



The Associated Press-NORC
Center for Public Affairs Research

HOW THE URBAN/RURAL POLITICAL DIVIDE PLAYS OUT IN AMERICA'S SUBURBS

America's suburbs have been competitive battlegrounds in recent elections. But a new UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll finds that, contrary to popular perceptions of suburbanites as swing voters,¹ there are actually fewer true independents in the suburbs compared to urban and rural areas of the country.

While the average overall opinions of suburbanites appear moderate, the survey shows that this is because the suburbs include a mix of individuals who strongly identify with the two main political parties. Indeed, fewer suburbanites identify as political independents than either urban or rural residents (15 percent vs. 25 percent and 30 percent, respectively).

Moreover, the poll finds that the ideological divisions among suburbanites are closely linked to the types of communities they have lived in before. In particular, suburbanites who have lived in urban areas previously are significantly more liberal in their political attitudes and voting behavior than those who have spent their entire lives in either suburban or rural communities.

For example, 58 percent of suburbanites who have previously lived in urban communities report they voted for a Democratic candidate for Congress in the 2018 midterm elections compared with 34 percent of suburbanites who have never lived in urban communities.

This split within suburbia parallels the broader political differences between Americans who live in rural communities and those living in urban communities.²



© 2018 AP Photo/Mark Lennihan (top left); © 2018 AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez (top right); © 2012 AP Photo/Tony Dejak (bottom)

Three Things You Should Know

About the UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll
Among American Adults:

- 1) Thirty-five percent of rural residents believe the country is headed in the right direction, while only 17 percent of urban residents say the same.
- 2) While suburbs are often viewed as home to swing voters, only 15 percent of suburbanites identify as independents compared with 25 percent of urban residents and 30 percent of rural residents.
- 3) Only 27 percent of suburbanites who have lived in an urban area favor building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border compared to the 41 percent of suburbanites with no urban living experience.

¹ New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/01/us/politics/republicans-trump-house.html>

² APNEWS. <https://www.apnews.com/226c77ee42f44f3c8ff1ca210eae9286>

The poll illustrates the urban and rural divide in political beliefs across a range of issues such as immigration, climate change, and views about the direction of the country.

The nationwide poll was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from January 16 to 20, 2019, using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,010 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.3 percentage points.

Among the key findings from the report:

- Urban residents are more likely to be Democrats than Republicans (58 percent vs. 17 percent), while rural residents are more likely to be Republicans than Democrats (42 percent vs. 28 percent).
- Fifty percent of those living in rural areas favor building a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border compared with 35 percent of suburbanites and 25 percent of urban residents.
- Rural residents are less likely to worry about the threat of climate change than either urban or suburban residents (37 percent vs. 60 percent and 56 percent, respectively).
- Suburbanites who have lived in urban areas before are more likely than other suburbanites to value diversity where they live (32 percent vs. 17 percent). Suburbanites without urban experience are more likely to value living near extended family (50 percent vs. 36 percent).
- Only 28 percent of suburbanites with urban living experience approve of the way that President Donald Trump is handling his job as president, while 42 percent of suburbanites with no urban living experience say the same.
- Only 30 percent of suburbanites who have lived in urban areas feel personally concerned about the potential threat of illegal immigration compared with 50 percent of the rest of suburbanites.

THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DEMOGRAPHIC AND ATTITUDINAL DIFFERENCES TIED TO THE TYPES OF COMMUNITIES WHERE AMERICANS LIVE, BUT RESIDENTS OF THESE AREAS HAVE SIMILAR PRIORITIES IN CHOOSING A COMMUNITY.

The poll highlights significant attitudinal differences among residents of different types of communities and also confirms demographic differences between rural, urban, and suburban areas found in previous studies.³

