Blue Metros, Red States: The Geography of the 2020 Vote in the Swing States*

David F. Damore
Professor and Chair
Department of Political Science
Interim Executive Director
The Lincy Institute and Brookings Mountain West
UNLV

Karen A. Danielsen
Associate Professor
School of Public Policy and Leadership
UNLV

Robert E. Lang
Emeritus Professor
School of Public Policy and Leadership
UNLV

Abstract

This paper builds on *Blue Metros, Red States: The Shifting Urban-Rural Divide in America's Swing State* to consider the importance of scale for understanding the geography of voting in contemporary presidential elections. We argue that as within-state geographic shifts strengthen and solidify over successive election cycles, the urban-rural divide that nourished the Republicans for decades is eclipsed by a split between metro areas and the balance of a state's population. Using data from 13 swing states that feature at least one metropolitan area with a population exceeding a million residents, we find these effects are particularly pronounced in much of the Sun Belt and in states where the population is concentrated in a single large, densely populated metro compared to states where the urban population is fragmented across multiple million-plus metros.

* Prepared for presentation at the State of the Parties: 2020 and Beyond Virtual Conference, The Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, University of Akron, November 4-5, 2021. Some of the content and analysis was presented in Damore, Lang, and Danielsen (2021a).

In *Blue Metros, Red States: The Shifting Urban-Rural Divide in America's Swing State*, Damore, Lang, and Danielsen (2021b) examine how the growing demographic, economic, partisan, and socio-cultural differences between Democratic-leaning million-plus metropolitan areas and the more Republican-voting balance of their respective states affect election outcomes and intrastate policy competition in 13 swing states that feature a combined 27 million-plus metros.[1]

According to our analysis of statewide elections between 2012 and 2018, movement towards the Democratic Party in rapidly urbanizing suburbs characterized by high levels of density, ethnic and racial diversity, and educational attainment is shifting America's partisan fault line from a long-standing urban-rural divide to an emerging metro-rest of state split.

In 2020 Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's vote share in nearly all of the million-plus metros analyzed improved relative to Hillary Clinton in 2016. These effects were strongest in the Sun Belt swing states, many of which grew their share of the statewide vote. In addition to flipping both Rust Belt and Sub Belt swing states, Biden won every state in the conterminous U.S. where a single metropolitan region accounted for half or more of a state's population.[2]

In this paper we extend the *Blue Metros, Red States* framework to consider the importance of scale for understanding the contours of partisan voting patterns. Drawing on classical and recent scholarship, we consider the metro-level context shaping the growing

[1] States were included in the analysis if they contained at least one census-defined metropolitan statistical area (MSA) with a population of at least one-million residents and a 2016 presidential election margin of ten percentage points or less. The first of these criteria excluded three states that were within ten percentage points in 2016, Iowa, Maine, and New Hampshire, but lack an MSA with a population of at least one-million residents.

[2] In 2016, the only such states that Hillary Clinton failed to win were Arizona and Georgia.

political cohesion in large-scale swing states metros. Next, we present data examining how geography conditioned partisan support in 2020 and the degree to which within state shifts in partisan support were decisive to the outcome of the presidential election in the 13 swing states. The paper concludes by assessing how growing intrastate geographic partisan divisions will affect electoral competition in the coming years.

Blue Metros, Red States, and the Politics of Scale

The blue state, red state, swing state trichotomy has been used since at least 2000 as shorthand for conceptualizing the country's partisan landscape. Despite the framework's ubiquity, it ignores how intrastate geographic tensions and political competition imbue the divisions between red and blue America. Within state differences also anchor the long standing urban-rural divide, a salient feature of American politics since the nation's founding.

In *Blue Metros, Red States,* Damore, Lang, and Danielsen (2021b) argue that the within state differences underling partisan voting patterns derive from four interrelated influences: socio-cultural factors often determined by initial settlement patterns that shape values and attitudes related to diversity acceptance; demographic and economic sorting that has concentrated diversity and economic productivity in the country's largest metros; sharper attitudinal differences due to rising negative partisanship and the growing saliency of cultural, racial, and other diversity-related issues and the implications these have for perceptions of status loss, particularly among whites; and finally institutions such as the U.S. Senate, the Electoral College, redistricting, home rule, preemption, and metro fragmentation that often disadvantage urban and suburban interests. Collectively, these factors have led to a decoupling of demographic and economic power from political power (Brownstein 2018).

Blue Metros, Red States considers the causes and consequences of these tensions by using a common geographic framework—the million-plus metro compared to the rest of a state's population—to analyze political and policy competition in swing states that determine the partisan balance of power at the federal level.

The million-plus population threshold distinguishes large, high-density metros from smaller-scale metros that while in urban in form, differ from their large counterparts in important ways. Million-plus metros generate most of the nation's economic output, foreign trade, and innovation technologies (Muro and Whiten 2018; Toomer and Kane 2014). Million-plus metros also support significant infrastructure and transportation networks, deliver extensive public services, and require administrative structures that can rival those of state governments (Damore, Lang, and Danielsen 2021b).

In developing the "the urban-size ratchet" model, Thompson (1965) argues that large metros are self-sustaining due to their fixed infrastructure, market access, high levels of economic diversification, and ability to attract investment resources and human capital. Once established, large metros typically continue to grow and are insulated from "absolute decline" (Thompson 1965, 24). Smaller-scaled metros with narrower industrial bases are more vulnerable to contraction and may lack the resources necessary to adapt to economic and demographic shifts.

