



# The Urban-Suburban-Rural “Divide” in American Views on Foreign Policy

## Understanding Both Agreement and Disagreement Among the US Public

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### Executive Summary

Much has been made about the urban-rural divide in American politics, but analyses of this divide often exclude individual consideration of suburban residents, which is most Americans. Additionally, urban-rural comparisons typically look at voting behavior and not at actual policy preferences.

For the first time, the 2016 Chicago Council Survey, an annual public opinion survey of Americans' views on foreign policy, provides results based on where respondents live relative to urban centers. While previous surveys have accounted for several variables such as party affiliation, gender, and age, the 2016 survey also differentiated between urban, suburban, and rural locations.

Key findings from the report include:

- No major political party affiliation had an overwhelming majority in cities, suburbs, or rural areas, at least in terms of respondents' initial self-identification.
- The issues around which significant urban-suburban-rural divides exist were those that could exert more immediate and readily identifiable domestic effects in people's everyday lives, such as immigration, the economy and trade, and climate change.
- The issues around which there was significant consensus tend to be more abstract and distant, such as America's role in the world, its posture toward international engagement, and traditional security and foreign affairs concerns.

- Location relative to an urban center seems to play a role in informing how people will perceive or directly experience the domestic impacts of foreign policy decisions in their everyday lives. Urban and suburban residents were most economically optimistic and positive about the benefits of international trade. Suburban and rural residents exhibited stronger anti-immigrant sentiment and support for anti-immigrant policies than urban residents.
- When dividing the general category of suburbs into categories of inner-ring and outer-ring suburbs, residents of inner-ring suburbs leaned toward their urban counterparts in matters of policy preference (generally aligned with globalist positions) and outer-ring suburbs leaned more toward their rural counterparts (generally aligned with more nationalist positions).

This analysis suggests that in order to support stronger economic, physical and social linkages across urban, suburban, and rural communities, policymakers should consider renewed emphasis on regional planning efforts that could decrease disparities in policy decision outcomes across the urban-rural spectrum.

## Introduction

Much has been made about the divide between urban and rural America in the wake of the 2016 US presidential election.<sup>i</sup> Across the country, city-dwellers overwhelmingly voted for the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, while suburban and rural residents overwhelmingly voted for the Republican nominee, Donald Trump.<sup>ii</sup> But few studies have analyzed how Americans from urban, rural, *and suburban* localities differ and converge in their views toward specific policy issues.

For the first time, the 2016 Chicago Council Survey, an annual public opinion survey of American views on foreign policy provides results based on where respondents live relative to urban centers. The nationally representative survey considers a wide range of policy issues that span questions of international trade, terrorism, immigration, military intervention, and American leadership in the world. The data also included variables that track where respondents live in relation to an urban center in an effort to understand the political differences between—and among—urban, suburban and rural residents in more nuanced and policy-specific terms.

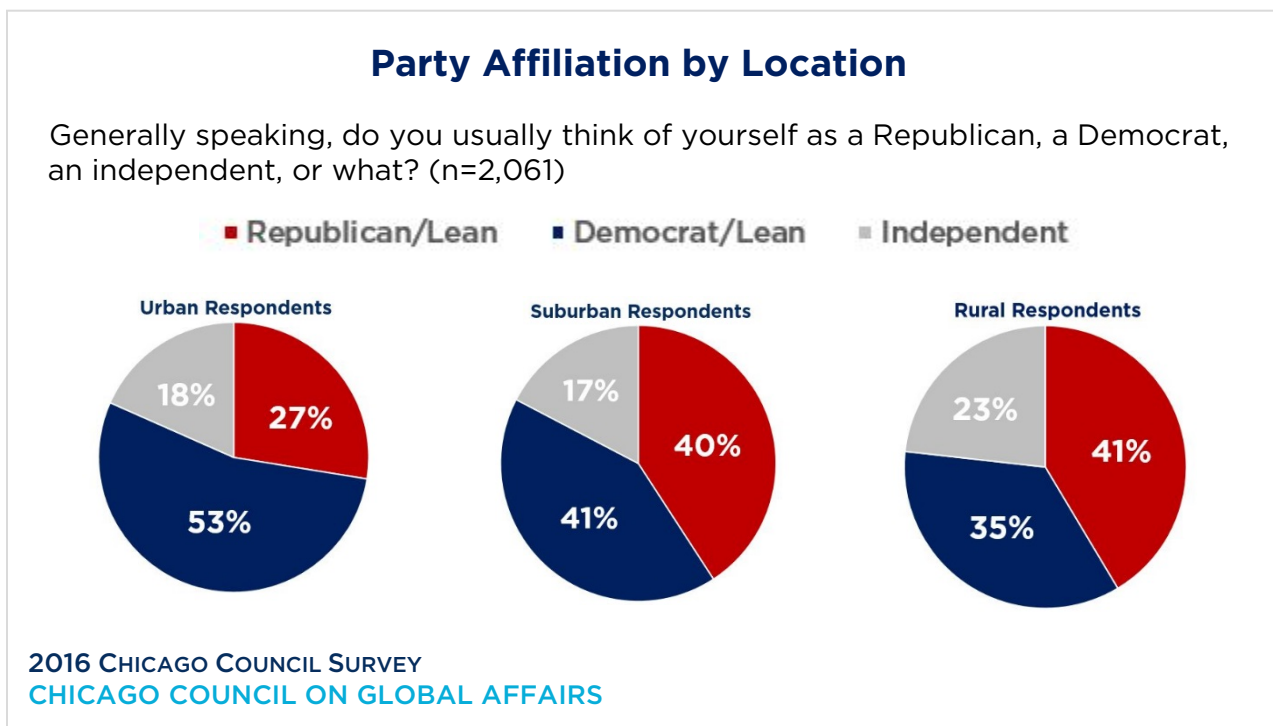
Conducted June 10-27, 2016, the Chicago Council Survey data reveal several important points. First, the “urban-rural divide” dichotomy excludes an incredibly important demographic: suburban residents. A majority of Americans do not live in dense urban centers (32% do) or in sparsely populated rural areas (15%): they live in the suburbs (53%).<sup>1</sup> So while votes for the Democratic or Republican candidates in 2016 may have clearly split along urban and rural lines, what happens in the suburbs could have greater weight in understanding American politics moving forward.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures come from the 2016 Chicago Council Survey and the location categories were coded by the polling firm on the basis of OMB Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) that correspond with actual respondent addresses. For more information about these categories, see the Methodology section on page 34.

Second, the urban-rural divide is not a simple partisan divide. According to the Chicago Council Survey results, none of the traditional political party affiliations—Democrats, Republicans, or Independents—has an overwhelming majority in cities, the suburbs, or in rural America. Although twice as many urban dwellers self-identified as Democrats or Democratic-leaning (53%) than Republicans or Republican-leaning (27%), it is not an overwhelming majority, and 18 percent self-identified as Independent. Residents of a suburb were as likely to identify as a Republican or Republican-leaning as they were to identify as a Democrat or Democratic-leaning (40% and 41% respectively). Even in rural areas, the gap between those who identified as a Republican or Republican-leaning (41%) is only 6 percentage points more than those who identified as a Democrat or Democratic-leaning (35%)<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**



This pattern suggests that differences in policy preferences at least partially reflect something about where a person lives rather than a simple partisan inclination. Data

<sup>2</sup> Partisan identification is based on respondents’ answer to a standard partisan self-identification question: “Generally speaking, do you usually 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.’ Of those who initially identified as independents, when looking at the responses to the follow up question of whether they leaned closer to the Republican or Democratic Party or neither, 24 percent of urban residents said they leaned Republican, 33 percent said they leaned Democratic, and 43 percent said neither. Among suburban independents, 32 percent leaned Republican, 29 percent leaned Democratic, and 39 percent said neither. Among rural independents, 32 percent leaned Republican, 21 percent leaned Democratic, and 47 percent said neither.

analysis shows that while partisanship is a strong predictor of attitudes toward foreign policy, “urbanicity”—a location variable based on where a respondent lives relative to a city center—is also a statistically significant factor in its own right (even when it is included in models alongside partisanship).

There are sharp differences along urban-suburban-rural lines on issues of international trade and the economy, climate change, and immigration (Figure 2). Urban residents were generally more likely to express views consistent with a favorable orientation toward trade, globalization, immigration, and taking measures to curtail climate change. Rural residents were more likely to express opposing positions. Overall, suburban residents generally took the middle ground on these issues.

- **Economy and International Trade:** A majority of Americans in all locations recognized that globalization and international trade come with both risks and rewards, acknowledging that trade can simultaneously be good for consumers and standards of living while being bad for job creation and job security. Urban residents were the least likely to express economic pessimism about the future of the US economy in general or about the impact of international trade specifically.
- **Immigration:** Urban residents expressed the most favorable attitudes toward individual immigrant groups, refugees and broader pro-immigration policy issues generally, while suburban and rural residents expressed the least favorable attitudes toward individual immigrant groups and pro-immigration policy issues.
- **Climate Change:** There were significant gaps between urban, suburban, and rural populations on the issue of whether they characterize climate change as a critical threat to US interests, with rural residents being the least likely to consider climate change a threat. That said, a strong majority of Americans in all locations said that the US should participate in the Paris Climate Agreement.

There are in fact many issues on which urban, rural, and suburban dwellers actually converged, rather than diverged. On broader issues of American leadership, foreign affairs, terrorism, and security, the American public broadly agreed regardless of residence.

- **American Leadership:** Americans were of the same mind on the core tenets of America’s role in the world, saying that the US should play both an active and shared leadership role in world affairs. They also broadly affirm American exceptionalism.
- **US Role in Foreign Policy:** Americans generally feared the same broad international threats and were unified in supporting a cooperative vision of American foreign policy. Strong majorities across residence categories supported maintaining commitment to NATO and US allies more broadly.
- **Terrorism and Security:** Americans broadly acknowledged that occasional acts of terrorism will be a part of life in the US moving forward. Americans also broadly characterized international terrorism as a critical threat.

These dynamics, pitting urban and non-urban voters against one another, have global implications. The decision of voters in the United Kingdom to support Britain’s exit from the European Union, the surprising election of President Donald Trump in the United States, and the rise of far right political candidates in continental Europe are all recent examples. Trying to understand the influence of “urbanicity” on positions regarding divisive foreign policy issues is an important step in comprehending the root causes of that division.

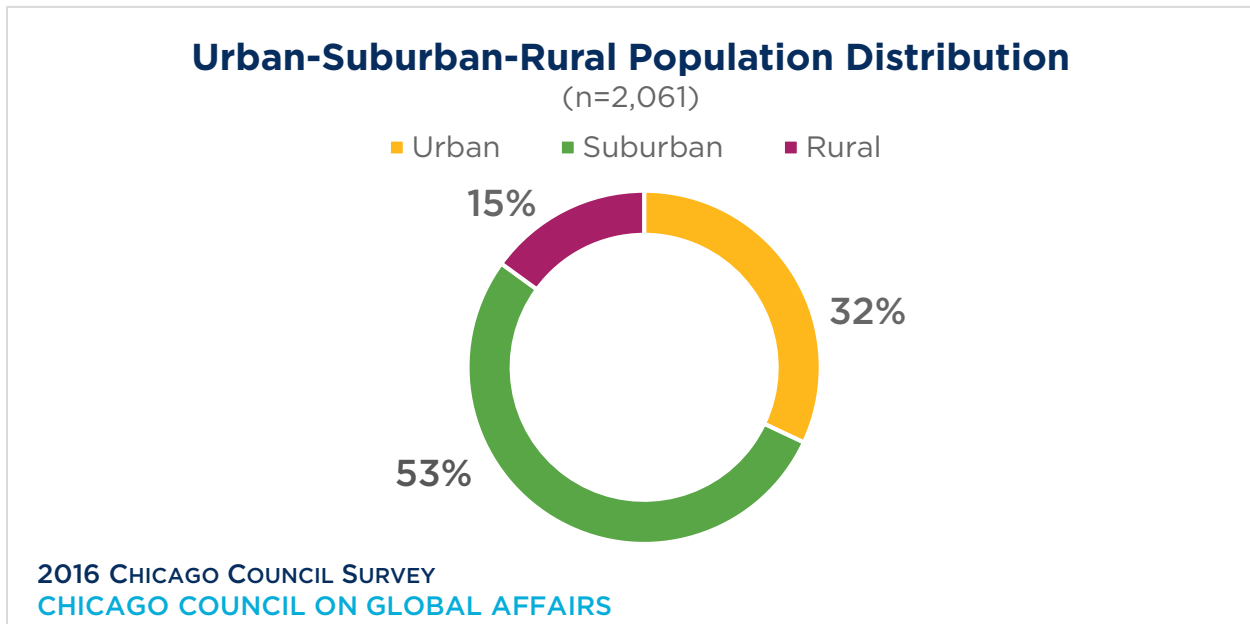
## **The Suburban Factor**

An important starting point for a conversation about convergences and divergences among American policy preferences based on where respondents live is to explicitly consider the suburbs as the dominant community and built environment type in contemporary America. This is not to suggest that all suburbs are the same—culturally, demographically, physically—but it is to say that the majority of Americans live in some form of suburbia rather than in central cities or rural areas. Conversations about urban and rural divisions in the United States often overlook the important dynamic of these suburban Americans.

### ***The distribution of the suburban population***

Trying to get an accurate figure for a suburban population is currently more of an art than a science. According to results from the real estate research firm Trulia, which asked respondents in a nationally representative survey to self-classify the area in which they live, roughly 26 percent of Americans self-reported that they live in an urban area, 53 percent said they live in a suburban area, and 21 percent said they live in a rural area.<sup>iii</sup> The proportions of urban, suburban, and rural Americans represented in the 2016 Chicago Council Survey based on metropolitan statistical area classifications from actual addresses rather than self-classifications break down to be slightly more urban and slightly less rural than the Trulia sample. The consistent through-line, however, is that both nationally representative samples suggest that more than half of Americans live in areas that are, by some measure, identified as the suburbs.

Figure 2



But the suburbs are not a monolith, either in terms of political affiliation or, more concretely, in the make-up of their built environments. In the 2016 Chicago Council Survey, residents of a suburb were as likely to identify as a Republican as they were to identify as a Democrat (40 and 41% respectively). Physically, there are inner-ring suburbs that may look like less dense parts of the city proper, there are middle-ring suburbs that may fit into the traditional schema of suburbia, and there are outer-ring suburbs that may look more like rural areas than suburban areas.<sup>iv</sup>

### ***Policy views of suburban residents***

In their answers to the questions covered in the 2016 Chicago Council Survey, suburban residents were largely distributed in the middle, generally expressing views somewhere between urban and rural poles. However, the suburbs cannot be easily generalized across the issue areas around which there is significant polarization, namely climate change, immigration, and trade. On the issue of immigration, the opinions of suburban residents lean more toward their rural counterparts than toward their urban counterparts. On the issue of trade and the economy, and to a lesser degree climate change, the opinions of suburban residents lean more toward their urban counterparts than toward their rural counterparts.

Across all of the issues around which there is a clear urban-suburban-rural divide, splitting the category of the suburbs into inner-ring and outer-ring suburbs shows residents of closer-in suburbs leaning more toward their central city counterparts, with residents of farther out suburbs leaning more toward their rural counterparts. For example, urban residents tended to have a more functionally open orientation on divisive foreign policy issues like immigration and trade than do rural residents. Overall, observing the data trends from parsing the suburbs into inner and outer rings further supports the argument that proximity to an urban center has at least something to do

with how residents encounter or perceive the day-to-day impacts and consequences of key policy decisions.

