

# Reasons for Rural Rejoicing

People living in our small town have two hobbies: cruising endless circles around the town square and complaining about living in our small town. Generations of residents in our community have been initiated into grumbling as a rural rite of passage. But, as the Bible says, “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so” ([James 3:10](#)). Those of us who live outside our nation’s great urban centers should give thanks we live in more remote areas—in part because so many city residents wish they could take our place.

When it comes to happiness about where they live, city and country residents are mirror images: A plurality of people who live in urban areas (43 percent) want to move away while half of rural dwellers want to stay where they are, [according](#) to Pew Research Center. People who live in suburbs are more than twice as likely to want to move to a rural area than to a city. But a plurality (46 percent) of people who live in the country and want to move say they would relocate to another rural community.

These results are hardly confined to one poll or one year. CBS News [found](#) in July 2021 that 45 percent of Americans wanted to live in the country, compared with 25 percent who preferred the city and 28 percent who chose the suburbs. And the desire to leave the big city for clean air and additional elbow room predates the pandemic and the surge of violence and vandalism that marked the last three years: As far back as 2001, a Gallup poll [reported](#) the largest share of Americans (47 percent) wanted to live in a rural area or small town while only 23 percent wanted to live in a small or big city.

In other words, people who live in the city want to move to the suburbs; people who live in the suburbs want to move to the country; and those of us who live in the country are happy

right where we are. That is another way of saying rural folks and small-town residents are the only groups of Americans who—in regards to where they live—are *content*, a component of the ideal life extolled by sacred and secular thinkers ranging from the [Apostle Paul](#) to [Epicurus](#).

Those who live in the region coastal elites derisively call “flyover country” have a cornucopia of reasons to enjoy country living. Pew Research reports that people in rural areas were [23 percentage points](#) less likely to say affordable housing is a major problem than those in cities (63 percent of urban residents versus 40 percent of rural residents). Even with [slower internet speeds](#), migration to the country has sped up, especially as many of us can perform much of our jobs from a home office. Between April 2020 and July 2021, rural areas [grew faster](#) than major metropolitan areas—overwhelmingly from net migration (rather than from birthrates).

True, people in small towns have more limited access to high-speed internet and [health care](#). But we have a greater abundance of peace of mind. “City residents (58%) register a higher level of worry [about crime and violence] than U.S. adults residing in suburbs (46%) and rural areas (51%),” a Gallup poll [found](#) last March. “City dwellers’ worry has increased nine percentage points since 2021, while worry among suburbanites and rural residents is essentially flat.”

Gallup also notes, almost in passing, “This likely reflects the record-high homicide rates in numerous U.S. cities” in 2021. That seems like a sensible surmise. The urban-rural crime divide is bad and growing worse. “From [2018](#) through [2020](#), the NCVS [National Crime Victimization Survey] found that the violent-crime rate in urban areas was between 29 percent and 42 percent higher than the rate in rural areas,” [reported](#) *City Journal*. “In 2021, however, the violent-crime rate in urban areas was 121 percent higher, more than doubling the rate in rural areas.” Overall homicides in big U.S. cities fell in 2022, although they [remained](#) above pre-pandemic

levels, and a number of cities—including [Portland](#), [Albuquerque](#), [Tacoma](#), and [Colorado Springs](#)—experienced a record number of homicides in 2022. While urban areas may offer [higher salaries](#) (and higher [costs of living](#)), their sky-high murder rate and wanton lawlessness more than offsets the possible salary bump. As Clint Eastwood [said](#), “Dyin’ ain’t much of a livin’, boy.”

It hardly seems necessary to admit that rural areas are not perfect or to point out the problems and deficiencies unique to our region—so I won’t. The human mind seems hardwired for negativity, pessimism, and grievance rather than hope, optimism, and gratitude. Perhaps cable news networks rail against red states because they long to move here.

If you live in a small town or rural area, don’t grumble. Give thanks! You’re living some city slicker’s dream.

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