From an Urban-Suburban-Rural "Divide" to Convergence?
Public Opinion on American Foreign Policy, 2016 to 2019

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Following the 2016 presidential election, differences in voting patterns and policy outlooks for residents of urban, suburban, and rural areas took on a new level of interest.[1] The political sorting between areas of residence, with Democrats clustered in urban areas and Republicans dominant in rural parts of the country, in many ways has become a common stand-in for political affiliation.[2] Beginning with the 2016 Chicago Council Survey, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs began differentiating the residence of respondents based on where they lived in proximity to an urban area.[3] Following the initial survey with geocoded responses, a 2017 Council report highlighting this data demonstrated the divergent opinions on foreign policy between urban, suburban, and rural groups. Now, with four years of such data available, it is possible to plot trends across location of residence, revealing a unique perspective on changes in public opinion based on geography.

Since 2016, urban, suburban, and rural respondents have converged on several policy positions, often eliminating a previous divide between geographies. Most notably, there is general agreement across these geographies on opinions of the economy and international trade, albeit with differences of opinion on President Donald Trump's tariff war with China. A majority of urban and suburban residents, and a plurality of rural residents, now also believe that climate change is a critical threat. In

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[1] Lazaro Gamio, "Urban and Rural America Are Becoming Increasingly Polarized," *Election 2016*, *Washington Post*: November 17, 2016; Emily Badger, Quoctrung Bui, and Adam Pearce, "The Election Highlighted a Growing Rural-Urban Split," *TheUpshot*, *New York Times,* November 11, 2016; Nick Carey, "In Rural-Urban Divide, U.S. Voters Are Worlds Apart," Reuters, November 11, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/2016-election/urban-rural-vote-swing/.
[2] Emily Badger, "How the Rural-Urban Divide Became America's Political Fault Line," *TheUpshot. New York Times*, May 21, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/upshot/america-political-divide-urban-rural.html.
[3] Please see the methodology section below.

fact, rural and suburban opinion on the gravity of the climate crisis has experienced higher percentage point jumps year to year than urban opinion.

This is not to suggest that American public opinion is moving toward convergence in all policy areas. In some cases, geography remains a key differentiator. Immigration policy is one example, with a majority of rural residents and a plurality of suburban residents viewing large levels of immigration as a critical threat to the United States. Yet the greater theme remains that American public opinion, across a range of topics and to varying degrees, has moved in similar directions across geography of residence.

Key Findings

The Economy and International Trade: Since 2016, all three geographic groups' support for international trade has increased, most notably in the belief of the positive effects of trade for the overall US economy and for American companies. Nine in ten respondents across geographies also see international trade as good for relations with other countries, and two-thirds of each subgroup view trade deals with other countries as mutually beneficial. Importantly, previous divisions between geographic groups have narrowed, often converging such that differences in urban, suburban, and rural public opinion have been eliminated.

Trade Relations with China: While rural respondents are more likely to support placing tariffs on Chinese imports, three in four respondents in each geography favor trade with China. Majorities in each group also believe in undertaking friendly engagement with China and that trading with China enhances US security.

Immigration: Immigration remains a relatively divisive subject between geographies. While support for legal immigration has increased for rural and suburban groups, the gulf between urban and rural geographies over the threat of large numbers of immigrants and refugees has grown considerably, with suburban opinions having changed little and resembling neither urban nor rural viewpoints.

Climate Change: Concern with climate change has risen across all geographies, with the largest increases in rural respondents' views since 2016. However, rural residents are far less likely to support drastic measures to combat climate change than their urban and suburban counterparts.

Introduction

The 2017 Chicago Council report *The Urban-Suburban-Rural "Divide" in American Views on Foreign Policy* demonstrated the gulf between urban and rural views on foreign policy, the positioning of suburban views between urban and rural opinions, and their effect on the US electoral map.[4] However, by examining data over the past four Chicago Council Surveys (2016 to 2019), the continuum of difference described in the previous study has largely dissipated. It is now often a story of convergence toward similar policy viewpoints on a range of subjects.

The data in the Chicago Council Survey geocodes where respondents live in relation to an urban center to help understand the differences in political affiliation and policy preference between (and among) urban, suburban, and rural residents. Roughly in line with previous survey data, a majority of respondents in 2019 did not live in either dense urban centers (38%) or in sparsely populated rural areas (14%). Instead, the largest share continued to reside in the suburbs (48%). This is generally in line with other studies that attempt to determine the percentage of the US population that resides in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Examples such as a recent analysis from Pew Research that used US Census Bureau data through 2016 suggest that about 14 percent of Americans reside in counties deemed rural, while around 31 percent and 55 percent live in urban and suburban counties, respectively.[5] Yet finding an accurate measure of what constitutes "suburban" is difficult, as the built environment and makeup of suburban areas differ from region to region and community to community.[6] Regardless, it is clear that around half of the US population, by some measure, is identified as living in a suburban area.
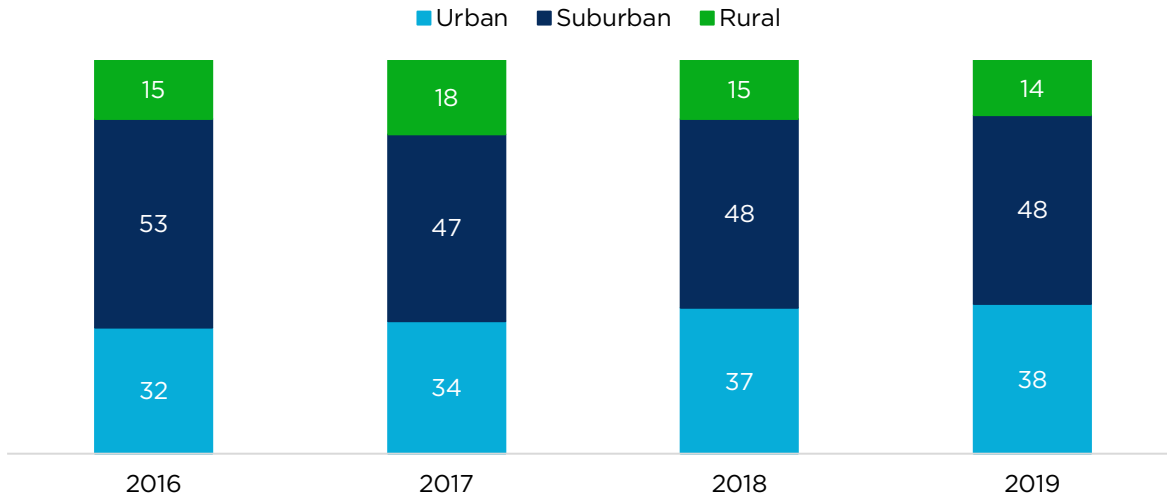
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[4] Sam Tabory and Dina Smeltz, *The Urban-Suburban-Rural "Divide" in American Views on Foreign Policy*, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, May 24, 2017. https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/urban-suburban-rural-divide-american-views-foreign-policy.

