
The Swing Suburbs: A presidential election in a time of stress

**The National Suburban Survey
for
The National Center for Suburban Studies
at
Hofstra University**

**By
*Princeton Survey Research Associates International***

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Executive Summary

The suburbs of the early 21st Century do not often bear much resemblance to the peaceful, homogeneous, pleasant and sparkling new residential neighborhoods that were the ideal suggested in television series in the 1950s and 1960s. American suburbs are sprawling, diverse areas that hold about half of the nation's population where people not only live, but work and play.

In the 2008 presidential election, the suburbs are a key to victory for John McCain or Barack Obama. And right now, the suburbs are leaning Republican, but are no sure thing for the GOP. The new National Suburban Poll for Hofstra University shows the Republican ticket of McCain and Sarah Palin is claiming the support of 48 percent of the suburban registered voters, while the Democratic ticket of Barack Obama and Joe Biden is backed by 42 percent of the suburbanites.

- The presidential battle in the suburbs has been a seesaw one this year, with a narrow edge going to Obama in the late spring. But by midsummer, McCain had pulled ahead slightly.
- There is much talk of gender, marriage and other factors as key to the vote in the suburbs. This poll finds McCain leading among men 51 percent to 40 percent, while women are dividing evenly, with each candidate drawing 45 percent support.
- Married registered voters in the suburbs and those with children do back McCain. But Obama holds an edge among the unmarried voters in the suburbs.
- The white working class voters in the suburbs, subject of major focus this year, are just leaning to McCain, 50 percent to 44 percent. The Republican nominee's strength in the suburbs comes from white voters making more than \$50,000 a year, who back him by a 61 percent to 35 percent margin over Obama.

These are some of the findings from a new survey conducted for The National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University. The survey, designed and executed by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, is based on telephone interviews in English with 1,526 adults age 18 and older living in the continental United States. The interviews were conducted from Sept. 15-21, 2008.

The survey over-sampled adults living in suburban areas of the country, completing interviews with 1,033 adults in the suburbs. This over-sampling allows a strong focus on the attitudes of suburbanites, while allowing comparisons with those who live in the nation's cities and rural areas.

Issues in the presidential race

The issues cut sharply and deeply in the suburbs, from attitudes on the Iraq war to the hot-button issues of abortion, gay marriage and gun control. It is the economy that the big issue on the agenda from the voters' perspective. Forty-six percent of suburban voters say the economy is the top issue they want the presidential candidates to discuss, with Iraq running a distant second at 9 percent.

- The suburban voters are not happy with the direction of the country and the Obama supporters in the suburbs are particularly unhappy: only 7 percent saying they are satisfied with the direction of the country and 90 percent are dissatisfied.

McCain's choice of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin energized the Republican faithful, appealing especially, some say to suburban women and mothers. The poll shows that Palin does have a strong appeal in the suburbs, where she is ranked highly as someone with a background and values that suburban voters can agree with (although McCain's rating on this dimension is stronger). But suburban men and suburban women view her in an equally positive light. Suburban parents do have a slightly more positive view of Palin (52%-35%) than suburban residents who are not parents (44%-38%). But these positive views of Palin perhaps do not have as much impact as expected because Obama also draws positive views, particularly among suburban women.

The economy is driving this election in the suburbs and across the nation as a whole. But the suburbs are suffering from the twin blows of high energy prices as well as job and benefit cutbacks that are eroding the economic base of suburban families.

The subprime mortgage crisis has hit all parts of America, with For Sale and Foreclosure signs popping up on many a suburban lawn. Fully 57 percent of suburban residents say home prices has gone down in the past year, with 28 percent saying they have gone down a lot. And more than one in four suburban residents say that they or someone they know has lost a house in the past 12 months due to foreclosure or because the owner could not afford rapidly increasing mortgage payments.

In addition, half of suburbanites (49%) say they or someone they know has lost a job in the past year.

The sharp rise in energy costs has hit suburbanites hard. About six in ten suburban residents report cutting back significantly on how much they drive and on household spending. And one in five says they have used switched to a different way of getting around to save on the gasoline bills. Interestingly, Obama's supporters say they have been hit harder than McCain's backers, with 71 percent saying they have cut back on driving compared with 57 percent of McCain's suburban voters.