### ***The challenge of defining the suburbs***

Even a more technical and spatial conversation about these issues is a challenge because there is no uniformly accepted definition across academia, government, or the private sector for what constitutes the suburbs generally, let alone common terminology that allows for consistently differentiating *between* various types of suburbs.<sup>v</sup> The often cited figure that the United States is now “more than 80 percent urban” is misleading to a certain degree. “Urban” in this case simply means “not rural” and is defined generally by density rather than population size.<sup>vi</sup> Binary definitions of urban and rural are assigned by the US Census Bureau in such a way that “urban” areas reflect a minimum level of development and population density, but that by no means necessarily correspond with images of dense city centers. More accurately, 80 percent of the United States lives within the urbanized part of a metropolitan area over 50,000 in population or in a sufficiently dense small town with a population between 2,500 and 50,000, both of which are not necessarily the same—culturally, economically, physically—as living in “the city.” While distinguishing between rural and not-rural is an important starting point for understanding current patterns of human settlement in the United States, “not rural” in this instance could equally mean someone who lives in downtown Chicago as it does someone who lives in a bedroom community on the far outskirts of Chicago’s metropolitan area. The sheer breadth of the definition of what constitutes “urban” limits its ability to accurately capture the reality of the large percentage of Americans that live somewhere in between dense city centers and rural America.

Lacking appropriate definitions and terms for talking about the suburbs is a problem because it prevents nuanced analysis of the communities in which most Americans live. Whether suburban residents lean increasingly toward their urban or rural counterparts in their public opinion, policy preferences, and voting behavior will likely be a critical factor determining politics in the United States for the foreseeable future.

Researchers need better agreed upon definitions for talking about “the suburbs,” preferably nuanced enough definitions to adequately parse the various forms of communities that make up the otherwise monolithic category of “the suburbs.” For the purposes of this report, a respondent is classified as a suburban resident if he or she lives outside the city limits of his or her metropolitan area’s “central city” but still within the boundaries of that metropolitan area in a locality that is not otherwise classified as rural. Central city designations for each metropolitan area nationwide are made annually by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). A more detailed treatment of the term “suburban” as well as the other location classifications used in this report can be found in the methodology discussion.

## Key Suburban Demographic Characteristics

- Suburban residents are **wealthier than their urban and rural counterparts**. 35 percent of suburban respondents reported a household income of more than \$100K a year; 28 percent of urban respondents and 18 percent of rural respondents reported household incomes of more than \$100k a year.
- The suburbs are **whiter than urban areas but less white than rural areas**. 68 percent of suburban respondents are white, while just over half of urban residents (52%) and 82 percent of rural respondents are white.
- Urban and suburban respondents were **equally likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher** at 31 percent; rural residents were least likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher (22 percent).

## Understanding the Divide: The Economy and Trade, Immigration, and Climate Change

In the 2016 election, there was a clear divide between urban and non-urban areas in that residents of urban cores overwhelmingly voted for the Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton by more than 90 percent, while residents of non-urban areas (suburban, small town, and rural areas) overwhelmingly voted for President Donald Trump at levels between 75 and 90 percent.<sup>vii</sup>

The consequence of any such electoral divide is not just about votes for a particular candidate, but also about the actual policy preferences that undergird current political moods in the country.

The data reveal a real divide among urban, suburban, and rural residents on key foreign policy issues that are likely perceived to have relatively greater domestic impacts, in addition to their international impacts, like trade, immigration, and climate change.

### ***Economy and International Trade***

By any number of measures, the American economy is driven by metropolitan areas and the activity within those areas, encompassing both urban cores and the suburbs that surround them.<sup>viii</sup> Average incomes nationwide are nearly \$16,000 higher for households of a metropolitan area<sup>3</sup> than they are for households in rural areas.<sup>ix</sup> The concentration of economic activity in metropolitan areas and the higher incomes earned by households of metropolitan areas suggest that metropolitan residents would have a more favorable economic outlook in general compared to rural residents, given the relative prosperity

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<sup>3</sup> The original analysis by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics from which this figure is drawn cites higher incomes for “urban” households relative to “rural” households, using the standards of the US Census Bureau which classifies all non-rural areas as “urban,” including suburbs. Accordingly, the authors use the term “metropolitan” as a stand in that encompasses both central city and suburban areas.



that metropolitan residents are more likely to enjoy. The data presented in this report support this correlation. Metropolitan residents, both urban and suburban, expressed more positive outlooks on the economy and international trade than their rural counterparts.

Americans recognize that globalization and trade come with both economic risks and rewards. Regardless of where they live, majorities of Americans believe that globalization is mostly good for the US economy, that international trade is overall good for consumers and standards of living, and that free trade agreements are an effective way to achieve US foreign policy goals. However, there is also consensus that international trade means less job security for American workers. At least six in ten Americans in all locations said that globalization is “mostly good” for the United States and that free trade agreements are an effective approach to achieving US foreign policy goals (see Figure 3, Figure 4). Urban residents were most convinced, though solid majorities in every location agreed. While these results suggest greater wariness among suburban and rural voters about the effects of international trade on jobs and job security, they do not suggest a wholesale rejection of trade and globalization among suburban and rural residents.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**

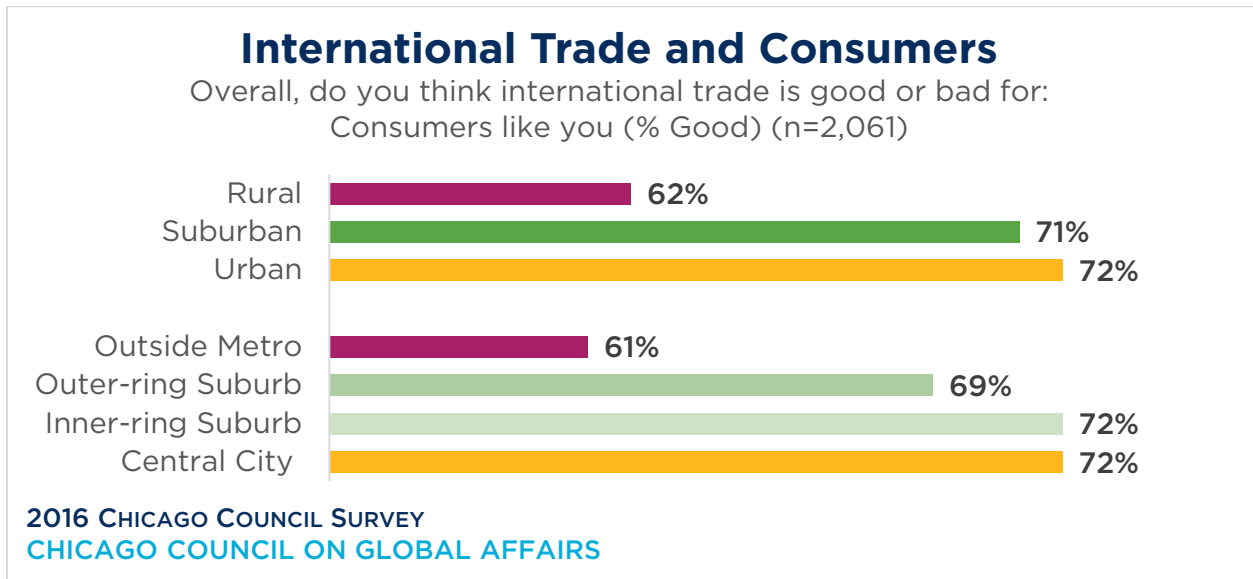


Despite an overall positive view towards globalization and international trade, respondents in all locations parsed both the associated risks and rewards. In interpreting the benefits of international trade, a majority of Americans in all locations said that international trade is good for consumers (62%+) and their standard of living (56%+). However, in both instances, urban and suburban residents were more likely to express positive views of international trade than rural residents (by 8+ percentage points) (Figure 5, Figure 6).

**Figure 5**



Figure 6



Where respondents live relative to urban centers correlates with their perceptions of the risks and rewards of a globalizing economy. While a majority of urban and suburban residents said that international trade is good for the US economy (59%+), rural respondents were split almost evenly on the issue (Figure 7).

Similarly, while a majority of Americans (58%+) in all locations said that international trade is bad for the job security of American workers, there is a 13 percentage point gap between urban and rural residents on this question, with urban residents expressing a relatively less unfavorable view (Figure 8). At least six in ten suburban and rural residents (60%+) said that international trade is bad for creating jobs in the US; urban residents were split nearly evenly on the issue (Figure 9). Rural respondents and residents outside a metro area express mixed views on trade's impact on the US economy and American companies, in contrast to more positive views in the suburbs and urban centers (Figure 10).

