

THE GREATER IDAHO MOVEMENT: AN EXAMINATION INTO
ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL FACTORS

by

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This thesis examines the underlying motivations driving the Greater Idaho movement, which seeks to relocate Eastern Oregon counties into Idaho. Using a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with people who have had direct interactions with the Greater Idaho movement, supplemented by non-statistically significant survey data from movement supporters, this research investigates the relative significance of economic, cultural, and political factors fueling the movement.

Despite extensive journalistic coverage, the movement has received minimal academic attention, creating a significant research gap this thesis will address. The findings reveal that while economic considerations contribute to support for border relocation, cultural alignment with Idaho's values and perceived political disenfranchisement within Oregon serve as the primary motivating factors. This research contributes to understandings of contemporary political regionalism and the urban-rural divide in Oregon, offering insights for policymakers seeking to address rural discontent.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Something is rotten in the state of Oregon. Of course, this statement paraphrases the famous line from William Shakespeare's Hamlet (Shakespeare, 1603), however, it is fitting for the situation to describe the Greater Idaho movement, as it is indicative of a larger political division developing within the state. The Greater Idaho movement is a political movement that seeks to redraw the border between Oregon and Idaho. It is composed primarily of Oregonians in the eastern part of the state, who want all counties east of the Cascade Mountain Range to join the state of [Idaho](#) (Greater Idaho, 2024). Since its formal inception in 2020, this organization's ballot measures have gained electoral approval in [thirteen Oregon](#) counties (Ballotpedia, 2025). While state border alterations would require approval from both state legislatures and the [United States Congress](#) (United States Constitution), the existence and electoral successes of the movement have illustrated that it is something that Oregonians, particularly state lawmakers, should take note of.

Note that the Eastern Oregon Area, as [defined](#) by the state of Oregon, comprises eight counties east of the Cascades: Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa counties. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will be using the term Eastern Oregon to identify all [17 counties](#) east of the Cascade mountain range (Oregon Secretary of State, 2025). This is because they are all geographically to the east and are the counties [outlined](#) by the Greater Idaho movement as Eastern Oregon (Greater Idaho, 2024).

Also note that the Greater Idaho movement wants to [divide](#) Deschutes County, Wasco County, and Jefferson County, taking the eastern parts while leaving the western sections with Oregon (Greater Idaho, 2024). For the purposes of this thesis, I will be including the totality of these three counties in Greater Idaho's territory objectives, to make calculations regarding vote count, population, and land mass feasible.

This thesis examines the underlying motivations driving support for the Greater Idaho movement through a mixed-methods approach combining expert interviews and quantitative surveys of movement supporters. Central to this investigation is determining the relative significance of three potential motivating factors: economic considerations, cultural alignments, and political grievances relating to representation and policy preferences.

Throughout Oregon's history, rural-urban tensions have periodically emerged in various forms of regional sentiment. From the proposed "[State of Jefferson](#)" movement in the 1940s, to contemporary county-level efforts to join Idaho, Eastern and Southern Oregonians have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with governance from the Willamette Valley (Oregon History Project, 2025). The current Greater Idaho movement thus represents not an anomalous development but rather the latest manifestation of long-standing regional identity conflicts within Oregon's borders. These historical examples provide essential context for understanding contemporary supporter motivations.

The methodology employed in this thesis combines qualitative interviews with a Greater Idaho movement leader, an Oregon State House Representative, and a resident of Eastern

Oregon, supplemented by quantitative survey data collected from self-identified supporters. However, it is important to note that the quantitative survey data collected does not reach the threshold of statistical significance and should be used only as a reference point, not to be extrapolated to make assumptions about the movement writ large. This mixed-methods approach provides information that creates a well-rounded perspective on the movement and useful insights into its motivating factors.

This study contributes to scholarly literature on political regionalism and contemporary manifestations of the urban-rural divide in American politics. There have been no research papers written, from what I was able to find, on any aspect of the Greater Idaho movement, much less its underlying factors. Understanding these motivations offers potential insights for policymakers seeking to address rural grievances, particularly in Eastern Oregon.

Chapter 2: Purpose and Setting the Stage

The United States is currently experiencing a period of heightened political polarization, which to some degree has been manifested in the [divide](#) between urban and rural communities (Cornell University, 2022). Urban areas increasingly tend to support the Democratic Party and liberal policy positions, while rural regions are more likely to align with the Republican Party and conservative values. This divide is visible in the state of Oregon as well. The state's densely populated urban centers on the western side of the Cascade Mountain Range, concentrated in the Willamette Valley (particularly Lane, Benton, Multnomah, Clackamas and Hood River Counties), often have markedly different politics [compared](#) to the rural, more sparsely populated eastern counties (Politico, 2024). Eastern Oregon comprises [approximately](#) 69% of the state's total land mass (Index Mundi, 2010), but only [approximately](#) 13% of Oregon's population (State of Oregon, 2024). Indeed, the Cascade Mountain Range serves as much of a physical barrier between Eastern and Western Oregon as it does a symbolic one.

The modern Greater Idaho movement emerged in [early 2020](#) as a pushback against what may be viewed as 'liberal Oregon' (Greater Idaho, 2024). Every governor since 1987, almost 40 years, has been a [Democrat](#) (National Governors Association, 2025) and the most recent Governors, current Governor Tina Kotek and former Governor [Kate Brown](#) (Domonoske, 2016), have been [LGBTQIA+](#) women — highlighting Oregon's progressive streak (Ring, 2023). A portion of Oregon's rural population, spanning a substantial geographic area encompassing a majority of the state geographically, supports moving the state border so their counties would become part of Idaho. As of the writing of this thesis, [13 counties](#) in Oregon have approved

ballot measures in favor of Greater Idaho: Baker, Crook, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Klamath, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Union, Wallowa, and Wheeler (Ballotpedia, 2025). These county-level votes, while not binding, signal a desire among residents for a formal examination of what would be a historically significant move. Their support suggests that many Eastern Oregonians feel so alienated from their state government that they see severing ties as the only viable solution to their grievances.

This sentiment appears particularly acute when examining the political dynamics within Oregon. The state government's executive branch is predominantly influenced by former legislative representatives from urban areas, where the majority of the population resides. An example of this can be seen in the fact that Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, Secretary of State Tobias Read, and State Treasurer Elizabeth Steiner all hail from Portland and the surrounding area (Ballotpedia, 2025). Consequently, policy decisions, such as abortion access and gun restrictions, both of which the majority of conservatives oppose, often reflect urban priorities and worldviews, potentially leaving rural communities feeling marginalized in the democratic process.

The level of support for such an action as border relocation suggests underlying issues in Oregon's political, cultural, or economic landscape. It points to a significant level of dissatisfaction and alienation among rural residents, emotions powerful enough to fuel efforts to redraw state lines. This study operates on the premise that understanding the perspectives of those in favor of the Greater Idaho movement is essential. Such understanding not only helps explain the origins and dynamics of the movement itself but also offers broader insight into how

rural-urban divides might be bridged and how representative democracy can be strengthened through understanding.

Importantly, there is a lack of academic research on the Greater Idaho movement itself. To date, no peer-reviewed scholarly articles have specifically investigated the motivations or implications of the movement. The vast majority of publicly available information derives from news articles or local reporting. While these sources are valuable for understanding the basic contours of the movement and the intensity of local sentiment, they are typically framed for broad audiences rather than for in-depth, systematic analysis. The only identifiable attempt at scholarly engagement is a [single booklet](#) (Joiner, 2024), which addresses the subject superficially and lacks detail and critical analysis. This gap in literature underscores the need for more focused academic studies on this topic.

This thesis aims to address this gap by applying qualitative and limited quantitative academic methods to examine the motivations behind the Greater Idaho movement. By doing so, it seeks to contribute not only to the specific understanding of this movement but also to broader theoretical frameworks regarding political polarization, rural identity, and democratic representation.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This literature review will be organized into several sections, each evaluating the different types of sources examined. The first section will explore the Greater Idaho movement through journalism, highlighting the usefulness of various news articles. The second section will focus on the Greater Idaho movement as explored in scholarly books, with an analysis of how different authors attempt to explain social movements. The third section will examine the movement through scholarly papers. Finally, the fourth section will consider the movement through government documents. It is important to note that through my review of the literature, there are no scholarly academic research papers on the Greater Idaho movement.

Journalism

There is an abundance of journalistic pieces on the Greater Idaho movement, this is, in part, due to the sensationalist nature of the movement. Journalists have interpreted the Greater Idaho movement and its ideals in two primary ways. First, they make a significant effort to capture the perspectives of the individuals behind the movement, examining their ideas and motivations. These motivations are not always described as political, although social norms certainly play a role. However, economic concerns, particularly regarding taxes, are often presented as the central focus (Busch, 2023). One particular article titled *The cost of a state line* by Laurenz Busch in the Deseret News is particularly insightful in highlighting the importance of not feeling represented as a motivating factor for Greater Idaho supporters. These articles also discuss how volunteerism played an important role in the early stages of the movement and how it has diminished in recent years as political realities tempered their ambitions (NWOB, 2020).