[5] Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, Richard Fry, D'Vera Cohn, and Ruth Igielnik, *What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities*, Pew Research Center, May 22, 2018. https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/05/22/what-unites-and-divides-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/.

[6] For a detailed discussion of what constitutes "suburban," please see the 2017 Chicago Council report *The Urban-Suburban-Rural "Divide" in American Views on Foreign Policy*. As with that report, this report relies on definitions put forth by Office of Management and Budget for classification of residents by suburb, which is further elaborated on in the methodology section.

Where Americans Live (%)

■ Urban ■ Suburban ■ Rural

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Rural	15	18	15	14
Suburban	53	47	48	48
Urban	32	34	37	38

June 7-20, 2019 | n=2,059

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The Chicago Council Survey also records demographic information for each geographic area, including ethnic and racial composition. While urban areas possessed a small majority of white residents in 2019, around seven in ten suburban and rural residents were white. Likewise, while minorities made up a notable share of the population in urban areas, fewer live in suburban areas, and even fewer in rural areas (For trend data, see appendix).

Differences are also apparent in levels of education across geographies. While urban residents had a higher percentage of those with a bachelor's degree or higher (35%) in 2019, they also possessed roughly equal amounts of respondents with less than a high school degree as rural areas. By contrast, suburban residents were more balanced across those holding a high school degree or higher.

Education and Race by Geography (%)

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Less than high school	11	10	14
High school	27	29	32
Some college	26	30	28
Bachelor's degree or higher	35	32	26
White, non-Hispanic	53	69	73
Black, non-Hispanic	16	10	6
Other, non-Hispanic	8	6	8
Hispanic	21	14	11
2+ races, non-Hispanic	1	1	2

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Political affiliation remained relatively steady across each geography from 2016 to 2019, with a majority of urban residents identifying as or leaning toward the Democratic Party, suburban residents split between the Democratic and Republican Parties, and a plurality of rural residents identifying as Republican or Republican-leaning. But notably, in rural areas, the number of self-identified independents decreased 11 percentage points over the same period due to a dramatic drop between 2018 and 2019.[7]
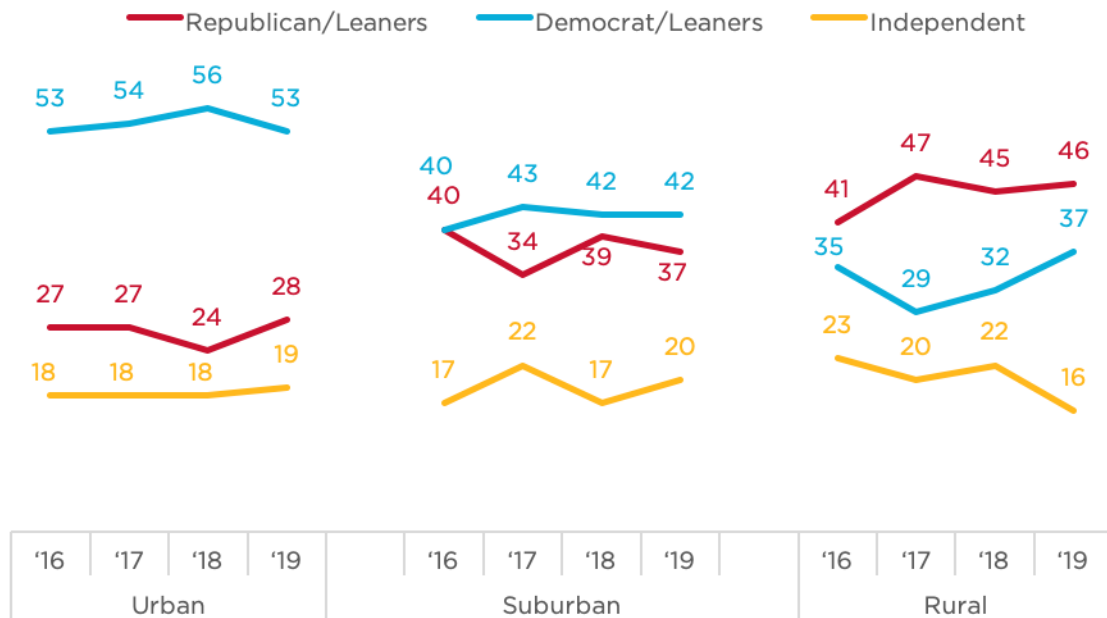
As demonstrated in the 2019 Chicago Council Survey, political affiliation remains a key differentiator of public opinion on foreign policy.[8] However, the recent convergence of public opinion across urban, suburban, and rural spaces suggests that geography of residence may play an additional and understated role in shaping attitudes on foreign policy. Indeed, this convergence of opinion across geographies over a period in which political affiliations in those geographies remained largely stable could suggest that opinions on foreign policy are less bound to political affiliation, manifesting in unique ways *within* partisan identities across geography of residence.

