

# Idaho Urban Areas Trending Democrat

*Randy Stapilus/Ridenbaugh Press*

One of the closest measures, coast to coast, of whether a place is likely to lean Republican or Democratic – now and in recent years – is whether it's urban or rural. Urban generally goes Democratic, rural Republican.

That's part of the reason suburban areas, which are a bit in between, have been political battlegrounds, in Idaho and elsewhere. But apart from suburbs, there's another variation on the theme: Small to mid-sized cities, of which Idaho has a bunch, and which are also sort of in-betweeners.

The largest Idaho city and one true metro center, Boise, has been trending Democratic, running deep blue in its downtown and north area and getting more purple as you move further away, transitioning into bright red in the suburban areas, which have not (yet, or maybe ever) turned into battlegrounds. But what about Idaho's other cities?

Several of them fit the thesis: Many of the central city areas around Idaho are true battlegrounds or even tint a little blue, especially for legislative seats and sometimes statewide and county offices. Other cities, not so much.

The most Democratic semi-urban area, the Ketchum-Hailey area in the Wood River Valley, of course isn't a large city but the central areas have a real urban feel, and the same atmosphere of a variety of people, lots of traffic, cultural links to urban areas, and people coming and going. In many ways they fit the pattern and character, as do the small cities of Driggs and Victor in resort-oriented Teton County.

Lewiston and Pocatello are cities with long Democratic histories but which are much more competitive now. The central Lewiston legislative district, or as close to it as exists (it also includes the rest of Nez Perce and Lewis counties), is home to some strongly competitive races this year. The most interesting may be the Senate contest between Republican Jeff Nasset (who defeated an incumbent Republican, Dan Johnson, in the primary) and Democrat John Bradbury, a former district judge.

Most of Kootenai County is solidly Republican, but one of the hottest legislative races in Idaho this fall is taking place in the central Coeur d'Alene district. The district 4 House B contest, between Republican Kathy Sims (who has been a legislator) and Democrat Anne Nesse, is reputed to be close, and this is based on more than speculation. In the last decade in a similar predecessor district, Democrats held the two House seats here exactly half the time. This seat is on the short list of realistic Democratic legislative pickup opportunities.

Central Idaho Falls is much less Republican, or more Democratic, than anything around it, but a few terms back it actually elected a Democrat to the House, and that area has seen other close legislative races. It may again, though this year it remains a tough catch for Democrats.

Then there's Nampa, Caldwell and Twin Falls, which would make a useful political science study. In theory, all three have the components that other, more Democratic or at least more competitive, mid-sized cities have. Democrats have talked in recent years about making inroads into each of them, and there are demographic reasons to think they might shift a bit toward purple. There's been no significant evidence so far at least that any of them are shifting. Down the road, the possibility remains.

Most of the rest of Idaho? Think of them as non-battleground states in a presidential year.

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