There also is reason to think that scale matters politically (Fischer 1984). It has long been the case that density and diversity predict Democratic support (Lang, Sanchez, and Berube 2008). Growing support among higher-educated voters (Florida, Patino, and Dottle 2020) and

the migration of blue-state voters into large red state metros such as Austin, Texas has helped the Democrats push further into the suburbs (Levin 2020).

Consider that large metro regions typically include numerous counties and municipalities that feature a variety of forms ranging from dense, urban cores to large-lot single-family exurban neighborhoods. As Table 1 details, these metro are home to most of the nation's population despite comprising less than ten percent of the land area in the U.S.

[Table 1 About Here]

Table 1 also reveals the extent to which the ranks of million plus metros have increased since 1940 and the rate at which the country's population is concentrating in million-plus metros. From this perspective, it is easy to see how shifts in partisan support in million-plus metros can be so consequential to outcomes in statewide elections. In many contexts, the metro vote share is so large that if the Democrats win enough urban and suburban voters, Republicans cannot secure enough votes in the reset of the state to offset the Democrats' metro advantage. As these patterns strengthen over successive election cycles, the urban-rural divide that for generations nourished Republican majorities is eclipsed by a divide between major metropolitan areas and the rest of the state—an emerging dynamic that favors Democrats.

Although there has always been an acknowledgment that the level of urbanization affects tolerance and voting behavior (Gimpel et al. 2020; Johnston, Jones and Manley 2016; Tam et al. 2013), scale is an increasingly important factor for understanding geographic political divisions. The idea of testing political tolerance in urban areas began with Stouffer's (1955) idea of "culture shock" where he found that city dwellers are more tolerant of diversity than rural

residents due to the "shock" of diversity. He predicted that tolerance would increase as the country urbanized and the populace became exposed to more conflicting values. Stouffer (1955) considered the migration of people from rural areas to more urban areas as the mechanism as part of a larger process of urbanization.

In a more direct assessment of how geography affects political identities, Gimpel et al. (2020) find that the physical distance people live from large cities predicts their party affiliation. The more remote the locality, the more likely an individual is to identify as a Republican.

But the migration of people to more urban areas does not always engender more tolerance (Marcus, Piereson, John Sullivan 1980). This argument experienced a revival with publication of Bishop's *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart* (2009). Bishop argues that over time the "sorting" of like-minded individuals into the same geographic spaces foments electoral polarization. Although he suggests that sorting exists at the inter-region, interstate and inter-community levels, the book's analysis only considers county election results (Johnston, Jones and Manley 2016). Counties, of course, can vary in size from a few hundred residents to more than 10 million in the case of Los Angeles County.

Other research at the zip code level suggests that the effects of migration and sorting on political behavior may be indirect. For instance, Tam et al. (2013) argue that "there is ample evidence that partisan considerations are not foremost in relocation decisions." Consistent with Tiebout's (1956) contention that people select where they live based on the level of public services they want and are willing to pay for, Tam et al. (2013) suggest that relocation decisions are shaped by evaluations of local tax rates and public service provision. Political effects stemming from geography are ancillary and of varying saliency (Gimpel and Hui 2017).

Actual size of the city, or as in our analysis, the size of the metropolitan area, is significant for understanding political outcomes for several reasons. First, metropolitan areas, by definition, are places that have a high degree of social and economic integration. These conditions stimulate interactions among different groups and interests that shape and reinforce broader political predispositions (Gimpel et al. 2020).

Second, million plus metro areas are usually polycentric. That is, they have a principal city along with several satellite cities or suburbs within them and may encompass more than one county. The jurisdictional boundaries are substituted into a more logical economic and social unit. Because density and diversity are not evenly distributed within a metro area, metros feature pockets of partisan support that collectively shape the intra-metro partisan balance of power.

Other analyses that use smaller-scale geographies, particularly census tract or counties, will not necessarily see the same patterns of political behavior. For instance, observations made at lower levels of analysis may reflect the effects of local land use policies that determine overall density and housing types. Racial and ethnic segregation at the neighborhood level may also exhibit a similar bias.

Thus, relative density, diversity, and their effects on political attitudes and behavior may be best captured at the metro-level scale. South and Crowder (1997) argue that that studying some social and economic conditions at the metropolitan level is necessary to overcome selection biases associated with lower levels of analysis. For instance, they suggest that segregation in metropolitan areas is sometimes more of a proxy for income stratification than just segregation. Because there are more housing opportunities in larger metropolitan areas, it

is easier for minorities to move from poorer to richer neighborhoods but that can only be observed at a metropolitan geographic scale.[3]

Third, principal cities are interconnected with their suburbs and even to some degree their surrounding rural areas through telecommunications, transportation, and media. Cities strongly influence these surrounding suburbs through these same economic and social forces (Huggins, and Debies-Carl 2015).

As Fischer's (1984) subcultural theory posits, "the scale of urban life" allows for new innovations in social and economic behavior to emerge. His idea of "critical mass" suggests that there is a certain threshold of population necessary to change or modify subcultures in urban areas. The larger the number of people or the more urban the area, the more these changes and effects are "intensified." According to Fischer (1984), "intensification" is the mechanism that creates new subcultures, attitudes, and common interests that spill into voting behavior.

Fourth, because metro areas are more heterogeneous, no single group controls the entire space, necessitating collaboration, communication, and by extension, tolerance and acceptance. This idea is the basis of Anderson's (2011) notion of "cosmopolitan canopies" that provide a more pluralistic space for group engagement. Lofland (1998) suggests that "repeated interactions with others" leads to tolerance. Huggins and Debies-Carl (2015) too suggest that tolerance can operate at societal levels, even in rural areas, and they contend that "tolerance should be thought of as a form of acceptance of nonconformity and not just an acceptance of diversity" (259).

