



# The Paradox of the Poor Voting Against Their Own Interest

**Paralegal Associates LLC** presents a statistical analysis of seven Republican stronghold states, revealing a striking contradiction: these states are home to some of the nation's poorest populations, who are also the most reliant on social safety net programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and school-based meal initiatives for their daily survival. Despite this dependence, voters in these states overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump—whose subsequent policies targeted and dismantled many of these critical support systems. This report examines the socioeconomic realities behind this voting pattern and the grave consequences it poses for the very communities most in need.

## 1. Defining "Red States"

For this analysis, the "seven Red States" are interpreted as the seven states with the strongest Republican voting records in recent presidential elections. These are commonly:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Idaho
- Oklahoma
- South Dakota
- West Virginia
- Wyoming

## 2. Poverty Rates in Red States vs. National Average

State	Poverty Rate (2023)	US Average (2023): ~11.5%
Alabama	16.2%	

State	Poverty Rate (2023)	US Average (2023): ~11.5%
Arkansas	15.2%	
Idaho	11.0%	
Oklahoma	14.7%	
South Dakota	11.8%	
West Virginia	16.8%	
Wyoming	10.1%	

**Observation:**

Most of these states have poverty rates above the national average, with West Virginia and Alabama particularly high.

**3. Reliance on Federal/State Safety Net Programs**

**Medicaid Enrollment (as % of population, 2023):**

- Alabama: 22%
- Arkansas: 25%
- Idaho: 17%
- Oklahoma: 24%
- South Dakota: 18%
- West Virginia: 28%
- Wyoming: 14%
- **US Average: ~21%**

**SNAP (Food Stamps) Participation (as % of population, 2023):**

- Alabama: 15%
- Arkansas: 14%
- Idaho: 9%

- Oklahoma: 13%
- South Dakota: 10%
- West Virginia: 17%
- Wyoming: 7%
- **US Average:** ~12%

#### **Other Programs (Meals on Wheels, School Lunch, etc.):**

- These programs are heavily used in high-poverty rural areas, especially in the above states, often exceeding national averages in per-capita participation.

#### **4. Demographics of Republican Voters**

- **Myth:** The Republican base is primarily wealthy, white, and suburban.
- **Reality:** Many Republican voters, especially in Red States, are low- to middle-income, rural, and heavily reliant on government assistance programs.
- **Data Point:** According to Pew Research and exit polls (2020–2024), about 40–50% of Republican voters in these states report household incomes under \$50,000/year, and a significant portion are enrolled in at least one government assistance program.

#### **5. Voting Patterns and Policy Contradictions**

- **Trump and GOP Platform:**
  - Frequently propose cuts or stricter eligibility for Medicaid, SNAP, and other social programs (often framed as "welfare reform").
  - Have supported rolling back Medicaid expansion, imposing work requirements, and reducing federal funding for food assistance.
- **Absurdity Highlighted:**
  - A large share of the GOP voting base in Red States is directly dependent on the very programs the party leadership seeks to cut.
  - Example: In West Virginia, over 1 in 4 residents are on Medicaid, and yet Trump won the state by over 40 points in 2020 and 2024.
  - Many voters appear to vote against their economic self-interest, often due to cultural, identity, or misinformation factors.

## 6. Summary Table

State	Poverty Rate	Medicaid %	SNAP %	Trump 2024 Vote %
Alabama	16.2%	22%	15%	62%
Arkansas	15.2%	25%	14%	65%
Idaho	11.0%	17%	9%	63%
Oklahoma	14.7%	24%	13%	65%
South Dakota	11.8%	18%	10%	62%
West Virginia	16.8%	28%	17%	68%
Wyoming	10.1%	14%	7%	70%

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### Conclusion: The Paradox

Despite being among the most dependent on federal and state assistance, poor Republican voters in these Red States overwhelmingly support a party and candidate (Trump) that repeatedly propose policies to cut these very benefits. This creates a political paradox—one that is well documented in political science literature (see “*What’s the Matter with Kansas?*” by Thomas Frank and more recent studies by Pew and Brookings).

### Key Takeaway:

*The statistical evidence underscores the irony: large portions of the Republican base in Red States are poor and rely on DEI benefits yet consistently vote for leaders who threaten to reduce or eliminate these supports—effectively “snatching the rug from beneath their feet.”*

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### Sources:

- US Census Bureau (2023 Poverty Data)
- USDA SNAP Data (2023)
- CMS Medicaid Enrollment Reports (2023)

- Pew Research Center, Brookings, and exit polls (2020–2024)
- State Health and Human Services Departments

## 1. Pie Chart: Share of Medicaid Enrollment by State (Relative)

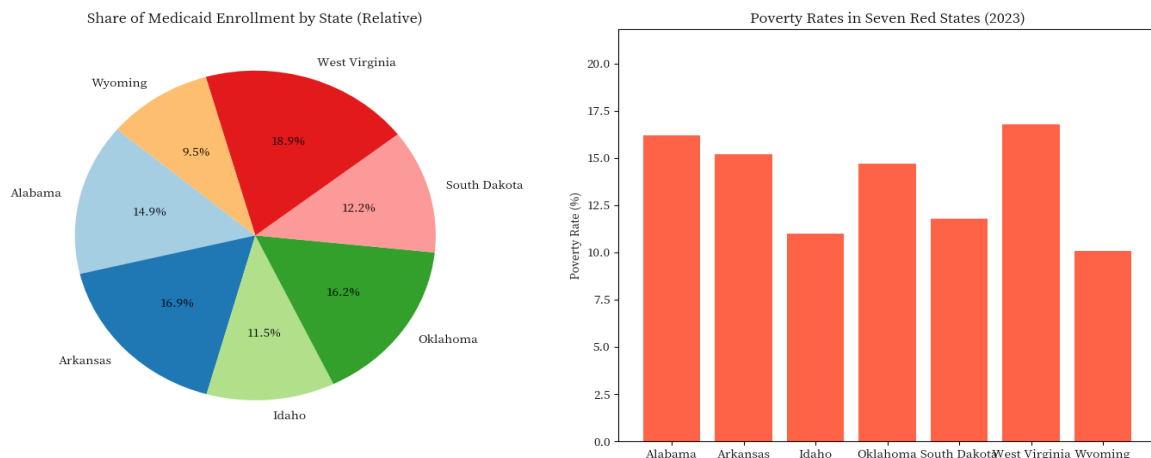
- This chart shows the proportion of Medicaid enrollment (as a proxy for dependence on social safety nets) across the seven red states.
- Each slice represents how much each state contributes to the total Medicaid-dependent population among these states.
- States like West Virginia and Arkansas have larger shares, reflecting their higher dependence.

## 2. Frequency Chart: Poverty Rates in Seven Red States

- This bar chart displays the poverty rate for each of the seven states.
- You can clearly see that West Virginia and Alabama have the highest poverty rates, while Wyoming and Idaho are lower but still significant.

### Interpretation:

These visualizations highlight both the high rates of poverty and the significant reliance on Medicaid in these deep red states—reinforcing the paradox that many voters in these states support policies and politicians who threaten to cut the very benefits they depend on.



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