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[7] In the context of party affiliation, "leaners" refers to respondents who initially identify as independents and, in a follow-up question, say they lean toward the Republican or Democratic Party. The remaining respondents, who say they do not lean toward a party, are identified here as Independents.

[8] Dina Smeltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, Craig Kafura, and Brendan Helm, *Rejecting Retreat: Results of the 2019 Chicago Council Survey of American Public Opinion and US Foreign Policy,* Chicago Council on Global Affairs, September 6, 2019. https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/lcc/rejecting-retreat.

Party Affiliation by Geography

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Indpendent, or what? (%)

— Republican/Leaners   — Democrat/Leaners   — Independent

Urban

Democrat/Leaners: 53, 54, 56, 53
Republican/Leaners: 27, 27, 24, 28
Independent: 18, 18, 18, 19

Suburban

Democrat/Leaners: 40, 43, 42, 42
Republican/Leaners: 40, 34, 39, 37
Independent: 17, 22, 17, 20

Rural

Republican/Leaners: 41, 47, 45, 46
Democrat/Leaners: 35, 29, 32, 37
Independent: 23, 20, 22, 16

'16	'17	'18	'19		'16	'17	'18	'19		'16	'17	'18	'19
Urban					Suburban					Rural			

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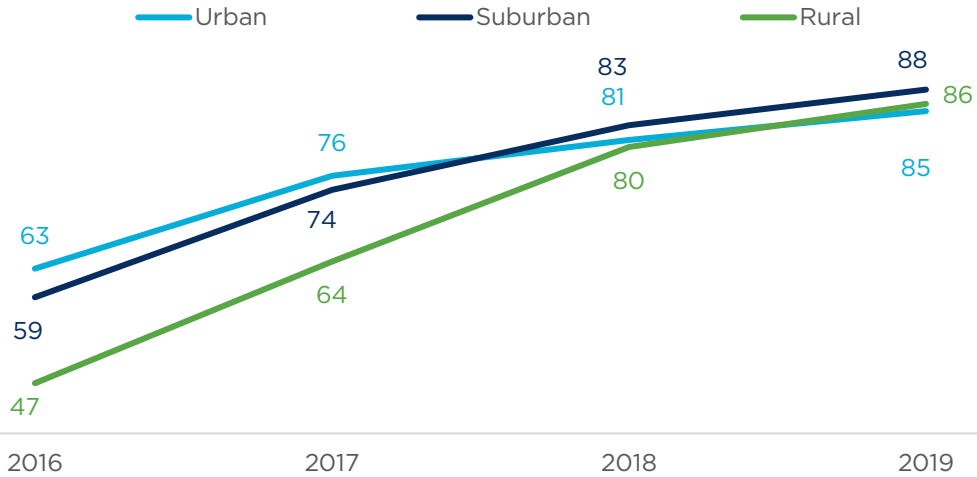*See Methodology for full fielding information*

Finally, it is important to recognize that the data analyzed in this report were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide protests in response to the killing of George Floyd and long-standing economic and social inequalities. It is beyond the scope of this brief to determine how such events will affect urban, suburban, and rural public opinion on foreign policy. However, future analyses will be able to discuss these topics in greater detail.

The Economy and International Trade

The American public's support for international trade has grown significantly in the past several years. That shift has taken place across geographies: from 2016 to 2019, urban, suburban, and rural residents all became more likely to say that international trade is good for the US economy. This shift has also erased many of the prior gaps between urban, suburban, and rural residents. In 2016 and 2017, urban and suburban residents viewed trade more positively than their rural counterparts, perhaps because urban areas have benefited most from an increasingly urban and globalized economy. However, those gaps have closed as views have trended upward among all three groups over the past four years. In 2019, large majorities of urban (85%), suburban (88%), and rural residents (86%) all saw international trade as good for the US economy.

Effects of International Trade

Overall, do you think international trade is good or bad for: **the US economy** *(% good)*