[3] For discussions of the issues surrounding the decline of segregation at different geographic levels, see Denton (2013), Logan (2013), and Vigdor (2013).

From this perspective, Huggins and Debies-Carl (2015) deconstruct tolerance into two dimensions: "tolerance of difference" and "the tolerance of threat." In their study of 48 countries, tolerance of difference was measured in terms of whether someone would mind having someone as a neighbor based on cultural differences alone.[4] Tolerance of threat was measured as whether someone would want to live near people who engaged in deviant behavior such as heavy drinkers or drug users among other qualities. The results show the tolerance of difference and threat was more common in larger cities and in places with relatively higher levels of educational attainment. The smaller and less educated the space, the lower the tolerance of threat and the less willingness to live near people who behave in "non-traditional ways."

The million-plus metro unit of analysis then is appropriate for understanding how geographic density shapes patterns of social interaction and the reinforcement of salient sociocultural values. As Damore, Lang , and Danielsen (2021b, 40) suggest, "big cities are not liberal just because they are diverse. They are also liberal because they expose white and minority inhabitants to dense and diverse environments that facilitate social integration and reduce bias." Thus, while selection effects may account for the demographic differences between a million-plus metros and the balance of a state's population, "the politically relevant behaviors and opinions manifest in these spaces also are shaped by differing patterns of social interaction" (Damore, Lang , and Danielsen 2021b, 40).

[4] This definition is consistent with Marcus, Piereson, and Sullivan's (1980, 733) contention that "tolerance implies a willingness to 'put up' with those things that one rejects. Politically, it implies a willingness to permit the expression those ideas or interests that one opposes."

Given the regional variation in swing states with at least one million plus metro there are reasons to expect variation in these effects. Demographically, a clear contrast exists between the Sun Belt swing states where the large metros are rapidly growing and diversifying and attracting higher-educated residents and the Rust Belt swing states where these trends are less prevalent. Among the 13 swing states considered here, many feature multiple million plus metros. In contexts where the urban space is splintered, metro residents may perceive themselves as rivals rather than allies and political loyalties may be divided. In other swing states, the metro population may not be large enough to offset the rest of the a state's partisanship even if the million-plus metro still trends heavily Democratic.

Swing State and Metro Partisan Shifts: Comparing 2020 to 2016

To assess the effects of scale on geographic patterns of partisan support in presidential elections, the analyses presented below summarize shifts in the 2020 presidential vote relative to 2016. The primary unit of analysis is the million-plus metro. We define metros using the U.S. census-designated metropolitan statistical area (MSA)[5] and refer to the MSA using the leading principal city instead of the formal MSA title.[6]

For each of the 13 states with a million-plus metro and where the 2016 presidential margin of victory was ten points or less,county level presidential turnout and vote choice data were collected for 2016 and 2020 from secretary of state websites after election results were certified. These data were then aggregated for the counties in the 27 million-plus metros to

[5] For the six MSAs that extend into multiple states, we only include data for the counties that are in the state associated with each MSA's principal city.

[6] For instance, we use Las Vegas instead of Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise MSA. The only exception to this is we use Northern Virginia to label the Virginia components of the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV MSA.

generate the partisan margin of support. We also use these data to measure each million-plus metro's share of the total state vote. Data for counties that are not part of a million-plus metro were aggregated to generate the "rest of state" measure presented in Figure 2.

[Table 2 About Here]

Table 2 summarizes the partisan margin for the 2016 and 2020 presidential election in the 13 swing states, the 27 million-plus metros, the inter-election shift in partisan support, and change in the million-plus metro share of the vote. States and metros are grouped regionally using a Sun Belt-Rust Belt framework noted above. For the Sun Belt states, we group Florida and Texas together as "Big Sun Belt" states due to their large scale and the fact that each state has four million-plus metros. The eastern (Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia) and western "New Sun Belt" states (Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada) are clustered. Table 2 also groups the eastern (Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania) and central "Rust Belt" states (Minnesota and Wisconsin). Figure 1 uses data from the "difference" column in Table 2 to order the 27 million-plus metros in terms of the magnitude of their inter-election partisan shift from most Republican to most Democratic.

Among the 13 states in the analysis, Florida was the obvious outlier. While Biden's margin did increase relative to Clinton's in Orlando and Tampa, these improvements were offset by President Donald Trump's surge in Miami that delivered the Sunshine State's 29 electoral votes for the GOP by a greater margin compared to 2016. While Biden narrowly won Duval County where the City of Jacksonville is located (Trump won it in 2016), Trump carried the metro due to huge margins in the surrounding suburban counties. After Miami, Jacksonville had the largest Republican swing among the 27 million-plus metros considered (see Figure 1).

Among Florida's four million-plus metros, only Orlando's share of the state vote increased relative to 2016.

[Figure 1 About Here]

In contrast to Florida, Texas and its million-plus metro shifted towards the Democrats but not enough to flip the state. In 2016, Austin was the only million-plus metro that Clinton won. Biden carried all four of the Lone Star State's million-plus metros, picking up nearly eight points in the Austin and Dallas-Fort Worth metros, while making modest gains in Houston and San Antonio. Inspection of Figure 1 revels that Biden's surges in Austin and Dallas-Fort Worth were the largest Democratic shifts in a swing state million-plus metro. Biden's performance in Texas's four million-plus metros provided him with an even larger bump given that each metro's share of the statewide vote increased.

