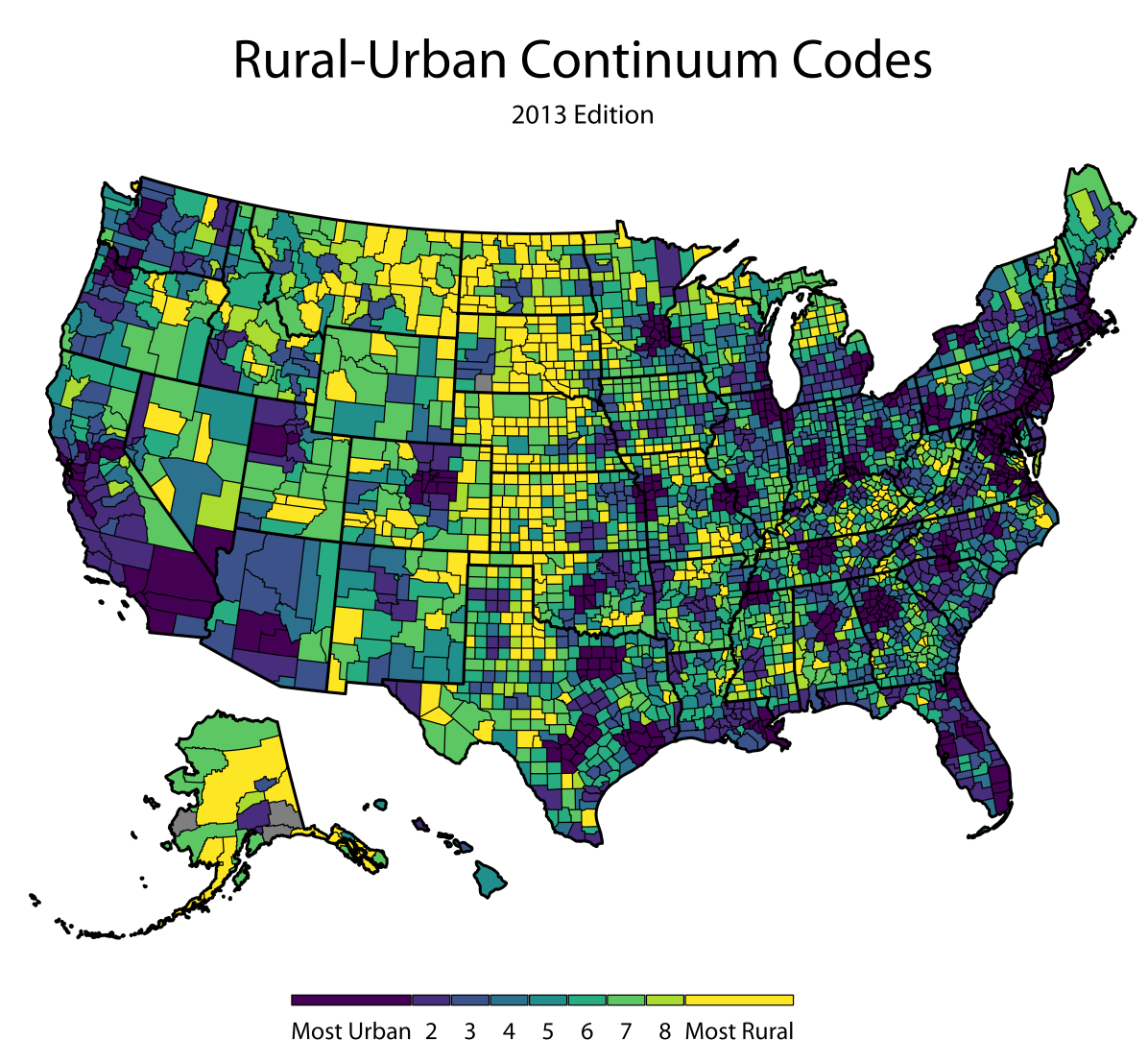
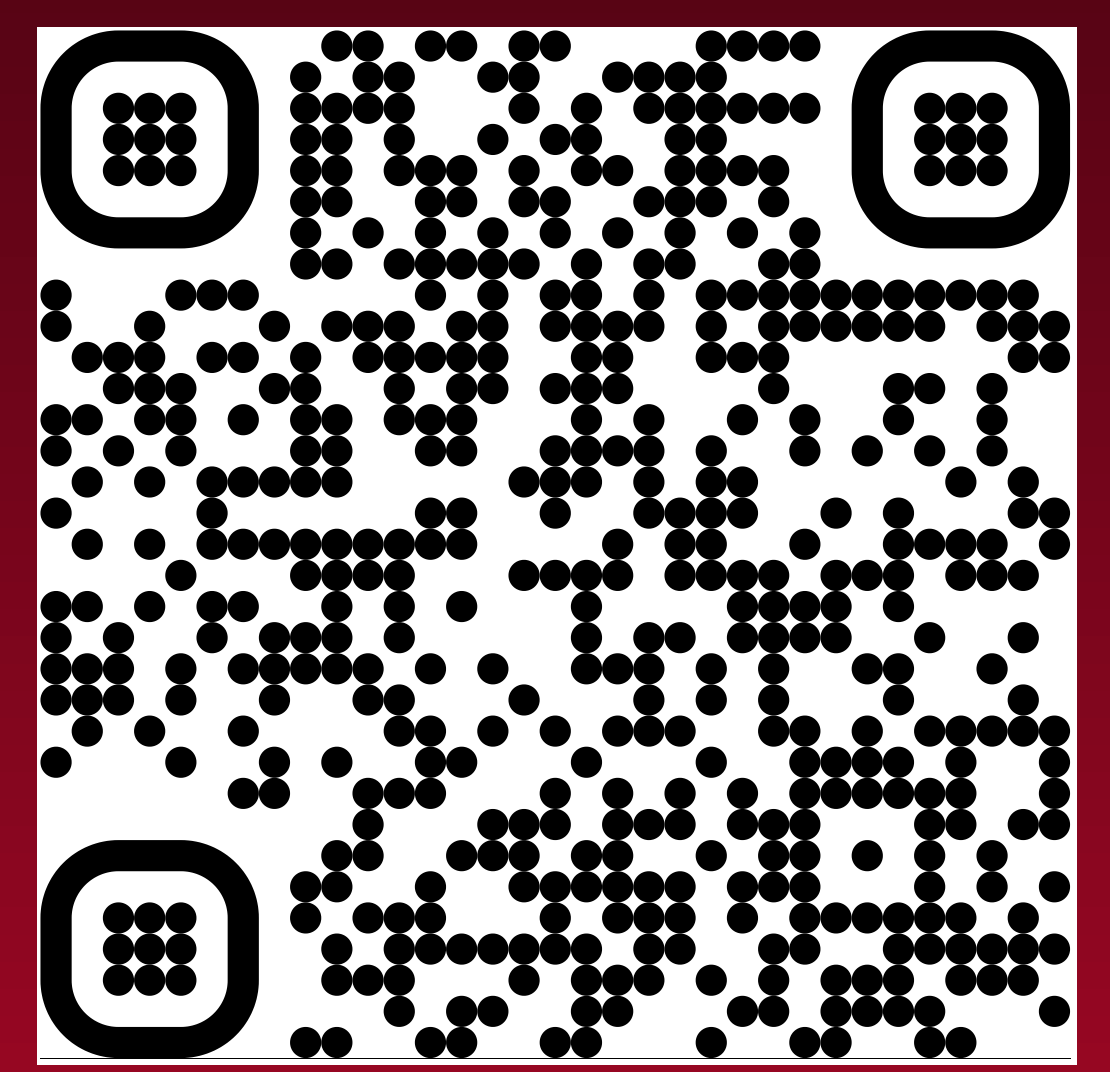
Our goal is to both collect data for all election jurisdictions and determine to what degree rurality impacts online accessibility. The data are all available on the project Github, and we plan to expand the coding in the future. So far we have fully coded 34 states, which amounts to about 2,102 counties. Coding continues and will resume in earnest once the summer term begins. Coders are being trained for consistency and collaborate to adjudicate any disagreement or challenging cases. We show our progress in the map below.