Figure 7

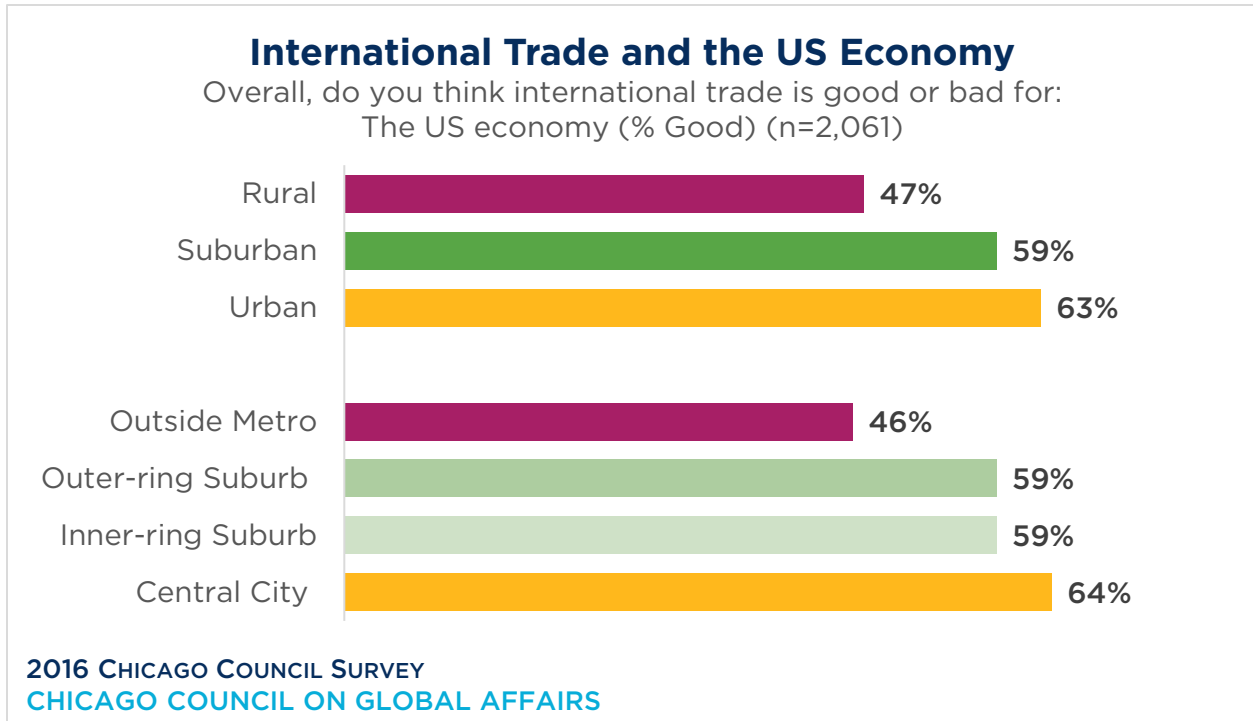


Figure 8

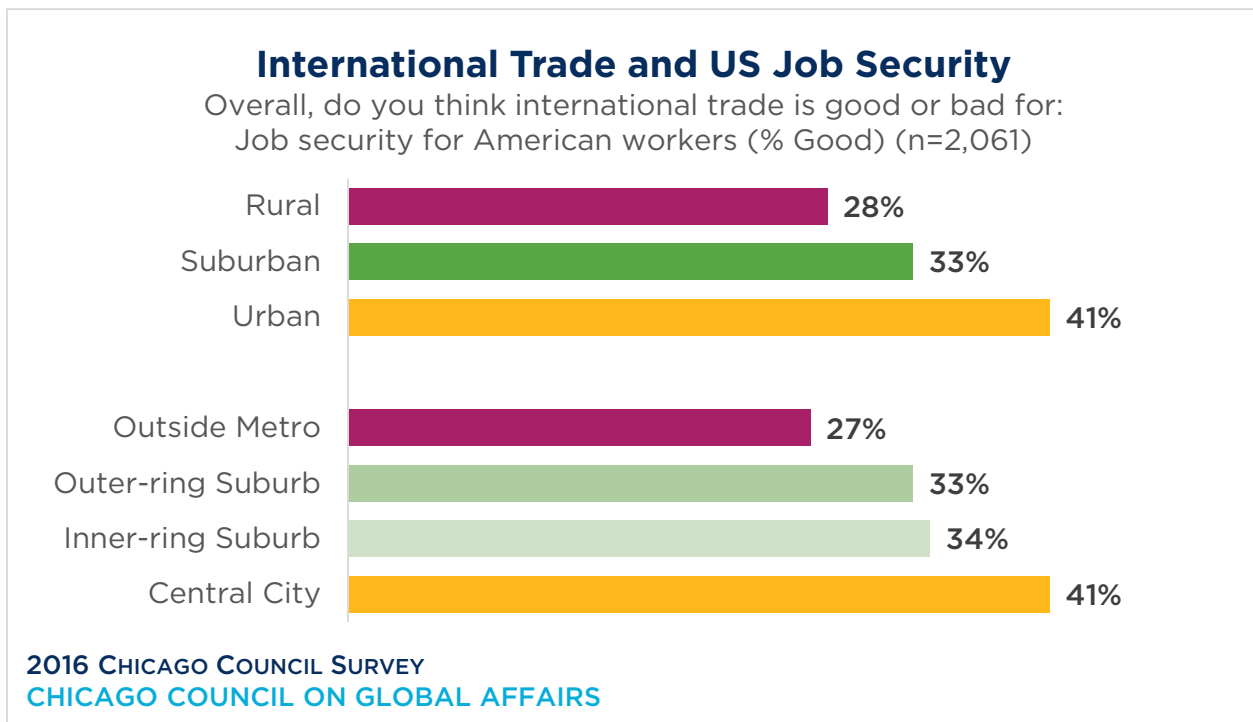


Figure 9

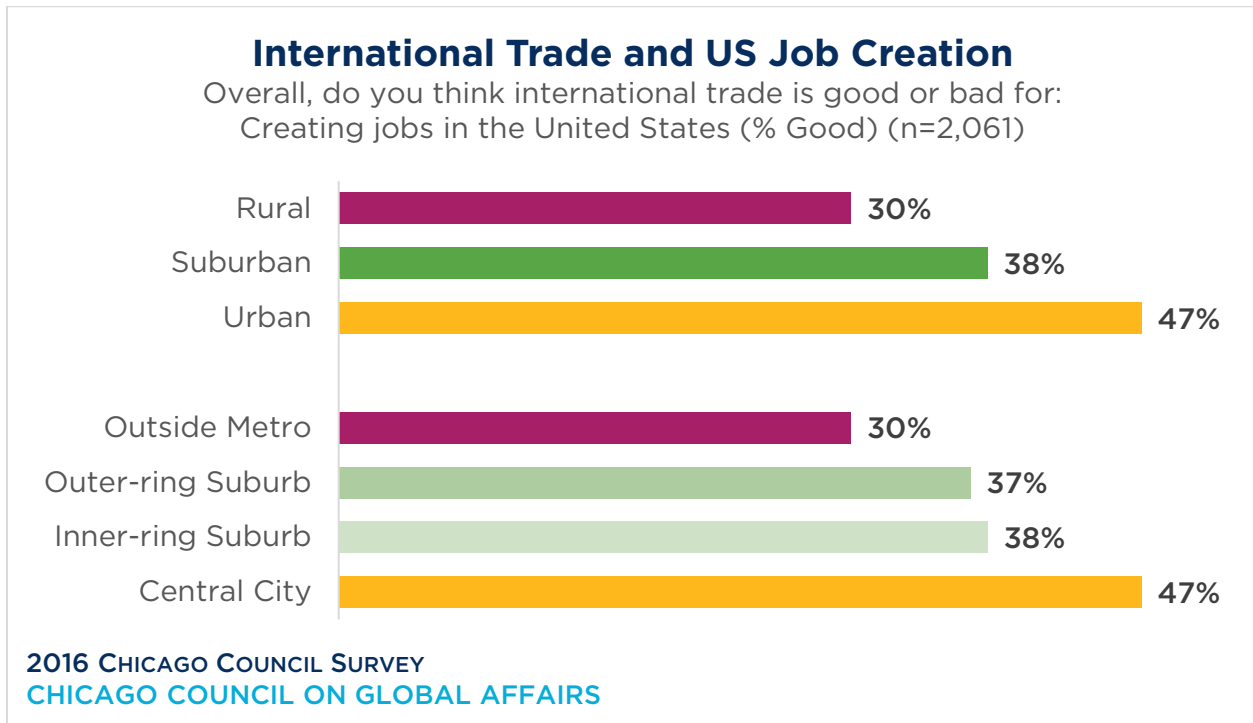
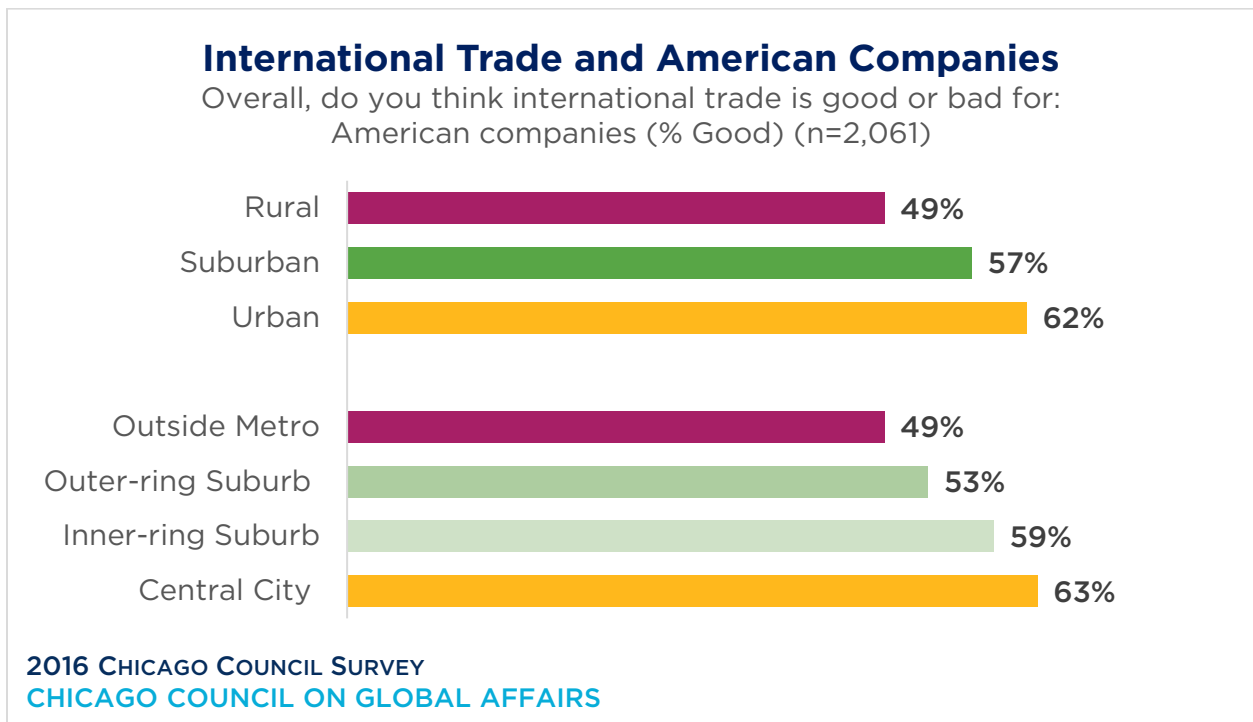


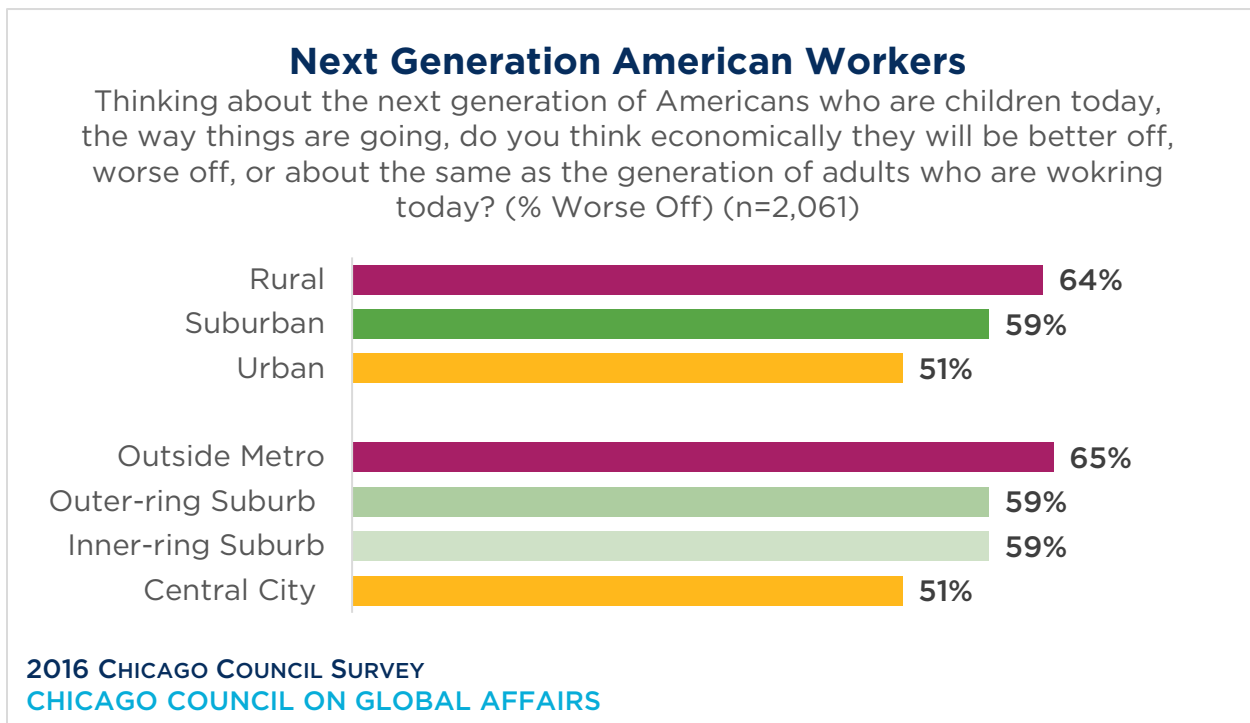
Figure 10



Even though suburban and rural residents seemed to acknowledge the positive aspects of trade as consumers, it also possible that they could be more concerned about jobs than consumer prices or standard of living. In the 2016 Chicago Council Survey, a majority among the US public overall (74%) rated protecting American jobs a top US foreign policy goal (69% among urban, 75% among suburban and 79% among rural respondents). This prioritization could have led many to vote for Donald Trump and his largely protectionist and somewhat anti-globalization economic platform.

Perceptions of trade’s impact on jobs is also related to views of economic pessimism for the next generation of Americans. A majority of suburban and rural residents (59%+) said that “the next generation will be worse off than adults working today” while urban residents were split evenly on the issue. Previous Chicago Council Survey analysis also shows that this sense of economic pessimism about lower economic mobility for the next generation was particularly acute among those who were core supporters of President Donald Trump (even though they are not the lowest income earners).<sup>x</sup> Those living outside of metro areas were the most pessimistic about the economic mobility of the next generation.

**Figure 11**



Substantial economic literature and empirical data link growth, trade, and metropolitan areas as intimately bound up with one another as hubs of the global economy that emerged as a function of liberal international trade regimes of the post-World War II order.<sup>xi</sup> This supports the assumption that those employed in, and who understand themselves to be most directly benefiting from, those systems of trade—metropolitan residents—might have a more positive outlook on trade generally.

The findings presented in this section show that while differences in opinion on trade and economic pessimism exist between urban and suburban residents, the average gap between urban and suburban residents were substantially smaller (an average gap of 4 percentage points) than the average gap between urban and rural residents (an average gap of 11 percentage points).

### **Immigration**

The immigrant population in the United States is increasingly dispersed and more likely to live in suburban areas than they were just a decade ago. The changes are part of a long-term trend that experts predict could dramatically reshape communities around the United States. Overall, three quarters (76 %) of the growth in the foreign-born population between 2000 and 2013 in the largest metropolitan areas occurred in the suburbs.<sup>xii</sup> Although immigrants are moving to the suburbs, urban residents among the overall US public were consistently more open to immigration than residents in other communities. In fact, suburban and rural residents expressed the least favorable views of individual immigrant groups and were the least supportive of generally pro-immigration policy stances.

Urban residents were far more likely than rural residents to say that legal immigration should be maintained at current levels or increased (Figure 12). Just over a third of urban residents said legal immigration should be decreased compared to almost half (47%) of rural respondents. Suburban residents expressed views between urban and rural residents on this issue, with 40 percent saying that legal immigration should be decreased. A minority of Americans (45% or less) in all locations considered large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the US a critical threat to US interests. Urban residents were the least likely to view large numbers of immigrants and refugees as a threat (Figure 13).

**Figure 12**

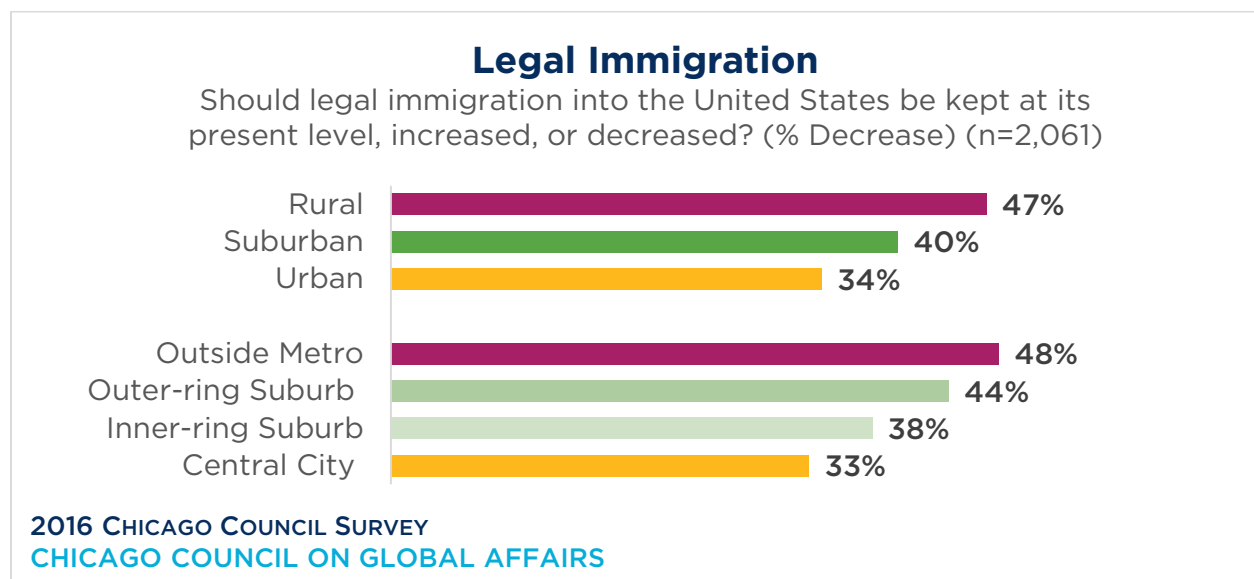
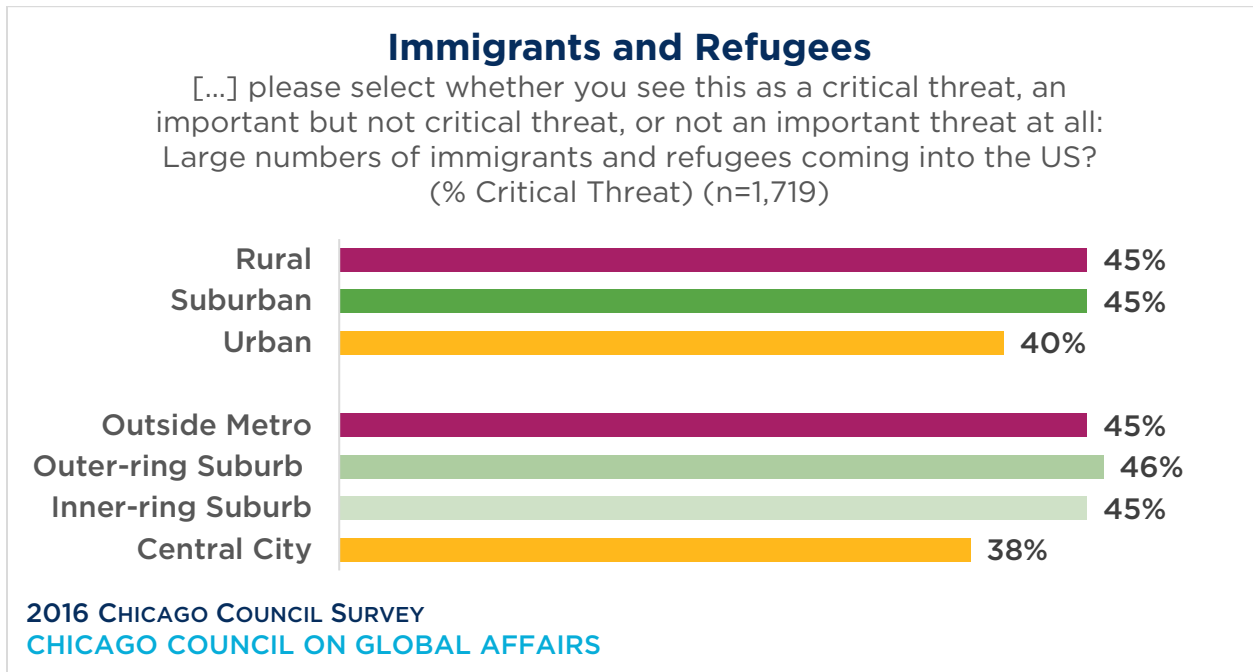


Figure 13



When asked about Chinese, Mexican, and Middle Eastern immigrants, suburban and rural residents were more likely than urban residents to say they had a somewhat or very unfavorable view of each immigrant group. The gap between urban and rural residents was as little as 8 percentage points and as many as 15 percentage points (Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16). Americans across all locations were more evenly divided on expressing an unfavorable view of Middle Eastern immigrants (ranging between 44% and 57% unfavorable). However, suburban and rural residents were more likely than urban residents (by 11+ percentage points) to characterize their view of Middle Eastern immigrants as somewhat or very unfavorable.