Urban ▬ Suburban ▬ Rural

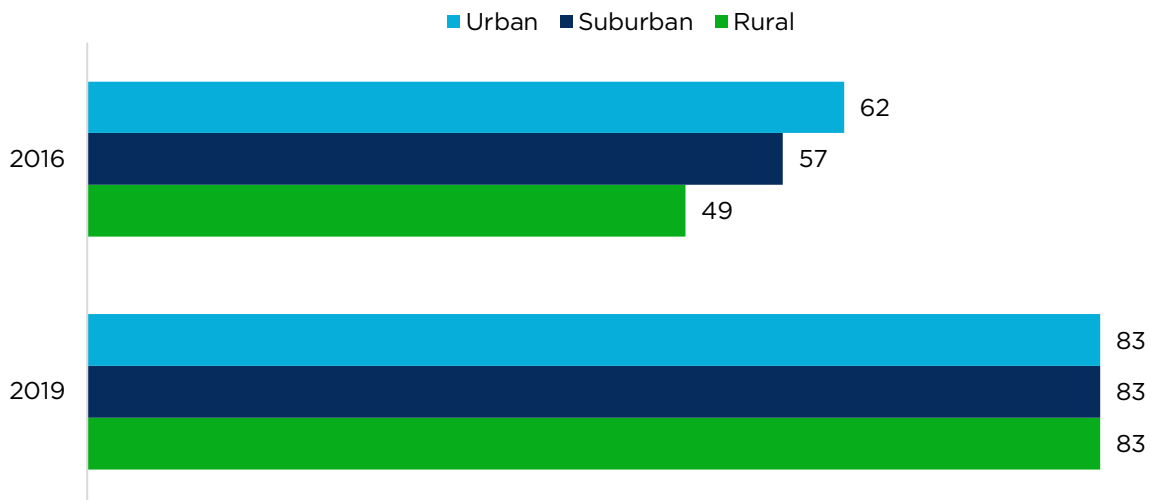|	2016	2017	2018	2019
Urban	63	76	81	85
Suburban	59	74	83	88
Rural	47	64	80	86

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The public also sees other benefits to international trade. In 2019, approximately nine in ten Americans, regardless of geography, believed that international trade was good for US relations with other countries, with similarly high levels of support among urban (89%), suburban (89%), and rural (91%) residents. Americans across geographies are also more likely now to see trade as good for US companies (83% among all residential locations), with the proportion of urban, suburban, and rural residents increasing by 21, 26, and 34 percentage points, respectively, since 2016.

Effects of International Trade for American Companies

Overall, do you think international trade is good or bad for: **American companies** *(% good)*

■ Urban ■ Suburban ■ Rural

2016
- Urban: 62
- Suburban: 57
- Rural: 49

2019
- Urban: 83
- Suburban: 83
- Rural: 83

The belief that international trade is good for consumers also increased in each geography from 2016 to 2018, with urban (85%), suburban (85%), and rural residents (84%) in agreement. Moreover, in terms of job creation in the United States, by 2018, nearly two in three respondents across geographies saw trade as good for creating jobs domestically (urban 65%, suburban 69%, rural 64%), while each group had less than a majority in 2016.
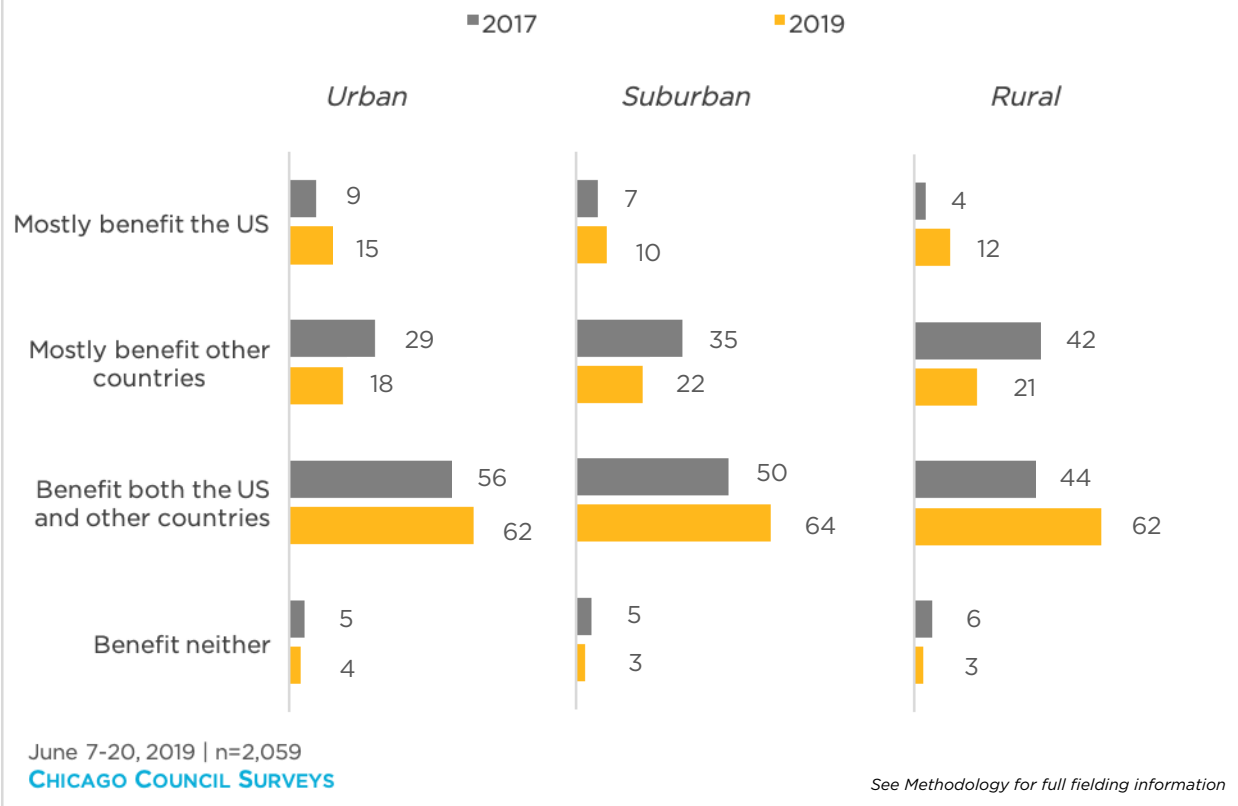
Backing for the multilateral trading system is also reflected by the support of between seven and eight in ten Americans across geographies supporting US compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) decisions, even if the ruling is against the United States. This healthy majority exists despite the Trump administration's barrage of attacks over the lack of fairness of the WTO.