Political Geography

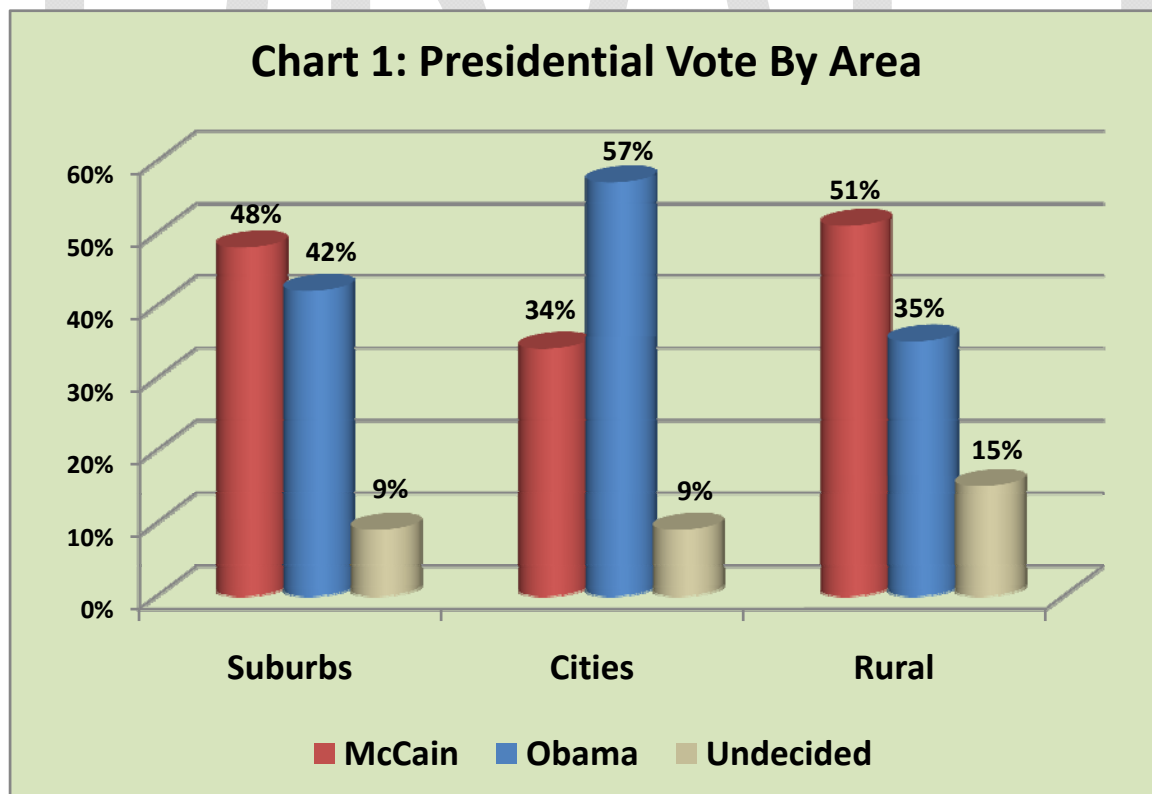
On first glance, it should be easy to define what a suburb is in America. But it is not as easy as it first appears. A full description of the method used in this survey to define suburbs is included in *Appendix I: One way to define The Suburbs*. Briefly, a method is used that labels each telephone number called as urban, suburban or rural. Then the interviews are aggregated into those groups.

Section 1: The Suburbs and the 2008 Presidential Race

The 2008 presidential campaign has moved at breakneck speed against a backdrop of soaring energy prices, plunging home values, turmoil on the financial markets and continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The nation's suburbs, with about half of America's population and half the voters, have been at the center of the bull's eye for the crisis in the real estate market. And the daily commutes that have long defined the suburban lifestyle have changed from a daily grind to a daily drain on the household budgets.

In presidential politics, the suburbs have long been thought of as a Republican bastion, in contrast to the Democratic strength in the nation's major cities. As the suburbs have spread out and diversified, the Republican strength has weakened. For this year's election, the new National Suburban Poll for Hofstra University shows the Republican ticket of John McCain and Sarah Palin wins the support of 48 percent of the suburban registered voters, while the Democratic ticket of Barack Obama and Joe Biden is backed by 42 percent of the suburbanites.

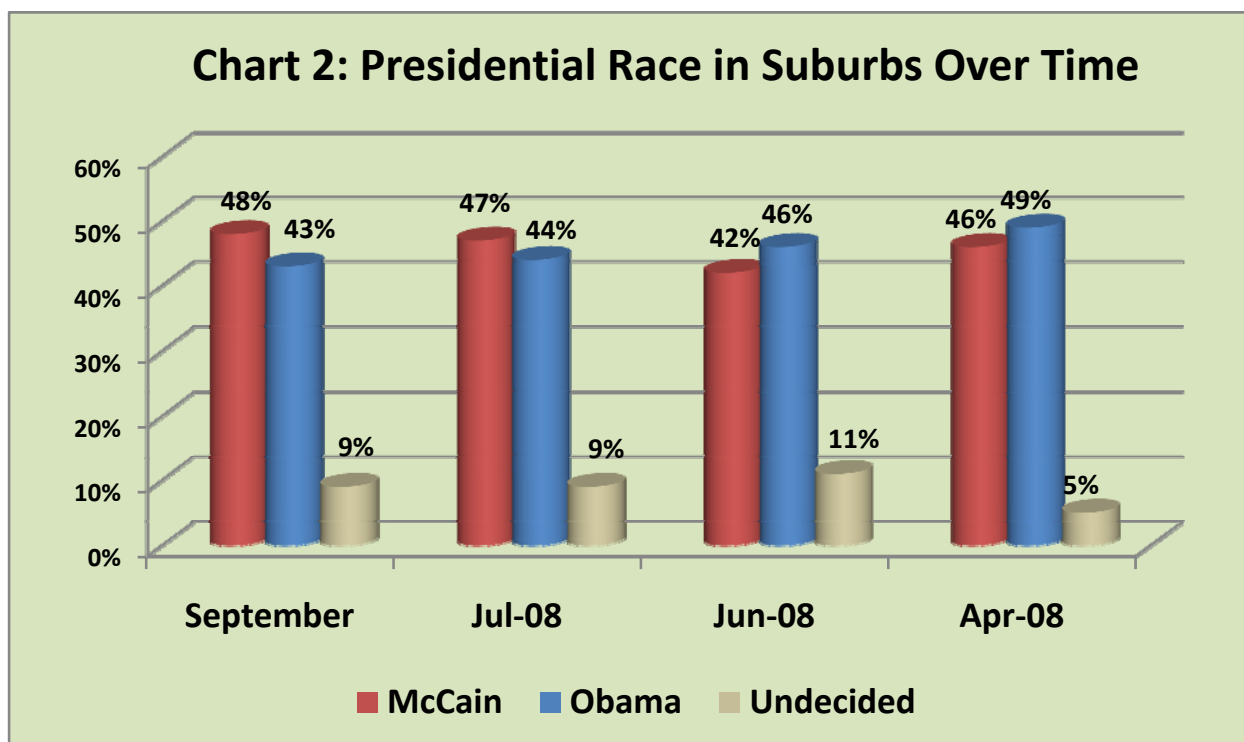
Outside the suburbs, in the picture is both similar and different. In the rural areas, the Republicans lead 51 percent to 35 percent. But in the cities, Obama and Biden lead by a 57-34 margin. Since major cities make up about a third of the vote and rural areas about 20