Even though the Democrats have cut the Republicans' margin from 16 percentage points to less than six since the 2012 presidential election, Biden fell short in Texas. Heavily Latino counties along the Mexican border, long supportive of Democratic candidates, delivered small margins for Biden compared to Clinton in 2016. Had Biden replicated Clinton's border county margins, he would have lost Texas by less than four percentage points.

Among the three "New Sun Belt East" states, Biden strengthened the Democrats' hold in the Old Dominion due to larger margins in Virginia's three million-plus metros. Northern Virginia and Richmond also increased their shares of the statewide vote. Biden's 2020 victory in Virginia is the fourth straight presidential win for the Democrats. The last time this was accomplished was in the 1930s and 1940s when Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman won Virginia in five consecutive elections. Although Trump again carried North Carolina, Biden

outperformed Clinton by nearly two and a half percentage points due to five-point increases in the state's two million-plus metros. Charlotte and Raleigh also increased their share of the statewide vote compared to 2016.

By nearly doubling the Democrats' margin in metro Atlanta on his way to a five and half percentage point improvement compared to Clinton in 2016, Biden become the first Democratic presidential candidate since Bill Clinton in 1992 to win Georgia. Among the 27 million-plus metros, Atlanta has the third largest Democratic shift (see Figure 1). Biden's strong showing in Atlanta was even more significant given the growth in metro-Atlanta's vote share relative to 2016.

In the west, Biden won all three of the "New Sun Belt West" states. His victory in Arizona was the first for a Democratic presidential candidate since 1996 when Bill Clinton carried the state with a plurality. Biden's Arizona win resulted from five point swings in the Phoenix and Tucson metros, a nearly doubling in the raw vote advantage in Coconino County (home to Flagstaff), and improving upon Clinton's margin in Apache County where the Navajo and Hopi Indian reservations are located. Biden's ability to tip Phoenix was even more potent given the increase in the metro's share of the vote that offset the smaller vote share delivered by more liberal Tucson.

Thanks to a nearly six point swing in metro Denver, Biden continued the Democratic winning streak in Colorado. Similar to Virginia, Colorado features large shares of college educated voters and growing diversity. As the Democrats rapidly consolidate their support in the state, Colorado's status as a swing state may be waning.

In contrast to the other "New Sun Belt West," Nevada held steady in 2020. The inter-election stability is surprising given strong Democratic showings in recent elections. However, as Table 2 and Figure 1 indicates, Biden lost ground in Las Vegas but was able to offset this erosion by cutting Trump's margins in the state's sparsely-populated rural counties and improving upon Clinton's showing in Washoe County, home to Reno. While Nevada has high levels of density and diversity, it is a bottom-dweller in educational attainment.

The only state besides Florida where Trump's margin improved relative to 2016 is Ohio, the lone "Rust Belt East" state that the president won. In Ohio, Trump's statewide margin held even though he lost support in two the state's three million-plus metro and Columbus' share of the statewide vote increased. Trump did perform better in Cleveland, but the metro's share of the vote decreased compared to 2016. Biden's narrow win in Wisconsin stemmed from increased support in Milwaukee and a larger margin in the relatively large and heavily Democratic Madison metropolitan area. Modest gains in the Detroit and Philadelphia metros and larger gains in Grand Rapids and Pittsburgh returned Michigan and Pennsylvania to the Democratic column.

In 2020 the Trump campaign targeted Minnesota after Clinton narrowly carried the state in 2016. These efforts fell well short. Biden secured Minnesota's electoral votes by nearly six percentage points due to a Democratic increase of nearly seven percentage points in metro Minneapolis-St Paul. Biden's strong showing in the Twin Cities was even more impactful due to the increase in the metro's share of the statewide vote.

To provide additional context for understanding the inter-election partisan swings, Figure 2 replicates Figure 2-3 from *Blue Metros, Red States* for 2016 and 2020. For each

election, the Democratic metro margin is contrasted to the Democratic margin in the rest of the state (all counties not within a million-plus metro) and the overall state margin. Positive values indicate a Clinton or Biden advantage and negative values indicate an advantage for Trump. Note that in states with multiple million-plus metros, the "Metro" values combine the data for all such metros.

[Figure 2 About Here]

The data for the 2020 and 2016 presidential election demonstrates the degree to which Democratic victories in the swing states depend upon million-plus metros and just how much the partisan support in million-plus metros differs from the balance of their states.

Expect for Pennsylvania, in all of the other states that Biden flipped, the increase in the Democratic vote in the million-plus metros exceeded the statewide margin. Just as important is the fact that compared to Clinton in 2016 Biden improved his margins outside of million-plus metros. Biden's "Rest of State" shift in Arizona and Wisconsin was a point or less, more than two points in Georgia and Michigan, and more than two and a half points in Pennsylvania. Only in Ohio and Texas did Trump gain support outside of those states' million-plus metros.

Even with these margins, Democrats need pockets of support in smaller cities and towns to win statewide. Where these votes come from reflect the uniqueness of each state. Pennsylvania, largely regarded as 2020's "tipping point" state, shifted back to Biden because of swings in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh suburbs as well as improved support in Lackawanna County in the west and Erie County in the east. Twin Ports in northeast Minnesota and northwest Wisconsin remain a Democratic stronghold. In the west, strong support among Native Americans in northern and central Arizona were critical to flipping the Grand Canyon

State. Colorado's high-amenity resort towns in the Rockies augment Democratic support in Denver and help to offset the strong Republican vote in Colorado Springs, the state's second largest metro.

Conclusion

The Democratic Party has long been the party of urban America (Rodden 2019). Continuing diversification and population concentration in million-plus metros should provide the Democrats with opportunities to expand their support among the growth segments of the electorate (Judis and Teixeria 2002).