The second angle that many journalists take is to explore the political attitudes of the Greater Idaho movement's members. It could be argued—perhaps with some validity—that these articles shed light on the more Trumpian, "backward," and racially charged elements of the movement. These articles note how the secessionist Greater Idaho movement echoes previous secessionist movements in Oregon and the United States, which were grounded in fundamentally racist ideals (Sottile, 2023). They also highlight the movement's active political wing, lobbying in both Salem (McIntosh, 2023) and with President Trump for assistance in bringing their vision of a new state line to fruition (McInally, 2024).

Books

The majority books reviewed do not specifically analyze the Greater Idaho movement; instead they focus on the emergence of rural discontent in recent years and its impact on politics. These books, by virtue of their format, allow for the inclusion of diverse voices from rural areas. Particularly, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* by Kathy Cramer was useful in finding information suggesting that this "rural resentment" is not solely a product of racism or social conservatism, which contrasts with the liberal population centers of the state (though these factors may play a role). Rather, the resentment often centers on economic issues (Cramer, 2016). Furthermore, these economic issues are perceived, with some justification, to be the result of actions taken by political elites in far-off liberal population centers. The books I reviewed also highlight how this resentment can be harnessed by political movements to channel the sentiments into a force capable of being recognized. Notably, the Tea Party serves as an example, and this framework could also be applied to the Greater Idaho movement (Williamson, 2011).

The book written by Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* while perhaps not as applicable as Cramer's work, was nonetheless useful in understanding the landscape of rural populist movements. The book discussed an idea he coined as "The Great Backlash," characterized by anger regarding social issues, an anger that is then utilized to advance Republican economic policies. In his book, Frank discusses how the Backlash characterizes its followers as normal, "real" Americans, and its opponents as touchy liberal elites. (Frank, 2004). This is curious because to a certain extent, an analogous comparison to Western Oregonians out of touch with the needs of Eastern Oregon while dictating policy to them, is a narrative in the Greater Idaho movement.

The book *Greater Idaho: Oregon's Modern Decline* by Preston Russel Joiner was the only book published specifically about the Greater Idaho movement. The source was not particularly useful; although it covered the basic history of the Greater Idaho movement, logistical concerns and demographic differences, it lacked original research.

Academic Papers

Academic papers discussing rural political movements in the 21st century were varied, addressing a range of different aspects. For instance, *What Explains Educational Realignment? An Issue Voting Framework for Analyzing Electoral Coalitions*, written by William Marble, examined why low-education voters have been making a significant and noticeable shift away from the Democratic Party. This shift contributes to population centers, where educational institutions are often located, becoming strongholds of Democratic support and liberal thought (Marble, 2024). This educational disparity often correlates with economic disparity, creating a divide between well-educated, liberal, wealthier citizens in small areas that dictate laws for a

less-formally-educated, conservative, and poorer population. This can be a manifestation of a harmful stereotype perpetuated by the media and the populace alike. Nicholas Jacobs' article, *Place-Based Resentment in Contemporary U.S. Elections: The Individual Sources of America's Urban-Rural Divide* discussed how this divide can fuel place-based resentment, where individuals resent others simply because of their geographic location and the assumptions that accompany it (Jacobs, 2022). This was useful reading, as the Greater Idaho movement is a political movement defined to some extent by geographic boundaries.

One academic paper specifically addressing the Greater Idaho movement was found, titled simply *Greater Idaho movement* by Heidi Roccograndi. In this brief, approximately two page paper, Roccograndi reviews the movements history and outlines , published reasons for public support. (Roccograndi, 2024). While it provided a helpful overview, the paper relied almost entirely on news articles and included no original research or analysis.

Government Documents

The government documents section of this literature review was both the most and least politically biased, depending on the type of document. Some of the documents reviewed were purely analytical in nature, providing a comprehensive breakdown of the economic data for Eastern Oregon counties (Wendel, 2023). This information is critical as it offers an accurate, objective picture of the economic realities on the ground, unfiltered by personal perceptions. The text of House Bill 3488, which would create the Move Oregon-Idaho Border Task Force to help facilitate discussion and information gathering in relation to redrawing the border, was extremely valuable and helpful. It was sponsored by Representatives Owens, Levy B, and Breese Iverson, and helps to illustrate what steps would need to take place to facilitate a border move. In a

similar fashion, the text of Senate Joint Measure 7, introduced also in the 2025 session by State Senator Dennis Linthicum, urged the two states to begin talks on border relocation. It seemed to reinforce the idea that talks regarding the move are necessary before any more dramatic actions could be taken.

Chapter 4: Methodology

These studies were granted Human Subjects research approval by the University of Oregon Institutional Review Board.

Interviews:

Participants:

To gain a well-rounded perspective on the Greater Idaho movement, it was important to interview people who were very familiar with the movement and Eastern Oregon. Six individuals were contacted for an interview.

Oregon State House Representative Vikki Breese-Iverson was contacted to inform their office of the project and to request an interview. Breese-Iverson represents House District 59, encompassing all of Crook County and parts of Deschutes and Jefferson Counties. Breese-Iverson was also a Chief Sponsor of House Bill 3488 in the 2025 legislative session, which would have established the Move Oregon-Idaho Border Task Force. No response was received.

Oregon State House Representative Mark Owens was contacted to inform their office of the project and request an interview. Owens represents House District 60, which encompasses all of Baker, Grant, Harney, Lake, and Malheur Counties and part of Deschutes County. Owens, who was also a Chief Sponsor of HB 3488, responded and scheduled an interview.

Matt McCaw, the executive director of the Greater Idaho movement. McCaw was contacted and an interview was scheduled.

Les Zaitz, the editor and publisher of the Malheur Enterprise, a local media organization in Eastern Oregon was contacted with a request for an interview. Zaitz has written several articles on the Greater Idaho movement. I did receive a reply from Zaitz, who politely declined.

Beth Upshaw, a contributor to the Oregon Capital Chronicle a League of Women Voters Oregon Union County member, and a lifelong Eastern Oregon resident was contacted and interviewed was scheduled.

Outreach:

For Breese-Iverson, Owens, Zaitz, and McCaw email addresses-either personal or for offices-were publicly available on their respective websites. Each was contacted with an explanation of the thesis project and a request to participate in an interview for the research.

Upshaw's email address was not retrievable online, so they were contacted via text by phone with an explanation of the thesis project and a request for an interview for the research. Upshaw agreed, and we set up an interview time.

Interview Materials:

Prior to the interviews with Owens, McCaw, and Upshaw, a list of questions was compiled. The interviews were conducted using Zoom for Owens and McCaw and via phone for Upshaw.

Procedure:

At the beginning of the interviews, after establishing contact and arranging an interview time, an introduction was given along with the interviewer's purpose and the thesis project. Permission was then requested from the interviewees to record audio of the conversations. All participants consented to being recorded and having the contents of their interview used in research and potentially published. A form outlining this information was also provided to each participant.

Analysis:

After the interviews were completed, [Otter.ai](#), an artificial intelligence software that transcribes recordings was used. The transcriptions were reviewed while listening to the audio, with corrections made to any mistakes.

Surveys:

Research Question(s):

The Greater Idaho Movement survey was designed to examine the underlying factors that are influencing the motivations of people who support the movement. The primary research questions focused on several aspects of public opinion. The survey investigated political identity and affiliation by measuring respondents' self-identified party alignment (Republican, Democrat, or Independent), as well as the strength of that identification for partisans and leaning tendencies among Independents. Political ideology was assessed across the conservative-liberal spectrum to understand ideological influences beyond party labels. Voting behavior in the 2024 Presidential Election was also recorded to establish recent political engagement patterns among respondents.

Cultural alignment represented another critical research dimension, examining perceptions of how closely respondents' values aligned with Idaho versus Oregon culture. This cultural identification element was explored as a potential driving factor behind border change support. The survey also investigated respondents' satisfaction with their political representation in the Oregon State Legislature. The goal of this was to examine how feelings of adequate or inadequate representation might relate to attitudes toward the Greater Idaho Movement.

Economic expectations constituted a third research focus, with questions addressing both anticipated personal financial impacts and expected economic effects on respondents' local communities if border changes occurred. These questions aimed to understand the degree to which economic self-interest and community economic concerns might drive movement support. The survey directly measured overall support levels for the Greater Idaho movement, allowing for analysis between demographic factors, political views, cultural perceptions, and economic expectations with movement support.

Survey Design:

The survey was structured to balance targeted questions with participant fatigue. The questionnaire opened with a consent form explaining the survey, laying out ethical considerations, and verifying that respondents met the minimum age requirement of 18 years. Following consent, the survey proceeded with a politics block containing questions assessing political identity, partisanship, and voting behavior.

The politics section was followed by a focused culture block containing a single question comparing respondents' perceived alignment with Idaho versus Oregon cultural values. This placement decision was deliberate, positioning the cultural assessment after basic political identification but before specific movement support questions to avoid priming effects. The second politics block then measured satisfaction with representation in the Oregon Legislature and directly assessed support for the Greater Idaho movement on a five-point scale ranging from strongly opposed to strongly supportive. The economics block followed, containing two parallel questions geared toward analyzing expected financial impacts at both personal and community levels if border changes occurred.

The survey concluded with a demographics block collecting standard information about respondents' age, education level, racial/ethnic identification, gender, and Oregon residency status. This placement followed survey design best practices by positioning potentially sensitive demographic questions at the end of the instrument. Throughout the survey, question formatting remained consistent, primarily utilizing five-point Likert scales for attitude measurement, single-selection options for categorical variables, and multiple-selection capability only for race/ethnicity identification.