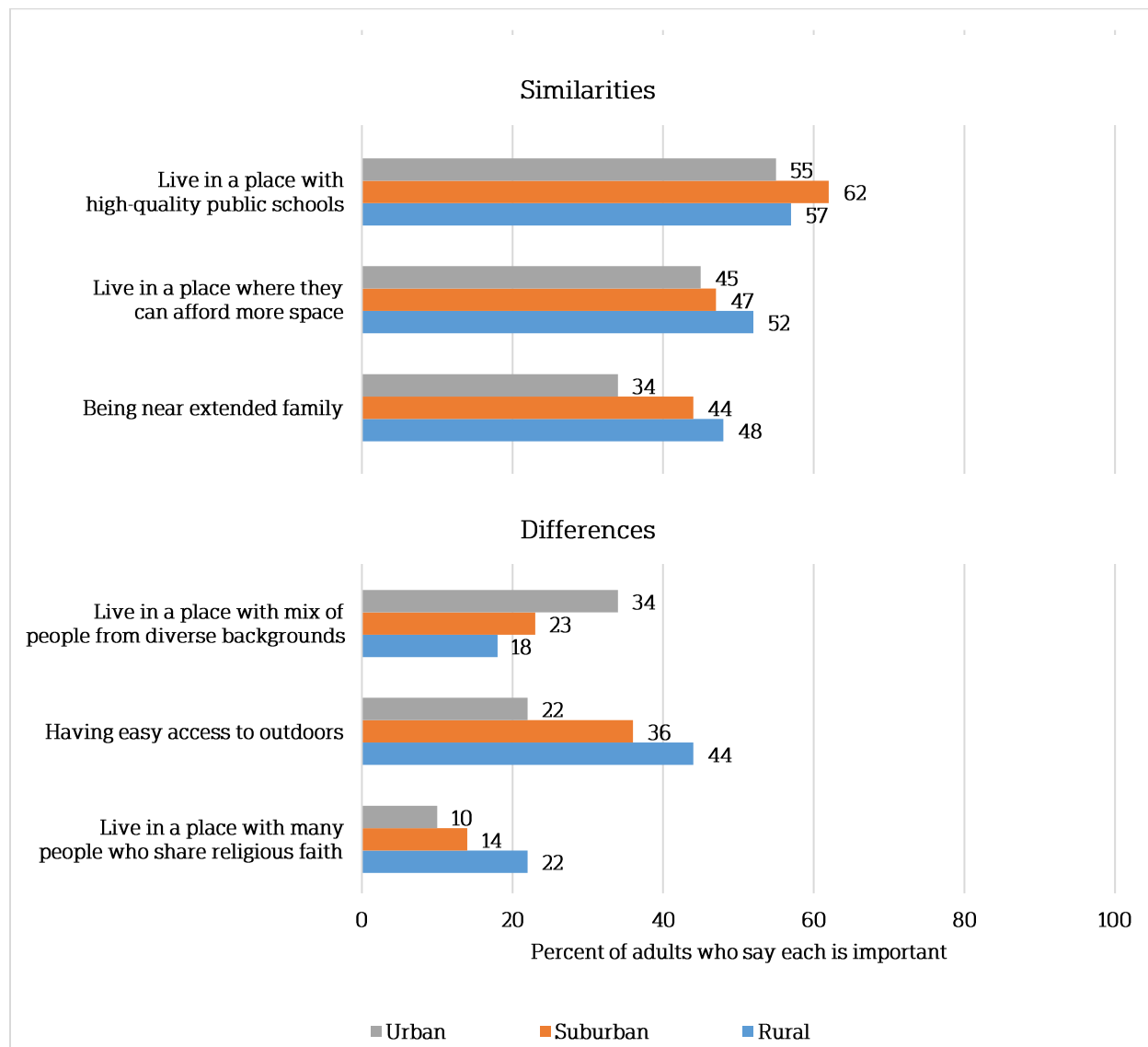
The results show urban communities tend to have more young adults and more racial and ethnic minorities than rural or suburban areas. Demographic characteristics such as race and age are often associated with ideological and political attitudes, and it is difficult to untangle the independent effects on political beliefs of different types of communities with the various demographic makeups of these communities. However, even when controlling for these demographic characteristics in statistical models, the data still reveal wide differences in attitudes between urban, suburban, and rural residents.

³ Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/graphics/election-2018-votecast-poll/>

When it comes to deciding where to live, urban, rural, and suburban residents⁴ are similarly likely to value having high-quality public schools, living in a place where they can afford more space, and being near extended family.

However, urban and rural residents do place more importance on certain features of their communities. For example, urban residents place more value than others on living in a place with a mix of people from diverse backgrounds, while rural residents place more importance on having access to the outdoors and living in a place with many people who share the same religious faith.

More urban residents value diverse communities, while more rural residents value the outdoors.



Question: Imagine that you are moving to another community. In deciding where to live, how important would each of the following be to you?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