While Joe Biden was able to regain the Rust Belt states—Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—that delivered the presidency for Donald Trump in 2016, the analysis presented here suggests that the Democrats' long-term future lies in the rapidly urbanizing and diversifying Sun Belt states (Damore, Lang, and Danielsen 2021b). From this perspective, in 2016 Hillary Clinton was caught between diminishing Democratic margins in the Rust Belt and yet to be realized Democratic gains in the Sun Belt (Brownstein 2016; Damore and Lang 2016). Four year later, by increasing Democratic margins in million-plus metros in both regions, Biden patched together enough Sun Belt and Rust Belt swing states to secure the presidency.

Beyond the Sun Belt-Rust Belt dynamic, our analysis reinforces the importance of scale for understanding the emergence of a pan-metro identity and the consequences this has for partisan voting patterns. In 2020 Joe Biden won every state where a single million-plus metro constitutes half or more of a state's population. Moreover, after the 2020 election the Democrats hold the ten U.S. Senate seats in the five swing states—Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Minnesota, and Nevada—where a single million-plus metro comprises more than 50 percent of

the state population. In last two cycles, six of these seats, all in the Sun Belt, flipped to the Democrats—two in Arizona and Georgia and one each in Colorado and Nevada.

The results in states with multiple million-plus metros are less clear cut. In 2020 Biden won Arizona, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Besides Pennsylvania, the other three multi-million-plus metro states have the smallest state populations among the eight such states analyzed. Trump won Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas, which rank third, ninth, seventh, and second respectively in total population.

Unlike Arizona, Michigan, and Virginia, but with some similarities to Pennsylvania, each of these states feature several medium to large-scale population centers. While these metros are below the million-plus threshold, they are home to a substantial share of their states' residents. Because the urban landscape is less cohesive, the blue metro versus red state tension may be a less prominent feature of interstate political competition. Or put differently, it is easy to see how Georgians or Nevadans who live outside of Atlanta or Las Vegas may feel alienated from those dwelling in their state's million-plus metro and vice versa. Similar sentiments are more difficult to convey if there are multiple large and medium-sized metros.

Certainly, it is tempting to attribute the 2016 and 2020 shifts in million-plus metros to Donald Trump and his anti-urban, anti- immigrant, anti-diversity, and anti-intellectual rhetoric and polices. To the degree that Trump's presence wanes and the Democrats struggle to govern, the Republicans should regain some of the suburban turf lost since Trump's emergence. Damore, Lang, and Danielsen (2021b) suggest that different suburb types provide better targets for each party by noting the following:

> American suburbs are now so large-scale and varied that it is impossible to declare that either party maintains a lock on the suburban vote. Republicans continue to hold the line in conventional suburbs that are auto-dominated, mostly white, consist mainly of single-family detached homes on large lots, and lie toward the metropolitan edge. But Democrats are rapidly gaining ground in urbanizing suburbs, especially in the Sun Belt, where multifamily housing mixes with commercial uses that are increasingly served by new transit systems. (398).

In *Boomburbs: The Rise of America's Accidental Cities*, Lang and LuFurgy (2007) identify fast -growing cities that fifty years ago were little more than bedroom communities adjacent to large-scale metros. More common in the Sun Belt, these municipalities have now grown by double-digit rates for decades and are socially and economically integrated with their principal cities. Boomburgs, along with mega counties and other unincorporated spaces such as census designated spaces, are eclipsing the size of traditional cities. Consider that more people live in Henderson, Nevada than in St. Louis, Missouri or that the population of Arlington, Texas is larger than that of New Orleans, Louisiana. Through the adoption of some form of rail and vertical infill, many boomburbs are urbanizing in form and politics. In the coming years, how partisan support ebbs and flows in these spaces will determine statewide election outcomes across the swing states.

References

Anderson, Elijah. 2011. *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life*. New York: W.W. Wilson.

Bishop, Bill. 2009. *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart.* Boston: Mariner Books.

Brownstein, Ronald. 2018 "The Prosperity Paradox is Dividing the Country in Two." *CNN*, January 23. https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/23/politics/economy-prosperity-paradox-divide-country-voters/index.html.

Brownstein, Ronald. 2016. "Has the Balance of Power Shifted From the Rustbelt to the Sunbelt?," *The Atlantic*, November 8. http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/11/campaign-efforts-rustbelt-and-sunbelt/506873/.

Damore, David F., Robert E. Lang, and Karen A. Danielsen. 2021a "In 2020, the Largest Metro Areas Made the Difference for the Democrats" Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings Institution, February 4. https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-2020-the-largest-metro-areas-made-the-difference-for-democrats/.

Damore, David F. and Robert E. Lang. 2016. "The End of the Democratic Blue Wall?" . Brookings Mountain West, December. https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/brookings_pubs/45/

Damore, David F., Robert E. Lang, and Karen A. Danielsen. 2021b *Blue Metros, Red States: The Shifting Urban-Rural Divide in America's Swing States.* Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Denton, Nancy. 2013. "Interpreting U.S. Segregation Trends: Two Perspectives." *City & Community*, 12(2), 156–159.

Fischer, Claude S. 1984. *The Urban Experience*, 2nd ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Florida, Richard, Marie Patino, and Rachael Dottle. 2020. "How Suburbs Swung the 2020 Election." *City Lab*, November 17. https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2020-suburban-density-election/.

Forstall, Richard L. and James D. Fitzsimmons. 1993. "Metropolitan Growth and Expansion in the 1980s." *Technical Working Paper Series.* Washington, DC: Population Division, US Bureau of the Census.