Figure 14

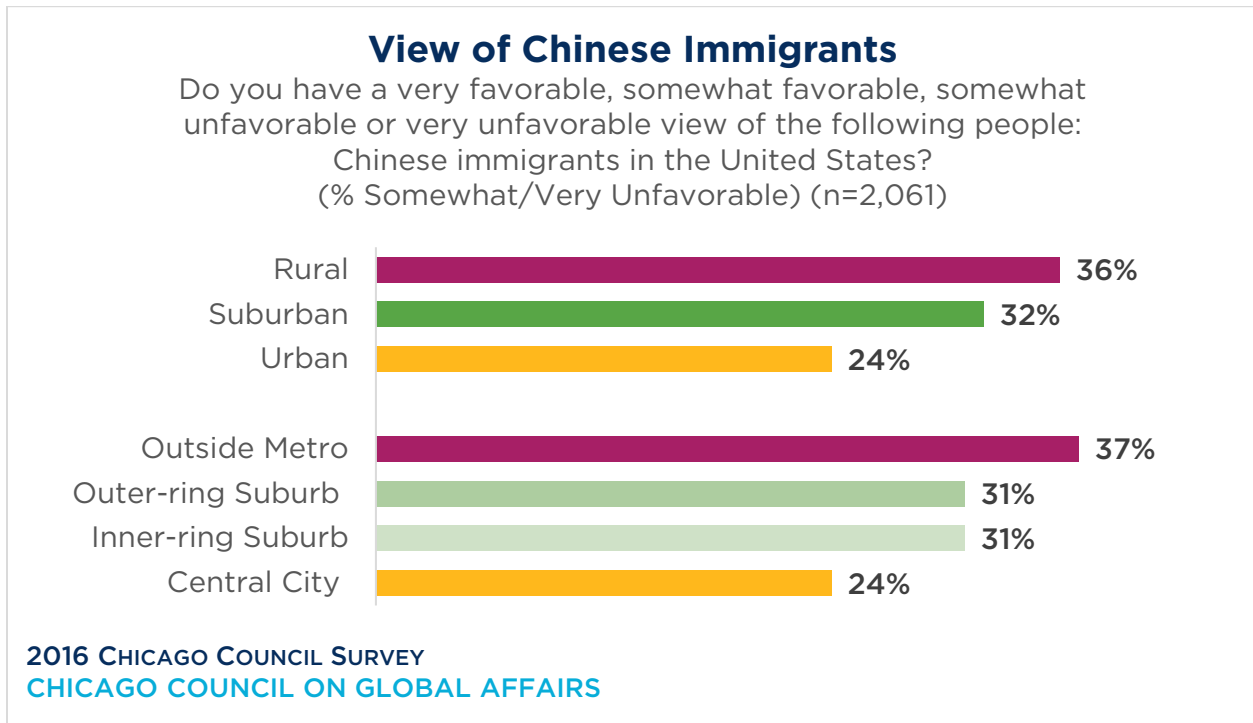


Figure 15

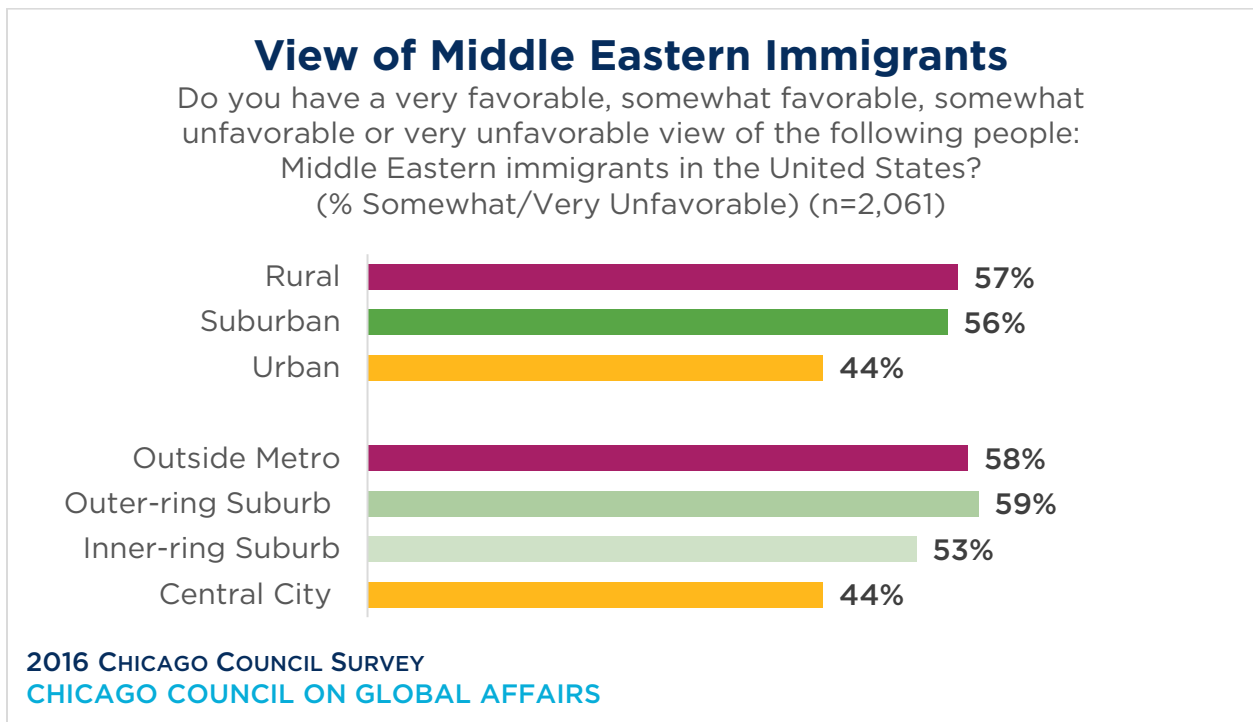


Figure 16

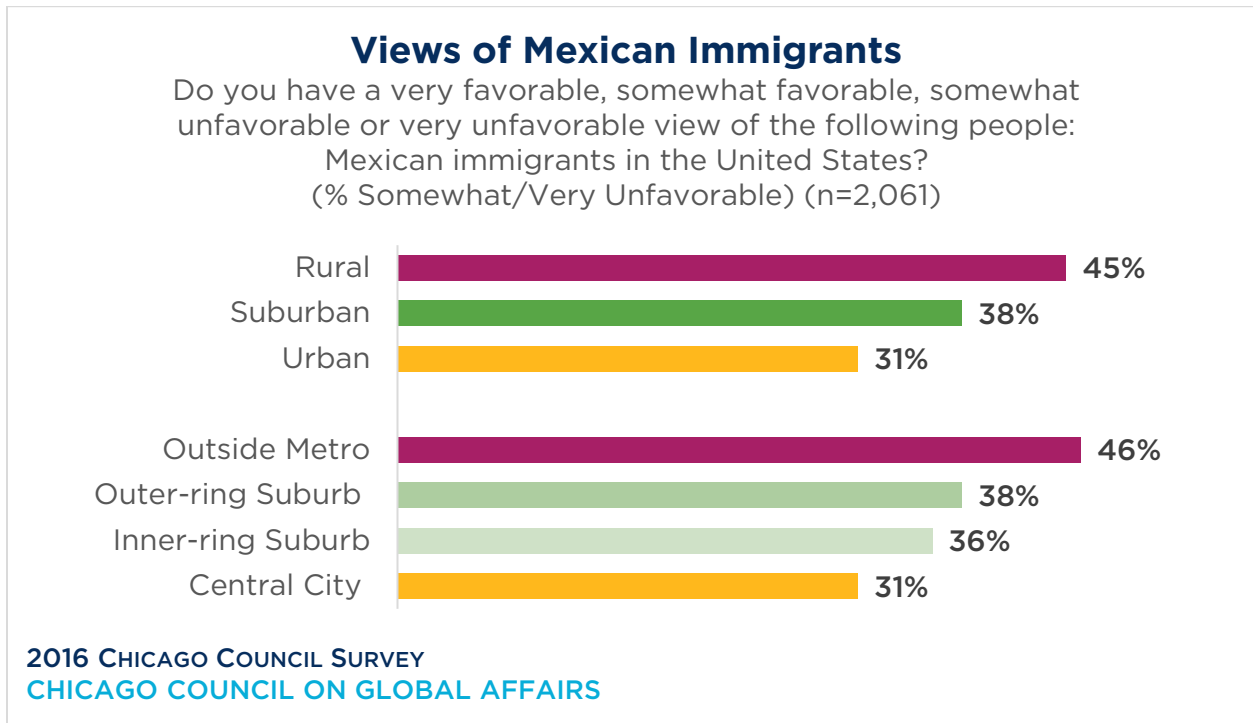
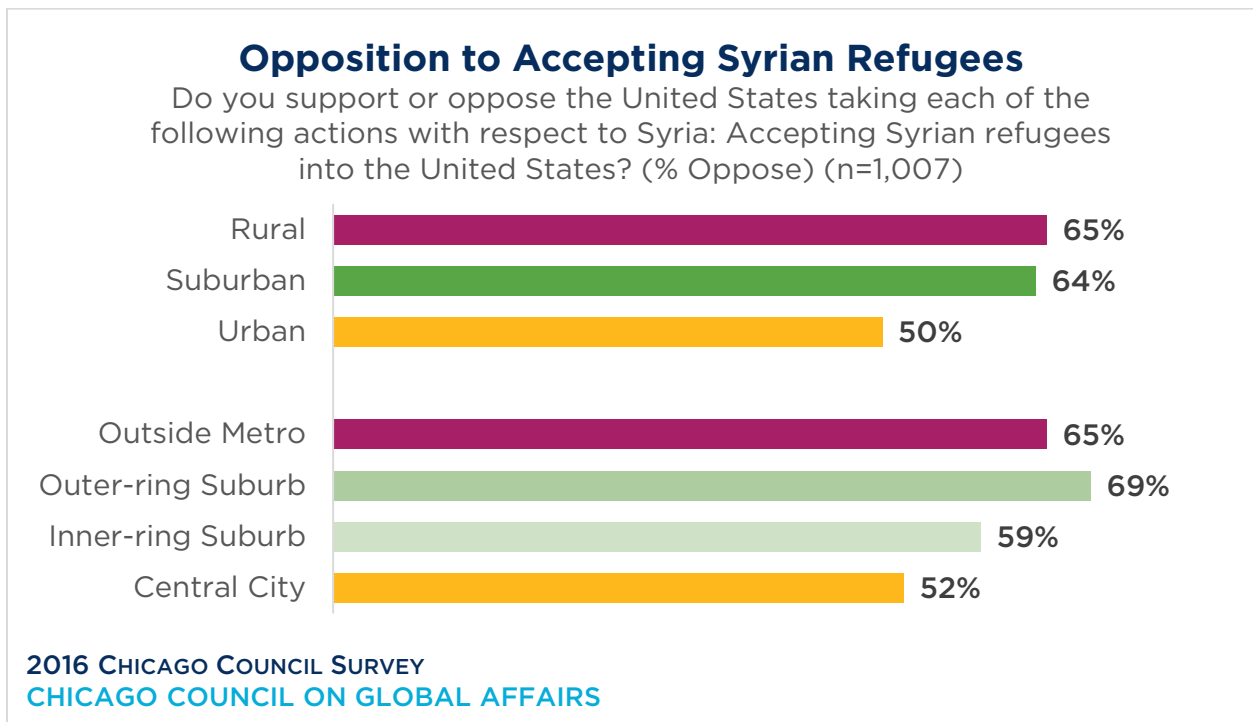


Figure 17



Given their views of Middle Eastern immigrants, it is not surprising that a majority of suburban and rural respondents opposed the US accepting Syrian refugees, while urban residents were nearly evenly divided on the matter (Figure 17).

Of course, a large component of the immigration debate in the United States centers on the best way to approach the issue of 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States.<sup>xiii</sup> While a minority opinion among respondents in all locations, suburban and rural residents were more likely to say that “undocumented immigrants” should be deported than urban residents were likely to support that course of action (by 7+ percentage points). The divide between urban and rural residents was greatest, with rural residents the mostly likely to have said that they support deportation (by 19 percentage points). Urban and suburban residents were more likely to say they favor offering an eventual path to citizenship for undocumented workers (Figure 18).

**Figure 18**

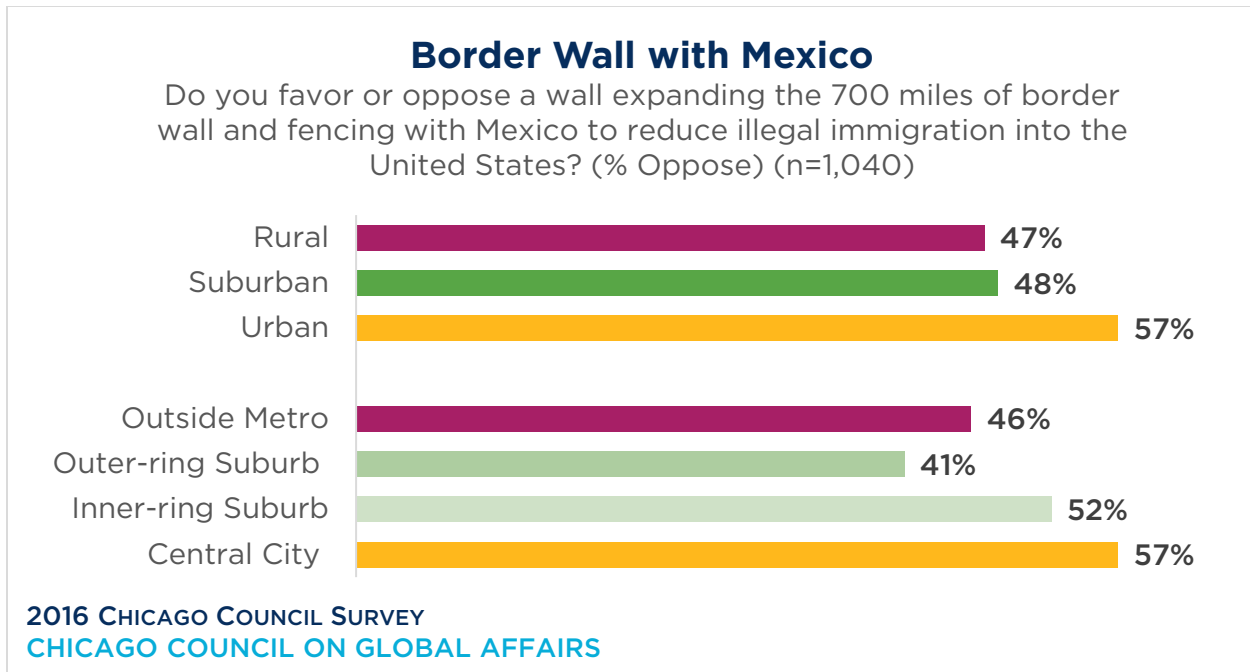
| <b>Path to Citizenship</b>  |                                   |  |  |                            |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|--|----------------------------|
| When it comes to immigration, which comes closest to your view about undocumented immigrants who are currently working in the United States?<br>(n=1,038) |                                   |  |  |                            |
|   | Stay in job/apply for citizenship | Stay in job/eventually apply for citizenship | Stay in job with permit/no citizenship | Leave job and leave the US |
| Urban   | 35%                               | 28%  | 12%                                    | 25%                        |
| Suburban  | 27%                               | 27%  | 14%                                    | 30%                        |
| Rural   | 25%                               | 18%  | 12%                                    | 44%                        |
| Central City  | 34%                               | 30%  | 22%                                    | 25%                        |
| Inner-ring Suburb   | 29%                               | 26%  | 29%                                    | 18%                        |
| Outer-ring Suburb   | 11%                               | 16%  | 12%                                    | 11%                        |
| Outside Metro   | 25%                               | 27%  | 36%                                    | 44%                        |

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The proposal to expand the border wall along the border with Mexico by some 700 miles is an issue that suburban and rural residents were more likely to favor than urban residents. That said, even suburban and rural residents were nearly evenly divided on the issue (Figure 19). Urban residents were the least likely to say that expanding the

border wall will be somewhat or very effective at reducing illegal immigration (38%), while rural residents were the most likely to say that it will be somewhat or very effective (57%). Suburban residents expressed views that fell between urban and rural views on the effectiveness of a border wall, with 46 percent saying that it would be somewhat or very effective.

**Figure 19**



The survey results show that suburban and rural residents exhibited stronger support for stricter immigration policies than urban residents. The gap between urban residents on the one hand, and suburban and rural residents on the other, was consistent across nearly responses to immigration related questions. On average, on all immigration related questions, suburban residents were just four percentage points away from their rural counterparts while they were nine percentage points away from their urban counterparts. Looking more closely at inner- and outer-ring suburbs, responses from residents of inner suburbs were closer to those of residents of central cities, while responses of those from outer suburbs were closer to, or in some instances even more anti-immigrant, than those of residents not living in a metropolitan area.