On the question of equitability of trade agreements between the United States and other countries, a similar convergence exists. Nearly two-thirds of respondents across geographies believe that trade deals with other countries benefit both the US and other countries (63% overall). Most notable is the double-digit decrease in each geography between 2017 and 2019 of respondents stating that international trade deals mostly benefit other countries.

Trade Deals with Other Countries

Which of the following comes closest to your view on trade deals between the US and other countries. Do they: (%)

■ 2017　　　　■ 2019

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Mostly benefit the US	2017: 9 / 2019: 15	2017: 7 / 2019: 10	2017: 4 / 2019: 12
Mostly benefit other countries	2017: 29 / 2019: 18	2017: 35 / 2019: 22	2017: 42 / 2019: 21
Benefit both the US and other countries	2017: 56 / 2019: 62	2017: 50 / 2019: 64	2017: 44 / 2019: 62
Benefit neither	2017: 5 / 2019: 4	2017: 5 / 2019: 3	2017: 6 / 2019: 3

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Trade Relations with China

In recent years, much of the concern with international trade has focused on the US-China economic relationship, with President Trump using executive powers to place tariffs on Chinese imports and Beijing responding in kind with tariffs on US exports.

In 2019, while majorities of rural (57%) residents supported the use of President Trump's tariffs on Chinese imports, suburban (51%) and urban residents (44%) were split on the topic. This differentiation may be indicative of greater partisan support for the Republican Party in rural areas, even as the trade war has negatively affected rural economies through Chinese tariffs on US commodity exports.[9]

Yet even with divergent opinions regarding tariffs, three in four Americans regardless of geography favored trade with China (75% urban, 73% suburban, 73% rural). This may be because a majority of Americans across geographies also believe that trade between the United States and China does more to strengthen than to weaken US national security.

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[9] Ana Swanson and Alan Rappeport, "Trump's Trade Appeals to China Still Left Farmers Reeling," *New York Times*, June 19, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/business/economy/trump-china-trade-war-farmers.html.

Urban, Suburban, Rural Views on China

■ Urban ■ Suburban ■ Rural

Would you support or oppose the following US policies towards China? Placing tariffs on products imported from China (% support)

Placing tariffs on products imported from China, Support
- Urban: 44
- Suburban: 51
- Rural: 57

Does trade between the US and China do more to strengthen US national security or weaken US national security? (% more to strengthen)

More to strengthen
- Urban: 66
- Suburban: 63
- Rural: 59

In dealing with the rise of China's power, do you think the US should: (% undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China)

Undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China
- Urban: 68
- Suburban: 68
- Rural: 64

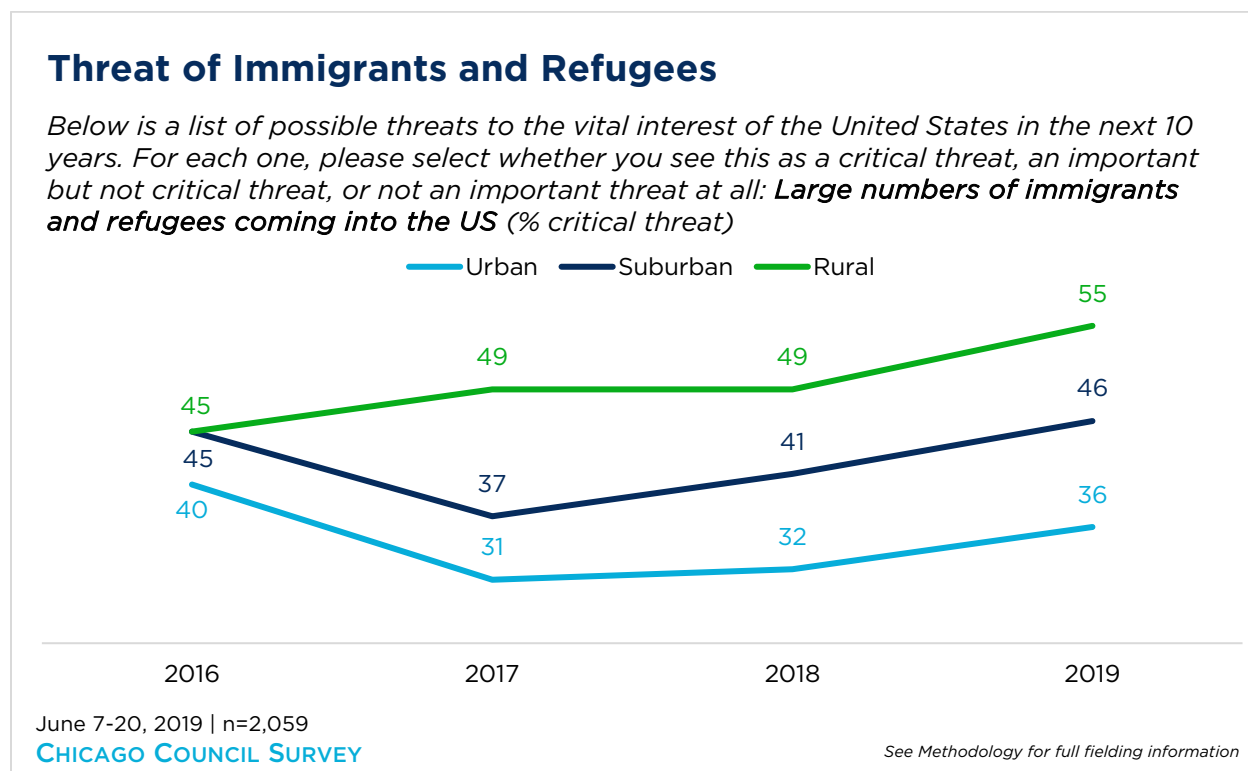June 7-20, 2019 | n=2,059
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Americans across geographies are also aligned in how they think the United States should deal with the rise of China's power, with strong majorities of urban (68%), suburban (68%), and rural (64%) residents preferring to undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China. President Trump's more nationalist economic policies stand in contrast to these figures, as the data suggest that the public, regardless of geography, still views cooperation as important in international relations.

