

## **Rural, Suburban and Urban Voters: Dissecting Residence Based Voter Cleavages in Provincial Elections**

Jason Roy

Department of Political Science, Wilfrid Laurier University – Email address: [jroy@wlu.ca](mailto:jroy@wlu.ca)

Andrea M.L. Perrella

Department of Political Science, Wilfrid Laurier University – Email address: [aperrella@wlu.ca](mailto:aperrella@wlu.ca)

Joshua Borden

Department of Political Science, McGill University – Email address: [joshua.borden@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:joshua.borden@mail.mcgill.ca)

**Abstract:** We explore provincial-level cleavages by drawing on surveys administered during eight elections. More specifically, we examine rural-suburban-urban divisions in regards to party support within Canadian provinces. Our results show a clear division according to place of residence, even after controlling for a host of individual-level characteristics. We argue that recognition of this rural-suburban-urban division is an important and often overlooked aspect of understanding Canadian political preferences and political behaviour more generally.

**Keywords:** cleavage; urban; rural; suburban; voting behaviour; ideology.

**Résumé:** Notre étude utilise les données des sondages effectués pendant huit élections provinciales pour examiner les clivages. Plus précisément, nous examinons les divisions entre les électeurs urbains, ruraux et suburbains selon leur soutien des partis politiques. Nos résultats montrent une claire répartition selon lieu de résidence, même après ajustement pour une gamme de caractéristiques au niveau individuel. Nous soutenons que la reconnaissance de cette urbains, ruraux et suburbains division est un aspect important et négligé dans les études de comportements politiques au Canada.

**Mots-clés:** clivage; urbaine ; rural; banlieue; comportement électorale; idéologie

## **Theoretical Framework**

Does the area in which one lives influence political preferences? There has been considerable work in the Canadian context that has examined regional voting patterns (Blais et al., 2002; Blake, 1972; Simeon and Elkins, 1974). For the most part, the consensus has been that region is one of the strongest and most enduring predictors of party support in Canada.

By “region”, most work considers Canada as an amalgam of relatively heterogeneous blocs of provinces, such as the “Atlantic” region, or the “West”. This narrow view of region fails to account for discrepancies in behavioural patterns that manifest within any one province, and sometimes even crosses over provincial borders (see, for example, Cochrane and Perrella, 2012; Henderson, 2004). One sub-regional dimension is the urban-rural cleavage, which has been regarded as “one of the main cleavages of Canadian politics” (Bittner, 2007: 939). Like provincial regionalism, the rural-urban divide manifests itself in both vote choice and broader political orientations.

In an effort to explain the division between urban and rural preferences, Cutler and Jenkins (2000) contend that the strongest differences between them lie within questions of moral traditionalism; urban voters tend to be more socially progressive, whereas rural areas maintain a more traditional character (Cutler and Jenkins, 2000; see also Turcotte, 2001). This division in attitudes falls neatly along a traditional left-right political spectrum, with urban and metropolitan areas of Canada leaning towards the left (e.g., favour greater government intervention and a liberal approach to social issues), while rural areas tend to align closer to the right (e.g.,

prefer less government intervention and a conservative approach to social issues).

This contrast in attitudes has also manifested itself notably in national vote choice within Canada. For example, based on evidence from the 2008 Canadian federal election, Elisabeth Gidengil and her colleagues show rural residents to prefer the Conservative Party (Gidengil et al., 2009). Gidengil et al. (2006) found similar results in the 2004 federal election, noting that the probability of rural residents supporting the Conservatives was nearly 12 percentage points higher than that of urban residents. These results were also observed in the 2000 Canadian federal election, where the probability of voting for the Canadian Alliance was found to be 10 percentage points higher for rural residents, while Liberals found more support among urban voters (Blais et al., 2002). Based on these observations, it appears clear that a significant cleavage between urban and rural Canada persists in regards to party support. This relationship appears to be borne out at the provincial level, as well, at least at the macro-level. A cursory examination of riding-by-riding results throughout much of Canada reveals that – at both the federal and provincial levels – right-wing parties tend to dominate in rural areas whereas liberal and social democratic parties tend to perform best in urban constituencies. These relationships have held true for a number of decades, particularly since the decline of the Liberal Party as a force in rural Western Canada in the 1980s (Adams, 2008; Mackinnon, 2007; Marland, 2007; Williams, 2001; Wishlow, 2001).

In recent decades, however, Canada has undergone a population boom and demographic shift that has made it increasingly difficult to classify Canadians

using only the urban-rural distinction. Immigration and internal migration have given rise to a third category applied to area of residence, that of suburbia (Bunting, Filion and Preston, 2002). In Canadian cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, and Halifax, the period of growth ushered in a new suburban lifestyle, as an increasing number of Canadians settled upon the outskirts of cities, away from both the central, downtown urban cores and the least densely populated rural areas that surround them. This demographic shift did not fit under prior rubrics of simply urban or rural, leading to the new classification of a suburban population.

