

votes, that gives some clout to the Republican legislators who represent rural areas.”

And, as the South did in Congress throughout much of the 20th century, rural areas are able to increase their clout simply by giving their representatives long careers and thus the power that seniority entails. That’s despite the fact that a pair of Supreme Court decisions in the early 1960s—*Baker v. Carr* and *Gray v. Sanders*—ended the ability of rural areas to dominate state legislatures through the old system, in some states, of apportioning districts by counties rather than population.

Rural areas don’t suffer the kind of image problems that big cities and wealthy suburbs tend to have in state capitols. In fact, the opposite is often true. People may not live in rural areas, but they’re still inclined to see that the countryside receives its fair share—or maybe more—from the state. Individual legislators themselves may view the world through a split lens. With rural areas losing so much ground, many districts are split between half-empty rural counties and slices of suburbia that give them a population base.

A study by Gerald Gamm and Thad Kousser published in 2013 in the *American Political Science Review* found that major cities—those with populations above 100,000—have had little luck passing state legislation. From 1880 until 2000, passage rates for bills that benefited big cities directly were consistently a quarter to a third less likely to pass than were those that dealt with smaller cities and towns. “Year after year, while most bills affecting smaller districts pass, most big-city bills fail,” Gamm and Kousser conclude.

After urban delegations got bigger, following the 1960s Supreme Court reapportionment decisions, the big-city batting average only got worse. As they became more numerous, metropolitan legislators were more likely to break ranks, splitting not just on partisan votes but on measures meant to help out their own areas. “It appears that legislators from the rest of the state follow the cues of the big-city delegation and split when its members divide, often dooming bills,” according to Kousser and Gamm. That’s not a problem rural legislators have had.