Immigration

While urban, suburban, and rural public opinion of foreign policy has recently converged on trade and economics, viewpoints toward immigration remain divergent.
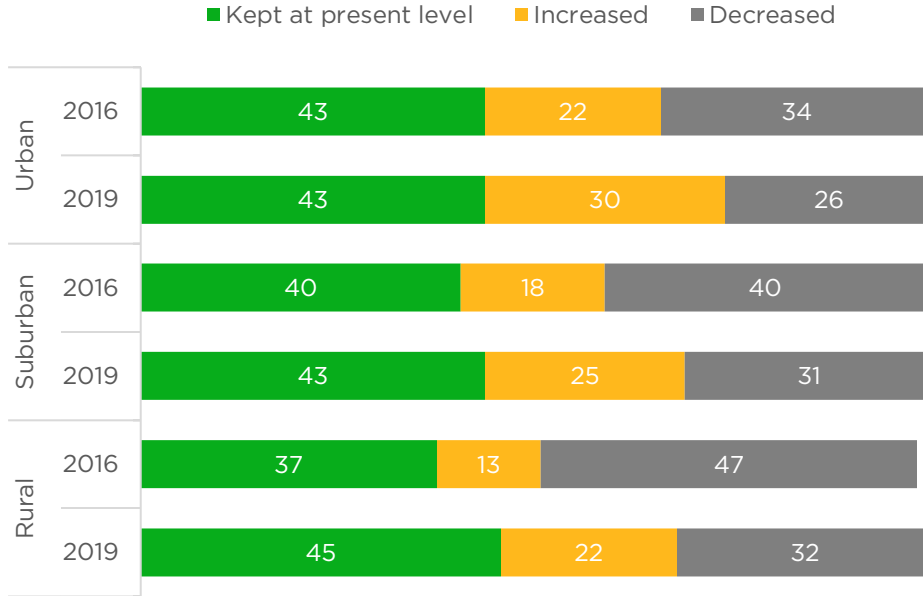
When asked about the threat posed by large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States, rural and urban residents have grown farther apart since 2016. Approximately one-third of urban respondents (36%) view large numbers of immigrants and refugees as a critical threat, down slightly from 2016. But that view has grown more common among rural residents, with a majority (55%) in 2019 saying large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States is a critical threat, up 10 percentage points from 2016. The divide between urban, suburban, and rural responses has grown since the 2016 survey, where urban and rural residents diverge on a number of opinions while suburban residents fall somewhere in between.

Threat of Immigrants and Refugees

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all: **Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the US** *(% critical threat)*

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However, this divergence is not apparent in views toward maintaining or increasing legal immigration levels. Notably, the support for increasing the amount of legal immigration rose between 7 and 9 percentage points across all geographies between 2016 and 2019, with a corresponding drop of between 8 and 15 percentage points in decreasing the level of legal immigration. Rural respondents led this shift, with support for decreasing legal immigration falling from 47 percent in 2016 to 32 percent in 2019.

Legal Migration Levels

Should legal immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased or decreased? (%)

■ Kept at present level   ■ Increased   ■ Decreased

		Kept at present level	Increased	Decreased
Urban	2016	43	22	34
Urban	2019	43	30	26
Suburban	2016	40	18	40
Suburban	2019	43	25	31
Rural	2016	37	13	47
Rural	2019	45	22	32

June 7-20, 2019 | n=2,059

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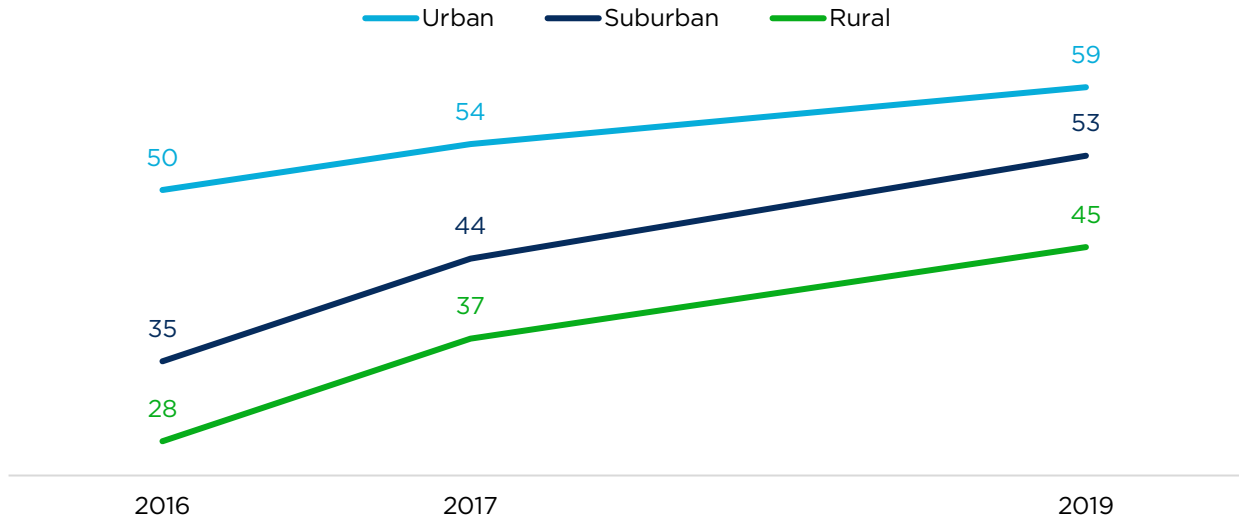*See Methodology for full fielding information*

Climate Change

Climate change is another issue that previously showcased major divergences between urban, suburban, and rural respondents. However, this is also shifting.