The new suburban lifestyle was noted to be markedly different from that of urban or rural areas, as its residents were more often middle-class, many becoming homeowners for the first time (Pratt, 1987). Given this demographic and lifestyle change, there was reason to believe suburban voters might differ from their urban and rural counterparts. By the late 1960s, possible differences were beginning to manifest, and initial studies undertaken in the United Kingdom (Cox, 1968) and the United States (Biel, 1972, Gainsborough, 2005) confirmed the need to differentiate between urban, suburban and rural citizens. More recently, De Maesschalck (2011a; 2011b) has replicated these results for Belgium, while Strobele (2012) found further evidence of urban-suburban differences in a cross-national study of France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Given the cross-national findings, the relevance of this potential political cleavage in the Canadian context seems apparent.

While the suburban distinction has received only limited attention in Canada, it has not gone completely unnoticed. For example, Walks (2004) observed that

Canadian inner-city, urban residents were more closely associated with left-leaning views and issue attitudes compared to their suburban counterparts. However, this split in political attitudes was found to be insignificant during the initial growth of suburbia in Canada, only manifesting itself during the 1984 federal election, in which outer-suburban residents were more likely to choose a right-leaning party (Walks, 2004). Building upon this work, Walks employed data from the 1945 through 1997 Canadian federal elections to test the suburban distinction in the Canadian context. Results suggest that while "...inner-city residents remained on the left throughout the study period, suburban residents shifted to the right in their mix of votes" from approximately 1980 onwards (Walks, 2005: 407). According to Walks (2004; 2005; 2006; 2008), there is a clear divide between urban, suburban, and rural voters worthy of attention in the Canadian context.

However, while a number of studies highlight the fact that suburban residents generally behave differently than their urban and rural counterparts, there has been much less agreement as to reasons why. One suggestion for the apparent differences in rural-suburban-urban political attitudes is that area of residence is a spurious factor; it is in fact socio-demographic characteristics associated with place of residence that drive political preferences (Taylor, 1969; Greer and Greer, 1976). This explanation posits that place of residence – urban, suburban, and rural – is simply epiphenomenal, and their differences are due to the fact that individuals living in each area share similar socio-demographic characteristics. For example, homeowners and married couples may tend to live in more

suburban locations, and they may also tend to vote for conservative parties. Hence, it may not be the area of residence that explains the observed cleavage, but rather the underlying socio-demographic characteristics of the residents.

However, while the arguments suggesting a spurious relationship may be sound, they are not supported by empirical evidence. For example, Walks (2005) found that, at the national level, Canadian rural-suburban-urban divergence "...cannot be reduced solely to differences in social composition...it constitutes a 'true' political cleavage" (2005: 385).

In further studies of the divide, Walks (2008) produces evidence to suggest that the areas and spaces themselves, as well as the way in which neighbourhoods develop, play a role in constructing citizens' political and social values. This line of explanation suggests voters' experiences within these particular areas can help to explain the stark differences between rural-suburban-urban voters. In short, the local experience helps shape political preferences and attitudes in a socializing effect.

We add to the debate, testing the impact of place of residence on political preferences in the Canadian provincial context. In particular, we look at the dimension of residence and its impact on voting behaviour in eight provincial elections that took place since 2011, spanning Canada's vast geography from Atlantic Canada to the West. Unlike previous studies that have had to rely mainly, if not exclusively, on federal data, we benefit here from having conducted surveys in eight different provinces, during the same time period. This allows us to build upon what we learned from the federal level and conduct our tests

within eight different electoral "laboratories" working together simultaneously. In doing so, this work will identify and compare political preferences across provinces according to rural-suburban-urban residency, offering empirical evidence in support of an updated residency measure in Canada, one that takes into account the distinct preferences of suburban residents.

## **Methodology**

Building primarily upon the work of Walks (2004; 2005; 2006; 2008), this study employs data drawn from eight provincial elections to examine residence-based differences in vote choice. Specifically, we aim to test for a rural-suburban-urban political cleavage within provinces. Based on national and cross-national evidence from earlier work, we expect to observe a residential cleavage, with rural and suburban residents more likely to support parties to the right of centre. Not all such parties carry the label "Conservative" as part of their proper name, but all are "small-c" conservative in general ideology and policy views. They will from this point be referred to as "conservative" parties. This forms the basis of our first research question:

*Q1: Are rural and/or suburban residents more likely to support conservative parties compared to their urban counterparts?*

As noted above, while a number of studies have observed residence-based voting cleavages, there has been some debate as to whether this cleavage reflects actual divisions according to place of residence or whether this reflects a spurious relationship with place of residence serving as a proxy for individual-level factors that explain

difference in political preferences (Taylor, 1969; Greer and Greer, 1976; Wasko and O'Neill, 2007). In order to examine the robustness of place of residence as an explanatory factor for political divisions, we control for socio-demographic characteristics. This leads to our second research question:

*Q2: Are rural and/or suburban residents more likely to support conservative parties than their urban counterparts even after taking into account socio-demographic characteristics?*

