

ABSTRACT

The 2008 presidential election and Sarah Palin's use of the term "real" America sparked a national debate about whether this concept further divided the nation into two distant parts, Red America and Blue America. For many the term Red America is meant to speak to "average" Americans who live in "average" places and earn "average" incomes. This is a major issue because the idea that "real" American places are a common occurrence is incorrect. Using an extensive literature review and advanced GIS techniques this study uses general social data to isolate actual geographic areas based on normative archetypes from political discourse, areas referred to as "real" and "fake" America. The study also challenged the notion of "real" America by finding the most "average" American places, the areas that best reflect the nation as a whole, and produced an "average" American landscape. The final part of the study compared these outputs and deciphered whether an area's 'realness or averageness' has a connection to recent political voting trends. To be clear the point of the study is not to find a place to label the 'real America', the point is to use the search itself as a means to demonstrate a problem. The question is not does the "real" America exist, there will be places that closely resemble the concept, the question is whether or not the "real" America speaks to a sizable percentage of the US population, and whether or not it describes the living conditions of the 'average American'.