percent, overall nationally, the vote is split 46 percent for Obama and 44 percent for McCain¹.

Among likely voters, the numbers shift in the GOP direction. McCain has the backing of 51 percent of the likely suburban voters, while Obama is stable at 42 percent of the likely voters. Among likely voters for the entire nation, McCain has 48 percent to 45 percent for Obama, which is not a statistically significant difference between the two candidates.

Over the past few months, the suburbs have moved as the relative positions of the candidates have changed. While the current numbers are little changed from those in July², they are different from June³ and from April⁴, where Obama led in both the suburbs and



nationwide. But the margin for either candidate in the suburbs has not been more than five percentage points.

¹ Discussions of attitudes on the presidential race in this report will be based on registered voters in most cases, except in those limited circumstances where the analysis focuses on likely voters. Survey results on topics other than the campaign will generally focus on the attitudes of all suburban adults.

² *Inflation Staggers Public, Economy Still Seen as Fixable*, Pew Research Center, July 31, 2008, <http://people-press.org/report/438/inflation-economy-obama-overseas-trip>.

³ *Likely Rise in Voter Turnout Bodes Well for Democrats*, Pew Research Center, July 10, 2008, <http://people-press.org/report/436/obama-mccain-july>.

⁴ *Obama's Image Slips; His Lead over Clinton Disappears*, May 1, 2008, <http://people-press.org/report/414/obamas-image-slips-his-lead-over-clinton-disappears>.

The enthusiasm gap that plagued McCain earlier in the year has pretty much evaporated. Obama's suburban backers say they *strongly* support him by a 74-26 margin. That is not different from the 70-29 margin by which McCain supporters say they *strongly* support the GOP ticket.

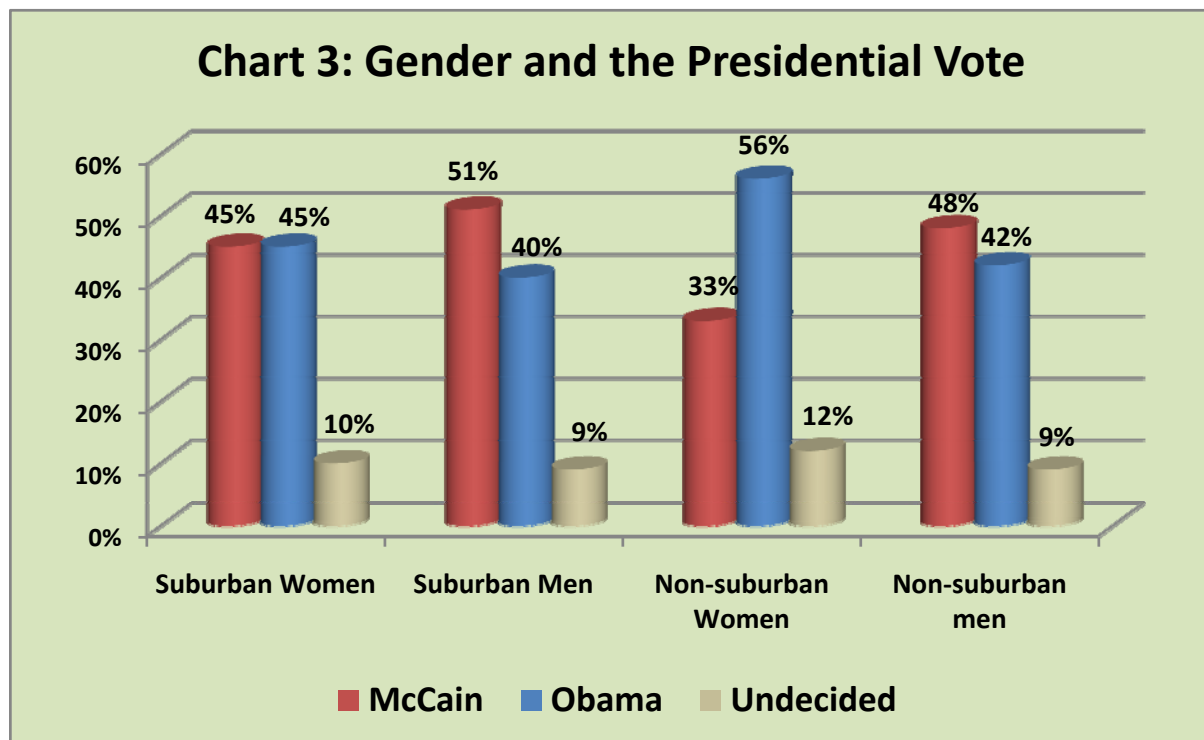
The Demographics of the Suburban Vote

The commentary on the demographics of American politics is replete with short-hand descriptions: the middle class, soccer moms, Wal-Mart moms, latte liberals, the blue-collar voters, the minority vote and such. And any discussion of politics in suburbia is no different.