Ideology is another potential confounding factor in the residence – political preference relationship. Similar to their argument regarding socio-demographic factors, Wasko and O'Neill (2007) have suggested that part of the explanation for difference across rural-suburban-urban residents may be explained by differences in individual-level ideological orientations. In general, research has found that rural and suburban voters tend to be more supportive of the free market, smaller government, and moral traditionalism (Cutler and Jenkins, 2000; Turcotte, 2001). In effect, the values and beliefs of rural and suburban voters tend to fit closely with the policy positions of conservative political parties. In order to further test the robustness of the residence-preference relationship, we consider a final model that includes place of residence, socio-demographic characteristics, and ideology. Congruent with our primary assumptions, we expect that the rural-suburban-urban cleavage will persist even after controlling for these additional factors. This leads to our third and final research question:

*Q3: Are rural and/or suburban residents more likely to support conservative parties relative to their urban counterparts even after taking into account individual level values and beliefs?*

Described in greater detail in the introduction to this special edition, we test our hypotheses using the CPEP dataset. The data for this study is drawn from an online survey that was administered immediately following the 2011-13 provincial elections in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL: n=557), Prince Edward Island (PE: n=378), Quebec (QC: n=710), Ontario (ON: n=786), Manitoba (MB: n=606), Saskatchewan (SK: n=577), Alberta (AB: n=631), and British Columbia (BC: n=574).<sup>1</sup> In all analyses, provincial weights have been applied to adjust for over / under representation of segments of the population.

We run each of our models separately by province. While it is possible to merge the data and incorporate dichotomous variables for the provinces, we believe our approach is preferable as a means of identifying provincial differences. In effect, our design is equivalent to interacting each of our control variables by province. While this approach does not allow for direct comparison of coefficients across provinces, it does allow us to examine how place of residence affects political preferences within each province and the robustness of these effects. Ultimately, this design allows us to draw conclusions about the existence of rural-suburban-urban cleavages in each province and the significance (or lack thereof) for political outcomes.

In each province we set a vote for an ideologically “right” political party as our dependent variable (conservative

vote =1). In four of the eight provinces, this variable takes a value of one if the respondent cast a ballot for the provincial Progressive Conservatives (PCs). However, in the case of Saskatchewan – where former supporters of the PCs, Liberals and federal Reformers have combined to form the Saskatchewan Party – we consider support for the Saskatchewan Party as our measure of a conservative vote (Blake, 2008). The Saskatchewan Party has taken decidedly fiscally conservative positions and remains clearly to the right of the next major party in the province, the NDP (McGrane, 2008). In Quebec, we consider a vote for the right-of-centre Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) as a vote in support of the conservative party (Petry, 2013). In Alberta, a province with a strong progressive conservative tradition, we classify a vote for the Wildrose Alliance as our indicator of conservative support (Sayers and Stewart, 2013). Finally, in the case of British Columbia, we code a vote for the BC Liberals as a vote in support of the ideologically conservative party (Cross and Young, 2004). While these classifications are relative, according to other viable options within each province, we believe this provides a reasonable metric that we can apply across the range of provincial party configurations to create a similar measure of right-wing party support. Furthermore, it is worth noting that we identify as “right” the party that is the *most* “small-c” conservative party in each province. For instance, even the Liberal parties of Alberta and Quebec, despite their names, are further to the right than similarly named parties in other provinces.

In regards to our measure of place of residence, we rely upon subjective evaluations drawn directly from respondents. In this case, respondents

were asked: “Do you live in an urban, suburban, or rural environment?” We set urban residence as our reference category and include a dichotomous measure of rural (=1) and suburban (=1) as independent variables. While we recognize that subjective evaluations of place of residence may be debatable, we also recognize some ambiguity with the concept as it applies to various contexts. “Suburbia” may be thought of as a commonly understood concept, but it turns out to be less than straightforward. As noted by McGrane and Berdahl (2012), there is no consensus on a definition (Harris, 2004; Ley and Frost, 2006). A suburban Toronto neighbourhood may appear much different than a suburban neighbourhood of Brandon, Manitoba. Also, urban sprawl may require a change in the designation of what was once a clearly rural area. More importantly, however, the concept of a “suburban” area matters politically in terms of what residents in these areas actually experience, and this goes beyond strictly physical features to include more subtle and more sociological aspects (Moos and Mendez, 2014), all of which provides for an experience distinct from what can be classified as an “urban” or a “rural” context. That experience, in turn can translate to political orientations. Furthermore, while that experience can vary, generally speaking, common understanding of suburban context includes certain attributes, such as: physical characteristics, namely housing types and street design, location from central business centre (urban core), transportation services, automobile reliance, land use (i.e., a suburb is typically a lot of land used only for housing, with little other purposes), socio-cultural aspects (e.g., individuals typically drawn to suburbs are “middle

class”), and lack of cultural attractions such as museums and theatres (Charney, 2005; Forsyth, 2012; Shearmur and Coffey, 2002). Overall, then, a suburban area is experienced differently than a more urban zone. It is this experience we capture with the survey question. People have a much better sense of whether their community is more obviously urban, rural or suburban. For these reasons, we see value in relying on perceptions of where people live as more relevant for the day-to-day experience than classification based on other, more objective criteria.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to place of residence, our second set of models includes a host of socio-demographic factors as controls. Specifically, we include measures of age cohort (under 35 years of age =1; over 54 years of age =1), sex (female =1), education (high school dropout =1; university graduate =1), income (low quartile =1; high quartile =1) race (visible minority =1), religiosity (religious or very religious =1), marital status (married or common-law =1), the presence of children in the home (children =1), and whether the respondent is a homeowner (owner =1). Each of these factors has been associated with Canadian vote preferences in past research, and as such serve as an inclusive list of control variables in our vote-choice models (see Blais et al., 2002; Gidengil et al., 2010).