There are several possible explanations for this pattern. A popular narrative for explaining support for stricter immigration enforcement and policy is the need to protect native born workers from immigrant labor pool competition. Research suggests that the long term effects of immigration do not suppress wages or raise unemployment rates among native born workers. That said, there is evidence to suggest that increased immigration can cause adverse short-term effects for low-skilled workers.<sup>xiv</sup> The narrative of economic anxiety and hardship acting as forces that drive support for anti-immigrant policy stances among suburban residents is hard to reconcile with the demographic data

captured in the 2016 Chicago Council Survey that suggests that suburban residents broadly are wealthier and just as well educated as their urban peers.

A second line of analysis mobilizes a substantial body of work by social scientists that elaborates upon what is known as the “halo effect.” According to this explanation, residents that ring areas in which there is a high concentration of immigrants—for instance an ethnically diverse central city—are more likely to express anti-immigrant sentiment or support restrictive immigration policies than residents who actually live in close proximity to immigrant communities. In this dynamic, it is not the immediate concentration of, or increased interaction, with immigrants in a particular area that drives anti-immigrant sentiment, but the *nearby* concentration of immigrants.<sup>xv</sup> Put differently, living near enough to see (and therefore to potentially fear) an influx of foreign born residents, but not near enough to regularly interact with those residents, has been found to be a relevant factor influencing anti-immigrant public opinion or electoral support for candidates and parties with strong anti-immigration policy platforms.

There is another line of analysis that suggests that it is the direct influx of immigrants in areas where the foreign-born population was previously very small in overall percentage terms that is correlated with support for political candidates and party platforms that support increased restrictions on immigration and/or increased enforcement of existing restrictions on immigration. In this explanation, it is the rate of the percentage change—and not the absolute number of new immigrants living in an area—that matters. Substantial tension and shock can emerge from immigrants settling in areas where there previously were few or none. Data from both the 2016 presidential election in the United States as well as the 2016 referendum decision in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union support this line of analysis. Areas that experienced relatively low levels of migration in absolute numbers, but high levels of migration in percentage terms, were more likely to support the candidacy of President Donald Trump and the decision to leave the European Union respectively.<sup>xvi</sup>

Taking a longer view of immigrant integration and acclimation processes would suggest that both of the dynamics outlined above can be factors in the process of acclimation on the part of a “receiving” population. The initial arrival of immigrants to a community that has very little experience with contemporary immigration can stoke increased anti-immigrant sentiment. However, prolonged exposure to and direct interaction with immigrant communities could ultimately act as a moderating force on anti-immigrant sentiment. California presents an interesting example whereby the substantial anti-immigrant tension and “shock” that initially accompanied the dramatic influx of immigrants from Mexico and Central America in the early 1990s eventually gave way to relatively workable equilibriums and generally pro-immigrant policy norms.<sup>xvii</sup> The California case would ultimately suggest that even if an influx of immigrants initially causes tension and anti-immigrant backlash, prolonged interaction with and exposure to an immigrant group can, in the long-term, lead to less tension and less anti-immigrant sentiment.

## Climate Change

Urban, suburban, and rural populations all face at least some level of climate change risk. But the risk profile faced by each of these community types is different in terms of the actual threats and consequences that are likely to be most immediately felt in those areas. For example, increased temperatures may exacerbate urban heat island effects and drive mortality rates in cities during the hottest months of the year. Rural populations dependent on agriculture may see their livelihoods threatened as a result of increasingly unpredictable weather patterns and water scarcity. Despite all localities facing consequences to climate change risks, there are clear divides along urban, suburban, and rural lines in terms of the level of threat that different populations were willing to ascribe to climate change.

This issue of how serious a threat Americans consider climate change is important because it has implications for the costs that Americans are willing to incur to mitigate that threat. A more serious threat, presumably, is something against which more serious action needs to be taken. Half of urban residents in the 2016 Chicago Council Survey said that climate change is a “critical threat” to US interests while just over a third of suburban (35 percent) residents and a quarter of rural residents (27 percent) concurred (see Figure 20). In turn, urban residents and those living in central cities were the most likely to say that immediate action is needed to mitigate the effects of climate change, even if this involves significant costs. Rural residents and those outside of a metropolitan area were least likely to prefer immediate measures to stem the effects of climate change.

Figure 20

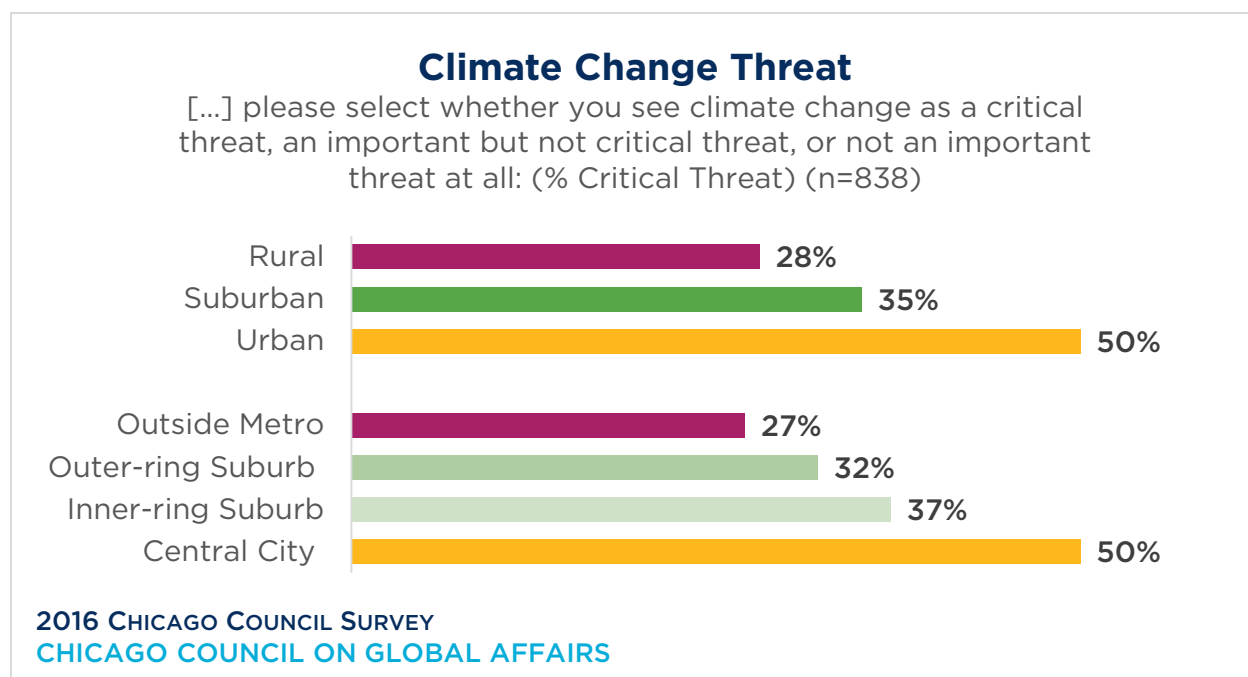
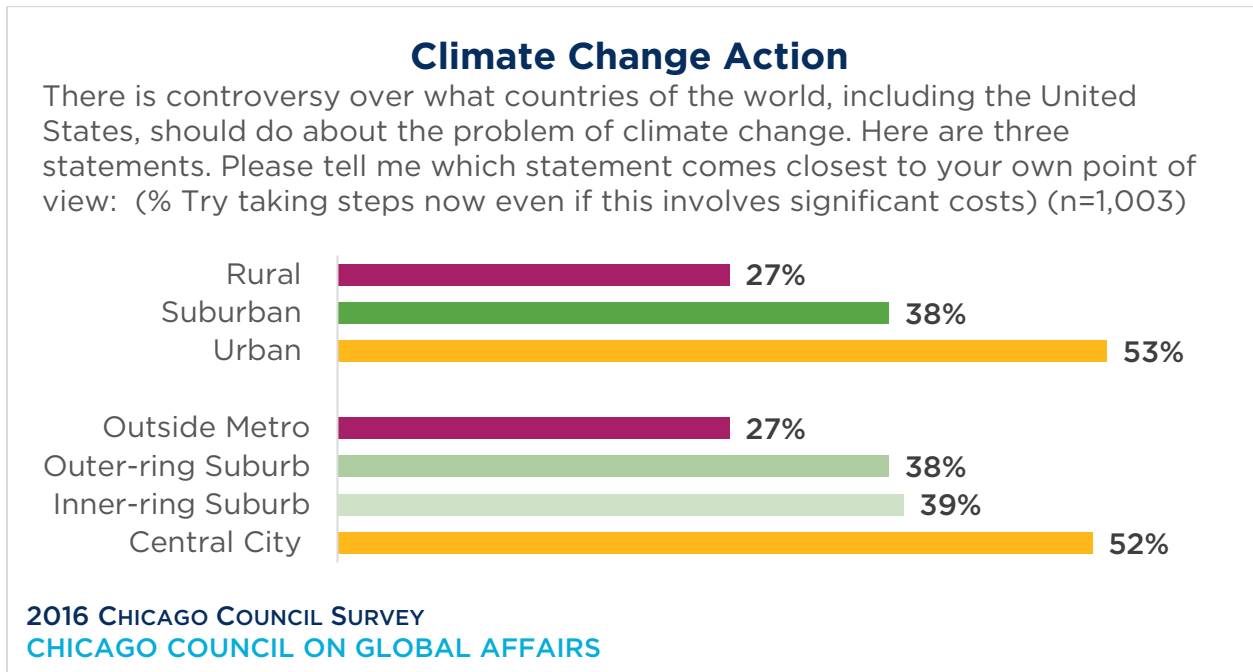


Figure 21



Despite the controversial nature of climate change in the contemporary American political climate, a strong majority of Americans in all locations favor US participation in the Paris Climate Agreement (Figure 22). International agreements of all kinds generally enjoy broad support across wide segments of the American public, and the Paris Agreement appears to be no different. In contrast to the more immediate consequences and costs of what it means to characterize climate change as a critical threat, voicing support for an abstract international agreement without any of the potential tradeoffs included in the question wording is likely to come across as having relatively few downsides and potential immediate costs for the average American.

Figure 22



### Shared Concerns: American Leadership, US Foreign Policy, Terrorism, and Security Threats

There are key policy issues on which the preferences of urban, rural, and suburban dwellers converge, rather than diverge. On issues of American leadership, foreign affairs, terrorism, and security, there is broad agreement among the American public, regardless of where they live relative to an urban center. Generally speaking, these policy topics are relatively abstract and distant from the immediate lives of most Americans. The United States' relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or its orientation to key allies most likely has less tangible effects on most Americans' daily lives (with the possible exception of military families) than issues related to the economy and immigration.

#### *American Leadership in the World*

Americans—urban, suburban, and rural—generally agreed that America should play an active role in the world. Regardless of where they live relative to an urban center, they voiced support for international engagement but with the United States ultimately playing a shared leadership role in the world.

A majority of Americans in all locations thought it would be best for the country if the US takes an active part in world affairs. Suburban voters were the most likely to say that the US should take an active part in world affairs, while rural residents were the least likely to say the US should take an active part in world affairs (Figure 23). A majority of Americans in all locations said that America should play a “shared leadership role” in the world, as compared to a dominant leadership role or no leadership role at all (Figure 24).



Figure 23

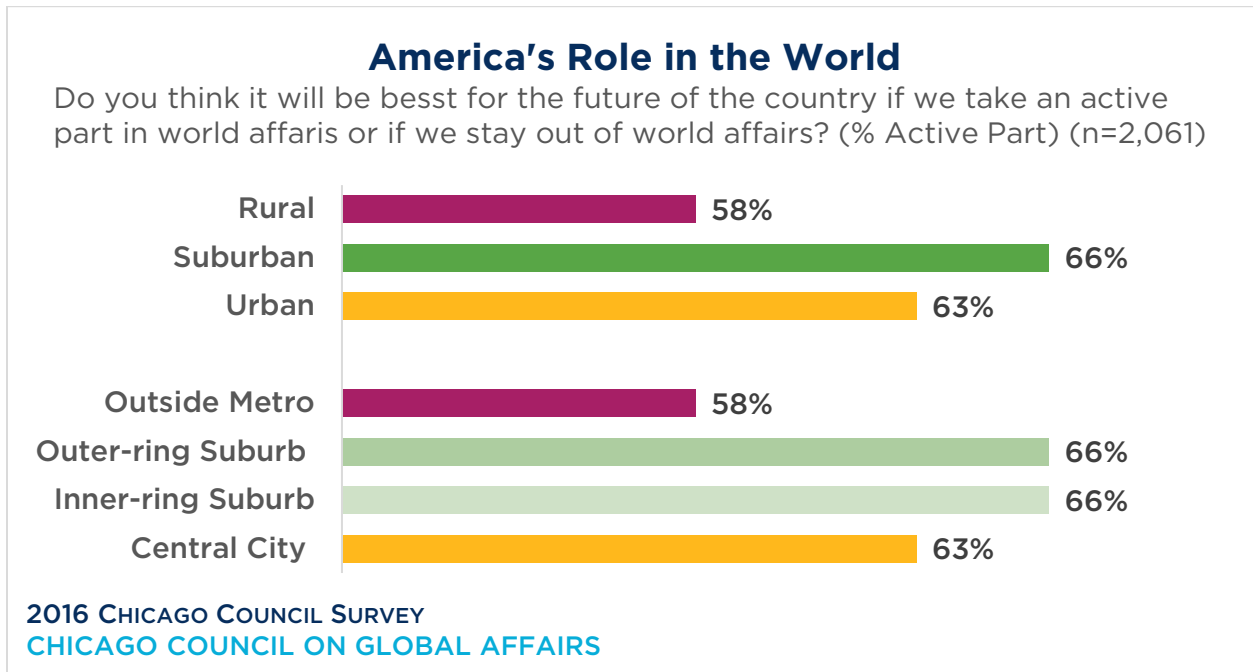
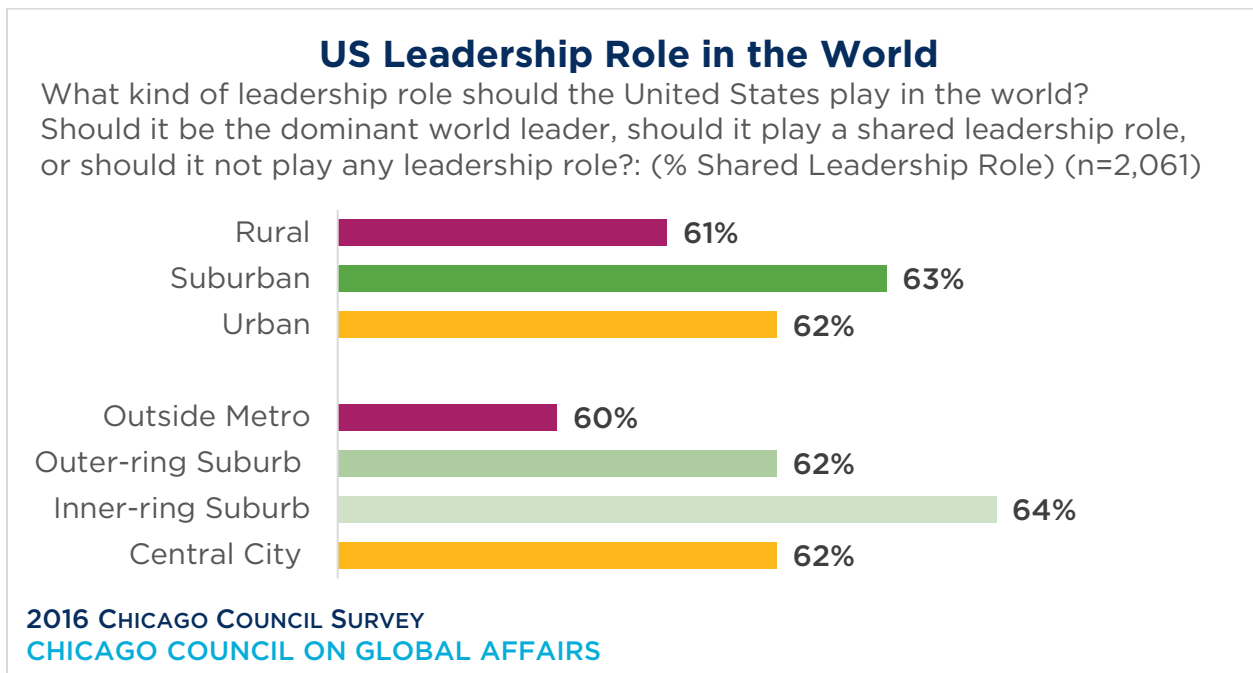