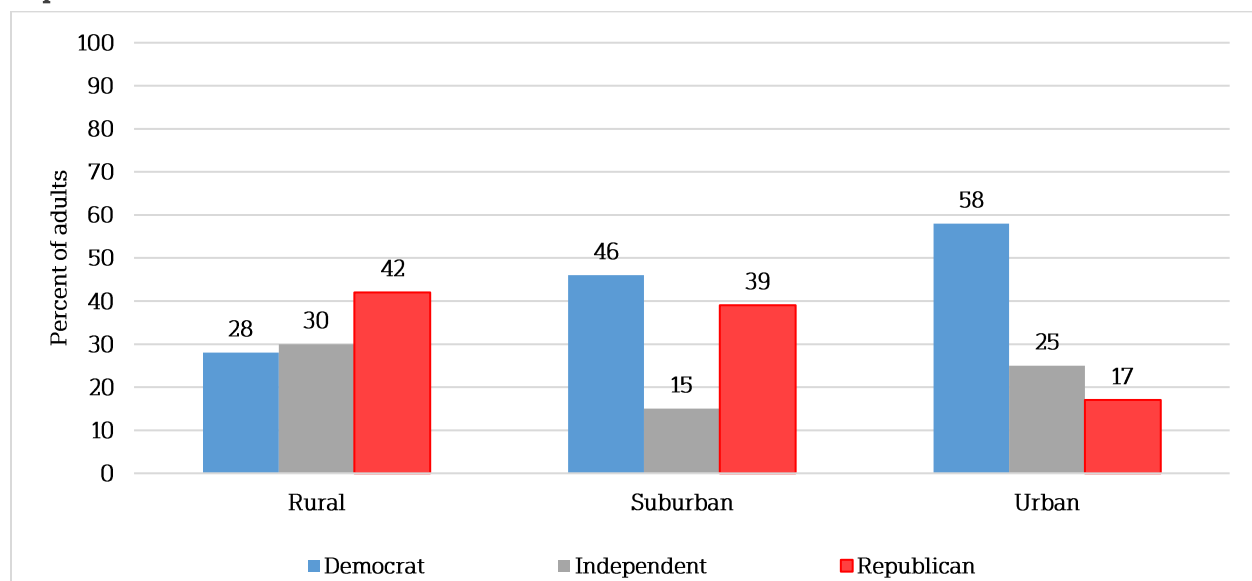
⁴ Survey respondents were asked to self-describe the community where they live. Forty-six percent report residing in a suburban location, while 25 percent report urban and 27 percent report rural locations.

WHEN IT COMES TO POLITICAL LEANINGS, URBAN RESIDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE LIBERAL AND IDENTIFY AS DEMOCRATS, WHILE RURAL RESIDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE CONSERVATIVE AND IDENTIFY AS REPUBLICANS.

The public's political ideology and partisanship varies greatly across types of communities. Urban (28 percent) and suburban (22 percent) residents are far more likely to identify as liberal than rural residents (12 percent). Likewise, rural residents are far more likely to identify as conservative (48 percent) than suburban (30 percent) and urban residents (19 percent).

Urban dwellers are more likely to identify as Democrats or lean Democratic while rural dwellers are more likely to identify as Republicans or lean Republican. There are fewer suburbanites who identify as independents than urban or rural residents.

A majority of urban residents identify as Democrats, while most rural residents identify as Republicans.