Finally, our third set of results considers two measures of ideology: support for the free market and moral traditionalism. In the case of the former, we build an index based on four questions: whether or not the government should leave job growth to the private sector; if government regulation stifles individual ambition; if individuals should blame themselves for not getting ahead; and whether the government should be responsible for

seeing that everyone has a decent standard of living.<sup>3</sup> In the case of moral traditionalism, we use individual responses to a survey question asking whether the respondent agreed (=1) or disagreed that society would have fewer problems if we emphasized more traditional values.

Overall, our approach of using survey data allows us to determine whether any urban/suburban/rural differences in voting are attributable to contextual factors or to “composition” effects (Cochrane and Perrella, 2012). That is, do people vote for a particular party *because* they live in an urban, suburban or rural area, or because such areas tend to attract individuals with certain attributes? The survey data employed here allow us to control for such individual socio-demographic factors in order to further explore the relationship between where one lives and what party one prefers.

## Findings

Our first set of results considers whether or not rural and suburban voters differed in regards to their vote preferences compared to their urban counterparts. Recall that we expect rural and suburban voters to be more apt to support conservative parties, and that is what we find.

As evident from the results of our first set of analyses in Table 1, there does appear to be a distinct difference between rural and suburban voters relative to their urban counterparts. In the case of rural residence, we find a positive relationship in all provinces, although the coefficient is only found to be statistically significant in four of the eight cases. These differences translate to

**Table 1. Place of Residence and Conservative Vote Choice**

	NL	PE	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
Rural	0.43 (.25) <sup>a</sup>	0.06 (.35)	0.04 (.31)	0.44 (.28)	1.16 (.25) <sup>***</sup>	1.00 (.23) <sup>***</sup>	0.74 (.29) <sup>*</sup>	0.38 (.33)
Suburban	0.99 (.29) <sup>***</sup>	0.10 (.38)	0.28 (.23)	0.91 (.23) <sup>***</sup>	0.91 (.30) <sup>**</sup>	1.05 (.36) <sup>**</sup>	0.31 (.31)	0.82 (.26) <sup>***</sup>
Constant	-0.41 (.19) <sup>*</sup>	-0.53 (.28) <sup>*</sup>	-1.11 (.17) <sup>***</sup>	-1.20 (.17) <sup>***</sup>	-0.75 (.17) <sup>***</sup>	0.12 (.14)	-0.92 (.17) <sup>***</sup>	-1.06 (.19) <sup>***</sup>
Pseudo R2	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.01	0.02
N	557	378	710	786	606	577	631	574

Cells contain logistic regression coefficients with standard errors shown in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<.001 \*\* p<.01 \* p<.05 <sup>a</sup> p<.10.

an increase in the probability of right-wing party support of 27 percentage points in Manitoba, a 21 percentage-point increase in Saskatchewan, a 17-point boost for the Wildrose party in Alberta, and 10 percentage points in NL.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, our measure of suburban residence reveals a positive relationship with right-wing vote choice. Once again the results fit with expectations; suburban voters are more apt to support conservative parties than their urban counterparts. Suburban residency yields a statistically significant increase in the probability of conservative party support of 23 percentage points in NL, 21 percentage points in Manitoba, 20 percentage points in Ontario, 20 percentage points in Saskatchewan, and 18 points in BC. While these results generally fit with national and cross-national work that finds a sizeable political cleavage according to place of residence, there are obvious provincial differences in the magnitude of the effects observed for rural and suburban residents, and in PEI and Quebec, there

are no significant effects for either variable.

While we cannot be sure, we suspect the null result for Prince Edward Island is, at least in part, explained by the relatively small size of the province's population and what we expect may be limited divisions in regards to place of residence given the limited geographical size of the island and its population. Furthermore, much of the literature pertaining to the Island's politics indicates little ideological differences between the provincial Liberal and Conservative parties (Stewart, 1986). In the case of Quebec, we also suspect provincial political factors play a role in explaining the null findings for both rural and suburban voters. Quite simply, we believe a combination of the issue of Quebec sovereignty as well as the economically conservative (yet socially centrist) positions of the CAQ, may offer some insight into this unexpected result (see Nadeau and Bélanger (2013), Forest (2013) and Pétry (2013) for a more detailed discussion of Quebec provincial politics).