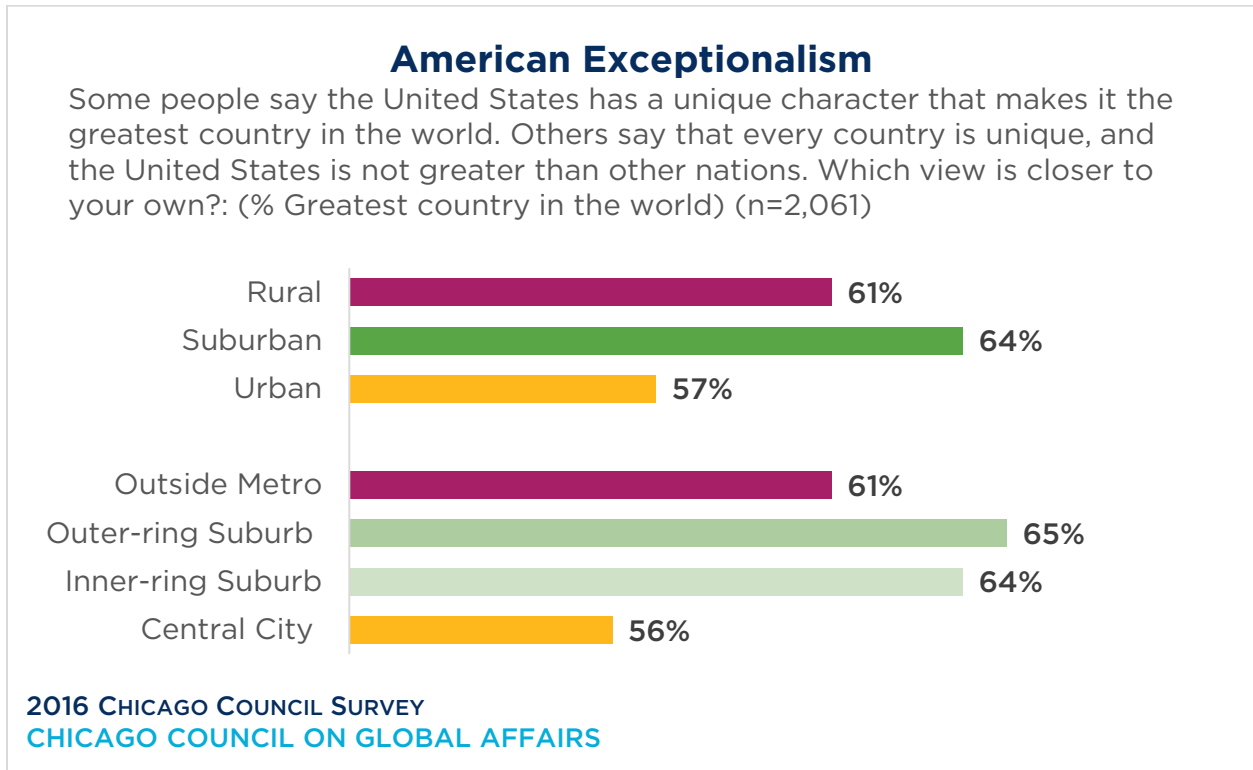
Figure 24



A majority of Americans in all locations also broadly affirmed American exceptionalism, saying that America is the “greatest country in the world” in contrast to being “no better than any other country in the world.” Suburban residents were the most likely to say that

America is the “greatest country in the world.” Urban residents were the least likely to express views in line with American exceptionalism, with rural residents expressing a view somewhere between urban and suburban residents (Figure 25).

**Figure 25**



### ***US Foreign Policy***

While President Donald Trump questioned the nature of US alliances on the campaign trail, majorities of Americans in all locations agreed that “maintaining existing alliances” and “building new alliances” are effective ways to achieve US foreign policy goals (Figure 26, Figure 27). Similarly, a majority of Americans in all locations said that NATO is still essential. Support for NATO was highest among urban respondents (Figure 28). In turn, a majority of Americans in all locations said that the US should at least maintain commitment to NATO at current levels (Figure 29). It is as yet unclear how President Trump’s provocative “America First” foreign policy will interact with broad public opinion mandates that seem to favor collaborative relationships with alliances.

Figure 26

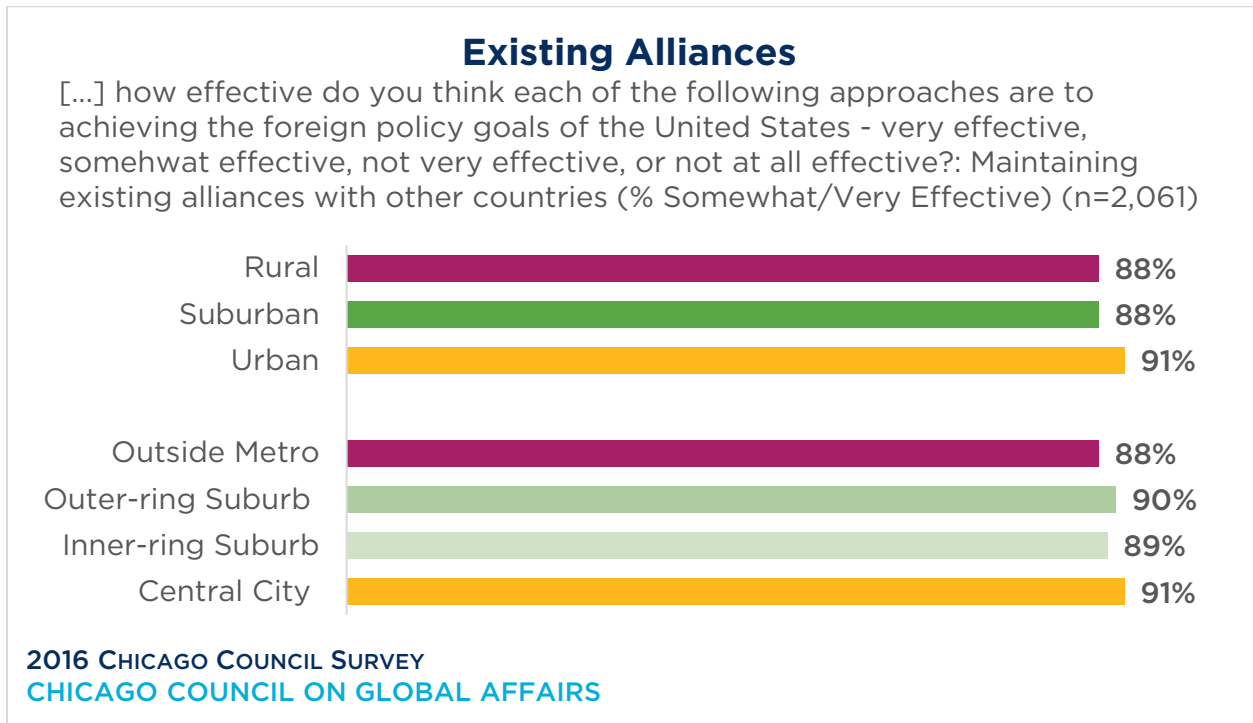


Figure 27

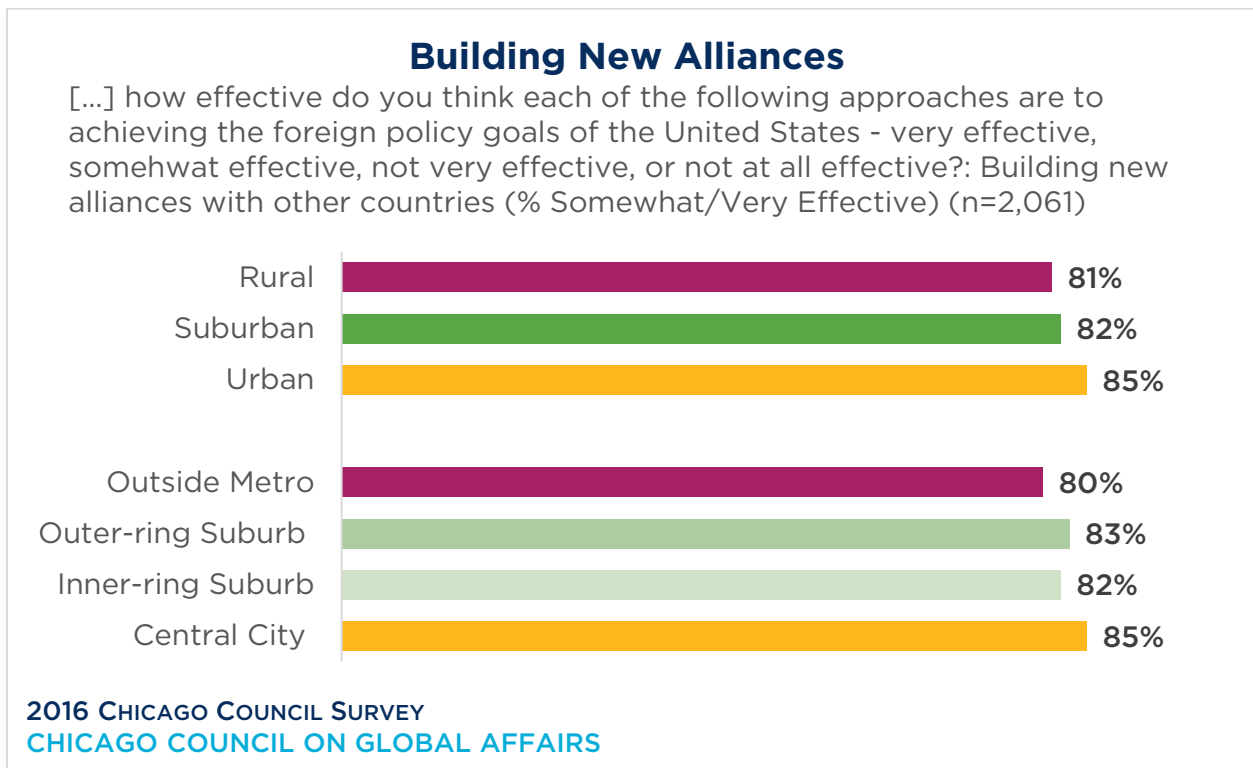


Figure 28

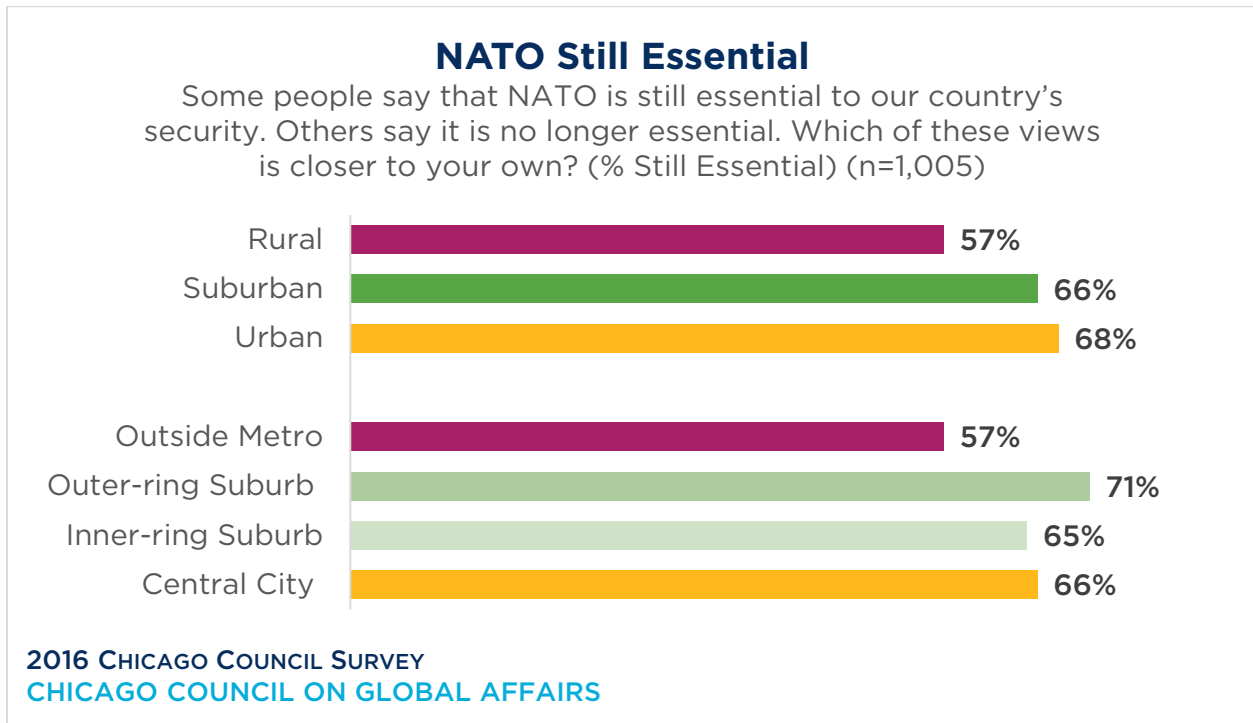
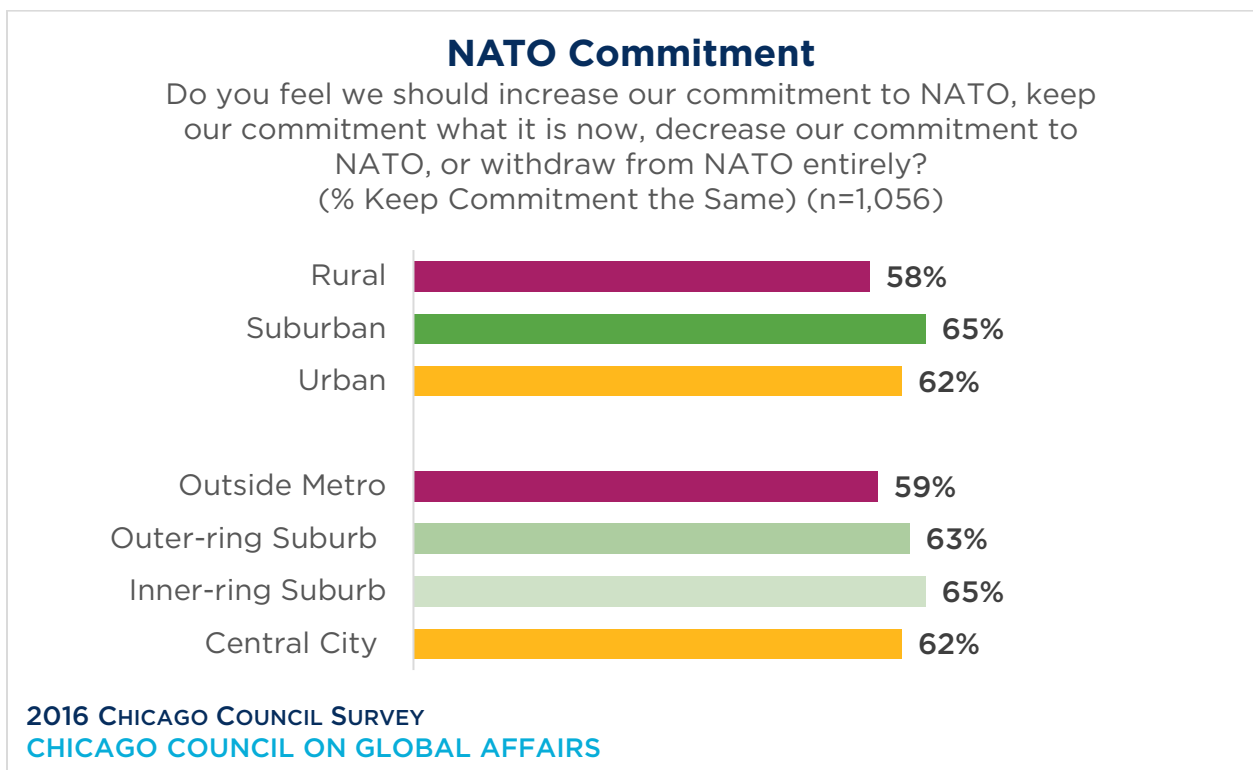
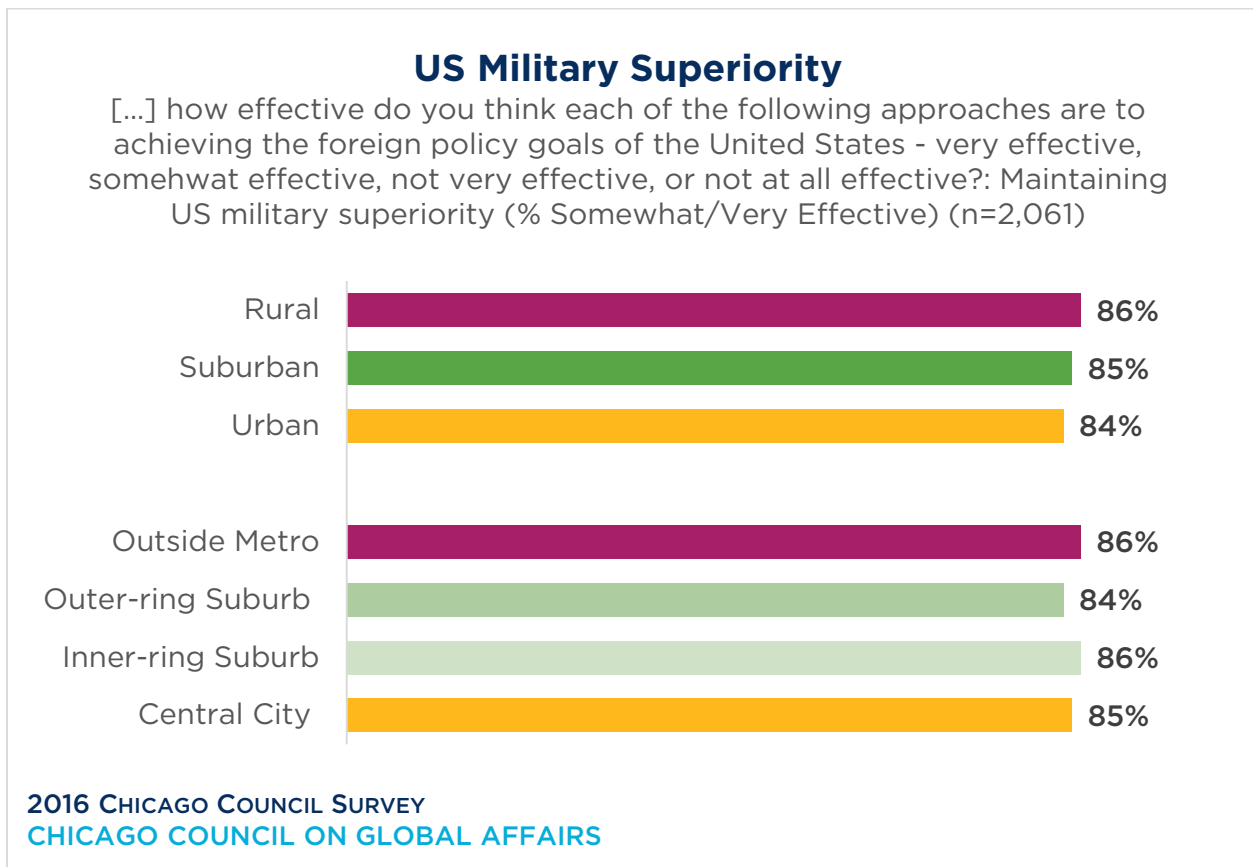


