The Disproportionate Effect of the Labor Force Exodus on Rural Communities

Hummel, William (School: Brookings High School)
Tummala, Aditya (School: Brookings High School)

America’s rural communities are home to 57 million people and contain 97% of the nation’s land. These communities are responsible for producing 10% of the country’s gross domestic product. However, these communities are facing an economic crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the issues that rural America faces are incredibly diverse, it is the unique impacts on key industries, caused by the labor force exodus, that are causing rural communities to progressively deteriorate. Data compiled from the Central Data Repository was used to analyze rural economies and the labor exodus’ impact on rural communities. A national survey was conducted to fill gaps and address discord in sociological research. Data from our school was also compiled to analyze brain drain within our community. The combined results showed that the labor force exit's impact on small businesses and transportation, key industries in non-metropolitan economies, are disproportionately impacting rural communities and prolonging the effects of the pandemic-era recession. It was found that during the pandemic, employees moved from small businesses to larger, more established and stable firms. Consequently, small businesses significantly reduced hiring or stopped hiring altogether. In the future, to improve rural America’s responses to economic recessions, redefining what constitutes rural would be beneficial for funding infrastructure in these communities and improving rural resilience during economic recessions. Through the use of focused and comparative analysis demonstrated in the present study, policies targeted towards recession recovery can become more efficient and effective, improving the overall resilience of rural America.

Awards Won:

Central Intelligence Agency: First Award: $1000 award