The percent of urban respondents who believe climate change presents a critical threat rose from 50 in 2016 to 59 in 2019. While this is a significant change, increases in suburban respondents and rural respondents were even more dramatic. In 2016, only one-third of suburban respondents viewed climate change as a critical threat (35%), but by 2019 this had increased to a majority of 53 percent. Likewise, in rural areas, while only 28 percent of respondents viewed climate change as a critical threat in 2016, this total increased by 17 points to a plurality of 45 percent in 2019.

Threat of Climate Change

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all: **Climate change** *(% critical threat)*

Urban — Suburban — Rural

Urban: 50 (2016), 54 (2017), 59 (2019)
Suburban: 35 (2016), 44 (2017), 53 (2019)
Rural: 28 (2016), 37 (2017), 45 (2019)

2016   2017   2019

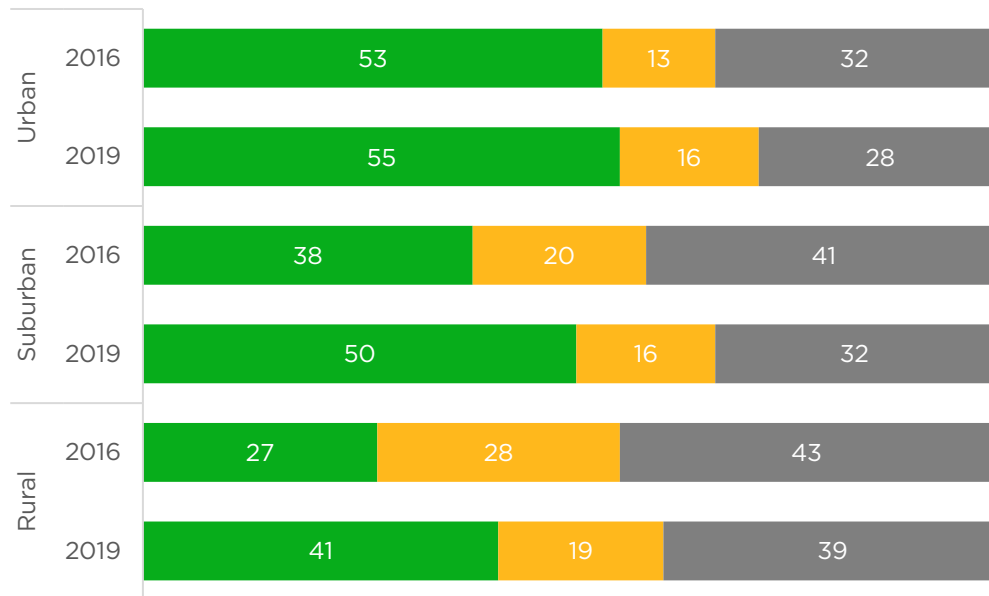June 7-20, 2019 | n=2,059
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The growing concern about climate change has also affected Americans' views on the urgency of mitigating its effects. While a majority of urban residents in 2016 supported action to tackle climate change, even at significant cost, in 2019, half of suburban residents (50%) also supported taking such steps. A plurality of rural respondents (41%) in 2019 also supported such action, up from 27 percent in 2016.

Attitudes Toward Climate Change

There is a controversy over what the countries of the world, including the US, should do about the problem of climate change. Here are three statements. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your own point of view: (%)

■ Climate change is a serious and pressing problem, take steps even if significant costs
■ Until we're sure climate change is really a problem, don't take steps that could have a cost
■ Climate change should be addressed gradually

Urban	2016	53	13	32
	2019	55	16	28
Suburban	2016	38	20	41
	2019	50	16	32
Rural	2016	27	28	43
	2019	41	19	39

June 7-20, 2019 | n=2,059

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This marked shift in public opinion across geographies occurred as President Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement in 2017, and as many city and state governments have pledged to uphold such standards through the "We Are Still In" campaign.[10] But at the very least, regardless of geography, the belief in the need to tackle climate change has grown beyond its traditional support in urban areas to include a majority of Americans.

Conclusion

In 2017, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs published findings that demonstrated divergent opinions between urban, suburban, and rural residents on a range of policy issues. While differences still exist between each of these populations, particularly in partisan affiliation and sentiment toward immigration, the broad trend among groups is toward converging policy viewpoints on key issues of trade and climate change.

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[10] We Are Still In campaign, https://www.wearestillin.com/.

As urban, suburban, and rural communities offer different economic opportunities, residential patterns, and even ways of interacting socially, variations in opinion toward foreign policy are likely to exist. However, as this analysis suggests, the merging of opinion across these residential areas presages a growing convergence across geography, potentially demonstrating that American public opinion is less spatially "sorted" when it comes to certain policy topics.[11]

Attempting to discern what is driving this convergence is more difficult. It may be that while each geographic group possesses similar opinions of international trade, climate change, and legal immigration, the fundamental reasoning behind such views differs between geographies. For instance, while some may view President Trump's ability to improve on a given policy as a reason for support, others may support it in spite of his actions. This convergence may also indicate that there is more to policy viewpoints than an individual's political party affiliation, suggesting that how foreign policies directly affect communities may run contrary to the official stance of the area's prevailing political party affiliation.