The two major fault lines of this year's presidential campaign are race and gender. With Obama as the first major party nominee who is African-American (defeating Hillary Clinton for that role) and Sarah Palin as the first woman to be picked for vice president by the Republican Party (and the second overall), this is no surprise. And in the suburbs, these faults lines are meaningful ones.

Gender in the suburbs

Gender is a dividing line in the suburbs on politics. Suburban men split 51 percent to 40 percent in favor of McCain over Obama. But suburban women are evenly divided: 45 percent



of McCain and 45 percent for Obama.

Here the suburbs stand out from the rest the country, where this pattern is not repeated in the rest of the country. Women outside the suburbs back Obama by a 56 percent to 33 percent edge, while non-suburban men split 48-42 for McCain.

...and marriage and children in the suburbs

Some might rush to toss gender, marriage and parenthood into one mix as demographic dimensions in the suburbs. But they are different in reality and in political terms in the suburbs, as the suburbs have aged and added retirement communities to an area once thought of as “places for families with children.”

There are sharp differences between married voters in the suburbs and unmarried voters. Married suburbanites back the Republican ticket by a 53 percent to 37 percent margin. But those who are not married – whether never married, widowed, divorced or separated – back the Democratic ticket by a 53-38 margin.

Outside of the suburbs, married registered voters split 48-45 between McCain and Obama, while unmarried non-suburbanites back Obama 55-30.

Having a child in your home in the suburbs shifts the focus in many ways and it clearly makes a difference in attitudes toward the presidential race. Suburban parents back McCain by a 51-40 edge over Obama. Suburbanites who are not parents divide 46 percent McCain, 44 percent Obama.

Does this mean the soccer moms are backing McCain in 2008? At this point, the answer is yes, but so are soccer dads. Suburban mothers with children under age 18 living at home back McCain by 50-41 over Obama. Suburban dads do the same by 53-40.

Race in the suburbs

Just raising the issue of race in the suburbs is a clear indication of how much U.S. suburbs are different from the stereotypes some hold: American suburbs are racially diverse. Perhaps the suburbs are not as diverse as the central cities, but as a group, suburbs are not white enclaves. In this survey, 78 percent of the suburban adults are white, seven percent are African-American, seven percent are Hispanic, six percent are of another race and two percent refused to answer.

And, in the suburbs, as in the rest of the country, views of the presidential candidates are divided by race. White suburbanites support the McCain-Palin ticket by a 55-38 margin over Obama-Biden. Minority group suburbanites support Obama by a 65-21 edge over McCain. Outside the suburbs, the pattern is similar.

Table 1: Suburban vote by race and ethnicity				
	Suburbs		Not suburbs	
	White	Minority	White	Minority
McCain-Palin	55%	21%	50%	17%
Obama-Biden	38%	65%	39%	73%
Other/Don't Know	7%	14%	11%	10%

The white working class

Much has been made during and after the Democratic presidential primaries about the role of white, working-class voters in the election. They were major supporters of Hillary Clinton in her nomination bid, and commentators suggested that this group might not back the first African-American candidate for president. In the suburbs, the battle for this group is clearly not over.

White suburban working-class voters (defined as those with incomes of less than \$50,000 a year) split 50-44 for McCain. But better-off white voters, those with higher incomes, give McCain a 61-35 edge.

And a few more

There are many different demographic variables to use to look at the suburban voters and then even more ways to look at the suburbs by even smaller groups across a number of dimensions. Here are several more ways to think about the suburban vote.

- Education:** One of Obama's strongest groups of supporters during the primaries was those with a college degree or more education. But now the picture is somewhat different. In the suburbs, Obama splits those with at least a college degree with McCain, 44 percent to 46 percent. McCain leads 49-42 among those with less education. In contrast, among those with at least college degrees in the major cities, Obama leads McCain 75-22.
- Income:** Overall, McCain has tended to do better among those with higher incomes, while Obama does better among lower-income groups. And that is the case in the suburbs. McCain holds a narrow 55-39 edge among those making at least \$50,000 a year, while Obama has a narrower 51-42 margin among those with lower incomes.
- Party:** Following the parties' national conventions in late August and early September, the partisans of each party solidified behind their candidates, with more than 90 percent of each group in the suburbs staying with the party line. Among the treasured group of independents, McCain holds a narrow 46 percent to 38 percent lead, but 13 percent are undecided.

- **Born-again Christians:** Born-again and evangelical Christians have been a solid part of the GOP base for more than 20 years. And they are today. McCain holds a 60 percent to 31 percent margin over Obama among this group in the suburbs. Outside the suburbs, his margin is 54%-35%.
- **Veterans:** McCain's military service is a key part of his personal story and fellow veterans are with him solidly in the suburbs. Voters in a household with a military veteran back McCain 57 percent to 30 percent for Obama.

Section 2: The Candidates

John McCain's choice of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his vice presidential nominee generated a jolt of energy at the Republican National Convention and ignited new enthusiasm among the Republican Party faithful. But the boosts in public opinion from the national political conventions can be ephemeral. One of the commentaries on the value of Gov. Palin to the ticket has been that she can be seen as appealing strongly in terms of background and values to those in suburbia, particularly women and mothers.