The survey flow was designed to move logically from political identification through cultural perceptions and economic expectations before collecting demographic data.

Data Collection:

Before launching the survey, it was refined several times with input from my primary thesis advisor. It was also tested to ensure the absence of any bugs or illogical flows. The methods for distributing the survey were varied. However, the geographical distance of the primary response base proved to be a significant factor limiting the availability to obtain a statistically significant number of responses.

The survey along with an introduction of the study was emailed to the local County Republican Parties in all 17 counties in Eastern Oregon. A request to forward the survey link to their respective members was included. I was operating on the informed notion that supporters of the Greater Idaho movement were likely to be Republicans.

The Deschutes County Republicans and the Malheur County Republicans confirmed that they had forwarded the survey link to Greater Idaho contacts. The Sherman County Republicans posted the survey on their Facebook page.

Professors in the Political Science and Sociology departments at Eastern Oregon University were contacted with a request to distribute survey to their students. Only two professors, Professors Dustin Ellis and Bill Grigsby, responded indicating that they would share the survey link with their students.

In an attempt to find supporters of the Greater Idaho movement to contact, testimony from public comment sections of County Commission meetings at which the Greater Idaho

movement was being discussed was reviewed. This avenue was not successful and did not result in identifying supporters.

A survey was sent to the Turning Point USA club at Eastern Oregon University; they responded that they would distribute the survey. A survey was sent to the University of Oregon College Republicans; this yielded no response.

The survey was posted on numerous subreddits related to Eastern Oregon; however, on almost all subreddits, it was blocked immediately as spam. Subreddits in which the survey was not removed included r/Oregon_Politics, r/StateOfJefferson, r/Prinevilleoregon, r/pendleton, and r/Hermiston.

In addition, in an attempt to increase survey participation, a trip was made to Eastern Oregon over the course of a weekend for in-person outreach.. One day was spent in Madras located in Crook County, displaying a sign with a QR code asking people to take the survey. An oversized Uncle Sam hat was worn in an attempt to grab people's attention. This was moderately successful. A photo of the hat and the sign are included for reference. Anecdotally, one individual came up to take the survey, expressed a desire to get rid of the 'tyrannical government in Salem.'

Another day of on-site outreach was spent in Prineville, Oregon. Approximately 200 flyers (that were in effect miniature versions of the poster) were distributed to passersby over the course of six hours.



Figure 1: Demonstration of survey sign and Uncle Sam hat.

The sign was designed to be visually enticing and simple. Since it was not be practical to print out numerous paper copies or include a link printed on the flyers/sign, a scannable QR code linked to the survey was used instead.

The image of the Greater Idaho logo was meant to quickly convey the purpose of the survey. While the “Your voice stays anonymous” text was meant to relieve any anxiety about privacy and encourage participation.

The survey was open to responses from April 25-May 17, 2025

Data Analysis:

The data was formatted into graphs via Qualtrics. However, there was not enough responses collected to be statistically significant. Therefore, the data should only be used for reference and should not be extrapolated to make precise estimations of the Greater Idaho movement.

Incomplete surveys were excluded, as well as surveys in which the participant was not an Oregon resident or in which they were not a supporter of the Greater Idaho movement. This eliminated the majority of the total 123 responses received, leaving just 41 usable responses.

The most effective form of participant recruitment, according to Qualtrics analysis, was via direct link — emailing the link directly to county parties, yielding 93 responses. Reddit was the second most effective, yielding 16 responses, and the in-person trip to Eastern Oregon was the least effective, yielding only 14 responses. The trip to Eastern Oregon can be confirmed as yielding the aforementioned 14 responses, as the QR code was only used for onsite outreach.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations were considered at every stage in the design and implementation of the Greater Idaho Movement survey. All research began with an informed consent process that communicated the study's purpose. Participants received information about procedures, potential risks, confidentiality protections, and their rights as research subjects. The consent form provided direct contact information for the principal researcher, me, ensuring participants could reach out with questions or concerns. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasized

throughout, with explicit statements that participants could refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. The consent process concluded with age verification to ensure all participants met the minimum age requirement of 18 years.

Confidentiality protections were also utilized in research to minimize potential risks. The survey avoided collecting any personally identifiable information, relying entirely on self-reported data without personal identifiers. All digital data was secured on protected servers with appropriate safeguards against unauthorized access.

A risk assessment was completed prior to survey deployment, acknowledging the potential for minor psychological stress when participants engaged with questions about political views and cultural identity. While this risk was deemed minimal, its possibility was communicated to participants in the consent materials. The potential for data breaches was also addressed, though described as unlikely given the security measures in place. No compensation was offered for participation, eliminating concerns about undue influence or coercion.

Chapter 5: Interviews

Matt McCaw

Matthew (Matt) McCaw is the executive director of the Greater Idaho movement. He is Oregon born and bred, and grew up in Bend — however, the Bend that McCaw recalls bears little resemblance to the Bend of today. When McCaw was growing up in Bend in the 1990s, the [population](#) was approximately 15,000 people; today it is over 100,000 people (United States Census Bureau, 2024). The 1990s coincided with the [collapse](#) of the logging industry in Oregon, which was disastrous for many rural communities reliant on the industry (Oregon Logging in the 1900s, 2025). However, McCaw’s involvement in Oregon politics did not begin with the collapse of the industry his community was [reliant](#) on (Robbins, 2024) or with the [Tea Party](#) movement that swept much of America in the late 2000s and early 2010s (Wright, 2021). McCaw said that while he was raised as an evangelical Christian in a conservative community in Eastern Oregon, he wasn't particularly political for most of his life.

“[I was] not active in politics other than, you know, listen to Rush Limbaugh and vote, you know, and that was the extent of my political activism.”

[Rush Limbaugh](#) was a popular conservative political commentator, prominent on the radio throughout the 1990s (Missouri Broadcasting Association, 2025).

However, McCaw said that when the COVID-19 Pandemic struck, that is when his view of politics really changed, and he moved from Portland to [Powell Butte](#), Oregon, a town of approximately 3,000 in Crook County (Census Reporter, 2023).

“Living through COVID, I made the decision I had to get involved in something. COVID was, was just a giant wake-up call that everything that I never thought could happen in the United States happened.”

McCaw said that what scared him most about the pandemic was the State of Oregon infringing on the rights of citizens.

“They [the government] shut down schools, they shut down the world. They shut down businesses. They shut down churches. They forced us to wear face masks.”

The “they” that McCaw is referencing is the state government, and it is true that in March 2020, when there were 191 known COVID cases in Oregon, Governor Brown issued an executive order shutting down a wide array of [businesses](#) (Hanson, 2020). While the governor did not shut down churches, she did sign executive orders [prohibiting](#) in-person religious services that had gatherings of over 25 people indoors or over 50 people outdoors. Her order was challenged in the Oregon Supreme Court, and the court upheld her authority to take such actions during a public health emergency (Wilson, 2020). Oregon, beginning in July 2020, began requiring face coverings in all indoor public places, including businesses and later schools. In March of 2020, Governor Brown signed an [executive order](#) ending in-person K-12 schooling (State of Oregon, 2020). Oregon was also the second-to-last state in the country to repeal indoor masking requirements in March [2022](#) (Kelleher, 2022), and even then, masking was still mandated in healthcare settings until [April of 2023](#) (State of Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, 2025).

However, it was in these early days of COVID that McCaw began looking at the restrictions taking place in Oregon, and the more limited COVID restrictions in Idaho, and began to feel an affinity towards Idaho. McCaw recalled a conversation he had with his cousin in the early days of COVID, in which his cousin described attending church in Boise with 500 other people, almost all not wearing masks.

“And, and I was just like. This is the difference between living in a conservative state and a liberal state. They're living their lives like we always have in Idaho. In a normal, free way.”

McCaw said that COVID terrified him because he saw for the first time rights that he had enjoyed his entire life taken away, and there was an uncertainty of when or if he would get them back. COVID appears to be for McCaw and in some respects to the Greater Idaho movement, a key point in development. It is a moment that crystallizes, in McCaw's own words, the Oregon government as “tyrannical” and the Idaho state government as one that maintains and guarantees the rights enjoyed by people without government interference.

In November of 2020, Oregon and the United States held general elections. McCaw felt that if there was ever a time that Oregon would vote “red,” for the Republican Party, and not elect Democrats who were implementing “insane” COVID mandates that were restricting freedoms, it was then. Instead, Oregon voted resoundingly “blue” for the Democratic Party. Joe Biden received over 400,000 more votes than Donald Trump in Oregon. And Statewide, the Democrats won every statewide office, including the Governorship and both chambers of the state [legislature](#) (Oregon Secretary of State, 2020).

This electoral moment solidified in McCaw the belief that Oregon was not going to change, and that any attempt to safeguard his rights and the rights of his community could not be done as part of the state of Oregon. It is at this time that he began volunteering with the Greater Idaho movement and eventually rose through the ranks to become Executive Director.

McCaw said that he had come to believe Western Oregon was forcing the people of the east to live under culture, values, and policy decisions that the westerners wanted, but the easterners did not.

“Our culture is different, our values are different. We want different things for our communities. We're far more like the people of Idaho. So let us join Idaho.”