**Table 2. Place of residence and conservative vote choice, controlling for socio-demographic characteristics**

	NL	PE	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
Rural	0.29 (.26)	-0.10 (.35)	0.11 (.33)	0.09 (.28)	1.13 (.29)***	0.84 (.25)***	0.47 (.31)	0.24 (.38)
Suburban	0.84 (.30)**	0.00 (.39)	0.23 (.24)	0.64 (.25)**	1.02 (.30)***	1.05 (.40)**	0.15 (.30)	0.65 (.28)*
Under 35	0.29 (.32)	-0.42 (.42)	0.02 (.29)	-0.65 (.29)*	0.27 (.33)	0.30 (.29)	-0.59 (.34) <sup>a</sup>	-0.17 (.35)
Over 54	0.30 (.29)	0.01 (.38)	-0.15 (.29)	0.69 (.24)**	0.05 (.32)	0.07 (.29)	-0.34 (.32)	0.12 (.28)
Female	0.19 (.23)	-0.11 (.29)	-0.28 (.22)	-0.71(.21)***	-1.01 (.25)***	0.07 (.22)	-0.46 (.26) <sup>a</sup>	-0.59 (.24)*
HS Dropout	0.57 (.52)	-0.21 (.63)	0.33 (.19) <sup>a</sup>	0.01 (.87)	0.29 (.54)	-0.70 (.55)	-0.77 (.61)	0.87 (1.37)
University	-0.24 (.22)	-0.15 (.27)	-0.42 (.20)*	-0.62 (.23)**	-0.78 (.23)***	-1.08 (.23)***	-1.37 (.24)***	-0.05 (.22)
Low income	-0.35 (.29)	-0.43 (.35)	-0.76 (.27)**	0.38 (.29)	-0.44 (.34)	-0.59 (.29)*	-0.32 (.41)	-0.05 (.35)
High income	0.20 (.27)	-0.50 (.44)	-0.42 (.33)	0.30 (.26)	0.05 (.29)	0.24 (.26)	-0.32 (.28)	0.43 (.27)
Visible Min	-1.74 (1.12)	-1.68 (1.26)	-0.54 (1.02)	-0.14 (.43)	0.37 (.60)	0.04 (.75)	-0.92 (.75)	-0.64 (.55)
Religiosity	0.61 (.24)**	0.18 (.32)	0.15 (.23)	0.24 (.21)	0.72 (.25)**	0.61 (.23)*	0.37 (.25)	0.47 (.26) <sup>a</sup>
Couple	0.27 (.30)	-0.51 (.37)	0.35 (.26)	0.26 (.24)	0.55 (.30) <sup>a</sup>	0.33 (.29)	0.01 (.30)	0.04 (.26)
Children	0.76 (.25)	0.34 (.37)	0.24 (.28)	0.38 (.25)	0.28 (.29)	0.04 (.28)	0.59 (.31) <sup>a</sup>	0.52 (.28) <sup>a</sup>
Home Owner	-0.28 (.35)	0.13 (.44)	-0.38 (.31)	0.79 (.31)**	0.77 (.39) <sup>a</sup>	0.97 (.37)**	-0.07 (.39)	0.82 (.32)**
Constant	-0.89 (.54) <sup>a</sup>	-0.05 (.72)	-0.43 (.37)	-1.95 (.39)***	-1.70 (.52)***	-0.97 (.44)*	0.01 (.55)	-1.68 (.42)***
Pseudo R2	0.06	0.02	0.05	0.12	0.15	0.12	0.11	0.09
N	557	378	710	786	606	577	631	574

Cells contain logistic regression coefficients with standard errors shown in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<.001 \*\* p<.01 \* p<.05 <sup>a</sup> p<.10

However, pending a more detailed analysis, we offer these as only plausible explanations that warrant additional investigation.

With the addition of socio-demographic characteristics to our models (see Table 2) we find that the originally significant relationship between rural residency and conservative vote preference no longer holds in NL and in Alberta. In other words, it would appear that, at least in those two provinces, living in a rural area is not what drives vote choice; rather those individuals who live in rural areas tend to share characteristics that prompt them to support more conservative parties. This fits with the arguments of Wasko and O'Neill (2007), who contend that the location-vote relationship is spurious and explained away by taking into account characteristics of the individuals who cluster within certain locations. However, in all other cases, the addition of socio-demographic controls does not change the initial significant results observed above. In fact, the relationship between suburban residence and conservative vote choice strengthens, marginally, in Manitoba. These results suggest a strong and enduring division between suburbanites and their city-dwelling counterparts, consistent with Walks (2005; 2008).

As a final test of this division, we add measures of support for the free market and moral traditionalism to our models, measures that tap both the "old" and "new" left-right ideology dimension (see Table 3). While the size of the coefficients decrease with the inclusion of these final controls, especially in the Prairie Provinces, the significance of the residency variables is unchanged. Clearly,

suburban voters differ from their urban counterparts when it comes to political preference in the majority of the provinces considered. In five of the eight provinces (the exceptions being PEI, Quebec and Alberta), living in a suburban area increases the probability of supporting a conservative party compared to urban residency. This is true even after taking into account socio-demographic and ideological characteristics suggested as potential spurious factors.

While rural residents are found to differ from urban voters in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors as well as ideology (unlike the rural-conservative vote relationship in NL and AB that disappeared with the addition of these controls), the most consistent finding across provinces appears to be that of a suburban-urban political cleavage; suburban voters in five of the eight provinces examined in this study are more likely than their urban counterparts to support conservative parties, net of socio-demographic and ideological considerations. As this group of voters continues to grow, the implications for provincial election outcomes are considerable.