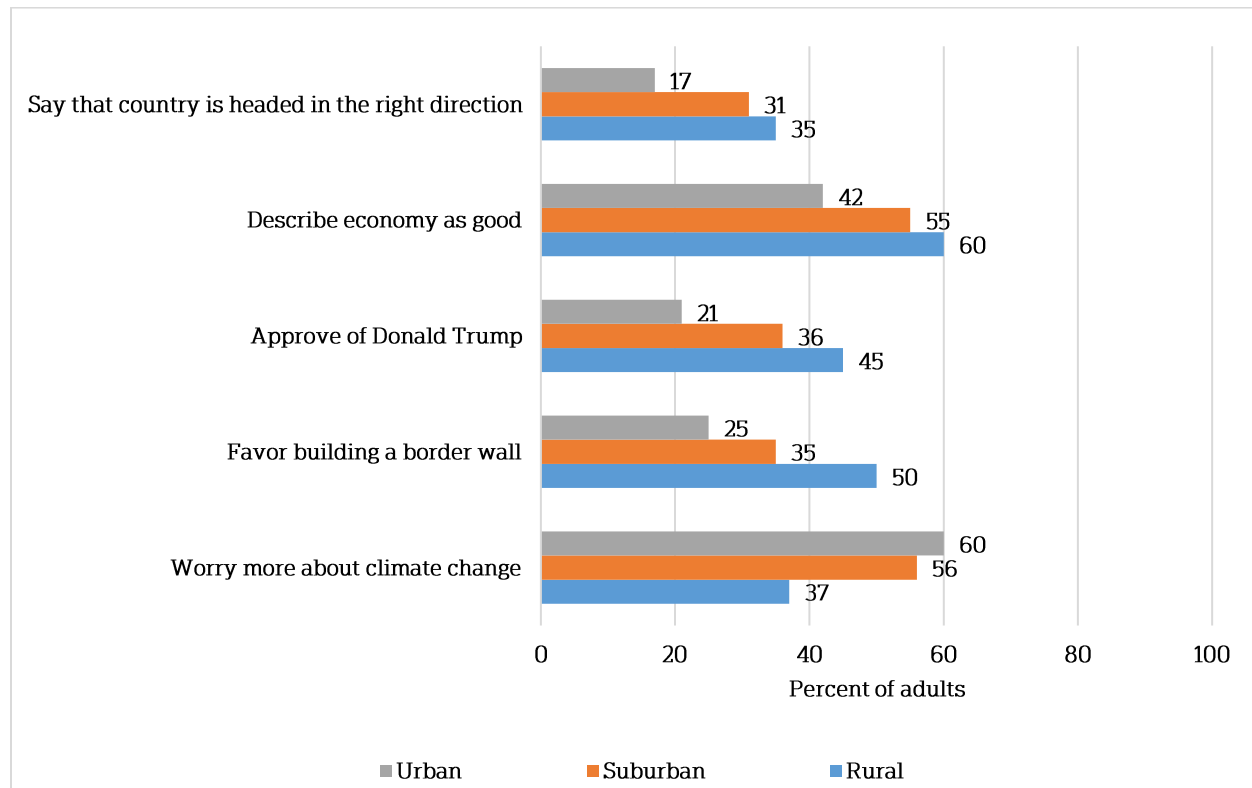


Questions: Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an independent or none of these? / Do you consider yourself a strong or moderate [Democrat/Republican]? Do you lean more toward the Democrats or the Republicans?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

In the 2018 midterm elections, 48 percent of urban residents report voting for the Democratic candidate compared with 45 percent of suburban residents and 26 percent of rural residents. Conversely, 39 percent of rural residents and 33 percent of suburban residents say they voted for the Republican candidate, while only 18 percent of those from urban communities report doing the same.

Urban residents tend to be more pessimistic about the direction of the country, and there are stark urban/rural differences in opinions toward immigration and climate change.



Questions: See study topline for full question wordings at www.apnorc.org

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

The political divide between urban, suburban, and rural residents extends to beliefs about the direction of the country and views on immigration and climate change.

Twenty-one percent of those from urban areas approve of the job Trump is doing, while 45 percent of rural residents and 36 percent of suburban residents approve.

While 35 percent of rural residents and 31 percent of suburban residents believe the country is headed in the right direction, only 17 percent of urban residents say the same. Further, majorities of rural and suburban residents describe the economy as good compared with 42 percent of urban residents.

Americans' immigration attitudes are closely tied to the types of communities in which they live. Only 25 percent of urban residents favor building a wall on the U.S.-Mexican border compared to 35 percent of suburbanites and half of rural residents.

Rural residents are less likely than urban or suburban residents to worry about the threat of climate change (37 percent vs. 60 percent and 56 percent, respectively).

DESPITE THE MIXED ATTITUDES OF SUBURBAN COMMUNITIES OVERALL, THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT IDEOLOGICAL SPLIT AMONGST SUBURBANITES TIED TO WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE PREVIOUSLY LIVED IN URBAN COMMUNITIES.

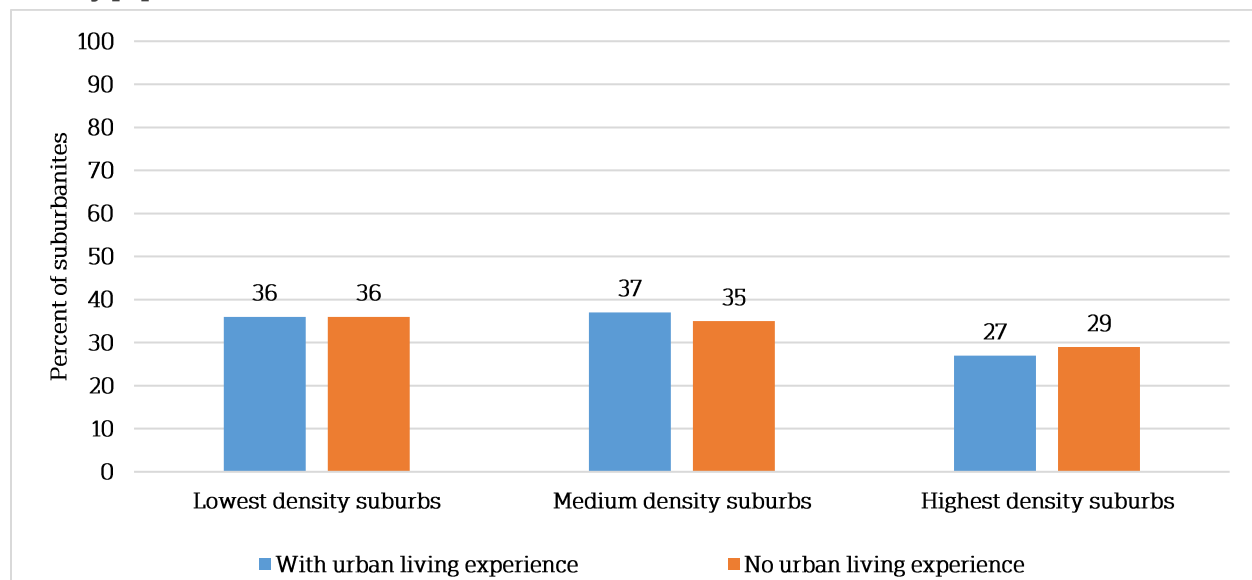
The suburbs are often competitive political battlegrounds in elections, and there is a perception that suburbanites tend to be politically independent as a result. However, the poll shows there is a strong

partisan divide within the suburbs, and differences in political attitudes are related to the types of communities suburbanites have lived in previously.