It seems that, according to McCaw, the primary reason the Greater Idaho exists is because of cultural differences, and these cultural differences often manifest themselves through policy. McCaw brought up Oregon Ballot Measure-114, a ballot measure approved by Oregon voters in [2022](#) that would require a permit to purchase or acquire a gun in Oregon, among other things (Oregon Department of Justice, 2025). McCaw said that in Eastern Oregon, guns are part of the culture. Not everyone owns one, but they are commonly used for hunting and other forms of recreation. McCaw pointed to this measure as an example of the western part of Oregon forcing cultural positions on the rest of the state through policy. He made this argument by highlighting the electoral breakdown of the ballot measure.

Measure 114

Requires permit to acquire firearms; criminally prohibits certain ammunition magazines

Yes: 869,844 51.0% **No: 836,866 49.0%**

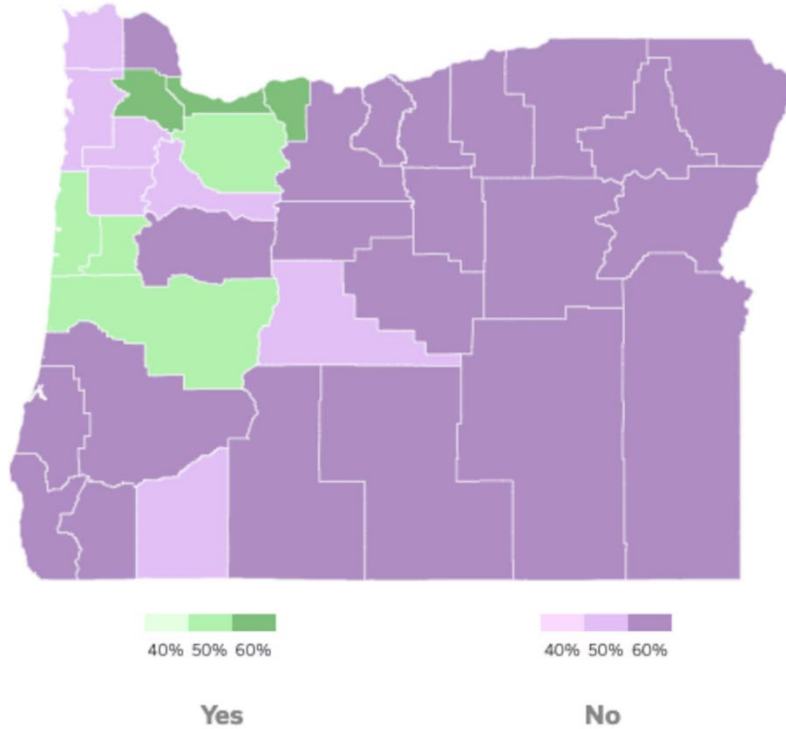


Figure 2: A graphic depicting the vote count for Measure-114 courtesy of OregonLive

The measure was [narrowly](#) approved by Oregonians with just 50.65% of the population voting 'yes.' The measure was effectively carried by Multnomah County, which contains Portland and the surrounding metropolitan area, and voted for the measure 74.1%. Not a single county in Eastern Oregon voted to approve the measure (Ballotpedia, 2025). To McCaw, this is just one in a plethora of policy changes contrary to the values of Eastern Oregon that are being forced upon them by Western Oregon.

Another example McCaw pointed to is “the wolves,” and how Western Oregonians support wolf reintroduction efforts in the state. For context, the first [wolf bounty](#) was introduced in Oregon as far back as 1843 to address the issue that the territorial legislature referred to as the “problem of marauding wolves” (Oregon Wild, 2024). The last wolf in Oregon was believed to have been killed in 1947, after over a century of extermination efforts. Wolves were mainly hunted to protect livestock.

McCaw said that the typical Western Oregonian mindset is that since wolves are cool and natural, they should be part of the local ecosystem, and shouldn't have been eliminated in the first place. The issue is that wolves prey on livestock, and Eastern Oregon has many people who rely on livestock for [ranching](#) (Bigelow and Stacey, 2024). This could jeopardize their livelihoods and their ability to support their family.

“So if Portland wants wolves, they're gonna force wolves onto eastern Oregon, and eastern Oregonians Don't have a whole lot of recourse. We have to just sit there and take it. And it, it just causes this massive amount of like tension and frustration and ill will towards each other when these sorts of things happen.”

McCaw said the example of wolves is just one of many. And the same sort of dynamic between east and west exists for “almost any topic.”

For context, Oregon does not have an official wolf introduction policy. [According](#) to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, wolves currently inhabiting Oregon migrated to the state or were born to wolves that migrated to the state (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2025). [Idaho](#) reintroduced wolves in 1995, and it's believed that the wolves crossed from Idaho into Oregon (Idaho Fish and Game Department, 2015).

It should be emphasized that the fact Idaho reintroduced wolves does not negate the sentiments McCaw has about Western Oregon supporting wolves despite disagreement from Eastern Oregon.

Prominent advocacy groups such as [Oregon Wild](#) do support wolf reintroduction, and their executive director is based out of Portland (Oregon Wild, 2025). The state of Oregon, while not actively pursuing wolf introduction, does support [existing](#) wolf recovery and conservation in the state (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2025). The state also has in place a [compensation program](#) for verified livestock loss due to wolves (Oregon Legislature, 2011).

Another issue that McCaw points to is abortion. Eastern Oregon primarily votes Republican and is conservative, meaning the majority of Eastern Oregon is likely to oppose abortion (Gallup, 2025). I am going to include the following quote from McCaw in full despite its length, because I believe it is important to accurately articulate his sentiments.

“If you're Western Oregon, you could say, ‘you know what, we're gonna make sure that people have access to abortion here in Western Oregon, but we're not gonna force it on you people in Eastern Oregon. We understand you're different than us, you have different value sets.’ They could do that. That's not what they choose to do. What they do instead is they come out here and they say, ‘you guys need an abortion clinic here, not that you put here, but we're going to put one in here so that people can come over from Idaho next door so that left leaning people in Idaho who can't get abortions can come over.[We're going to] pay for those people to come over to your community to do this thing that you don't want in your community, and we're gonna use your own money to do this thing that goes against your values.’”

In [2022](#), the Oregon Legislature established the Reproductive Health Equity Fund, which allocated \$ 15 million to be awarded as grants to non-profit organizations that will expand access to abortions. According to reporting in the Oregon Capitol Chronicle from the time, “Legislators also intended to expand services in the state, especially in Eastern Oregon, where women traditionally have traveled to Boise, Idaho for their health care (Terry, 2022).”

“That causes, I, I cannot describe to you how much anger, resentment, and frustration that causes,” McCaw said.

At this point in the interview. McCaw had laid out numerous policy disputes that can be fairly argued to be contrary to the culture and values of the majority of Eastern Oregon. These disputes were, from my perspective, accurately attributed to the values and political power of Western Oregon, albeit at points they were not so cut and dry. However, the argument that McCaw will make in the next portion of this interview is not one based as much on policy, but on a historical difference that cuts to not just the foundation of the state. And upon deeper examination, some of the same issues surrounding slavery that initiated the American Civil War from 1861-1865.

“Western Oregon is just geographically and climatically different than eastern Oregon. At the very first constitutional convention in 1857, the people of eastern Oregon said, ‘We don't want to be associated with Western Oregon,’ but the people of western Oregon, who were more of the population, said, ‘We want eastern Oregon to be associated with us.’”

McCaw said that the western part of the state won, and ever since this time, Eastern Oregon has been forced into a union it did not want to be part of. McCaw pointed to the

geographic differences between east and west as evidence that the economy, politics, and culture were also predestined to be different.

What McCaw claimed is not without substance. In the book, *The Oregon Constitution and Proceedings and Debates of the Constitutional Convention of 1857* by Charles Cary, the early debates of Oregon statehood are discussed. At times in the book, it does seem that the foundations of what would become the Greater Idaho movement were laid in the 1850s during the creation of the state.

In early 1854, while the United States Congress was debating legislation regarding Oregon statehood in Washington, D.C., there was a failed movement to split the southern part of the Oregon territory off from the state that was being created, and this new territory would be known as Jackson territory. The territory would also include part of northern California, and resembles what we contemporary readers recognize to be territory in the state of Jefferson. The state of Jefferson is a secessionist movement with significant overlap with the proposed Jackson Territory— a territory whose purpose was ostensibly to one day form a proslavery state from the southern counties of present-day Oregon. However, this movement did not acquire the necessary support (Cary, 1926, p. 13).

A partition that gained significantly more attention and momentum, though, would fix the Oregon border at the Cascade Mountain Range. A proponent of this partition was Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, who, as Chair of the Senate Committee on territories, pushed for

a motion that would set Oregon's eastern border at the Cascades. The motion, despite Douglas's urging, was defeated in a vote of 18 to 20 (Cary, 1926, p. 16).

[Senator Douglas](#) of course, who helped broker the Compromise of 1850 which among other things included the Fugitive Slave Act — requiring escaped slave's in the north to be returned to slavery in the South, and opened the possibility of slavery to the New Mexico Territory (present day New Mexico, Arizona, parts of Nevada, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming) and the Utah Territory (present day Utah and parts of Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, California and Wyoming). Douglas also would go on to famously partake in the Lincoln-Douglas debates and defeat future U.S. President Abraham Lincoln in the 1858 U.S. Senate race in Illinois ([Histroy.com](#), 2009).