Figure 29



President Trump has vowed to revitalize the United States' military, most notably with a 10 percent increase in the defense budget.<sup>xviii</sup> This is likely to please Americans. A 2016 Pew survey found that for the first time in more than a decade, a greater share of Americans said that spending on national defense should be increased (35%) than say it should be cut back (24%; 40% said it should be the same).<sup>xix</sup> In addition, the 2016 Chicago Council Survey shows that a large majority of Americans in all locations said that maintaining US military superiority is an effective way to achieve US foreign policy goals (Figure 30).

**Figure 30**



### ***Terrorism***

Regardless of where they live, about three in four Americans expect that occasional terrorist attacks are likely to be a factor of American life in the future. Roughly three quarters of Americans also characterized international terrorism as a critical threat to the United States. A minority of Americans in all locations said that they are somewhat or very worried they or someone they know will be the target of a terrorist attack.

Figure 31

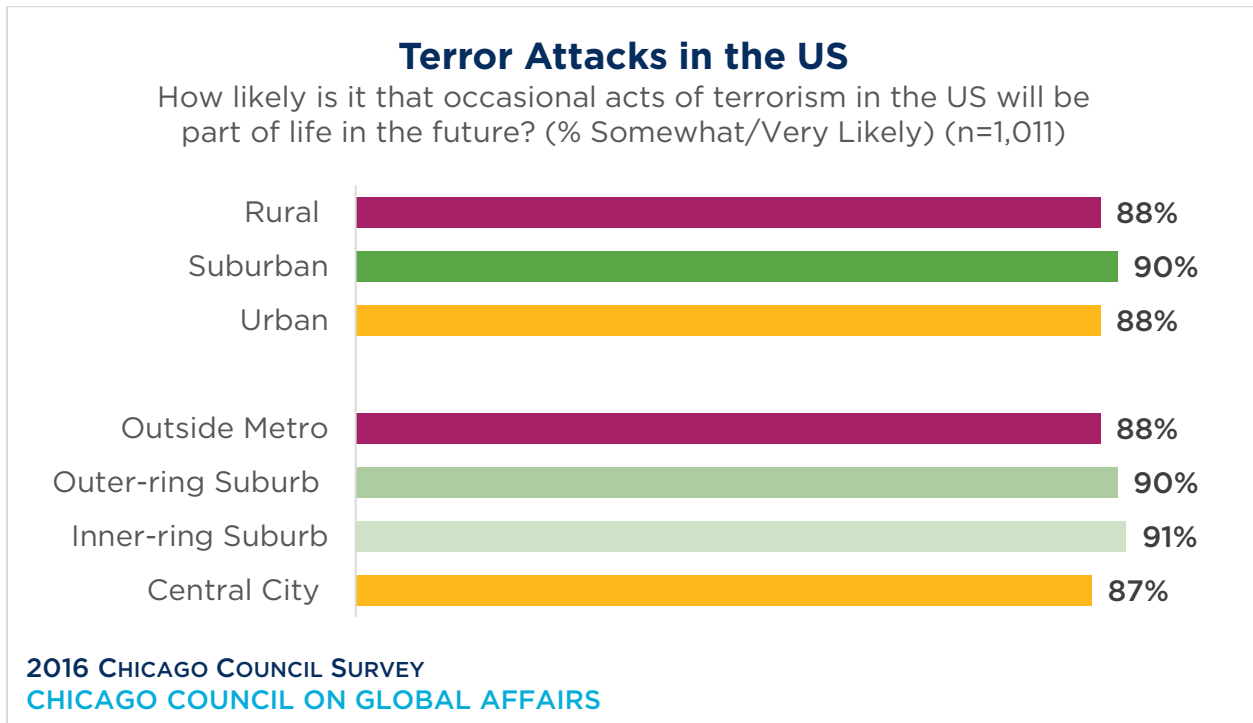
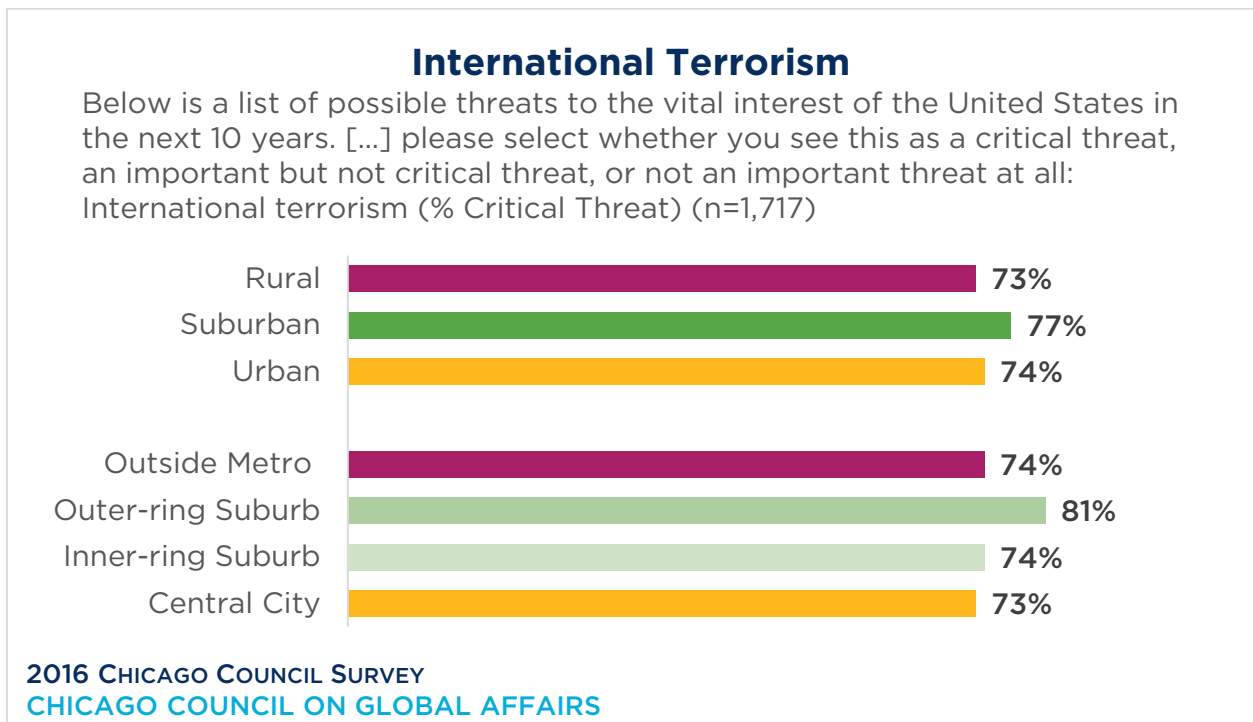
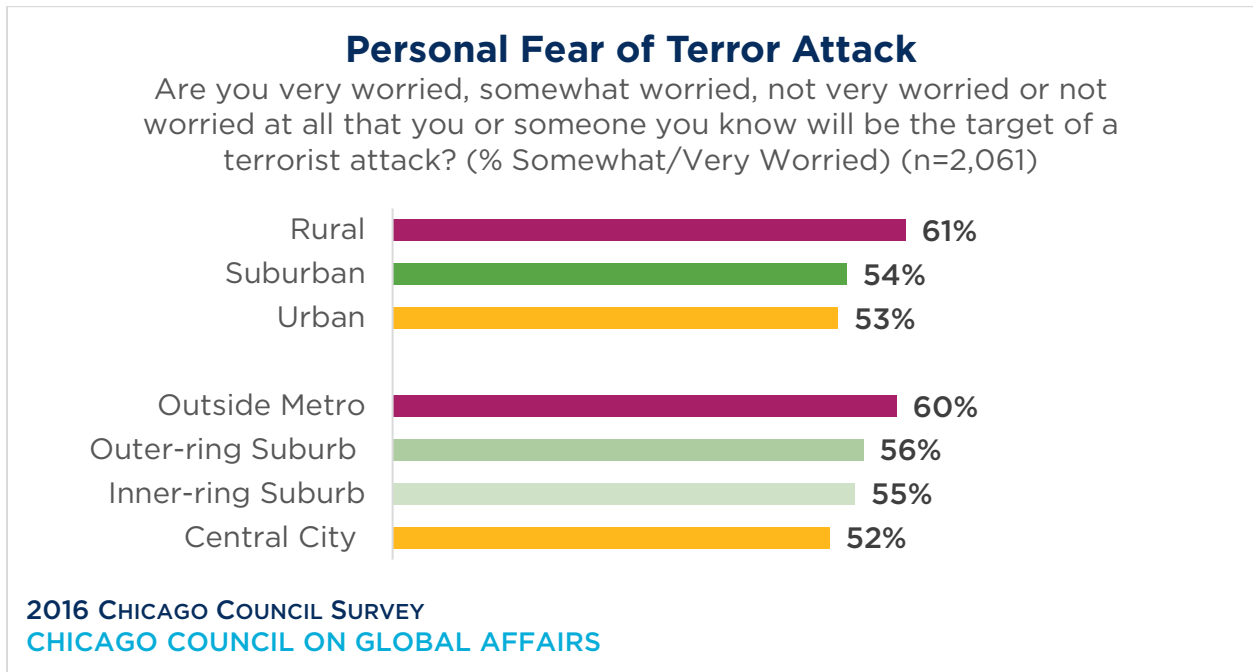


Figure 32



**Figure 33**



### ***Security Threats Posed by China, North Korea, and Nuclear Proliferation***

As American foreign policy stances regarding China, North Korea, and the topic of nuclear proliferation generally shift and reorient under the Trump administration, it is noteworthy that in the lead up to the 2016 presidential election, Americans were mostly aligned in the level of threat they sensed from each of these issue areas.

Broadly speaking—regardless of residence area—Americans were generally worried about the same foreign threats, roughly to the same degree. The threats considered most critical were terrorism, the possibility of unfriendly countries becoming nuclear powers, and relatedly, a nuclear threat from North Korea (Figure 34, Figure 35). By contrast, few Americans sensed a critical threat from China’s military power (Figure 36).

It remains to be seen whether and how Americans’ views of these issue areas have shifted—and to what degree any shift might reveal increased division along urban, suburban, and rural lines—over the course of the last year and the first several months of the Trump administration.