### **Implications**

In expanding upon Walks' (2005) analysis of suburban voting, the results presented above provide clear evidence that a new class of suburban voters exists, and that class of suburban voters can be clearly distinguished in their vote choice preferences from both rural and urban voters. In a discussion of regional political cultures in Canada, Henderson (2004) has

**Table 3. Place of residence and conservative vote choice - controlling for socio-demographic characteristics and support for the free market and moral traditionalism**

	NL	PE	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
Rural	0.23 (.26)	-0.18 (.35)	0.01 (.35)	0.07 (.35)	0.99 (.32)**	0.74 (.28)**	0.19 (.39)	-0.07 (.45)
Suburban	0.85 (.30)**	0.05 (.40)	0.25 (.24)	0.60 (.29)*	0.73 (.32)*	0.90 (.46)*	-0.23 (.37)	0.50 (.30) <sup>a</sup>
Under 35	0.29 (.32)	-0.27 (.42)	-0.01 (.29)	-0.57 (.33) <sup>a</sup>	0.07 (.38)	0.47 (.34)	-0.60 (.44)	-0.06 (.38)
Over 54	0.27 (.29)	0.05 (.39)	-0.20 (.29)	0.58 (.31)*	-0.30 (.35)	-0.15 (.32)	-0.80 (.38)*	-0.12 (.33)
Female	0.28 (.23)	0.09 (.29)	0.21 (.23)	-0.46 (.26) <sup>a</sup>	-0.75 (.27)**	0.30 (.25)	0.01 (.32)	-0.06 (.28)
HS Dropout	0.53 (.51)	-0.46 (.64)	-0.28 (.17)	-0.18 (0.74)	0.27 (.55)	-1.48 (.66)*	-0.35 (.74)	1.40 (1.30)
University	-0.04 (.23)	-0.01 (.28)	-0.54 (.20)	-0.01 (.27)	-0.27 (.26)	-0.85 (.26)***	-0.68 (.30)*	0.45 (.26) <sup>a</sup>
Low income	-0.37 (.29)	-0.43 (.35)	-0.71 (.28)*	0.61 (.36)*	-0.39 (.36)	-0.50 (.33)	-0.63 (.40)	-0.17 (.40)
High income	0.21 (.27)	-0.46 (.44)	-0.54 (.34)	0.11 (.29)	0.04 (.32)	0.09 (.30)	-0.54 (.35)	0.25 (.31)
Visible Min	-1.72 (1.16)	-1.62 (1.26)	0.37 (1.02)	-0.21 (.49)	0.32 (.79)	-0.31 (.86)	-1.66 (.88)	-0.40 (.53)
Religiosity	0.50 (.25)*	0.06 (.33)	0.06 (.24)	-0.17 (.27)	0.24 (.29)	0.43 (.28)	-0.07 (.30)	0.24 (.30)
Couple	0.21 (.30)	-0.42 (.37)	0.25 (.27)	0.12 (.33)	0.64 (.33)*	0.26 (.32)	0.23 (.33)	-0.02 (.29)
Children	0.12 (.25)	0.44 (.37)	0.20 (.29)	0.55 (.31)*	0.00 (.35)	-0.07 (.31)	0.48 (.37)	0.56 (.32) <sup>a</sup>
Home Owner	-0.32 (.36)	0.14 (.44)	-0.40 (.38)	0.59 (.36)	0.76 (.41) <sup>a</sup>	1.13 (.42)**	-0.44 (.43)	0.92 (.38)*
Free market	0.85 (.42)*	1.30 (.51)**	1.53 (.43)***	4.01 (.50)***	2.75 (.46)***	4.00 (.52)***	3.74 (.51)***	3.26 (.48)***
Moral trad	0.46 (.25) <sup>a</sup>	0.56 (.32) <sup>a</sup>	0.18 (.25)	0.98 (.28)***	0.85 (.31)**	0.12 (.29)	1.37 (.38)***	0.51 (.30)
Constant	-1.45 (.57)*	-1.12 (.83)	-1.26 (.46)**	-4.18 (.57)***	-3.21 (.64)***	-2.68 (.56)***	-2.53 (.57)***	-3.44 (.55)***
Pseudo R2	0.07	0.05	0.08	0.35	0.26	0.28	0.33	0.22
N	557	378	710	786	606	577	631	574

Cells contain logistic regression coefficients with standard errors shown in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<.001 \*\* p<.01 \* p<.05 <sup>a</sup> p<.10

suggested that the traditional rural-urban dichotomy should be extended and clarified to distinguish among not just big cities and small rural areas, but also among suburban areas and mid-sized towns. The results herein present both empirical evidence and further reason for doing so. Studies of Canadian elections and voting behaviour have continued to rely upon the traditional rural-urban dichotomy; for example, Bodet's analysis of stronghold and battleground ridings in Canada suggests "close suburban districts...are becoming more and more competitive" (Bodet, 2013: 590) yet still references the traditional urban-liberal, rural-conservative distinction as a starting point (Bodet, 2013: 578). Our results suggest extending our study of Canadian political behaviour beyond the traditional rural-urban division to include a suburban classification; in fact, the suburban distinction seems most relevant and persistent in our examination of provincial voting cleavages.