Ironically in the 1860 Presidential Election, Douglas would contribute to [splitting](#) the Democratic vote and help propel Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican President in American history, to the Presidency. Douglas would rally to the Union at the outset of the Civil War, before his death a few short weeks after its outbreak (Drexler, 2022). I recognize this Douglas exposition has been slightly off the topic of Greater Idaho. However, I believe it to be important for illustrating the history of the movement and how it interacts with the politics of the time.

According to a Feb.13, 1871, editorial in the Oregonian:

“Mr. Douglas...stopping before a large map, he drew his cane across it on the shaded line indicated as the Cascade mountains and exclaimed, ‘There is your natural boundary!’ This line is the line marked by nature as the eastern boundary of your state. Oregon should lie wholly west of the Cascade mountains.” (Cary, 1926, p. 16).

What Douglas seemed to be indicating, according to this editorial, is in some measure the same point that supporters of the Greater Idaho movement are arguing to this day. The idea that the natural border for Oregon lies at the Cascades.

26 *History of the Constitution of Oregon*

POPULAR VOTE ON CONVENTION, BY YEARS
(From Oregon Statesman, July 11, 1854; June 30, 1855; May 27, 1856; July 7, 1857)

	1854		1855		1856		1857	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Marion	297	690	412	768	593	492	785	271
Linn	566	361	773	400	705	356	1,049	68
Benton	202	231	276	231	288	273	535	50
Lane	518	67	476	344	495	338	800	76
Yamhill	246	267	292	379	182	399	548	195
Clackamas	288	458	352	310	204	366	509	121
Multnomah .....	.....	.....	227	332	150	365	566	89
Columbia .....	.....	.....	23	62	18	66	66	88
Clatsop	115	74	102	28	42	52	125	12
Douglas	234	156	346	257	254	191	408	130
Cocoe	113	75	129	104	28	16	40	7
Polk	271	187	359	318	309	235	517	62
Washington	160	728	191	368	109	349	363	163
Jackson	20	723	312	734	216	281	553	180
Tillamook	19	6	8	12	.....	.....	.....	.....
Umpqua	143	49	142	188	96	114	160	77
Curry .....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	108	9
Wasco	28	9	.....	.....	9	76	57	68
Josephine .....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	408	63
Southern brigade volunteers .....	.....	.....	.....	.....	234	301	.....	.....
Northern regiment volunteers .....	.....	.....	.....	.....	254	170	.....	.....
Total	3,210	4,079	4,420	4,835	4,186	4,435	7,617	1,679
Majority .....	.....	869	.....	415	.....	249	5,938	.....

Table 1: A county break down for the popular vote to hold an Oregon Constitutional Convention

In 1857, the people of the Oregon territories voted for a fourth and final time (the previous three popular votes had failed) resoundingly in favor of statehood. 7,617 votes in favor, and 1,679 votes against statehood. The 1857 vote had a majority vote of 5,938 over the opposition, while the previous 1856, 1855, and 1854 votes failed by 249, 415, and 869 votes, respectively. (Cary, 1926, p. 26).

Notably, the only county to vote in rejection of statehood in 1857 was Wasco County — 57 votes in favor and 68 against (Cary, 1926, p. 26). Despite the small population, Wasco

County's rejection again echoed the Greater Idaho movement to come, as at the time, [Wasco County](#) stretched across all of Eastern Oregon, through the entirety of Idaho except the panhandle, and into Wyoming. It was the largest county ever formed in United States history (Oregon Secretary of State, 2025). This 1857 Wasco County, was the last time that Eastern Oregon and present-day Idaho were ever unified in local administrative territory.

The statehood vote was influenced by the incoming pro-slavery Buchanan administration and fears that Buchanan would force slavery onto the free territories by federal action. To some extent, the statehood was an avenue to avoid such action. Oregon, during its constitutional convention of 1857 would go on to resolve the slavery question by outlawing slavery in the new state, while at the same time not permitting the "residence of free negroes." (Cary, 1926, p. 22-27).

During the Oregon Constitutional Convention of 1857, the vast majority of delegates — all of whom came from what would become Western Oregon — favored expanding the state certainly to its modern border with Idaho along the Snake River, but also further if possible. The sole opponent to this large-state solution was Charles Meigs, a delegate representing the vast expanse of Wasco County. Meigs espoused his belief at the convention that the border of Oregon should lie at the Cascades due to its geographic sense (Cary, 1926, p. 146-149).

Delazon Smith, a delegate representing Linn County, argued vehemently against Meigs. In summary of his argument, he believed that the new state of Oregon should seek to gain all the

land it could, to be influential on the national stage, and provide ample land for incoming settlers.

“If we are hemmed in between these ranges of mountains here, with every acre of land appropriated, what avails it, sir? Nothing! [...] Now, let us take in that country—and it is a good country — good, permanently good for stock-raising purposes. [...] It contains inexhaustible quantities of invaluable timber [...] Why not take it? What hinders us? Congress surely has no objection.” (Cary, 1926, p. 149-150).

In effect, what Smith is saying in this excerpt is that Oregon had the opportunity to seize a massive swath of country, in which there are valuable natural resources. It is the duty of the new state to claim this land because it can, and it could accumulate wealth from these lands. However, what Smith said later in his speech is almost prophetic in nature, seemingly acknowledging the future political strife such a decision could cause, but not truly considering its consequences because it is so far off in the future.

“The smaller the states you make, the more senators you will have; but in God's name, when are you going to have them? [...] We want to have the benefit of our constitution in time [...] I am unwilling in framing the fundamental law of this country, to make the vast sacrifice of all that country, in order that sometime in the year 2000 we may have two senators more in the Congress of the United States than we should otherwise have.” (Cary, 1926, p. 151).

Smith acknowledges that one day in the future, this territory in the east may warrant a population deserving of its own representation. However, also acknowledging the population of the territory at that time, he deemed it too big a sacrifice to make for something that would not come to make sense until the year 2000... or perhaps, in the case of Greater Idaho, until the year 2020. At the time, Smith was referring to a period nearly a century and a half in the future. It

would be comparable to a state making political decisions now, based on how something will likely evolve by the year 2168.

Another delegate, La Fayette Grover, who would incidentally go on to become the fourth [Governor of Oregon](#) (National Governors Association, 2025), argued that the land east of the Cascades joining Oregon would be beneficial for the residents of those lands, as they would experience greater economic growth. However, despite this, he also recalled a conversation with a settler in the Walla Walla valley (a valley primarily in Washington but the southern end stretches approximately to present-day Pendleton in Oregon). The settler expressed “His desire that the Cascade Mountains should be our [Oregon’s] eastern line.” (Cary, 1926, p. 153).

It is an interesting anecdotal example of people in that region expressing their desire for the Cascades as a border, and one that is included because it comes from a “common” person and not a politician of the time. Grover also made an economic argument for a larger Oregon, stating:

“If I was a citizen of Wasco County, I would prefer the boundaries reported by the Committee, for reasons, some of which the gentleman from Linn (Mr. Smith) has stated. The city Wasco is bound to become the largest inland town [...] and the business of all western Oregon must pass through the town on its way east...” (Cary, 1926, p. 154)

After bearing much testimony against his notion of where the border should lie, Meigs spoke. He expressed being disheartened that he alone stood for the Cascades as the border but defended his position.

“Gentlemen, say here that it would be for the benefit of the people east of the Cascade Mountains to be included in the state of Oregon? In answer to that argument, let me say that it is entirely gratuitous on your part, gentleman of Oregon, to advance such arguments. We on the other side do not ask for any such showing up of our interests. We are aware of the situation which we occupy...”

Here, Meigs seems to rebuke the Western Oregonians for presuming that they know what is best for the people of the east. It is in some form a familiar argument, an ancestor of the contemporary one made by McCaw in the present day. Indeed, in his closing statement, Meigs argued, or perhaps foretold, that one day when the population center lies in the Willamette Valley, the people of the east would chafe under their governance.

“Our part of the country is not susceptible of a dense population and would best thrive under a government of its own.” (Cary, 1926, p. 157).

However, in the end, Meigs’s attempt to halt Oregon at the Cascades proved futile. When the Convention President called the matter to a vote:

“All those in favor of making the Cascade Mountains the eastern boundary of the state of Oregon will say aye.” It was only the voice of Meigs that rang out across the delegation floor (Cary, 1926, p. 157).

The point of this rather lengthy exploration of Carey’s 1926 publication is one that is entirely necessary for the purpose of this thesis. It provides a glance into how the circumstances for the Greater Idaho movement came to be. In effect, whether the politicians of the time knew it

or not, they were laying the groundwork for a movement championing the dissociation of the Eastern part of the state from the west.

“If you were starting from scratch, if there were no lines already on the map, how would you group people together, thinking what's gonna make the most sense?” McCaw asked. McCaw said that one would never believe it was a good idea to take a sparsely populated rural area and combine it with a highly productive agricultural valley, because the Willamette Valley would always dominate. The state, or rather the borders of the state, McCaw called a historical relic.

McCaw notes that the states' borders were drawn 168 years ago against the wishes of the Eastern Oregonians. And that throughout his life, a tension between the Oregon east of the Cascades and west of the Cascades has always existed.

“It always will exist because we're not the same and we never will be.”