For each of the candidates on the major party tickets, a question was asked whether that *person has a background and set of values that you can identify with*. On this measure, McCain comes out on top, with 56 percent of all suburban residents saying he has values and a background one can identify with. Thirty-seven percent disagree. Obama and Palin are labeled by 47 percent each as having such backgrounds and values. But 16 percent of the suburbanites did not express an opinion on the Alaska governor. And 45 percent said that Obama does not have a background and values they can identify with.

Table 2: Suburbanites' views of the candidates

	Background and values can identify with	NOT a background and values can identify with	Don't know/ Refused
	%	%	%
John McCain	56	37	8
Sarah Palin	47	37	16
Barack Obama	47	45	8
Joe Biden	35	41	24

Democratic vice presidential candidate Joe Biden is the least know and received the lowest marks on this dimension, with only 35 saying he has a background they can identify with.

In terms of Palin's image, there is no significant difference on this dimension between suburban women (48%-37%) and suburban men (46%-36%). There is a difference between suburban parents, who have a slightly more positive view of Palin (52%-35%) than suburban residents who are not parents (44%-38%).

But the shape of suburban attitudes toward Obama is interesting and may work to mitigate Palin's impact in the suburbs. For the Democratic presidential candidate, suburban men are slightly negative toward him (43%-49%), while suburban women have a positive tilt toward the nominee (51%-42%). Suburban parents and non-parents have similar views of Obama, but those suburban mothers are positive as a group. Suburban mothers divide 50 percent to 42% in a positive direction on Obama, while suburban fathers go the other way 45 percent to 52 percent.

Section 3: The Issues

Just as there are serious issue differences between John McCain and Barack Obama, there are serious issue divides between their supporters in the suburbs. And there are some interesting comparisons between the views of the candidates' supporters and those who are still undecided in the presidential race.

Obama supporters in the suburbs are very unhappy with the direction of the country, with only 7 percent saying they are satisfied with the direction of the country and 90 percent are dissatisfied. McCain backers in the suburbs are not satisfied, but their view is less stark with 29 percent satisfied and 65 percent not.

Iraq is the issue where the differences between the candidates are stark. McCain's support for the *surge* of U.S. troops into Iraq has been cornerstone of his campaign, while Obama's early opposition to the Iraq war was a key to his winning the Democratic nomination. Among registered suburban voters, McCain's supporters back keeping U.S. troops in Iraq by a 77-percent-to-20-percent margin. Obama's supporters oppose keeping U.S. troops there by 24 percent to 74 percent. And those who are undecided tend to agree with the Democratic nominee: they oppose keeping troops there by 29 percent to 62 percent.

But the economy is the big issue on the agenda from the voters' perspective. Forty-six percent of suburban voters say the economy is the top issue, with Iraq running a distant second at 9 percent.

And Obama supporters say they have seen economic problems more often than McCain's backers. Asked about whether they, or someone they know, had suffered one of the following economic blows, Obama's supporters always report seeing more economic suffering:

- **Lost job:** Obama voters, 57% yes. McCain voters, 44% yes.
- **Cut in pay, cut in hours or loss of benefits:** Obama voters, 54%. McCain voters, 46%.
- **Lost home due to foreclosure or rising mortgage payments:** Obama voters, 32%. McCain voters, 23%.

The rising costs of gasoline, electricity and other energy have put a crimp in many suburbanites' budgets. Again, Obama's supporters say they have been hit harder than McCain's backers:

- **Cut back on driving:** Obama voters, 71%. McCain voters, 57%.
- **Cut back on household spending:** Obama voters, 69%. McCain voters, 57%.
- **Used public transit more:** Obama voters, 27%. McCain voters, 16%.

In addition, there are a range of hot-button issues that are often discussed in terms of partisan politics, even though the issues themselves may not be partisan. And on many of

these issues, there are major gaps between McCain's supporters in the suburbs and Obama's backers there.

- **Abortion:** Seventy-one percent of Obama's supporters say abortion should be legal in most situations. Only 40 percent of McCain's supporters agree.
- **Gay Marriage:** Half of McCain's suburban voters say there should be no legal recognition of gay couples and only 19 percent support gay marriage. Nearly half of Obama's supporters (48%) support gay marriage and 26 percent are opposed to any type of legal recognition.
- **Guns:** More than six in ten McCain supporters (62%) say protecting Americans' right to own guns is more important than controlling gun ownership (35%). Among Obama backers, only 26 percent say the right to own a gun is more important while 70 percent say controlling gun ownership is more critical.
- **Immigration:** Nearly two-thirds of Obama's backers (65%) support offering amnesty to immigrants living illegally in this country under certain conditions. Almost as many McCain supporters (58%) oppose such an approach.
- **Drilling in Alaska:** More than four in five McCain supporters (84%) back drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, actions that McCain has opposed on occasion. Only two in five of Obama's supporters agree (42%).
- **Health insurance:** Conversely, four in five Obama supporters (80%) would back the federal government guaranteeing health insurance for all citizens, even if it means raising taxes. Just under two in five McCain backers agree (38%). This is an issue that could resonate with undecided suburban voters: 61 percent of this group back such a federal promise.

But at least on one dimension of the tax issue, Obama and McCain supporters pretty much agree. On the question of whether local taxes are too high considering the level of local services, 49 percent of McCain supporters say they are too high, but 47 percent say they are about right. Among Obama backers, almost identical results: 46 percent too high; 49 percent about right.

Section 4: The Suburbs Today

The word “suburb” still raises snickers among some thinkers as a place “out there” where middle-class people without taste reside. The harshest critics dismiss suburbs as the “geography of nowhere.”