Slightly less than half of Americans report living in a suburban community, and among those suburbanites, 44 percent say they have previously lived in an urban area at some point in their life.

It is not simply the case that suburbanites who have lived in urban areas previously live in different types of suburbs than those who have only spent time in rural or suburban communities. Twenty-eight percent of these urban-suburbanites live in densely populated suburbs, as do 30 percent of other suburbanites. In other words, suburbanites who have lived in urban areas before are living in communities with similar population densities to other suburbanites. They are not more likely than other suburbanites to live in more urban-like suburbs that may be more politically similar to cities.

Suburbanites who have lived in urban areas are not more likely than other suburbanites to live in densely populated communities.



Note: Data are calculated using respondents' ZIP Code and Census population density data.

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

When comparing the demographic makeup of suburbanites who have lived in urban areas before and those who have not, there are no significant gender, education, or income differences. However, a higher percent of suburbanites with urban living experience are black (14 percent vs. 5 percent), and a higher portion of those who have never lived in urban areas are age 18-29 (25 percent vs. 12 percent).

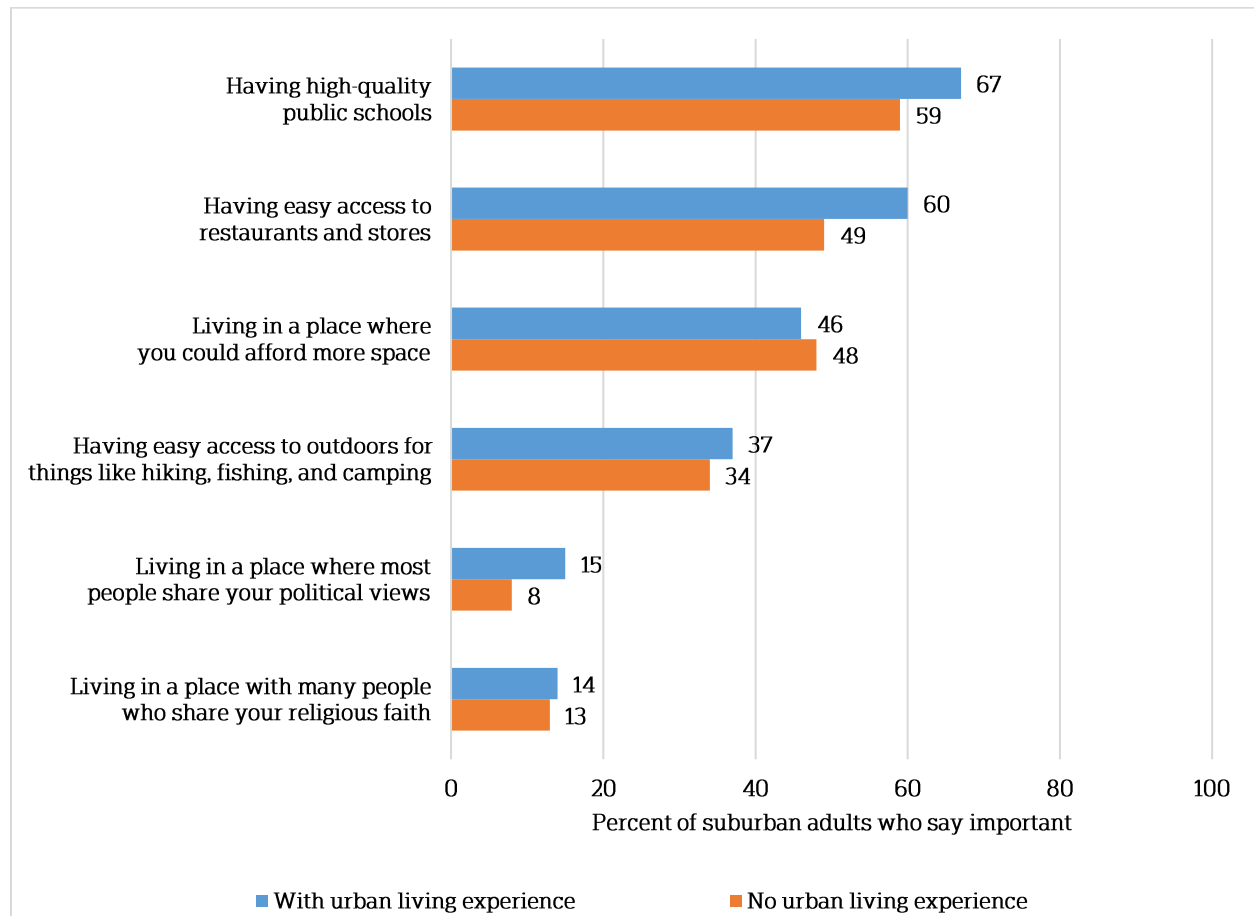
Even when controlling for these relatively modest demographic differences, the experience of having lived in an urban community is strongly related to suburbanites' views on a range of political issues, voting behavior, and assessments of what factors are important in deciding where to live.