Gimpel, James G. and Iris Hui. 2017. "Inadvertent and Intentional Partisan Residential Sorting. *The Annals of Regional Science* 58(3), 441-468.

Gimpel, James G., Nathan Lovin, Bryant Moy, and Andrew Reeves. 2020. "The Urban–Rural Gulf in American Political Behavior." *Political Behavior* 42(4):1343–1368.

Huggins, Christopher M. and Jeffrey S. Debies-Carl. 2015. "Tolerance in the City: The Multilevel Effect of Urban Environments on Permissive Attitudes." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 37 (3): 255-259.

Johnston, Ron, Kelvyn Jones, and David Manley. 2016. "The Growing Spatial Polarization of Presidential Voting in the United States, 1992–2012: Myth or Reality?" *PS: Political Science & Politic*s, 49(4): 766-770.

Judis, John B. and Ruy Teixeria. 2002. *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. New York: Scribner.

Lang, Robert E. and Jennifer B. LuFurgy. 2007. *Boomburbs: The Rise of America's Accidental Cities*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Lang, Robert, Thomas Sanchez, and Alan Berube. 2008. "The New Suburban Politics: A County-Based Analysis of Metropolitan Voting Trends since 2000." In *Red, Blue, & Purple America,* ed. Ruy Teixeira, pp. 25-50. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Levin, Matt. 2020 "How California Expats are Helping Turn Texas into a Battleground State." *Cal Matters*, October 8. https://calmatters.org/politics/2020/10/california-expats-texas-battleground-state/.

Lofland, Lynn. 1998. *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territor*y. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Logan, John R. 2013. "The Persistence of Segregation in the 21st Century Metropolis." *City & Community*, 12(2), 160–68.

Marcus, George E., James Piereson, and John Sullivan. 1980. "Rural-Urban Differences in Tolerance: Confounding Problems of Conceptualization and Measurement." *Rural Sociology* 45(4):731-737.

Muro, Mark and Jacob Whiten. 2018. "Geographic Gaps are Widening while U.S. Economic Growth Increases," The Avenue, Brookings Institution, January 23. www.brookings.edu/blog/the-venue/2018/01/22/uneven-growth/.

Rodden, Jonathan A. 2019. *Why Cities Lose: The Deep Roots of the Urban-Rural Population Divide*. New York: Basic Books.

South, Scott J., and Kyle D. Crowder. 1997 "Escaping Distressed Neighborhoods: Individual, Community, and Metropolitan Influences." *American Journal of Sociology* 102:4, 1040–84.

Stouffer, Samuel. 1955. *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties*. New York: Doubleday.

Tam, Wendy K., Tam Cho, James G. Gimpel, and Iris S. Hui. 2013. "Voter Migration and the Geographic Sorting of the American Electorate." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103(4): 856-870.

Tiebout, Chalres M. 1956. "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures." *Journal of Political Economy* 54(4):416-424

Tomer, Adie Tomer and Joseph Kane. 2014. "Mapping Freight: The Highly Concentrated Nature of Goods Trade in the United States," Global Cities Initiative, The Brookings Institution, October 24. www.brookings.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/06/Srvy_GCIFreight Networks_Oct24.pdf.

Thompson, Wilbur R. 1965. *A Preface to Urban Economics*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Vigdor, Jacob L. 2013. "Weighing and Measuring the Decline in Residential Segregation." *City & Community*, 12(2), 169–177

Table 1: Increase in Million-Plus Metros, 1940-2020

Year	Number of Million-Plus Metros	Population in Million-Plus Metros	Share of U.S. Population in Million-Plus Metros (%)
1940	11	33,799,000	26
1950	14	45,524,000	30
1960	22	68,118,000	38
1970	32	95,103,000	47
1980	35	107,655,000	47
1990	44	135,191,246	54
2000	68	163,968,191	58
2010	51	167,087,415	54
2020	56	189,138,117	57

Source: Forstall and Fitzsimmons (1993) and authors' calculations of data from the U.S. Census.

Table 2: Swing State and Million-Plus Metro Partisan Shifts, 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