Yet the American suburbs have grown so immense and diverse, now housing more than half the U.S. population, that no out-of-date stereotypes can capture their complexity, meaning or future direction.

---Robert Lang, Diversity and the Changing face of Suburbia

The easy stereotypes about the American suburbs have long since lost their value and their accuracy. This National Suburban Survey is designed, in part, to grab an accurate snapshot of life and times in the suburbs in 2008. It has not been an easy couple of years in the suburbs, as the days of easy mortgage and rapid development have come to a halt, a crashing halt in some suburbs.

But Americans are still satisfied with their life in the suburbs, even if it does not match the ideals dreamed up but those who lived elsewhere. About half of suburban resident rate their quality of life as excellent (16%) or good (30%), with roughly the same percentages saying life is good (30%) or fair (17%). Only six percent say the quality of life is poor.

An Economic Crunch in the Suburbs

Some of the abiding images before the subprime mortgage crisis slammed America were pictures of dozens of condominium building sprouting up in Miami as well as aerial photos of sprawling subdivisions blooming in the desert outside of Las Vegas or in the browned landscape miles and miles from Los Angeles.

Those days are gone in the suburbs. Most suburban residents (57%) say home prices has gone down in the past year, with 28 percent saying they have gone down a lot. And that is not just a paper loss for many. And more than one in four suburban residents (27%) say they or someone they know has lost their home in the past 12 months due to foreclosure or because the owner could not afford rapidly increasing mortgage payments.

Today's Energy Crisis in the Suburbs

For those old enough to remember gas lines and rationing in the 1970's experiencing the energy crisis in this country today might seem like déjà vu. The reality is there was an energy crisis in the '70s and there is one now. Soaring gas prices and fuel shortages in some areas across the nation today make the situation very much like those hard times. In the suburbs, as elsewhere, the energy crunch is evident most in people's decisions about how much they drive and what they can afford to spend on household essentials. Increased gas prices are especially worrisome as a large majority of suburban workers commute to their jobs by car. Working class and lower income suburbanites report making more changes in their lives to adjust to the crunch.

The Impact of Increased Energy Prices

The rise in energy costs has influenced the habits and decisions of suburbanites as much as it has all Americans. The most common changes as a direct result of the increase in energy prices are in routine activities that are more readily modified. As shown in Table 3, about six in 10 suburban residents report cutting back significantly on how much they drive and on household spending, and one in five says they have used other modes of transportation for their regular commute or errands.

Table 3: Personal Changes as a Result of Increased Energy Prices			
	<i>Percent Who Made the Change</i>		
	Suburban	Urban	Rural
Changes Made			
<i>Cut back significantly on how much you drive</i>	62	69	70
<i>Cut back significantly on household spending</i>	62	62	67
<i>Used other modes of transportation for your regular commute or errands</i>	22	35	23
<i>Bought a more fuel-efficient car</i>	19	17	24
<i>Moved closer to where you work</i>	7	9	6
<i>Changed jobs</i>	10	8	1

Similar numbers of urban and rural residents report making such changes to help them save on energy costs. Although, rural residents are more likely than suburbanites to say they cut back on driving (70% v. 62%) and urbanites (35%) are more likely than both suburban and rural residents (22% and 23%) to say they have found alternative modes of transportation.

For some suburban residents the increased energy prices have resulted in more major changes in their lives. One in five says they bought a more fuel efficient and one in 10 says they changed jobs. And a fraction (7%) report moving closer to where they work. Similar numbers of non-suburban residents overall report making such major adjustments as a result of increased energy prices, although very few rural residents report changing jobs.

Among suburbanites, income is a strong factor in who has made changes in their lives in response to the increased energy prices. Residents whose annual income is under \$50,000 are more likely than those whose income is \$50,000 or more to say they cut back on driving (73% v. 56%), reduced household spending (76% v. , 52%), and used alternative modes of transportation for their routine travels (29% v. 17%).

Few other characteristics have a consistent influence on whether suburban residents have made such adjustments. For example, more suburban women than men (69% v. 54%) say they have cut back on household spending as a result of increased energy prices but the sexes are otherwise equal with regard response to the energy crunch.

The Commuters

The increasingly high cost of gas, and the threat of a shortage, is probably causing equal concern among suburban and non-suburban commuters. The image of suburbanites as the only car-bound commuters is not today's reality according to the survey. Eighty-six percent of suburban workers commute by car to their jobs most workdays, a number comparable to the 84 percent of those living in non-suburban areas. Relatively few suburban or non-suburban workers – about one in 10 – report using buses, trains or other alternatives for their daily commute.

But suburban workers' spend more time getting to and from their jobs than workers in non-suburban areas so they may be somewhat more vulnerable to fluctuating gas costs and its availability. Fully two-thirds of suburbanites estimate that their commute takes a half hour or less. But that proportion increases to three-quarters (76%) among non-suburban commuters, including 42 percent who report that their commute takes less than 15 minutes. Suburban workers, on the other hand, are more likely to say their commute averages a half hour to an hour each day (27% suburban workers v. 19% non-suburban).

Section 5: Conclusion

More than half of the nation's homes are in the suburbs, but in the past three decades they have been joined by wave after wave of office buildings and factories. The suburbs are diverse and sprawling, defying any easy characterization.

In the 2008 presidential race, the suburbs are playing a major role in choosing John McCain or Barack Obama as the next president. McCain's lead in the often-Republican suburbs is his bulwark against the big margins Obama is looking to roll up in the big cities. But Obama's appeal to young people and those with college degrees has helped to cut into GOP strength.