Later in the interview, McCaw would compare the relationship, almost to one colonial in nature. One that Europe had with African peoples during the early 1900s, one of subjection and dominance, and one in which the voices of the subjected are not truly taken into consideration.

“There are people all over this country who feel like they are stuck in a government that doesn't understand them, doesn't represent them, and makes their lives worse. And, and so, of course, those people are going to try to engage in the political process to change that.”

The interview with McCaw was approximately 50 minutes long, during which time McCaw made his position clear. The people of Eastern Oregon, over 150 years ago, were outvoted and forced into a union with the west that they were always in opposition to. This opposition, according to McCaw, was predicated on the notion that the East would be dominated by a more prosperous and populated West. It was also a notion McCaw believes to be proven right by history, as today the West forces its values and desires upon the East just as they did during the Constitutional Convention of 1857, when Meigs was outvoted.

These distinct geographic, economic, and political environments on either side of the Cascades, in McCaw's view, were destined to evolve different cultures and politics due to their naturally occurring geographic differences. It would seem that McCaw believes that the primary factor contributing to the Greater Idaho movement, although motivations are varied, is cultural differences.

Mark Owens

Mark [Owens](#) represents Oregon's 60th House District in the Oregon House of Representatives (Oregon Legislature, 2025). He was formerly a farmer in the Harney County town of Crane, population [158](#) (Data Commons, 2023). His district encompasses all of Baker, Grant, Harney, Lake, and Malheur Counties and part of Deschutes County. In the 2025 Regular Legislative Session, Owens was Chief Sponsor of [House Bill 3488](#), which would have established the Move Oregon-Idaho Border Task Force to examine the feasibility of moving the border and begin conversations on such. The bill was not called for a public Hearing, workshop, or floor vote and died in the House Committee on Rules (Oregon State Legislature, 2025).

Owens said that he was compelled to propose HB 3488 after years of town halls and public meetings in which his constituents would ask him about moving the Oregon-Idaho border. Owens articulated that a lot of people living in his community, and rural communities in Oregon in general, feel disenfranchised by the population centers in Oregon metro areas that have large amounts of influence on policy decisions.

“Sometimes they'll [the Oregon state government] put environmental factors and ecological factors over families.”

Owens emphasized that despite introducing HB 3488, he “hasn't given up on Oregon.” But there are a lot of people who have given up and do not feel heard. Introducing HB 3488 was, in Owens' view, a method to identify for people a way to make their voices heard.

Owens believes that moving the border, which would [require](#) approval from both the Oregon and Idaho state legislatures, as well as the United States Congress (Constitution Annotated, 2025), presents an “insurmountable challenge.” However, despite this challenge, something changed in the 2024 election cycle that compelled Owens to introduce HB 3488.

“Three of the five counties that I've served put it up on the ballot to have the county commissions or county courts not have to have these discussions, and all those failed.”

In November of 2024, Malheur, Baker, and Lake counties all held votes on measures that would have removed the requirements for their board of commissioners to hold regularly

scheduled discussions on moving the Oregon-Idaho border. In all three counties, the measures were defeated. This was the genesis for HB 3488. A bill that Owens hoped would allow the state to hold robust discussions with the community members that would explore next steps, unintended consequences, and generate productive dialogue.

Owens said it is hard to identify a single factor or motivation for why people support moving the border, and that one could ask numerous people and probably get different answers. However, if he had to identify a cause:

“I would probably say more social issues and constitutional issues than I would economics.”

Owens believes that social-cultural issues and constitutional issues, such as those revolving around abortion and gun rights, are more prevalent motivating factors than economic concerns.

Owens said he has given the issue of the rural-urban divide in Oregon a lot of thought over the past decade, and that he believes he has come to his conclusion on what is causing it. According to Owens, it comes down to a fundamental disagreement on the role of government in society. People in urban areas have a desire, if not a need, for government assistance on things such as food, housing, loans, etc. — and they expect the government to be integrated into their lives.

However, in rural and “frontier Oregon” as Owens described it, many community members see government as a hindrance and do not appreciate it being intertwined in their lives. They (rural Oregonians) would rather the government solely focus on the core functions needed to keep a society operating — law enforcement, roads, and basic infrastructure. This, in part, stems from the fact that many rural communities are based on natural resource economies, and the government introduces regulatory restrictions that hinder the ability of these communities to control their economies, and thus their communities, as they see fit.

Owens was asked directly if he supports moving the border, and he said that because the issue is something that is important to the constituents he has sworn to represent, it has become important to him. He does not believe that the feasibility of moving the border would increase if HB 3488 were to pass, but he does believe that it would help identify areas of policy that Oregon can improve on, so his constituents are better represented and included in policy discussions.

Owens was also asked if he thinks that the majority of people in Eastern Oregon support the greater Idaho movement. He said that while it is hard to be certain, because a minority of people in the region voted on ballot measures in relation to moving the border, he believes it is roughly 50-50.

“It's fairly split through my community of those that would still have hope that we can improve Oregon. And I still think there's a good subset that have abandoned that thought and want to do something else.”

Owens said that the driving factor behind this sentiment is that people in Eastern Oregon feel that the social values of the western part of the state have shifted over time to be more

progressive. These issues include gun rights, LGBTQ prevalence, and abortion rights. They feel that “Those types of conservative social values have been under attack.”

“I feel that the majority of my community feel that the majority of Oregonians probably have a different social set than they did 30 years ago. Not saying that's right nor wrong. I just think that's the perception of a majority of my community.”

The Owens interview helps to shape our understanding of what is motivating the Greater Idaho movement. According to Owens, it is being shaped by a feeling in Eastern Oregon, that may not be held by all but perhaps by a majority, that the values of Oregon have shifted so much that they represent an active attack of the east’s more conservative values. While Owens himself may not support moving the border, he hopes that helping to facilitate conversations about such action will provide insight into how the grievances of Eastern Oregonians can be addressed. And that these grievances are not without merit. The Owens interview also seems to point to cultural differences as the primary basis for the Greater Idaho movement. While also acknowledging that economic factors play a large role.

Beth Upshaw

Beth Upshaw is a lifelong Oregonian. Originally from Grant County, she now resides in the city of Union, in the far Eastern county bearing the same name, Union County. Upshaw grew up on a cattle ranch, a ranch that was run by her father and his father before him.

“I'm a third-generation born and raised Eastern Oregon woman,” Upshaw said in describing herself.

In 2020, Union County residents voted 52.4% in [favor](#) of their county commission holding meetings to discuss the issue of Greater Idaho (Ballotpedia, 2025). The county voted for Donald Trump in the 2024 Presidential Election by over [68%](#) (Oregon Secretary of State, 2024) — in nearly all respects, it is a conservative county. Knowing this information, one may assume that Upshaw supports the Greater Idaho movement. However, Upshaw does not.

Upshaw is a member of the League of Women Voters of Oregon, Union County. A non-partisan organization that aims to provide electoral information to voters.

Upshaw said that at the moment, the Greater Idaho movement has a very large voice, but that it does not speak for all Eastern Oregonians. To properly examine Upshaw's claim, it is important to see how, by what margin, the Greater Idaho movement was approved on a county-by-county basis, and what percentage of voters turned out.

1	County	Year	Yes Votes	No Votes	Yes %	No %	Registered Voters	Turnout
2	Jefferson	2020	5,757	5,553	50.90%	49.10%	15,590	~72.5%
3	Union	2020	7,435	6,753	52.40%	47.60%	18,525	~76.6%
4	Baker	2021	3,346	2,474	57.49%	42.51%	12,596	~46.2%
5	Grant	2021	1,471	896	62.15%	37.85%	5,422	~43.7%
6	Harney	2021	1,583	921	63.22%	36.78%	5,486	~45.6
7	Lake	2021	1,510	513	74.64%	25.36%	5,425	~37.3%
8	Malheur	2021	3,059	2,592	54.13%	45.87%	16,890	~33.5%
9	Sherman	2021	430	260	62.32%	37.68%	1,410	~48.9%
10	Douglas	2022	16,791	18,659	47.37%	52.63%	88,032	~40.3%
11	Josephine	2022	13,619	14,344	48.70%	51.30%	69,720	~40.1%
12	Klamath	2022	9,649	7,278	57.00%	43.00%	50,737	~33.4%
13	Morrow	2022	2,386	1,546	60.68%	39.32%	6,874	~57.2%
14	Wheeler	2022	472	334	58.56%	41.44%	1,106	~72.9%
15	Wallowa	2023	1,752	1,745	50.10%	49.90%	6,386	~54.8%
16	Crook	2024	5,149	4,493	53.40%	46.60%	20,828	~46.3%

Table 2: Eastern Oregon County vote tabulations on Greater Idaho measures.

Above is a spreadsheet of counties that have voted on Greater Idaho measures. Note that for counties that have voted more than once, the most recent election data was utilized. As visible in the graph, counties in Eastern Oregon voted for or against the measures with varying degrees of support and turnout over the course of four years. However, what this data illustrates is that of 324,037 people in Oregon who have had the opportunity to vote for Greater Idaho, only 74,409, or 22.96% of people, have. This evidence seems to reinforce Upshaw’s claim that the movement does not speak for all Eastern Oregonians.