Figure 34

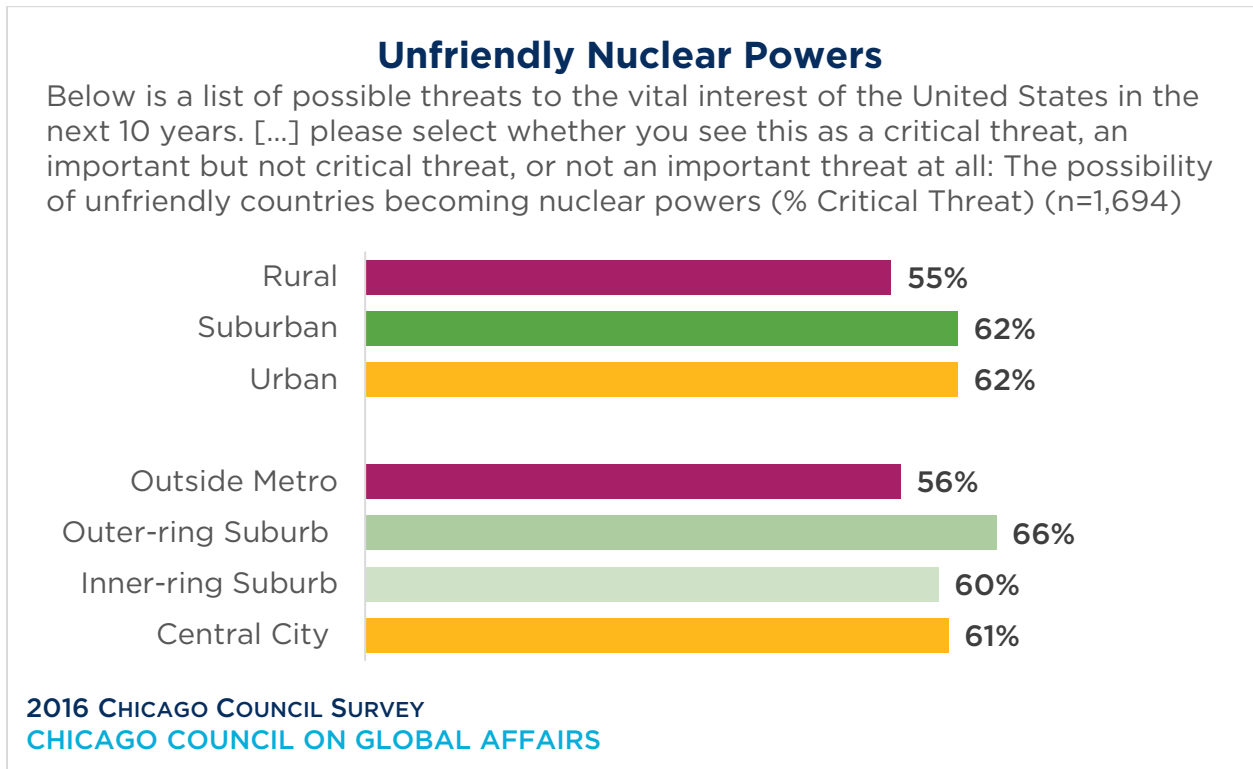


Figure 35

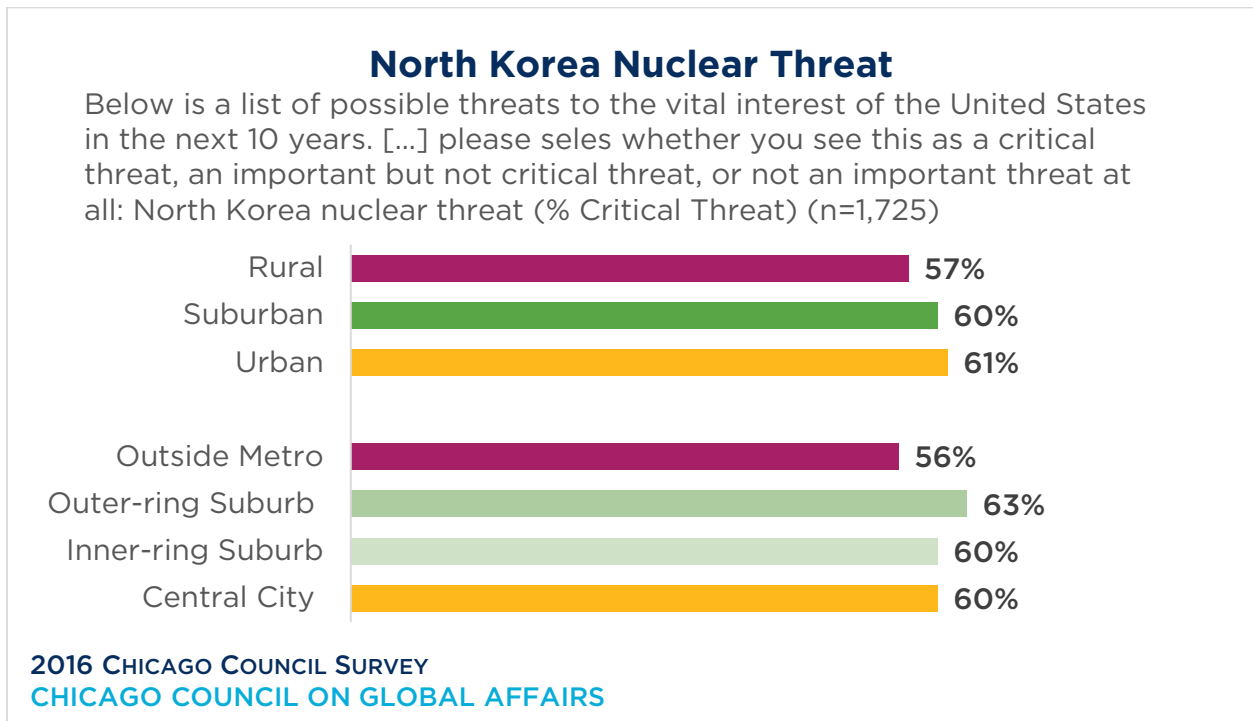
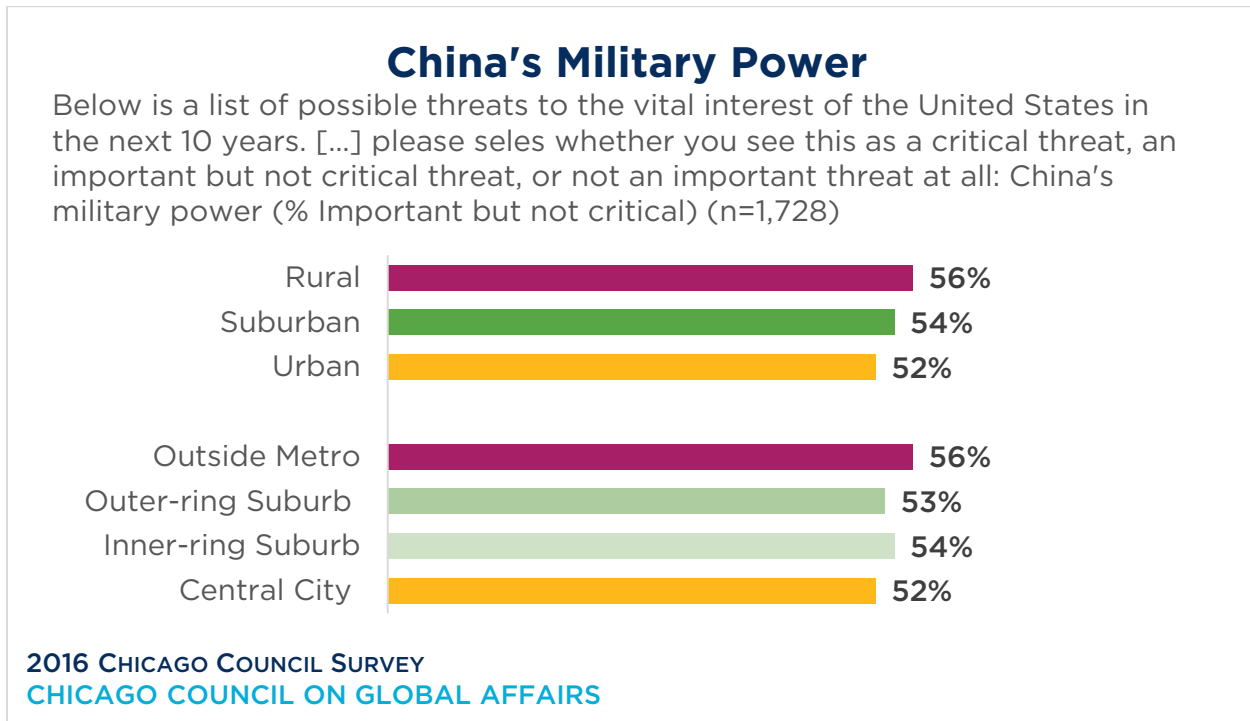




Figure 36



## Conclusion

The United States is clearly divided along urban, suburban, and rural lines with respect to at least some key foreign policy questions, namely on issues of immigration, international trade, the economy, and climate change. Notably, these are foreign policy areas that have particularly noticeable domestic implications that have the capacity to exert readily identifiable effects in the lives of average Americans. The type of community a person lives will partly define fundamental aspects of daily life such as the education opportunities and jobs to which they have access, how they move around, and with whom they live in proximity. As urban, suburban, and rural community localities differ substantially in terms of the economic opportunities, mobility options, and social configurations they offer residents, it makes sense that those differences would play a role in influencing perceptions of the everyday consequences of foreign policy positions.

Alternatively, Americans—regardless of where they live—share a relatively unified outlook on core policy issues that have to do with broad questions of America's leadership in the world, its posture towards international engagement, and stances on key questions of traditional foreign affairs. To be sure, these issue areas arguably exert less tangible effects on the everyday lives of most Americans.

As leaders grapple with the urban-suburban-rural divide around critical foreign policy issues, key recommendations to consider drawn from the findings of this report include:

- Location variables—urbanicity—and the metropolitan and regional planning considerations that are closely connected to questions of where people live need

to be incorporated into understandings of how critical foreign policy decisions are experienced and perceived domestically.

- Policymakers and researchers need to pay more attention to the ways in which the residents of various types of suburbs—collectively the dominant community type in contemporary American life—are leaning in policy preference and voting behavior either toward their urban or rural counterparts.
- Any understanding of an urban-suburban-rural divide on key issues of foreign policy should be at least partially recast in terms that minimize ideological differences between residents of different communities, instead emphasizing the technical and spatial determinants of policy outcomes in those different communities.
- Federal agencies need to establish standardized definitions for suburban categorizations that allow for a more nuanced treatment of the dominant community type in which most Americans live.

A collective reading of the data presented in this report suggests that the root of urban-suburban-rural divides rests at least partly upon how the practical impacts of foreign policy decisions are experienced by everyday Americans based on the community type in which they live. More robust studies that examine how critical policy issues affect Americans based on where they live are needed. As a corollary, policymakers concerned about urban-rural-suburban disparities in domestic political perception of key foreign policy decisions—especially around issues of trade, immigration, and climate change—should pay more attention to questions of physical and economic planning both at the local and regional level. The goal of any such planning efforts should be to better support economic, physical, and social linkages across urban, suburban, and rural communities so that residence in one community type does not preclude access to the type of decent life chances and prosperity that might be available in another.

## METHODOLOGY

The 2016 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research panel between June 10-27, 2016, among a national sample of 2,061 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is  $\pm 2.38$ , including a design effect of 1.2149. The margin of error is higher for questions administered to a partial sample.

For the purposes of the 2016 Chicago Council Survey, 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 Office of Management and Budget 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.

The 2016 Chicago Council Survey results also allow for analysis a step beyond urban/suburban/rural classification. In taking a more detailed look at where in an MSA a respondent lives, the survey results allow for analysis based on whether a respondent is a resident of an inner-ring suburb (closer to the central city) or an outer-ring suburb (further from the central city but still within the MSA). Respondents are classified as a central city resident if they live within the boundaries of their metropolitan area's central city (as identified by the OMB). They are classified as residents of an inner ring suburb if they live outside the boundaries of the central city but in the same county as the central city. They are classified as residents of an outer-ring suburb if they live within the metropolitan area of the central city, but outside the county in which the central city is located. Respondents are classified as outside a metropolitan area if they live beyond the boundaries of a metropolitan area (as designated by the OMB). As a general note, it is not uncommon that metropolitan areas will have at least some rural areas located within their boundaries.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the electoral split between urban and rural America, see Emily Badger, Quoctrung Bui and Adam Pearce, “The Election Highlighted a Growing Rural-Urban Split,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/12/upshot/this-election-highlighted-a-growing-rural-urban-split.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/12/upshot/this-election-highlighted-a-growing-rural-urban-split.html?_r=1).

<sup>ii</sup> For a of voting patterns based on urban, suburban, and other geographic classifications, see Lazaro Gamino and Dan Keating, “How Trump redrew the electoral map, from sea to shining sea,” *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/2016-election/election-results-from-coast-to-coast/>

<sup>iii</sup> For a more extensive discussion of these results and their implications for understanding the conflation of urban and suburban classifiers, see Jed Kolko, “How Suburban are Big American Cities?” *FiveThirtyEight*, May 21, 2015, <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-suburban-are-big-american-cities/>

<sup>iv</sup> For more on the blurred distinctions between urban and suburban areas specifically, see Wendell Cox “Urban Cores, Core Cities, and Principal Cities” *New Geography*, August 1, 2014, <http://www.newgeography.com/content/004453-urban-cores-core-cities-and-principal-cities>.

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<sup>viii</sup> See James Manyika, Jaana Remes, Richard Dobbs, Javier Orellana and Fabian Schaer, “Urban America: US cities in the global economy,” McKinsey Global Institute, April 2012, <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/urbanization/us-cities-in-the-global-economy>; see also “U.S. Metro Economies,” The United States Conference of Mayors, November 2013, <http://www.usmayors.org/metroeconomies/2013/201311-report.pdf>; see also Drew Desilver, “Chart of the Week: How metro areas drive the U.S. economy,” Pew Research Center, February 21, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/21/chart-of-the-week-metro-areas-drive-the-u-s-economy/>

<sup>ix</sup> See William Hawk, “Expenditures of urban and rural households in 2011,” US Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2013, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-2/expenditures-of-urban-and-rural-households-in-2011.htm>

<sup>x</sup> See Dina Smeltz, Ivo Daalder, Karl Friedhoff, and Craig Kafura, “America in the Age of Uncertainty,” Chicago Council on Global Affairs, October 6, 2016, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/publication/america-age-uncertainty>

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<sup>xii</sup> In 53 metro areas, the suburbs accounted for more than half of immigrant growth, including nine metros in which all of the growth occurred in the suburbs: Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Jackson, Los Angeles, Ogden, Rochester, and Salt Lake City. See Jill H. Wilson and Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, “Immigrants Continue to Disperse, with Fastest Growth in the Suburbs,” Brookings Institution, October 29, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/immigrants-continue-to-disperse-with-fastest-growth-in-the-suburbs/>

<sup>xiii</sup> See Jens Manuel Krogstad, Jeffrey S. Passel, D’Vera Cohn, “5 Facts about Illegal Immigration in the U.S.” Pew Research Center, November 3, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/03/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>

<sup>xiv</sup> See Francine D. Blau and Christopher Mackie (Eds.), “The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration,” The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, September 2016, <https://www.nap.edu/read/23550/chapter/1>

<sup>xv</sup> See Eric Kaufmann, “Positive contact or ‘white flight’?: why whites in diverse places are more tolerant of immigration.” London School of Economics, British Politics and Policy Blog, June 15, 2015, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/positive-contact-or-white-flight-why-whites-in-diverse-places-are-more-tolerant-of-immigration/>; see also Jens Rydgren and Patrick Ruth, “Contextual explanations of radical right-wing support in Sweden: socioeconomic marginalization, group threat, and the halo effect.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(4), 711-728, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.623786>; see also Michael Barbaro, “The Daily: The Rise of the Far Right in Europe,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/14/podcasts/the-daily/the-daily-germany-the-last-defender-of-the-liberal-west.html?ref=collection%2Fcolumn%2Fthe-daily>

<sup>xvi</sup> See Janet Adamy and Paul Overberg, “Counties That Experienced Rapid Diversification Voted Heavily for Donald Trump,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/counties-that-experienced-rapid-diversification-voted-heavily-for-donald-trump-1478741076>; see also, “Explaining Brexit: Britain’s Immigration Paradox,” *The Economist*, July 8, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21701950-areas-lots-migrants-voted-mainly-remain-or-did-they-britains-immigration-paradox>

<sup>xvii</sup> See Emily Badger, “Immigrant Shock: Can California Predict the Nation’s Future,” *The New York Times*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/01/upshot/strife-over-immigrants-can-california-foretell-nations-future.html>

<sup>xviii</sup> See Abby Phillip and Kelsey Snell, “Trump to Propose 10 Percent Spike in Defense Spending, Major Cuts to Other Agencies,” *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/trump-to-propose-10-percent-spike-in-defense-spending-massive-cuts-to-other-agencies/2017/02/27/867f9690-fcf2-11e6-99b4-9e613afeb09f\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.8333af2154c9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/trump-to-propose-10-percent-spike-in-defense-spending-massive-cuts-to-other-agencies/2017/02/27/867f9690-fcf2-11e6-99b4-9e613afeb09f_story.html?utm_term=.8333af2154c9)

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