The suburbs are also sufferings from the woes of declining home prices, rising mortgage payments, lost jobs and higher energy costs. They are not satisfied with the direction of the country and will play a big role in determining how that direction changes in the year to come.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1: One way to define The Suburbs

Defining what is a suburb in America is not as easy as looking up a location and seeing whether the U.S. Census Bureau defines it as urban, suburban or rural. The lack of such an easy-to-apply definition is complicated further when one is conducting a random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey.

The goal of this note is to 1) explain how suburban is defined for telephone samples and 2) explain how some information can be summed to the county level in useful ways.

Telephone company geographies

Just as there are Census geographies, there are also telephone company geographies. These telephone company geographies have a long history, based on assigning telephone numbers, first via exchanges (the first three digits of the telephone number) and then by area code. Originally, each of the more than 64,000 telephone company exchanges was tightly linked to a specific geographic area. With the modernization of the telephone infrastructure, that link has loosened, but it still exists. A single telephone exchange in a given area code, say 202-555-xxxx in Washington DC is still located in and linked to a specific geographic area.

SSI Definitions

What is the definition of URBAN?

A Central City of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is considered Urban.

What is the definition of SUBURBAN?

Any portion of an MSA county that is not in a Central City is considered Suburban.

What is the definition of RURAL?

All non-MSA counties are considered "Rural."

PSRAI uses telephone samples from Survey Sampling International for most of its RDD surveys. SSI understands the nation's telephone system at a deep level: PSRAI takes advantage of that knowledge in drawing and using telephone samples.

SSI uses Census Bureau definitions and Census tract information to code each of the 65,000 telephone exchanges in the country as Urban/Suburban/Rural. In short, an exchange is coded as *Urban* if a plurality of the directory-listed telephone households in the exchange are in tracts coded as *Urban*. If a plurality of the exchange's numbers are in non-MSA counties, it is coded as *Rural*. If it is not one of these, it is coded *Suburban*.

Thus, for each telephone number dialed, there is a designation of Urban, Suburban or Rural, a variable called USR. This is a variable at the telephone number level, not at the county level. For an average telephone survey, around half of the numbers are suburban, just about three out of ten are urban and under 20 percent are rural.

For this poll, when talking about suburban residents, it will be those respondents whose telephone numbers are coded Suburban using this process.

Additional Geographic Variables

In addition to the USR variable, there is the FIPS code for the county, again mapped by SSI. None of these mappings are, or can be, perfect. Different geographies were created for different purposes and thus conflicts occur. There is a certain amount of noise in these variables that is simply unavoidable.

At the county level: USR

Using the straight USR variable, here is how the counties break down:

	Counties		Population	
Urban only	28	0.9%	14,731,575	5.3%
Suburban only	613	19.7%	43,986,094	15.7%
Rural only	1,992	64.1%	46,676,963	16.7%
Urban/Suburban	426	13.7%	169,795,237	60.7%
Urban/Rural	5	0.2%	349,824	0.1%
Suburban/Rural	32	1.0%	1,457,710	0.5%
Urban/Suburban/Rural	13	0.4%	2,586,034	0.9%
	3,109		279,583,437	

For analytical purposes, this breakdown at the county level can be useful, but it is limited. The problem is that the mixed counties (Urban/Suburban, for instance) can vary from 2% Urban/98% Suburban to 99% Urban/1% Suburban.

Other Categorizations: County-level

The information available from SSI does allow us to make an estimate of what proportion of telephone exchanges in each county are urban, suburban and rural. While that maps well to the number of telephone households in the county, it is certainly not precise. But PSRAI has used that information to further categorize counties by majority status of the county.

So there are 817 counties that are majority suburban, with 123.75 million residents.

Estimated County Type

Type based on SSI USR		2000 Population	2000 Households
Divided Counties	N	11	11
	Sum	192,135	72,774
Majority Rural	N	2016	2016
	Sum	48,188,020	18,509,009
Majority Suburban	N	817	817
	Sum	123,753,800	46,104,562
Majority Urban	N	265	265
	Sum	107,449,482	40,168,916
Total	N	3109	3109
	Sum	279,583,437	104,855,261

Another categorization at the county level was contained in *Suburban Blues: The 2006 Democratic Sweep to the Metropolitan Edge*, by Robert E. Lang and Thomas W. Sanchez, Metropolitan Institute 2006 Election Brief. Among suburban counties, Lang and Sanchez categorized 397 counties and did not categorize 682 counties categorized in PSRAI fashion as at least partially suburban. Here is the breakdown:

	Frequency	Percent
None	682	63
Cores	7	1
Emerging suburbs	145	13
Exurbs	147	14
Inner suburbs	35	3
Mature Suburbs	63	6
Total	1079	100

Appendix II: The Topline and Questionnaire

To be inserted Friday

Appendix III: Survey Methodology

Methodology

National Suburban Poll

Prepared by Princeton Survey Research Associates International
for the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra

September 2008

SUMMARY

The National Suburban Poll, sponsored by the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra, obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,526 adults living in continental United States telephone households. The survey was conducted by Princeton Survey Research International. Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source, LLC from September 15 to September 21, 2008. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is $\pm 3.3\%$.

Details on the design, execution and analysis of the survey are discussed below.

DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Sample Design

The sample was designed to represent all continental U.S. telephone households. The telephone sample was provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. The sample was drawn using standard *list-assisted random digit dialing* (RDD) methodology. *Active blocks* of telephone numbers (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households; after selection two more digits were added randomly to complete the number. This method guarantees coverage of every assigned phone number regardless of whether that number is directory listed, purposely unlisted, or too new to be listed. After selection, the numbers were compared against business directories and matching numbers purged.