However, just because Upshaw doesn't support the movement and doesn't believe it speaks for the people of Eastern Oregon, she said that doesn't mean they do not have valid concerns. Upshaw, like McCaw, brought up the issue of wolves in Oregon as an example of something that people in the western part of the state do not understand.

“Understand, you lose a cow [to wolves], that's like 10 years of inventory,”
Upshaw said

Upshaw also said that at times it feels like people in Eastern Oregon are not being heard
by their counterparts in the west.

“We're the minority of the population, but we're the majority of land, right? And I
think that's important to know,” Upshaw said. “I'm not necessarily saying we need
more votes. I'm just saying we need to be heard.”

Upshaw expressed concerns that the Greater Idaho movement is spreading
misinformation. She recalled attending a Union County Commission meeting, at which
redrawing the border was being discussed. Upshaw recalled a farmer, whom she knew, speaking
to the commissioners about how Idaho has a better education system than Oregon, and that was
one of the reasons why the border should be redrawn. Upshaw said that the farmer was spreading
misinformation which is dangerous.

Note that while it cannot be ascertained what specific points the farmer was making,
Idaho ranked [39th](#) amongst states in school system quality in 2025 (McCann, 2025) and [17th](#) in
K-12 achievement in 2021 (Education Week, 2021). Oregon ranks 45th and 42nd, respectively,
in the same metrics. This would seem to reinforce the unnamed farmers' claims, however, again
what was said cannot be ascertained.

However, what really concerned Upshaw was that the words the farmer was speaking at the meeting did not sound like his own. Upshaw believed someone had written his testimony for him to say at the commission meeting.

“The farmer that spoke with the county commissioner, I know him, and I know that's not his words.”

Upshaw wanted to make it clear that while she does believe many people in Eastern Oregon support Greater Idaho, the movement does not speak for all in Eastern Oregon. She pointed out that the Greater Idaho measures were not binding resolutions of border relocation support, but rather non binding measures aimed at facilitating conversation within the respective counties.

“I don't know a lot, but I know enough that I'm born and raised here, and we don't all feel this way. And that story does have to be told right, no matter what.”

Upshaw said that she does not know for certain why people support the Greater Idaho movement, but suspects it stems from a feeling of not being heard by Oregonians on the other side of the Cascades. And this sentiment, Upshaw said, is not without basis.

Ultimately, Upshaw believes the Greater Idaho movement represents a symptom rather than a solution, stemming from a profound sense of being unheard by decision-makers across the Cascade mountains. While she opposes border relocation and expresses concern about misinformation within the movement, she empathizes with the underlying frustration driving support.

Chapter 6: Survey Results

Introduction to Results:

As previously discussed in the methodology section, the number of usable survey respondents is not high enough to be statistically significant or accurate. While 123 respondents took the survey, the majority either did not support the Greater Idaho movement, did not reside in the State of Oregon, or failed to complete the survey. Only 41 surveys were adequate for use. Because this number is far below that needed for statistical significance, these survey responses should only be used as a reference point for understanding the Greater Idaho movement and should not be treated as representative of the entire movement's supporter base.

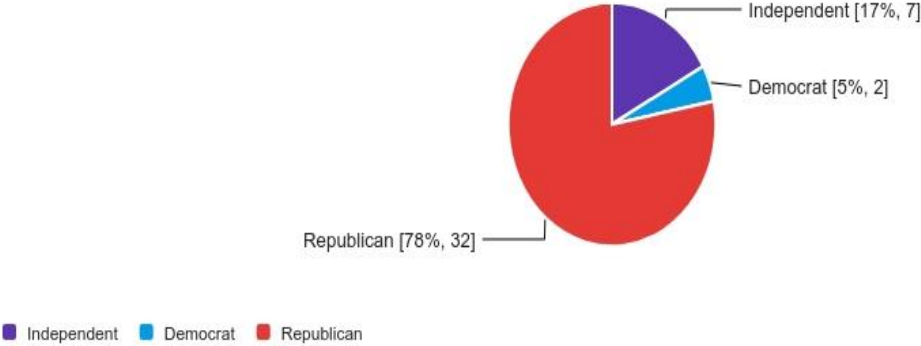
These responses instead provide qualitative insights into potential motivations and characteristics of some movement supporters. They offer insight into certain perspectives that can help contextualize the movement's appeal, but cannot be extrapolated to make definitive claims about all supporters. The limited sample size prevents meaningful statistical analysis, such as correlation studies or demographic generalizations.

When interpreting these results, it is important to acknowledge this as exploratory research that may inform future, more comprehensive studies of the Greater Idaho movement. The data points to possible trends that warrant further investigation through more robust sampling methods. Future research would benefit from larger sample sizes, stratified sampling techniques, and inclusion of non-supporters for comparative analysis.

Politics of Greater Idaho Supporters:

Table 3: Survey responses on partisan affiliation.

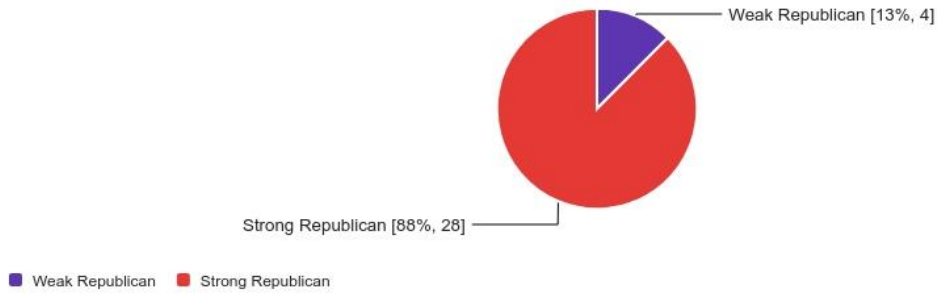
Q3 - Do you consider yourself more of a Republican, a Democrat, or Independent?



For respondents who identified as Republican:

Table 4: Survey response on Republican partisanship.

Q5 - How strongly do you identify as a Republican?



For respondents who identified as an Independent:

Q6 - As an Independent, to which party do you lean?

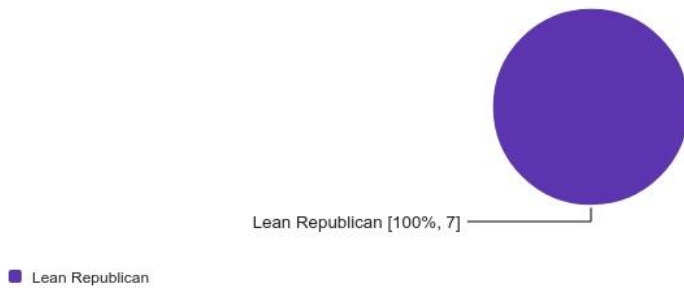


Table 5: Survey response on Independent lean.

Q7 - What best describes your political ideology?

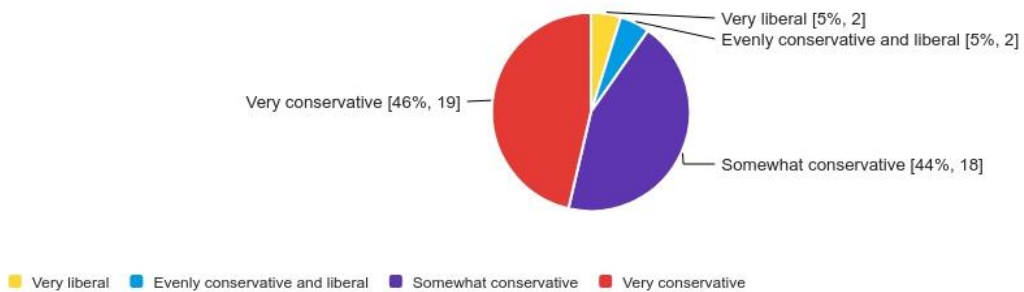


Table 6: Survey response on political ideology.

Q8 - Who did you vote for in the 2024 Presidential Election?

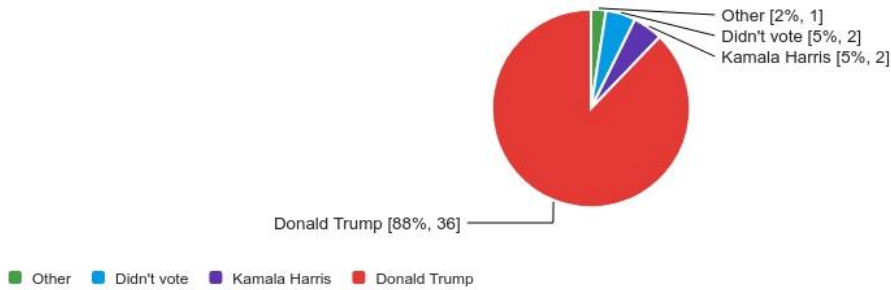


Table 7: Survey response on 2024 vote choice.

Analysis:

Keeping in mind that the data provided above can only be used to offer insight and context into Greater Idaho supporters, the data may suggest that supporters of the Greater Idaho movement tend to be strong partisans. This is because 78% of respondents self-identified as Republican, and 88% of self-identified Republicans identified as "strong" Republicans. 88% of respondents indicated they voted for Donald Trump in the 2024 Presidential Election. Of the seven respondents who identified as Independents, all identified themselves as Republican-leaning independents. The number of Democrats who identified as Greater Idaho supporters, two, is negligible. 90% of respondents identified as either very or somewhat conservative, seeming to reinforce the quantitative evidence that the Greater Idaho movement is comprised almost entirely of conservative Oregonians.