When it comes to what people value in a community, most suburbanites agree that high-quality public schools are important, and that living near people with the same politics or religion are less important.

However, there are some differences in priorities as well. Suburbanites with experience living in urban communities are more likely than those without such experience to value living in a place with a mix of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (32 percent vs. 17 percent) and being near art museums and theaters (19 percent vs. 9 percent).

In contrast, those who have never lived in urban areas are more likely than those who have to place importance on living near extended family (50 percent vs. 36 percent).

Most suburbanites agree that high-quality public schools are important when picking a community.



Question: Imagine that you are moving to another community. In deciding where to live, how important would each of the following be to you?

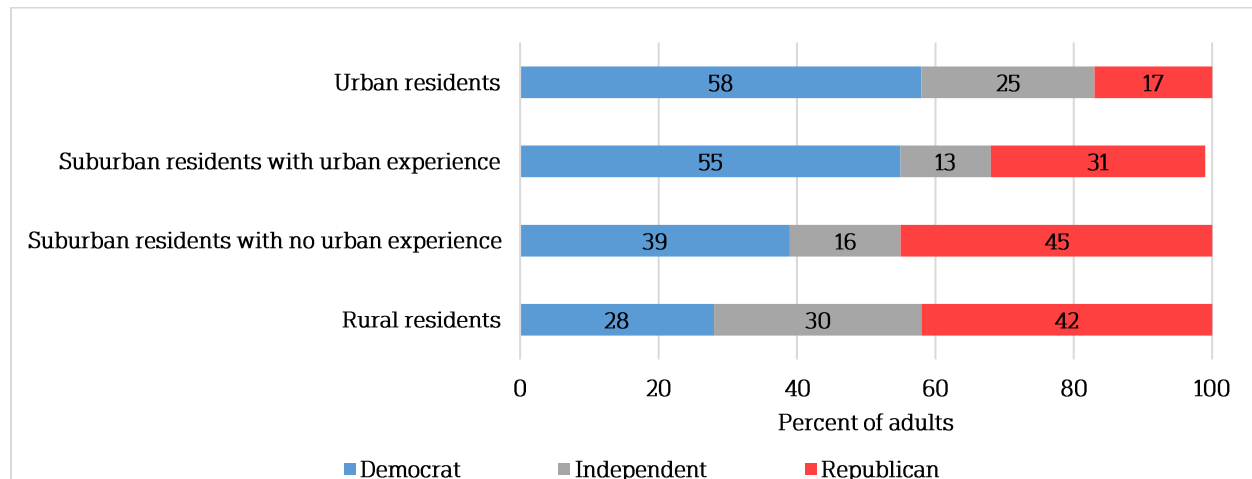
Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

SUBURBANITES WITH URBAN LIVING EXPERIENCE ARE MORE LIKELY THAN THOSE WITHOUT TO IDENTIFY AS DEMOCRATS AND REPORT VOTING FOR A DEMOCRAT IN THE 2018 CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS.

Among those living in the suburbs, there are significant differences in partisanship, ideology, and voting between those with experience living in urban areas and those without it, even when controlling for age, education, income, gender, and race and ethnicity.

Suburbanites who have lived in urban areas are more likely to identify as Democrats or lean Democratic and less likely to identify as Republicans or lean Republican than those who have never lived in an urban community.

Suburbanites with urban living experience are much more likely to identify as Democrats than others living in the suburbs.



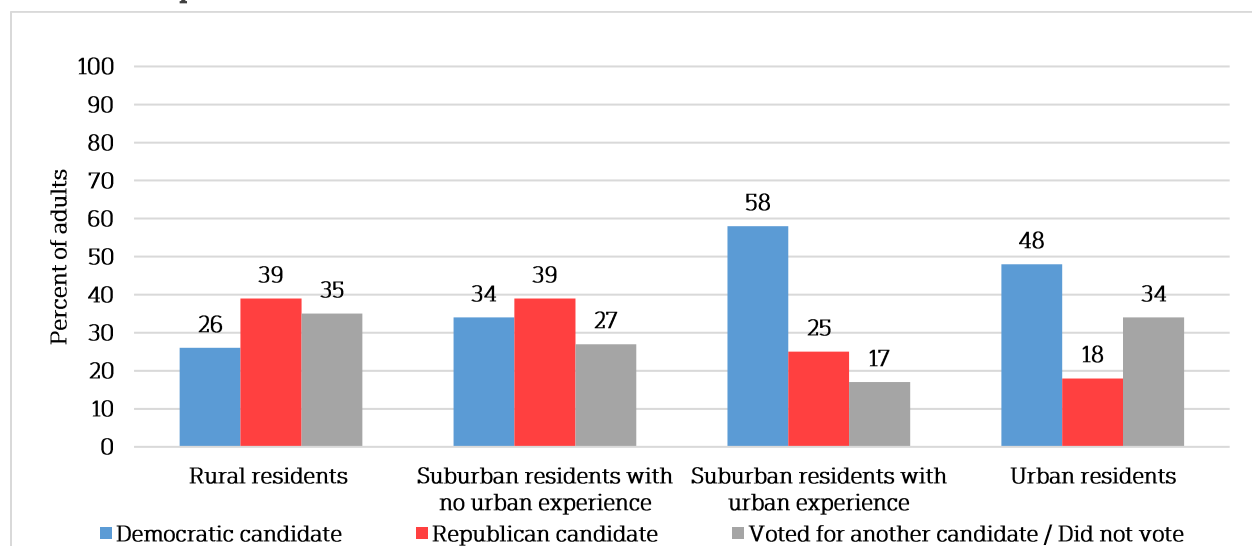
Question: Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an independent or none of these? / Do you consider yourself a strong or moderate [Democrat/Republican]? Do you lean more toward the Democrats or the Republicans?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

