



## **The Next Frontier**

*A New Study of Exurbia*

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By

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## Executive Summary

Is exurbia really solid GOP territory—so dominated by conservative white voters that the Democrats have no chance of competing successfully there? This report takes a careful look at the data and concludes that view is incorrect. Exurbia is changing rapidly and the most important part of exurbia—America’s emerging suburbs—is definitely accessible to Democrats. A serious effort by Democrats to reach these voters should result in significantly compressed GOP margins in these areas which, in turn, should make Democratic electoral success more likely in 2006 and beyond.

In this report, exurbia is divided into two parts—borderline rural “true exurbs” and borderline suburban “emerging suburbs”. Today’s true exurbs contain only 2 percent of the nation’s population. Emerging suburbs on the other hand contain 13 percent of the nation’s population and, on average, are growing faster than any other type of county in the US, including true exurbs. Emerging suburbs are therefore the most politically significant and salient part of exurbia by a wide margin.

Analysis of Census data indicates that the emerging suburbs are rapidly becoming more diverse and are considerably more downscale than generally believed. In terms of diversity, between 1990 and 2000, emerging suburbs declined from 85 percent white to 79 percent white, a rate of decrease of about six-tenths of a percent per year. This decline occurred despite solid growth in the white population in that decade (by 21 percent). But the minority population of the emerging suburbs exploded: the black population of these counties grew by 50 percent and the Hispanic and Asian populations grew at the blistering rate of 117 percent and 111 percent, respectively. Overall, the minority population in these counties grew by 89 percent, substantially faster than minority growth in any other category.

In terms of class, about 58 percent of emerging suburban residents are white working class—that is, are whites without a four year college degree. Only 23 percent are college-educated whites. Looked at by occupation, a very strong majority (65 percent) of emerging suburban workers do not hold professional or managerial jobs. There are more construction and production workers than professionals and way more sales and office workers than managers. And by income, 70 percent of emerging suburban households have incomes under \$75,000 and only 17 percent have incomes over \$100,000.

Looking at past voting patterns, true exurban counties voted 62-37 for Bush over Kerry, a lop-sided result, to be sure, and a 10 point gain in GOP margin over 2000. But the Bush-Kerry split in emerging suburban counties was significantly closer and represented only a 5 point gain in margin over 2000, when the Bush-Gore split was 52-44. And, in 1996, Dole had only a slim one point margin over Clinton in these counties (45-44).

Emerging suburban counties are particularly accessible to Democrats in areas of the country that are most critical to their future electoral success. For example, Kerry in 2004 lost emerging suburban counties in the solidest blue states by only 51-48. And in both purple states that lean blue (Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin) *and* purple states that lean red (Florida, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio), he did just a bit worse in these counties, losing 53-46.

Moreover, while Democrats in 2006 do need to improve over their 2004 presidential performance in the emerging suburbs in most states, they typically need not win these counties outright to triumph. Significantly narrowing the GOP advantage in the emerging suburbs should suffice, as indicated by analysis of the vote in key states like Missouri, Ohio and Colorado.

Numerous public opinion surveys conducted from 2004 to 2006 support the idea that emerging suburban voters are potentially accessible to Democrats. Together, these surveys indicate that emerging suburban voters are tax-sensitive and concerned about government waste, but not ideologically anti-government. Similarly, while they tend to be religious and family-oriented and hold some conservative social views, they are socially moderate in comparison to rural residents. They are also not anti-business, but do hold populist attitudes toward corporate abuse and people who game the system. And these voters worry more about concrete issues like public education than they do about whether politicians have the “correct” stance on various values issues.

Looking at views that are likely to be particularly salient today, emerging suburban voters are now distinctly negative on President Bush and the Iraq war. They also believe the country is off on the wrong track and indicate a desire to move in a significantly different direction.

One particular issue where residents of the emerging suburbs are open to Democratic approaches is health care. Not only do they strongly prefer Democrats over Republicans on the issue, they overwhelmingly say they support reforming the system to provide affordable health care for all Americans (87 percent). Even more impressive, almost three-fifths (58 percent) in the emerging suburbs said they would support such reform even if it meant paying more in taxes *and* a much larger government role in the health care system.

On the economy, views in the emerging suburbs are also distinctly negative. Most disapprove of Bush’s handling of the economy and believe the economy is going in the wrong direction. And 55 percent in the emerging suburbs now agree that “Most people today face increasing uncertainty about employment, with stagnant incomes, paying more for health care, taxes, and retirement, while those at the top have booming incomes and lower taxes”, compared to 42 percent who think “Our economic faces ups and downs, but most people can expect to better themselves, see rising incomes, find good jobs and provide economic security for their families”.