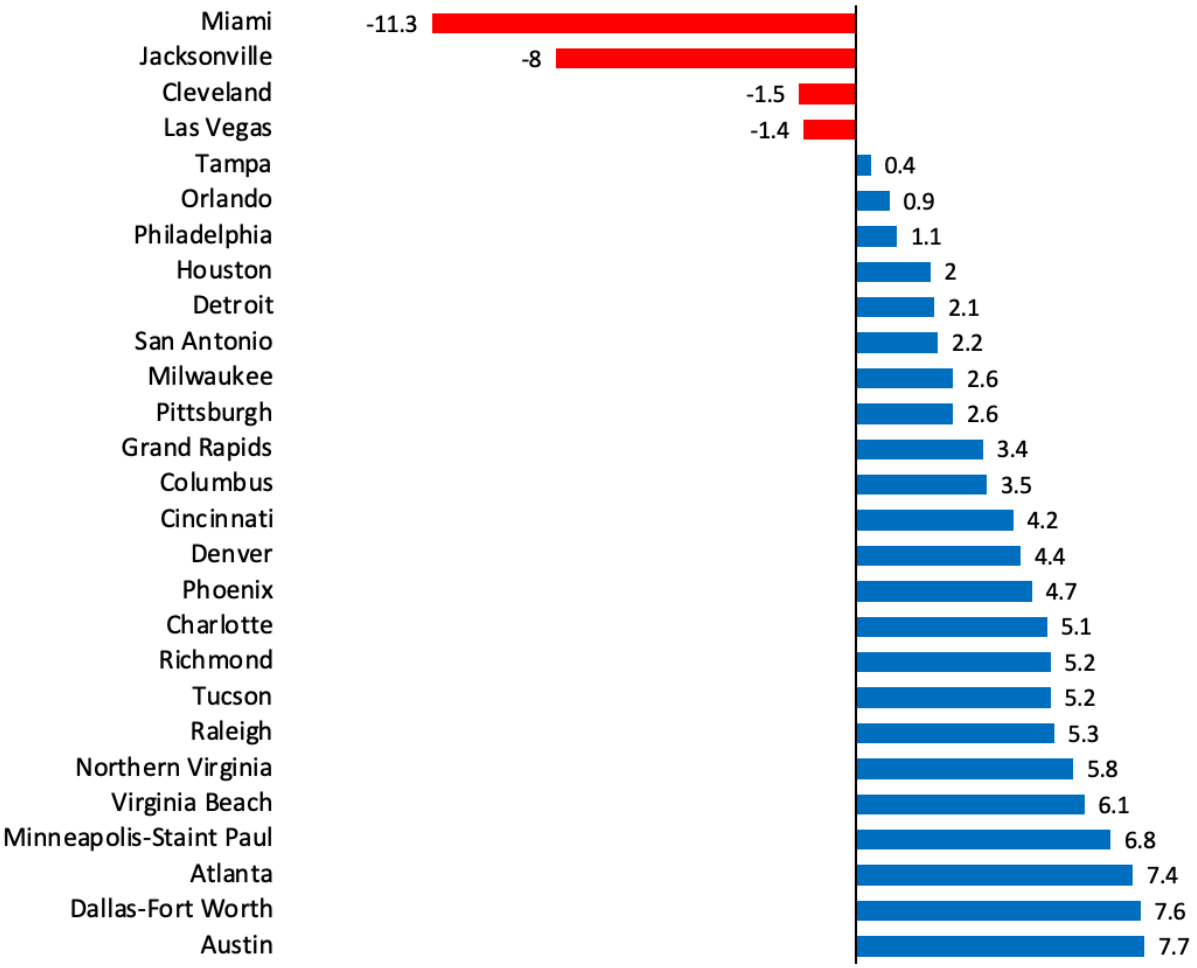
State and Million Plus Metro	Margin			Change in Metro Vote Share
	2016	2020	Difference	
Big Sun Belt				
Florida (29 electoral votes)	1.2 R	3.4 R	+2.2 R	
Jacksonville	4.8 R	12.8 R	+8.0 R	-0.1
Miami	27.5 D	16.2 D	+11.3 R	-0.3
Orlando	11.6 D	10.7 D	+0.9 D	+0.1
Tampa	3.0 R	2.6 R	+0.4 D	0.0
Texas (38 electoral votes)	9.0 R	5.6 R	+3.4 D	
Austin	19.5 D	27.2 D	+7.7 D	+.04
Dallas-Fort Worth	7.1 R	0.5 D	+7.6 D	+.04
Houston	1.0 R	1.0 D	+2.0 D	+.03
San Antonio	1.1 R	3.3 D	+2.2 D	+.04
New Sun Belt East				
Georgia (16 electoral votes)	5.2 R	0.3 D	+5.5 D	
Atlanta	8.1 D	15.5 D	+7.4 D	+.03
North Carolina (15 electoral votes)	3.7 R	1.3 R	+2.4 D	
Charlotte	1.5 R	3.6 D	+5.1 D	+.08
Raleigh	12.0 D	17.3 D	+5.3 D	+.05
Virginia (13 electoral votes)	5.3 D	10.1 D	+4.8 D	
Northern Virginia	25.8 D	31.6 D	+5.8 D	+0.5
Richmond	9.0 D	14.2 D	+5.2 D	+0.1
Virginia Beach	9.1 D	15.2	+6.1 D	-0.3
New Sun Belt East				
Arizona (11 electoral votes)	3.5 R	0.3 D	+3.8 D	
Phoenix	4.1 R	0.6 D	+4.7 D	+1.5
Tucson	13.7 D	18.9 D	+5.2 D	-1.0
Colorado (9 electoral votes)	4.9 D	10.6 D	+5.7 D	
Denver	15.4 D	19.8 D	+4.4 D	-0.1
Nevada (6 electoral votes)	2.4 D	2.4 D	0.0	
Las Vegas	10.7 D	9.3 D	+1.4 R	1
Rust Belt East				
Michigan (16 electoral votes)	0.2 R	1.7 D	+1.9 D	
Detroit	10.7 D	12.8 D	+2.1 D	-0.1
Grand Rapids	14.2 R	10.8 R	+3.4 D	+0.2

Table 2: Swing State and Million-Plus Metro Partisan Shifts, 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections, continued

State and Million Plus Metro	Margin			Change in Metro Vote Share
	2016	2020	Difference	
Rust Belt East				
Ohio (18 electoral votes)	8.1 R	8.0 R	+0.1 D	
Cincinnati	12.1 R	7.9 R	+4.2 D	-0.3
Cleveland	15.7 D	14.2 D	+1.5 R	-0.4
Columbus	4.6 D	8.1 D	+3.5 D	+0.3
Pennsylvania (20 electoral votes)	0.7 R	1.2 D	+1.9 D	
Philadelphia	32.3 D	33.4 D	+1.1 D	-0.5
Pittsburgh	4.9 R	2.3 R	+2.6 D	+0.6
Rust Belt Central				
Minnesota (10 electoral votes)	1.5 D	7.1 D	+5.6 D	
Minneapolis-Saint Paul	13.6 D	20.4 D	+6.8 D	+1.2
Wisconsin (10 electoral votes)	0.8 R	0.6 D	+1.4 D	
Milwaukee	7.2 D	9.8 D	+2.6 D	-.06

Source: Authors' calculations of data collected from secretary of state websites after completion of ballot certification.