There are similar ideological differences: 24 percent of suburbanites who have lived in urban areas say they are conservative compared with 36 percent of those in the suburbs who have not lived in urban areas. In contrast, 19 percent of Americans in urban communities say they are conservative, and 48 percent of those in rural communities say the same.

Many suburban communities were seen as part of key battleground districts in the 2018 midterm elections, and there is a significant divide in vote choice among suburbanites related to whether or not they have lived in urban areas before. Among suburbanites with urban living experience, 58 percent report voting for a Democratic candidate, while only 25 percent say they voted for a Republican candidate. In comparison, 34 percent of other suburbanites report voting for a Democratic candidate, and 39 percent say they voted for a Republican.

Suburban voters with no urban living experience are more similar to rural voters than suburban voters with urban experience.



Question: In the 2018 election for the U.S. House of Representatives, did you vote for a Republican candidate, a Democratic candidate, someone else, or did you not vote?

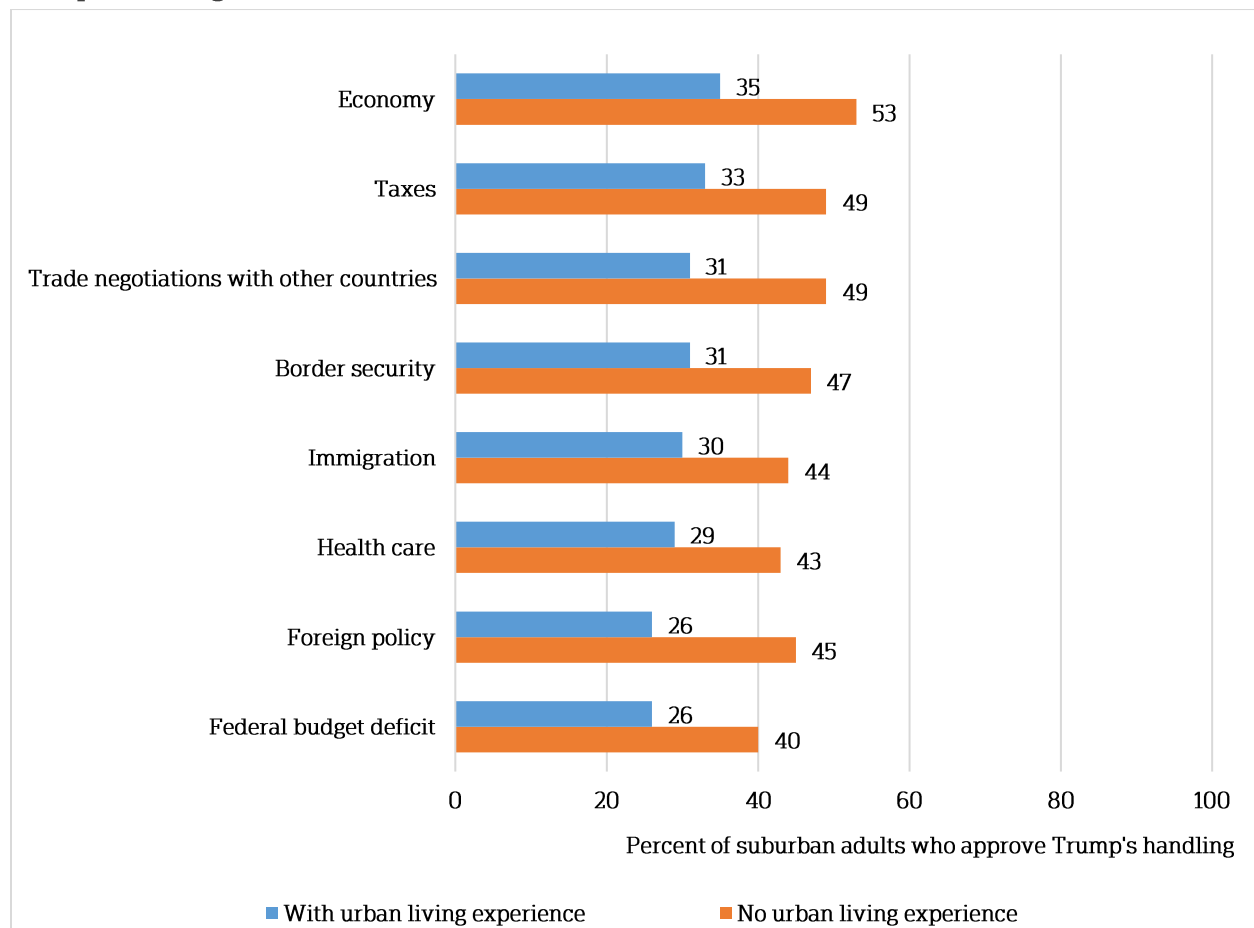
Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