Of course, this is not to suggest that convergence is a pattern for all opinions of foreign policy. Along with differences of opinion on immigration, questions around broader American identity also show deep geographic differences. For example, from 2016 to 2019, when asked if they believe the United States is the greatest country in the world, the percent of urban residents agreeing decreased from 57 to 52, while rural residents increased from 61 to 66. Suburban residents' opinions moved closer to urban residents', with 58 percent responding that the United States is the greatest country in the world, down from 64 percent three years earlier. Moreover, the changed political atmosphere because of the COVID-19 pandemic may portend divergences in viewpoints once again, particularly if certain geographies see higher positive cases in the coming months and years as a result of varied state and local policies.

But recognizing this convergence offers a valuable opportunity for researchers to think beyond the prevailing narrative of the "urban-rural divide" and focus on how specific policy topics result in different reactions across varied geographies. This convergence in policy positions should also be taken as an opportunity to build on common ground, which can lead to collaboration across municipal and metropolitan borders on a range of seemingly divisive policy topics.

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[11] Richard Florida, "America's 'Big Sort' Is Only Getting Bigger," Bloomberg CityLab, October 25, 2016. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-25/how-the-big-sort-is-driving-political-polarization.

Demographics by Geography

	Urban			
	2016	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Unweighted N	630	915	722	760
	Percentage			
% of the sample	32	34	37	38
Republican/Leaners	27	27	24	28
Democrat/Leaners	53	54	56	53
Independent	18	18	18	19
Less than high school	15	12	13	11
High school	28	28	26	27
Some college	26	30	28	26
Bachelor's degree or higher	31	29	34	35
White, non-Hispanic	52	53	54	53
Black, non-Hispanic	17	16	17	16
Other, non-Hispanic	9	9	9	8
Hispanic	21	19	19	21
2+ races, non-Hispanic	1	3	1	1
18-29 years old	21	21	23	21
30-44 years old	23	28	28	28
45-59 years old	28	24	23	22
60+ years old	28	26	25	28
	Suburban			
	2016	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Unweighted N	1117	1330	997	1011
	Percentage			
% of the sample	53	48	48	48
Republican/Leaners	40	34	39	37
Democrat/Leaners	40	43	42	42
Independent	17	22	17	20
Less than high school	10	13	10	10
High school	30	24	30	29
Some college	29	30	29	30
Bachelor's degree or higher	31	32	32	32
White, non-Hispanic	68	66	66	69

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Black, non-Hispanic	10	10	10	10
Other, non-Hispanic	6	6	7	6
Hispanic	14	16	16	14
2+ races, non-Hispanic	1	2	1	1
18-29 years old	22	21	20	21
30-44 years old	27	24	22	24
45-59 years old	26	27	27	27
60+ years old	25	28	30	28

	Rural			
	2016	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Unweighted N	314	515	327	288
	Percentage			
% of the sample	15	19	15	14
Republican/Leaners	41	47	45	46
Democrat/Leaners	35	29	32	37
Independent	23	20	22	16
Less than high school	15	12	11	14
High school	33	35	34	32
Some college	30	33	30	28
Bachelor's degree or higher	22	19	25	26
White, non-Hispanic	82	84	82	73
Black, non-Hispanic	6	7	6	6
Other, non-Hispanic	2	1	3	8
Hispanic	9	7	8	11
2+ races, non-Hispanic	1	2	1	2
18-29 years old	19	19	18	22
30-44 years old	23	25	26	21
45-59 years old	28	29	28	27
60+ years old	31	27	28	30

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 Chicago Council Surveys of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2016 survey was conducted from June 10–27, 2016, the sample size was 2,061 American adults, and the margin of sampling error for the full sample is ±2.38, including a design effect of 1.2149. The 2017 survey was conducted from June 27–July 19, 2017, the sample size was 2,760 American adults, and the margin of sampling error for the full sample was ±2.4, including a design effect of 1.1758. The 2017 survey also oversampled millennials

(n=390) and Americans who live in the Midwest (n=438). The 2018 survey was conducted July 12–31, 2018, the sample size was 2,046 American adults, and the margin of sampling error for the full sample is ±2.37, including a design effect of 1.1954. And the 2019 survey was conducted from June 7–20, 2019, the sample size was 2,059 American adults, and the margin of sampling error for the full sample is ±2.3, including a design effect of 1.1607. The 2019 survey was conducted by Ipsos using the Ipsos KnowledgePanel; the 2016, 2017, and 2018 surveys were conducted by GfK Custom Research using the GfK KnowledgePanel. The margin of error is higher for questions administered to a partial sample.

Partisan identification is based on respondents' answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Those who identified themselves as an Independent were asked a follow-up question to determine whether they thought of themselves as closer to the Republican Party, to the Democratic Party, or neither; these are classified as "leaners."

In this report, a respondent is classified as an urban resident if he or she lives within the city limits of his or her metropolitan area's "central city." Central city designations for each metropolitan area nationwide are made annually by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). A survey respondent is classified as a suburban resident if he or she lives in any part of a metropolitan area that is not in that metropolitan area's central city. A respondent is classified as a rural resident if he or she lives in a county that is not part of any metropolitan area. The OMB formally designates metropolitan areas based on demographic data collected by the US Census Bureau using the technical term Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). An MSA is a metropolitan area anchored by a dense urban center of 50,000 people or more. Areas outside of the dense urban center of an MSA are considered for inclusion in the MSA based on proximity, land-use patterns, and strength of economic ties.

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