Motivations of Greater Idaho Supporters:

Q9 - Would you agree that culture in the state of Idaho reflects your values more than culture in the state of Oregon does?

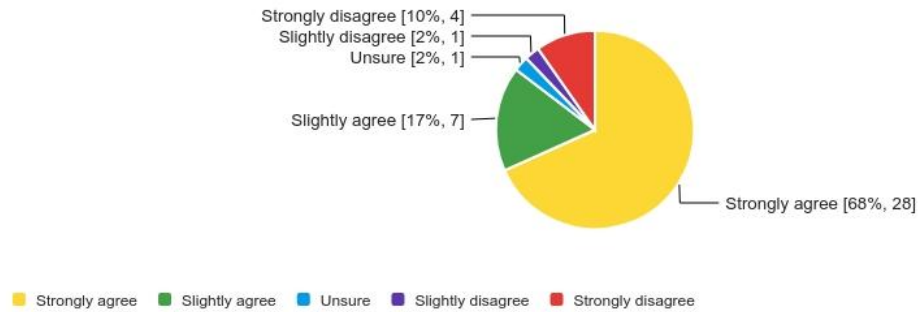


Table 8: Survey response on culture question.

Q10 - Do you agree that your best interests are represented in the Oregon State Legislature?

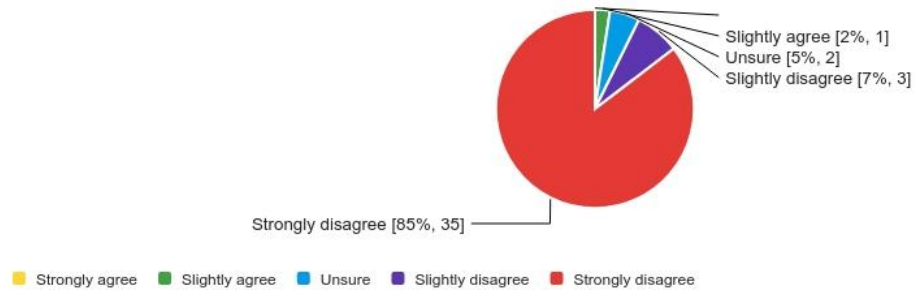


Table 9: Survey response on representation.

Q11 - Do you agree with the idea that joining Idaho will improve your personal financial situation?

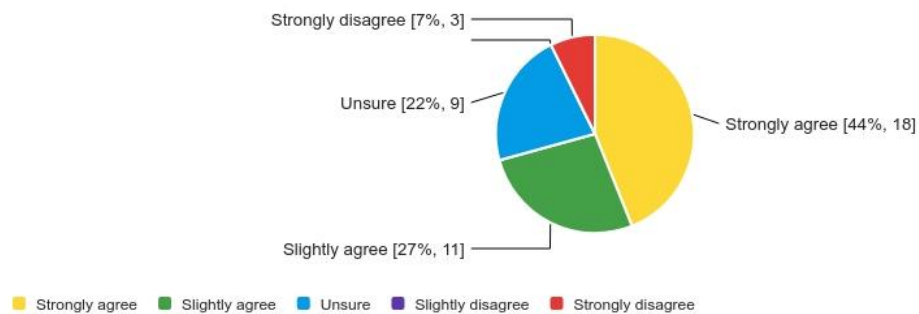


Table 10: Survey response on personal finances.

Q20 - Do you agree with the idea that joining Idaho will improve the financial situation of your city and county?

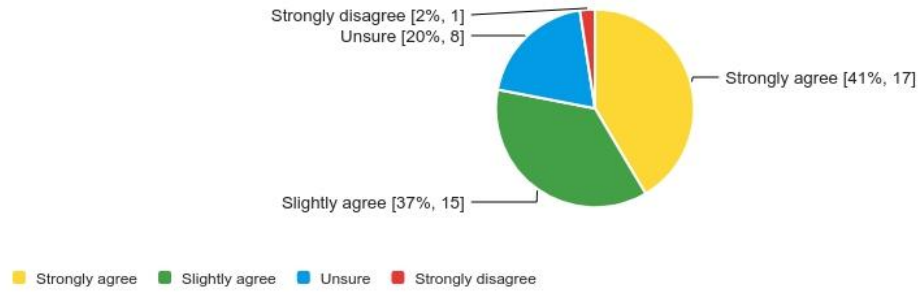


Table 11: Survey response on local finances.

Analysis:

Keeping in mind that the data provided above can only be used to offer insight and context into Greater Idaho supporters, the data may suggest that supporters overwhelmingly believe that their own cultural values are more aligned with the state of Idaho than the state of Oregon. 68% of respondents strongly agree that their culture is better represented by Idaho, and 85% either strongly agree or somewhat agree.

The survey question that garnered the strongest sentiments from participants was on the issue of representation. 85% of respondents strongly agreed and 92% strongly or slightly agreed that their interests are not being represented by the Oregon State Legislature.

Interestingly, the section in which respondents least related to was in relation to whether moving the border to be part of Idaho is a financially wise decision. 44% of respondents strongly agreed, and 71% of respondents strongly or slightly agreed that joining Idaho would improve their personal financial position. Similarly, 41% of respondents strongly agreed, and 78% of

respondents strongly or slightly agreed that joining Idaho would improve the financial position of their city or county.

These responses would seem to suggest that Greater Idaho supporters' primary motivations for moving the border are that they do not feel heard or represented in the Oregon legislature, and that they are more culturally similar to Idaho. At the same time, while supporters do generally believe that joining Idaho would improve the financial positions of themselves and their communities, that is not the primary motivating factor. These results are echoed in the qualitative data as well.

A copy of the survey and the full dataset of survey used responses will be included in the supporting materials.

Chapter 7: Research Limitations

Time and Distribution Challenges

It is important to acknowledge several methodological limitations that impacted this thesis. The research timeline presented a significant constraint, as the thesis topic was not established until January 15, 2025, with the prospectus completed on March 31, 2025. This compressed timeframe necessarily affected multiple aspects of the research design and implementation.

The survey response rate represents a notable limitation, with 41 usable responses obtained against the target of 200 needed for statistical significance. This limitation stemmed from several factors, including geographic challenges in accessing the target population. The Greater Idaho movement supporters are predominantly located in rural Eastern Oregon, approximately three hours from Eugene, making in-person survey distribution logistically difficult given academic and employment obligations. While online distribution offered an alternative approach, it relied heavily on third-party sharing. Though several key movement figures and Republican county organizations assisted with distribution, the majority of county parties contacted did not respond to distribution requests.

Potential Participant Barriers

Several participant-related factors may have influenced response rates. The researcher's professional affiliation with the Democratic Party of Lane County and legislative internship with a Democratic lawmaker—both publicly visible through basic online searches—may have

deterred participation from Republican-affiliated organizations. Additionally, individuals supporting the Greater Idaho movement may have reservations about participating in research conducted by a state university, potentially due to government-skeptical perspectives. The technological requirements for survey participation also potentially excluded older demographics less familiar with digital interfaces. As evidenced during in-person recruitment efforts in Prineville, where an older woman who wanted to take the survey but did not have a smart phone was unable to access the survey.

Research Context Challenges

The pioneering nature of this research presented its own methodological challenges. The absence of prior in-depth academic studies on the Greater Idaho movement meant there were no established research frameworks or methodological precedents to build upon. This limitation necessitated the development of original approaches to understanding the movement's underlying motivational factors without the benefit of existing scholarly works on this particular issue.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The Greater Idaho movement represents a localized manifestation of the urban-rural divide in American politics. Through interviews with key stakeholders and survey data from supporters, this research reveals some of the complex relationships and motivations driving the movement. While economic concerns, particularly regarding the use of state funds and regulatory policies contribute to rural discontent, this thesis demonstrates that cultural affinity with Idaho's values and a deep sense of political disenfranchisement by those in Eastern Oregon serve as the primary catalysts for the movement's momentum. This thesis has also shed light onto the true levels of support for the movement throughout the Eastern parts of Oregon.

The findings suggest that the movement transcends mere policy disagreements, reflecting deeper questions about identity, representation, and allegiances to one's community. Rural Eastern Oregonians' pursuit of state boundary changes highlights fundamental tensions between the Eastern and western parts of the state, and at times these tensions turn into resentment and anger. The roots for the Greater Idaho movement can be traced back to the founding of the state of Oregon, and it seems that the founders of the state despite foreseeing the political disunity that might arise from merging two geographically dissimilar and divided lands, chose to do so nonetheless. This research contributes to a broader understanding of contemporary regionalism and offers the first scholarly examination of a movement that has captured substantial local support yet remained academically unexplored.

Future research should expand upon this foundation through larger-scale quantitative studies and comparative analyses with similar movements across the United States. Policymakers in Oregon face a challenging question: whether to address (or not address) the underlying grievances through policy reform or consider more fundamental changes to governance structures. If lawmakers in Salem chose to maintain the status quo, it can be inferred from historical precedent within the state, that the Greater Idaho movement or some movement resembling it will continue to manifest itself in Eastern Oregon. Regardless of the Greater Idaho movement's ultimate success, it reveals important insights about rural identity and political representation that deserve continued scholarly and practical attention.

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