Defining Rural

There are many definitions of rural and little agreement across disciplines and government agencies on exactly what constitutes a rural location (Waldorf and Kim 2015). Given this issue, we fully expect that there may be some disagreement on whether specific counties are urban or rural. For our purposes we are using the Rural-Urbam continuum codes from the USDA ERS (USDA Economic Research Service 2013). "The 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes form a classification scheme that distinguishes metropolitan counties by the population size of their metro area, and nonmetropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and adjacency to a metro area." Counties are coded on 1-9 scale where one is the most urban and 9 is the most rural. Few reliable scales of rurality exist below the county level. This creates particular challenges for election jurisdictions that operate at the sub-county level, thus our plan to link these to the USDA's Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes (Cromartie and Bucholtz 2008). The RUC codes are shown in the map to the right.

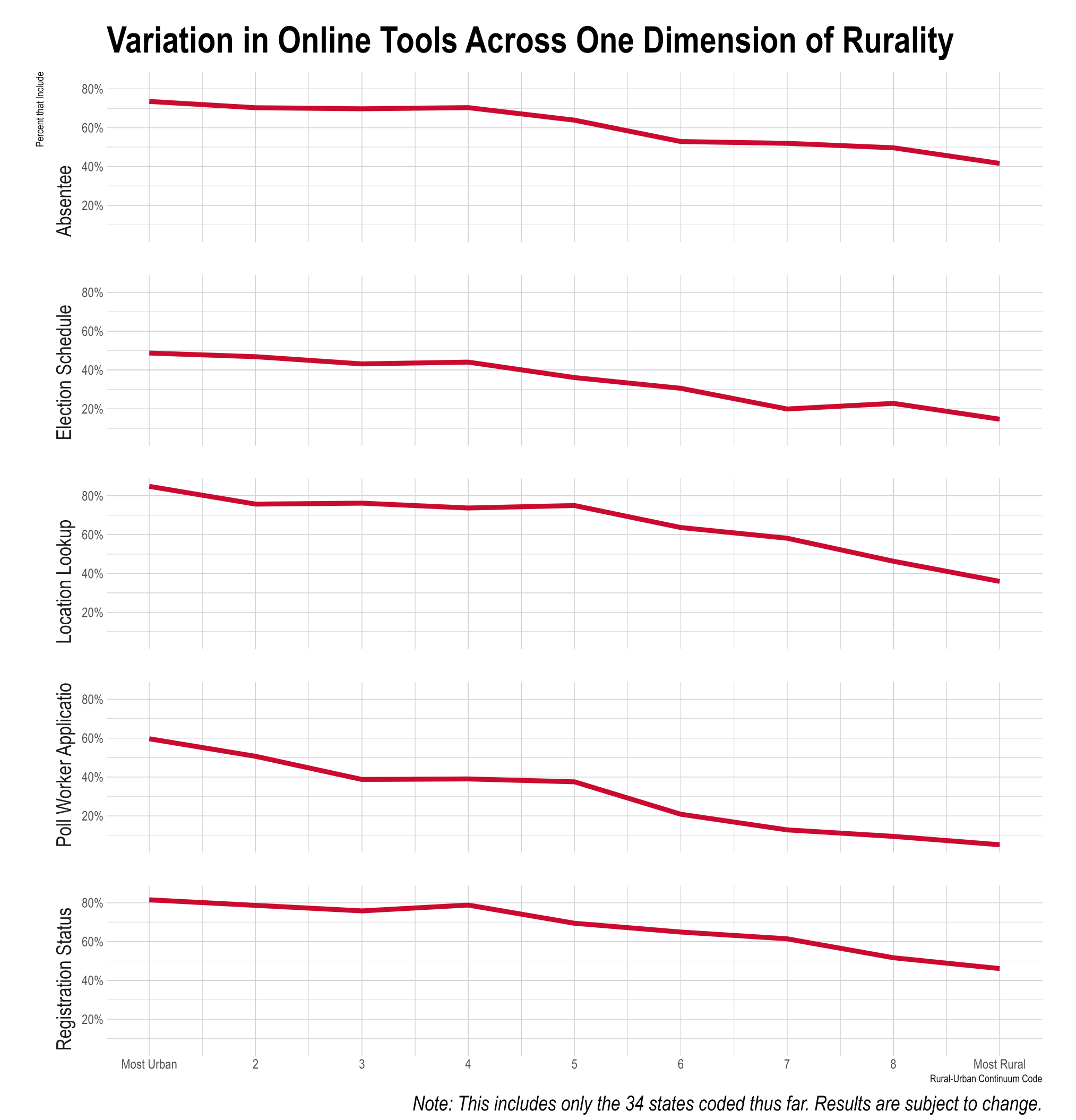
Most rural election jurisdictions offer far less to voters in terms of online tools. States and jurisdictions should prioritize helping to provide more access and information to their voters.



What Are We Learning?

So far it is clear, perhaps unsurprisingly, that as jurisdictions become more rural they offer less to voters in terms on online tools. Sometimes there is significant variation at the state level in terms of centralized support for web hosting and links to state-level resources, but this is far from ubiquitous. This underscores both a lack of support for these types of tools in rural jurisdictions and a distinct election administration experience between urban and rural jurisdictions. It also corroborates what we have learned elsewhere in our project: rural election officials face an uphill battle when it comes to communicating with voters.

Example Findings



Acknowledgements

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