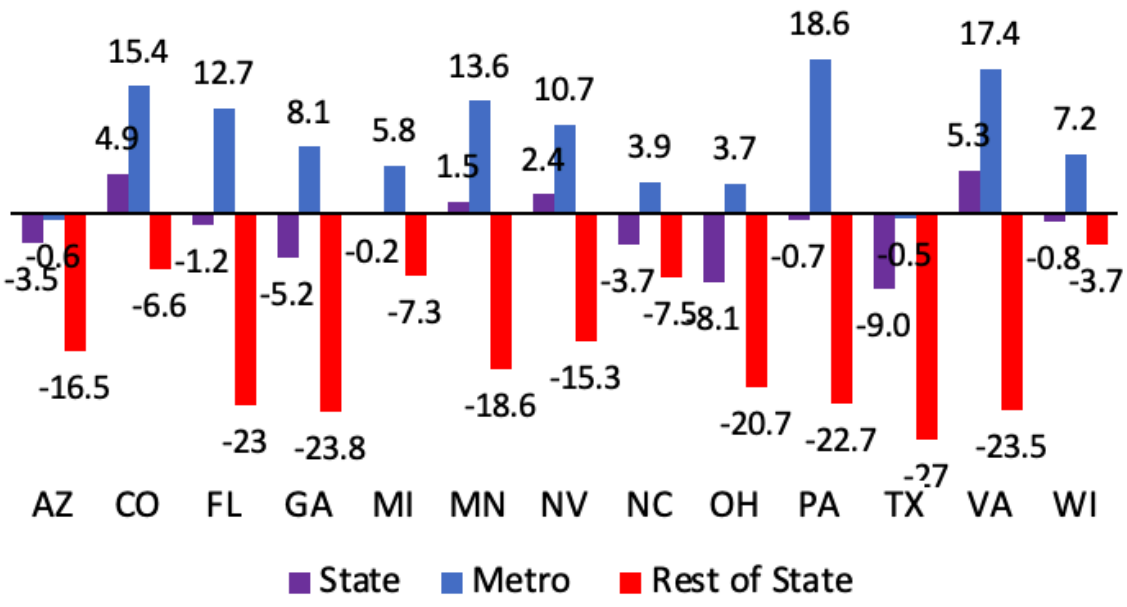
Figure 1: Partisan Shifts in Swing State Million-Plus Metros, 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections



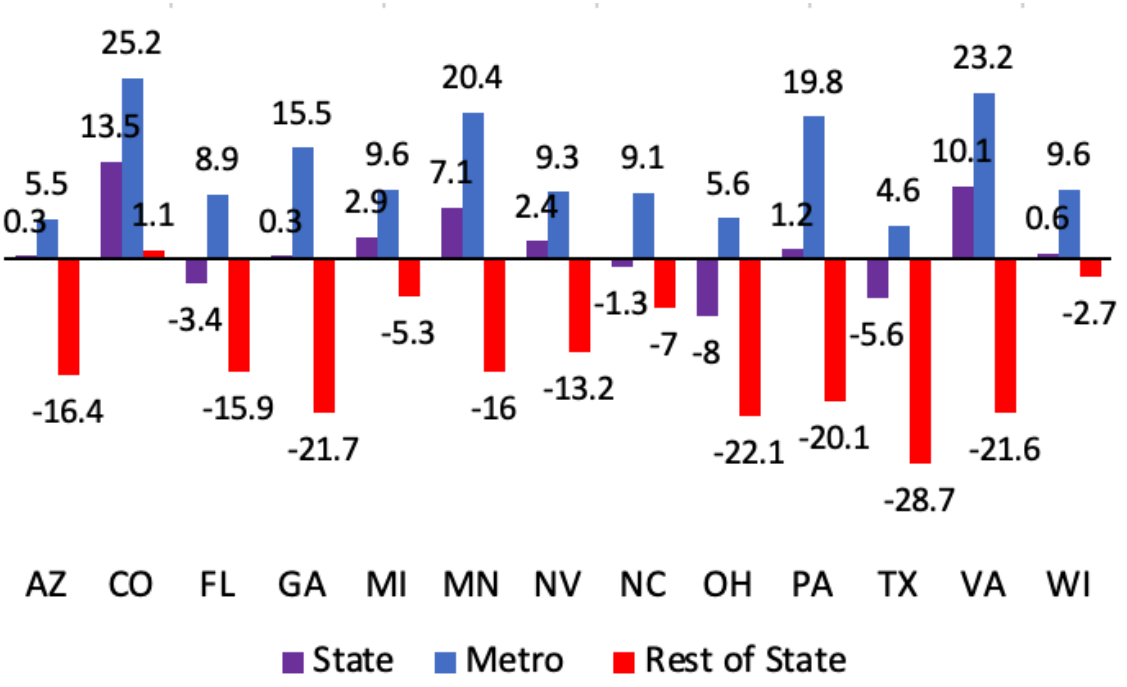
Source: Authors' calculations of data collected from secretary of state websites after completion of ballot certification.

Figure 2: Comparison of Statewide, Million-Plus Metro, and Rest of State Partisan Margins, 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

2016



2020



Source: Authors' calculations of data collected from secretary of state websites after completion of ballot certification.