SUBURBANITES WITH URBAN LIVING EXPERIENCE ARE MORE CRITICAL OF TRUMP'S OVERALL PERFORMANCE AND HANDLING OF SPECIFIC ISSUES THAN THOSE WHO HAVE SPENT THEIR ENTIRE LIVES IN THE SUBURBS OR RURAL AREAS.

Amid the partial shutdown of the federal government, the percentage of Americans that approve of how Trump is handling his job as president fell from 42 percent in December to 34 percent in January.⁵ Among suburbanites, 28 percent of those with experience living in urban communities approve of Trump compared to 42 percent of suburbanites with no urban living experience. In comparison, 21 percent of urban residents approve of Trump, while 45 percent of rural residents approve.

This suburban division extends to approval of Trump's handling of specific issues such as taxes, immigration, health care, and foreign policy. For example, 35 percent of suburbanites with urban living experience approve of the way Trump has handled the economy compared with 53 percent of suburbanites with no urban living experience.

Among those in the suburbs, previously living in an urban community is strongly related to approval of Trump's handling of various issues.



Question: Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling... ?

Source: UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll conducted January 16-20, 2019, with 1,010 adults age 18 and older nationwide

⁵ January 2019 Omnibus. *The Government Shutdown: How Big a Problem and Who Is to Blame?* <http://apnorc.org/projects/Pages/The-Government-Shutdown-How-Big-a-Problem-and-Who-is-to-Blame.aspx>

SUBURBANITES WITH URBAN LIVING EXPERIENCE TEND TO HAVE MORE PRO-IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES THAN OTHERS LIVING IN THE SUBURBS.

Among those living in the suburbs, those with experience living in urban areas tend to have more positive attitudes toward immigrants. Only 30 percent of suburbanites with urban living experience feel strongly concerned about the potential threat of illegal immigration, while 50 percent of the rest of suburbanites are very or extremely concerned about illegal immigration. While 43 percent of rural residents are concerned about the threat of illegal immigration, only 31 percent of urban residents say the same.

When it comes to building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, few suburbanites with urban living experience are convinced of the benefits. Only 27 percent favor building a wall at all compared to the 41 percent of suburbanites with no urban living experience. While 39 percent of rural residents believe building a border wall will help the economy, only 19 percent of urban residents say the same.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Staff from Harris Public Policy and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between January 16 and 20, 2019, with adults age 18 and over representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,010 completed the survey—878 via the web and 132 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in English. The final stage completion rate is 22.3 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.2 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 85.1 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 6.5 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.34 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Among respondents, 276 identified as living in an urban community, and the margin of sampling error for urban respondents is +/- 8.07 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. There were 484 respondents who identified as living in a suburban community, and the margin of sampling error for suburban respondents is +/- 5.83 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. Among respondents, 235 identified as living in a rural community, and the margin of sampling error for rural respondents is +/- 7.56 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2018 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

A topline with full question wordings is available at www.apnorc.org. For more information, email info@apnorc.org.

About the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy

One of the largest graduate professional schools at the University of Chicago, Harris Public Policy has been driven by the belief that evidence-based research, not ideology or intuition, is the best guide for public policy. For more than three decades, our exceptional community of scholars, students, and alumni have applied this exacting perspective to the world's most pressing problems using the latest tools of social science. Through our undergraduate and graduate programs, we empower a new generation of data-driven leaders to create a positive social impact throughout our global society.

<https://harris.uchicago.edu/>

About the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

- The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.
- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected, independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

The founding principles of The AP-NORC Center include a mandate to carefully preserve and protect the scientific integrity and objectivity of NORC and the journalistic independence of AP. All work conducted by the Center conforms to the highest levels of scientific integrity to prevent any real or perceived bias in the research. All of the work of the Center is subject to review by its advisory committee to help ensure it meets these standards. The Center will publicize the results of all studies and make all datasets and study documentation available to scholars and the public.