If we examine parties in power across these provinces, all of them rely heavily on their suburban bases. Much like in federal politics, where the battlegrounds are in the suburban areas of the major cities, so too are the provincial battlegrounds found on the outskirts of the metropolitan areas. In British Columbia, Vancouver suburbs are crucial to a Liberal or NDP victory. In Alberta, the PCs held onto power by winning Calgary and Edmonton suburban seats, despite losing their rural southern base. In Saskatchewan, Brad Wall's breakthrough came when he beat the NDP out of the small cities, and his dominance is increasing as he wins seats around Regina and Saskatoon. In Manitoba, since 1969, the southern suburbs of Winnipeg have been the key to every provincial government victory. In

Ontario, as is true at the federal level, the battlegrounds between Liberals and Conservatives are not found in the urban or rural areas, but in the famed "905" suburban area around Toronto and other suburban areas throughout the province. In Quebec, the CAQ's gains are found outside of the Montreal urban area and outside of many rural, mining and resource-dependent areas. In Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's is growing and the PCs are hard-pressed by Liberals to retain seats around the capital.<sup>vi</sup>

According to De Maesschalck (2011a; 2011b), party strategists are aware of residential differences in vote preference. Given this easily identifiable group of voters and the clear preference of party, it is indeed plausible to imagine election campaign efforts focusing increased efforts on some areas over others and potentially exacerbating these residential differences for political gain. This potential prompts further questions regarding the cause and effect of the relationships observed here: are parties simply taking advantage of existing residential political differences or might the efforts of parties to highlight differences in interests have created this cleavage? Disentangling this relationship suggests a fruitful avenue of future research that would help explain both existing divisions as well as offer insight into the potential impact of this cleavage in the future, especially in an era when suburban growth continues at the expense of urban and rural populations (Bunting, Filion and Preston, 2002).

## Works Cited

- Adams, Christopher. 2008. Politics in Manitoba: Parties, Leaders, and Voters. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Biel, Howard S. 1972. "Suburbia and Voting Behavior in the London Metropolitan Area: An Alternate Perspective." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 63(1): 39-43.
- Bittner, Amanda. 2007. "The Effects of Information and Social Cleavages: Explaining Issue Attitudes and Vote Choice in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 40(4): 935-968.
- Blais, Andre, Elisabeth Gidengil, Richard Nadeau, and Neil Nevitte. 2002. *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory: Making Sense of the Vote in the 2000 Canadian Election*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Blake, Donald E. 1972. "The Measurement of Regionalism in Canadian Voting Patterns." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 5(1): 55-81.
- Blake, Raymond B. 2008. "The Saskatchewan Party and the Politics of Branding." In *Saskatchewan Politics: Crowding the Centre*, ed. H. Leeson. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre.
- Bodet, Marc Andre. 2013. "Strongholds and Battlegrounds: Measuring Party Support Stability in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 46(3): 575-596.
- Bunting, T., P. Fillion, and H. Preston. 2002. "Density Gradients in Canadian Metropolitan Regions, 1971-96: Differential Patterns of Central Area and Suburban Growth and Change." *Urban Studies* 39(13): 2531-2552.
- Charney, Igal. 2005. "Re-examining Suburban Dispersal: Evidence from Suburban Toronto." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 27(5): 467-484.
- Cochrane, Christopher, and Andrea Perrella. 2012. "Regions, Regionalism and Regional Differences in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 45(4): 82-853.
- Cross, William, and Lisa Young. 2004. "The Contours of Political Party Membership in Canada." *Party Politics* 10(4): 427-444.
- Cox, Kevin R. 1968. "Suburbia and Voting Behavior in the London Metropolitan Area." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 58(1): 111-127.
- Cutler, Fred, and Richard Jenkins. 2000. "Where One Lives and What One Thinks: Implications for Rural/Urban Opinion Cleavages for Canadian Federalism. Paper presented at the Transformation of Canadian Political Culture and the State of the Federation Conference, Institute of Intergovernmental Affairs, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, 13-14 October.
- De Maesschalck, Filip. 2011a. "The Suburbanisation of Political Representation in a Context of Proportional Representation: The Case of Belgium." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 102(1) : 72-87.
- De Maesschalck, Filip. 2011b. "The Politicisation of Suburbanisation in Belgium: Towards an Urban-Suburban Divide." *Urban Studies* 48(4): 699-717.
- Forest, Benjamin. 2013. "La géographie de l'élection de 2012 au Québec." In *Les Québécois aux urnes: Les partis, les médias et les citoyens en campagne*, ed. Frédérick Bastien, Éric Bélanger and François Gélinau. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Forsyth, Ann. 2012. "Defining Suburbs."

