



The 10 Must-Know Facts Defining America's New Suburban Majority

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America's new suburban majority means that the suburbs are where 21st-century electoral majorities will now be made or lost. Their emergence as the central electoral battleground for 2020 and for decades beyond means that it is more important than ever that parties, campaigns, and candidates understand the political, demographic, and economic forces that are shaping these communities.

Below are 10 of the must-know demographic, political, and economic facts that are defining America's new suburban majority.

Suburban Demographics

- 1. Suburbanites now make up half of all voters.** Forty-eight percent of all voters nationwide came from suburban counties in the last presidential election. By comparison, 28% of voters came from urban counties and 24% from small-town and rural counties.¹
- 2. There are more voters of color in the suburbs than in cities.** According to an analysis from the progressive data firm Catalist, more than half of voters of color live in suburban areas.²
- 3. Only one-in-four adults in the suburbs have a college degree.** Contrary to the perception that the suburbs are a white-collar enclave, census data indicates that just one-in-four adults in the suburbs have a college degree.³

Suburban Politics

- 4. In 2018, Democrats won the battleground-state suburbs that will decide the presidential race in 2020.** In 2018, Democrats won swing-state suburban counties with 51% of the vote. This was a five-point improvement from 2016. By comparison, Democrats improved in urban counties by just two points.
- 5. Democrats won the Blue Wall suburbs overwhelmingly last year, after losing them in 2016.** In 2016, Clinton lost the Blue Wall of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin – and as a result, the election – by 77,744 votes. She lost the Blue Wall suburbs by 181,642 votes. But in 2018, Democrats won the Blue Wall suburbs by 652,519 votes (and because of that they won the governorships and Senate seats in all three states).
- 6. The rapid pace of electoral change in the suburbs is turning onetime battleground areas into Democratic strongholds.** Virginia is the latest example of Democrats' suburban surge. As recently as 2013, Republicans controlled 13 of the two dozen state House districts in the Northern Virginia suburbs. After the 2019 election, Republicans control just one district in Northern Virginia, which is located in the outer suburbs of Loudoun County.

7. Clinton would have won the presidency in 2016 if she had matched Democrats' 2018 performance in battleground-state suburbs. If Clinton had matched 2018 Democrats' battleground-state suburban performance, she would have won Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Florida would have been up in the air, and she would have narrowly lost New Hampshire). In total, this would have given her at least a winning 274 Electoral College votes.

Suburban Economics

8. Suburban economies have grown at a slower pace than the country as a whole in recent years. As measured by per capita GDP growth, suburban counties have grown 6.6% since 2012. By comparison, per capita GDP nationwide has grown 9.7% over the same period.⁴

9. More than one in 10 suburban jobs are in manufacturing, but this share is on the decline, and manufacturing incomes have stagnated. Manufacturing jobs make up 11% of total employment in suburban counties, but this is down from 16% in 2000. And while manufacturing jobs in the suburbs provide a middle-class income, on average \$54,976 a year, this is only a \$50 increase adjusted for inflation since 2000.⁵

10. On the key issue for 2020, health care, suburban and urban voters are united against Trump, but suburban voters reject Medicare for All. Nearly equal shares of suburban (63%) and urban voters (65%) have a negative view of Trump's handling of health care. But the cities and the suburbs are divergent when it comes to Medicare for All: voters in cities *back* it by 24 points, while those in the more populous suburbs *reject* it by 13 points.⁶

ENDNOTES

1. Counties are classified as urban, suburban, and rural based on the National Center for Health Statistics' Urban-Rural Classification Scheme. Subsequent election results by urbanity in this memo are calculated using this classification system and county-level election results.
2. Ghitza, Yair. "Revisiting What Happened in the 2018 Election." Medium, 21 May 2019, https://medium.com/@yghitza_48326/revisiting-what-happened-in-the-2018-election-c532feb51c0.
3. Census Bureau's 5-year (2012–2016) American Community Survey.
4. "BEA Data." Bureau of Economic Analysis, <https://www.bea.gov/data>. Accessed November 5, 2019.
5. "BEA Data." Bureau of Economic Analysis, <https://www.bea.gov/data>. Accessed November 5, 2019.
6. Erickson, Lanae, and Pougiales, Ryan. "2019 Health Care Poll Toplines." Third Way, Aug. 20, 2019, <https://www.thirdway.org/polling/2019-health-care-poll-toplines>. Accessed November 5, 2019.