The sample was designed to oversample suburban areas. For sampling purposes exchanges that serve suburban areas were oversampled to yield roughly 1,000 suburban completes. Suburban areas were defined as any part of an MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) that is not part of the Central City. MSA Central Cities are determined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The remaining completes came from urban and rural areas. This oversampling was corrected in the first stage of weighting.

Contact Procedures

Interviews were conducted from September 15 to September 21, 2008. As many as 7 attempts were made to contact every sampled telephone number. Sample was released for interviewing in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger sample. Using replicates to control the release of sample ensures that complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample.

Calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chance of making contact with potential respondents. Each household received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone at home. In each contacted household, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male currently at home. If no male was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest female at home. This systematic respondent selection technique has been shown to produce samples that closely mirror the population in terms of age and gender.

WEIGHTING AND ANALYSIS

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for disproportionate sampling and patterns of nonresponse that might bias results. This data was weighted in two stages. The first-stage weight corrected for the oversampling of suburban areas. The second stage of weighting adjusted sample demographics to match national parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, population density and community size. Most of the parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2007 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC). The population density parameter was derived from 2000 Census data and the community size parameter was derived from an analysis of area code/exchange data from SSI.

Weighting was accomplished using Sample Balancing, a special iterative sample weighting program that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using a statistical technique called the *Deming Algorithm*. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the national population. Table 1 compares weighted and unweighted sample distributions to population parameters.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

	Parameter	Unweighted	Weighted
<u>Gender</u>			
	Male	48.3	47.6
	Female	51.7	52.4
<u>Age</u>			
	18-24	12.5	5.2
	25-34	17.6	8.6
	35-44	19.1	16.7
	45-54	19.7	22.1
	55-64	14.7	21.4
	65+	16.4	25.9
<u>Education</u>			
	Less than HS Grad.	14.5	5.5
	HS Grad.	35.5	28.9
	Some College	23.2	24.6
	College Grad.	26.8	40.9
<u>Region</u>			
	Northeast	18.5	20.6
	Midwest	23.0	25.2
	South	36.5	36.9
	West	22.0	17.4
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>			
	White/not Hispanic	70.3	82.5
	Black/not Hispanic	10.9	8.6
	Hispanic	12.8	4.9
	Other/not Hispanic	6.0	3.9
<u>Population Density</u>			
	1 - Lowest	20.1	20.3
	2	20.0	25.6
	3	20.1	23.3
	4	20.2	18.2
	5 - Highest	19.6	12.6
<u>Community size</u>			
	Urban	35.4	18.5
	Suburban	46.2	67.7
	Rural	18.4	13.8

Effects of Sample Design on Statistical Inference

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. PSRAI calculates the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss

in statistical efficiency that results from systematic non-response. The total sample design effect for this survey is 1.74.

PSRAI calculates the composite design effect for a sample of size n , with each case having a weight, w_i as:

$$deff = \frac{n \sum_{i=1}^n w_i^2}{\left(\sum_{i=1}^n w_i \right)^2} \quad \text{formula 1}$$

In a wide range of situations, the adjusted *standard error* of a statistic should be calculated by multiplying the usual formula by the square root of the design effect (\sqrt{deff}). Thus, the formula for computing the 95% confidence interval around a percentage is:

$$\hat{p} \pm \left(\sqrt{deff} \times 1.96 \sqrt{\frac{\hat{p}(1-\hat{p})}{n}} \right) \quad \text{formula 2}$$

where \hat{p} is the sample estimate and n is the unweighted number of sample cases in the group being considered.

The survey's *margin of error* is the largest 95% confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample—the one around 50%. For example, the margin of error for the entire sample is $\pm 3.3\%$. This means that in 95 out every 100 samples drawn using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 3.3 percentage points away from their true values in the population. The margin of error for estimates based on the 1,033 suburban respondents is $\pm 3.6\%$. The margin of error for estimates based on the 493 non-suburban respondents is $\pm 5.3\%$. It is important to remember that sampling fluctuations are only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Other sources, such as respondent selection bias, questionnaire wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error of greater or lesser magnitude.

RESPONSE RATE

Table 2 reports the disposition of all sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number sample. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:⁵

Contact rate – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made – of 78 percent⁶

Cooperation rate – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused – of 30 percent

Completion rate – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed – of 90 percent

Thus the response rate for this survey was 21 percent.

⁵ PSRAI's disposition codes and reporting are consistent with the American Association for Public Opinion Research standards.

⁶ PSRAI assumes that 75 percent of cases that result in a constant disposition of "No answer" or "Busy" are actually not working numbers.

Table 2: Sample Disposition

19993	Total Numbers Dialed
1014	Business/Government/Non-Residential
957	Fax/Modem
9	Cell phone
8414	Other not working
1721	Projected not working (No answer/Busy)
7879	Working numbers
39.4%	Working Rate
574	Projected Non-Contact (No Answer/Busy)
1070	Answering machine/Voice mail
66	Other Non-Contact
6169	Contacted numbers
78.3%	Contact Rate
352	Callback
3947	Refusal
1870	Cooperating numbers
30.3%	Cooperation Rate
176	Language Barrier
1694	Eligible numbers
90.6%	Eligibility Rate
168	Interrupted
1526	Complete
90.1%	Completion Rate
21.4%	Response Rate