- Journal of Planning Literature* 27(3): 270-281.
- Gainsborough, Juliet F. 2005. "Voters in Context: Cities, Suburbs, and Presidential Vote." *American Politics Research* 33(3): 435-461.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, Andre Blais, Joanna Everitt, Patrick Fournier, and Neil Nevitte. 2006. "Back to the Future? Making Sense of the 2004 Canadian Election outside Quebec." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 39(1): 1-25.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, Patrick Fournier, Joanna Everitt, Neil Nevitte, and Andre Blais. 2009. "The Anatomy of a Liberal Defeat." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Ottawa.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, André Blais, Neil Nevitte, and Richard Nadeau. 2010. "Citizens". In *Auditing Canadian Democracy*, ed. William Cross. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Greer, Ann Lennarson, and Scott Greer. 1976. "Suburban Political Behavior: A Matter of Trust." In Barry Schwartz. In *The Changing Face of the Suburbs*. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Harris, Richard. 2004. *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Henderson, Ailsa. 2004. "Regional Political Cultures in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 37(3): 595-615.
- Ley, David, & Frost, Heather. 2006. "The Inner City." In *Canadian Cities in Transition: Local Through Global Perspectives, Third Edition*, ed. T. Bunting & P. Filion. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Mackinnon, Wayne. 2007. "The 2007 Provincial Election in Prince Edward Island". *Canadian Political Science Review* 1(2): 69-74.
- Marland, Alex. 2007. "The 2007 Provincial Election in Newfoundland and Labrador." *Canadian Political Science Review* 1(2): 75-85
- McGrane, David. 2008. "The 2007 Provincial Election in Saskatchewan." *Canadian Political Science Review* 2(1): 64-71.
- McGrane, David and Loleen Berdahl. 2012. "Conservative in what way? Suburban Political Attitudes in Six Canadian Provinces." Paper presented at the annual Conference of the Prairie Political Science Association Conference, Saskatoon.
- Moos, Markus, and Pablo Mendez. 2014. "Suburban ways of living and the geography of income: How homeownership, single-family dwellings and automobile use define the metropolitan social space." *Urban Studies* 52(10) : 1864-1882.
- Nadeau, Richard, and Éric Bélanger. 2013. "Un modèle général d'explication du vote des Québécois." In *Les Québécois aux urnes: Les partis, les médias et les citoyens en campagne*. ed. Frédérick Bastien, Éric Bélanger and François Gélinau. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.
- Pétry, François. 2013. "La positionnement des partis dans l'espace politique québécois." In *Les Québécois aux urnes: Les partis, les médias et les citoyens en campagne*. ed. Frédérick Bastien, Éric Bélanger and François Gélinau. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal.

- Pratt, Geraldine. 1987. "Class, home and politics." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 24(1): 39-57.
- Sayers, Anthony M., and David K. Stewart. 2013. "Breaking the Peace: The Wildrose Alliance in Alberta Politics." *Canadian Political Science Review* 7 (1): 73-86.
- Shearmur, Richard G., and William J. Coffey. 2002. "Agglomeration and dispersion of high-order service employment in the Montreal metropolitan region, 1981-96." *Urban Studies* 39(3): 359-378.
- Simeon, Richard, and David J. Elkins. 1974. "Regional Political Cultures in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 7(3): 397-437.
- Stewart, Ian. 1986. "Friends at Court: Federalism and Provincial Elections on Prince Edward Island." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 19(1): 127-50.
- Strobele, Maarit Felicitas. 2012. "How Do People Vote In Suburbia? Political Preference and Suburbanisation In Europe." *Urban Research & Practice* 5(1): 93-115.
- Taylor, Peter J. 1969. "Causal Models in Geographic Research." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59(2): 402-404.
- Turcotte, Martin. 2001. "L'opposition rural/urbain a-t-elle fait son temps? Le cas du traditionalisme moral." *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 26(1): 1-29.
- Walks, R. Alan. 2004. "Place of Residence, Party Preferences, and Political Attitudes in Canadian Cities and Suburbs." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 26(3): 269-295.
- Walks, Alan R. 2005. "The City-Suburban Cleavage in Canadian Federal Politics." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 38(2): 383-413.
- Walks, Alan R. 2006. "The Causes of City-Suburban Political Polarization? A Canadian Case Study." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96(2): 390-414.
- Walks, Alan R. 2008. "Urban Form, Everyday Life, and Ideology: Support for Privatization in Three Toronto Neighbourhoods." *Environment and Planning A* 40: 258-282.
- Wasko, Kevin, and Brenda O'Neill. 2007. "The Urban/Suburban/Rural Cleavage in Canadian Political Opinion." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Saskatoon.
- Williams, Robert J. 2001. "The Ontario Party System and the Common Sense Revolution: Transformation or Transient Turmoil?" In *Party Politics in Canada*, ed. H. G. Thorburn and A. Whitehorn. 8th Edition. Toronto: Prentice-Hall.
- Wishlow, Kevin. 2001. "Rethinking the Polarization Thesis: The Formation and Growth of the Saskatchewan Party, 1997-2001." In *Saskatchewan Politics: Into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. H. Leeson. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Number of cases in each province excludes respondents who had missing values on any of the socio-demographic and ideology variables.

<sup>2</sup> Interested readers should refer to McGrane and Berdahl (2012) for discussion of objective measures of residence based on the CPEP data.

<sup>3</sup> Cronbach's alpha = .59.

<sup>4</sup> Change in vote shares estimated using Stata 12's post-estimation 'margins' commands while holding all other covariates at their means.

---

<sup>5</sup> The presence of two high-profile “conservative” parties in Quebec, the Quebec Liberal Party and the CAQ, could have also played a role.

<sup>6</sup> PEI is a bit of an anomaly in that it is more difficult to distinguish rural, urban and suburban constituencies, given the small size and small population of the province.