

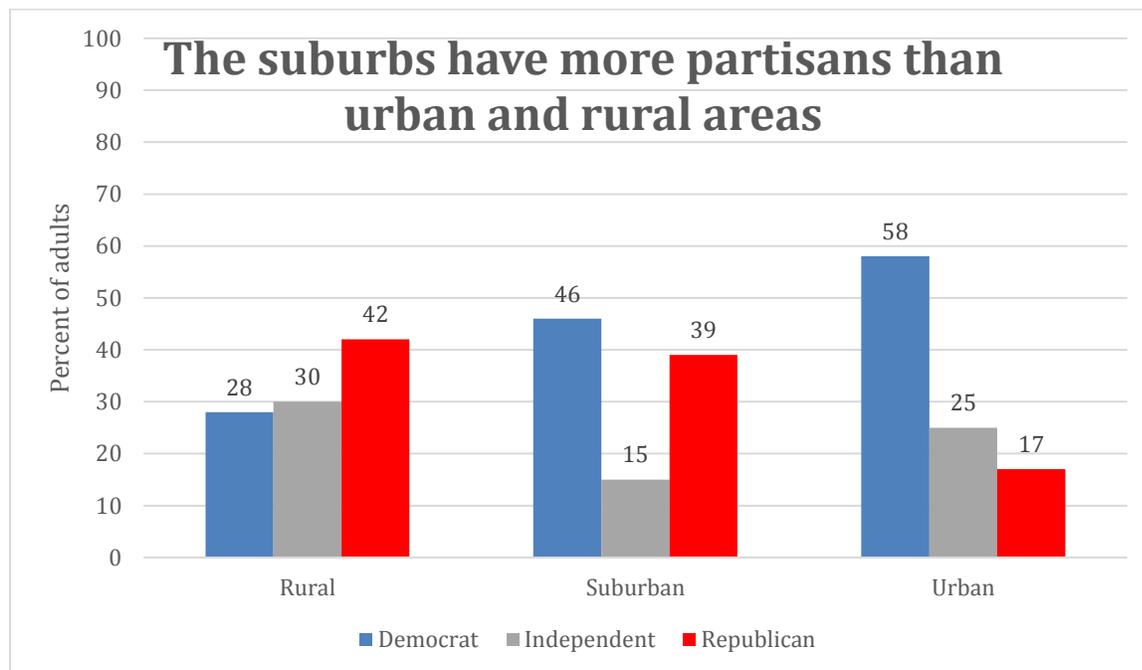
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New UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll highlights how the urban/rural political divide is playing out in America’s suburbs

The suburbs have fewer residents who identify as political independents than both urban and rural communities.

CHICAGO, February 19, 2019 — 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, there are actually fewer true independents in the suburbs compared to urban and rural areas of the country.

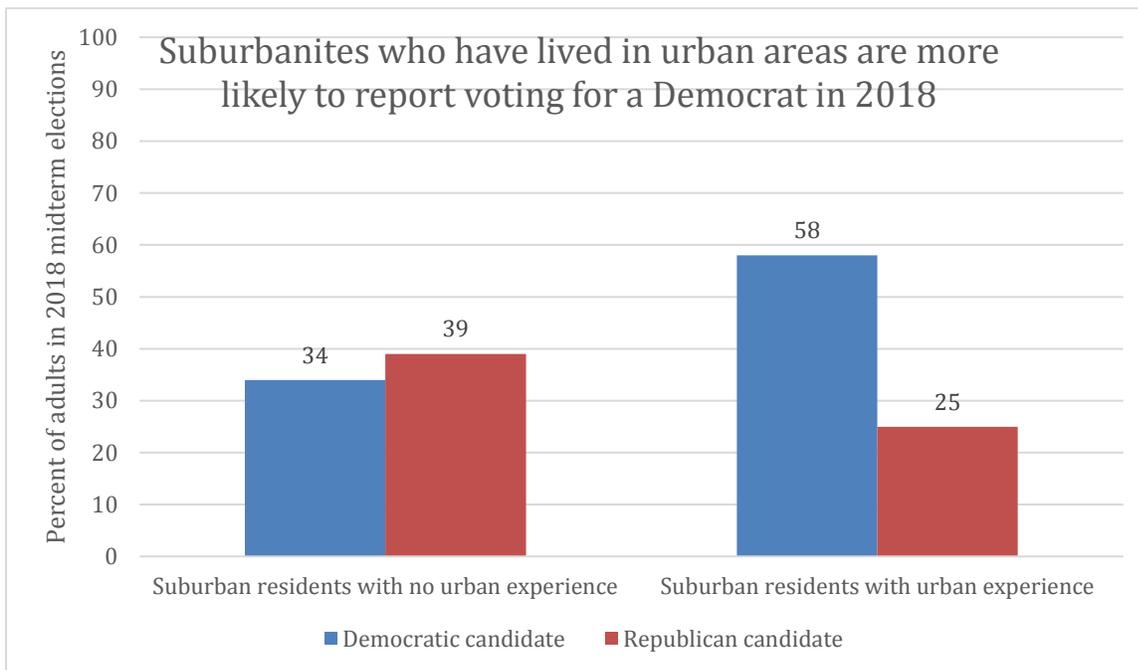
The poll, which is a collaboration between the [University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#), finds significant political polarization in the suburbs that is closely tied to the nation’s broader urban/rural divide. In fact, suburbanites who have previously lived in cities are much more likely to be Democratic voters than those who have not.



“Appealing to independents is not necessarily the way to win the suburban vote,” said Christopher Berry, the William J. and Alicia Townsend Friedman Professor in the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. “The suburbs are electorally competitive not because they are populated by swing voters, but because they are populated by a more even mix of partisans than cities or rural areas. We estimate that independents are actually a smaller share of the electorate in suburbia than in either cities or rural areas. This challenges popular impressions coming out of the 2016 election.”

The nationally representative survey of 1,010 adults also highlights how ideological divisions among suburbanites are closely linked to the types of communities they have lived in previously and illustrates that those who have lived in urban areas are more liberal. These differences persist even after controlling for demographic differences among suburbanites.

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.



Only 27 percent of suburbanites who have previously 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 experience.

The poll shows that the split within suburbs parallels the broader political differences between those currently living in rural communities and those currently living in urban communities.

The poll finds urban residents tend to be more pessimistic about the direction of the country, and the results show there are stark differences between urban and rural residents when it comes to opinions on immigration and climate change.

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.

Among the study's key findings:

- 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.

“This study highlights how Americans’ political identities and attitudes are closely tied to both the types of communities they reside in now and previous places they have lived,” said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. “The results help illustrate how the urban/rural political divide is playing out within America’s suburbs.”

About the report

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. 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 +/- 4.3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

A full description of the study methodology for the survey can be found at the end of the report.

The proper description of the survey’s authorship is as follows: This study was conducted jointly by the [University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

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and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

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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.

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