So there is clearly fertile ground in the emerging suburbs for a Democratic message. But competing in exurbia necessarily means that Democratic field operations will have to venture into areas where they feel less comfortable and where finding Democratic votes takes a bit more effort. To succeed in these areas, they will have to develop new models of voter mobilization that go beyond traditional precinct-based methods and reach out to the newer voters and others who lean their way, but who are dispersed throughout their communities, rather than conveniently concentrated within specific precincts. New models and methods developed in successful Democratic campaigns like Tim Kaine’s in Virginia’s 2005 gubernatorial contest show great promise along these lines and now need to be refined and generalized. The 2006 election should provide the laboratory Democrats need to do this and enter the 2008 election season prepared to turn exurbia if not blue, at least a much lighter red.

# **The Next Frontier: A New Study of Exurbia**

Ruy Teixeira

In 2002, conservative commentator David Brooks surveyed the landscape after a smashing election victory for the GOP and penned an influential *New York Times* op-ed, “For Democrats, Time to Meet the Exurban Voter”<sup>i</sup>. In that article, he argued that the rise of America’s exurbs—those fast-growing counties at the fringes of metropolitan areas populated by legions of conservative white voters—contributed mightily to the GOP’s success in that election and would continue to do so in the future, putting the Democrats on the demographic ropes, so to speak. Bush’s strong showing in those same exurbs in 2004 seemed to validate Brooks’ thesis. As he put it in his 2002 op-ed: “[Exurban voters] swung this election, and when it comes to how they see the world, what scares and inspires them, the Republicans, so far, just seem to get it.”

The view of the exurbs reflected in Brooks’ article has become part of today’s conventional wisdom about American politics. But, like most other aspects of the conventional wisdom, it confuses fact with fancy and leads us away from the fundamental questions we should be asking. Just how important are the exurbs politically today? And how much is their importance likely to increase in the future? How do different types of exurbs differ from one another? What kinds of people live there and how conservative are they, really? And do the Republicans truly “get it” in a way that shuts out the Democrats?

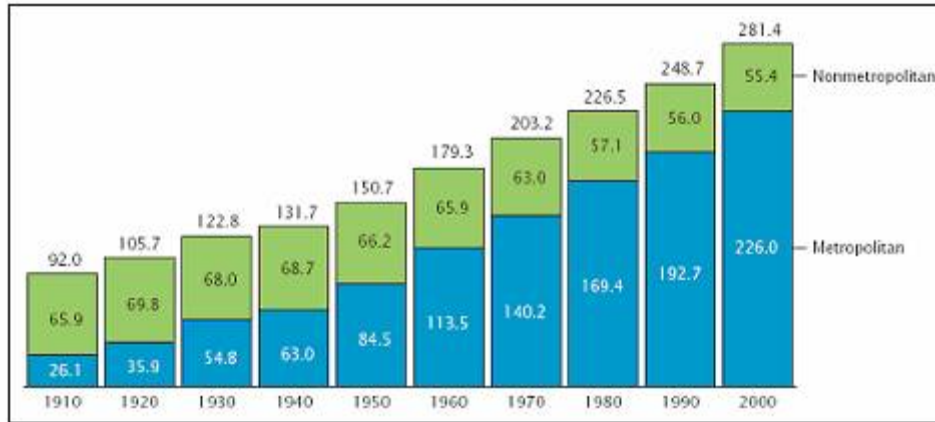
The answers to these questions explode many of common myths about the exurbs that were encapsulated in Brooks’ article. And they show that, rather than being lost to the GOP forever, exurbia—at least the most significant part of it—can be the Democrats’ next frontier for successful political mobilization.

## **THE BROAD CONTOURS OF SUBURBANIZATION**

To understand the exurbs and where they came from, it’s first necessary to take a brief stroll down memory lane and understand the trajectory of suburban growth in the United States.

Start with the growth of metropolitan (metro) areas overall. In 1910, only 26 million out of the US population of 92 million, or 28 percent, lived in metro areas<sup>ii</sup> (Figure 1). The other 72 percent lived in nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas that were predominantly rural. Indeed, it wasn’t until sometime in the 1940’s that metro areas first became home to a majority of the US population. After that decade, which was a time of particularly rapid metro population growth, the US population of about 151 million included 85 million metro residents and 66 million nonmetro residents or about 56 percent metro/44 percent nonmetro. By 1980, the percentages were 74 percent metro/26 percent nonmetro and by 2000, they were 80 percent metro/20 percent nonmetro.

**Figure 1**  
**Total Population by Metropolitan Status: 1910 to 2000**  
 (millions)



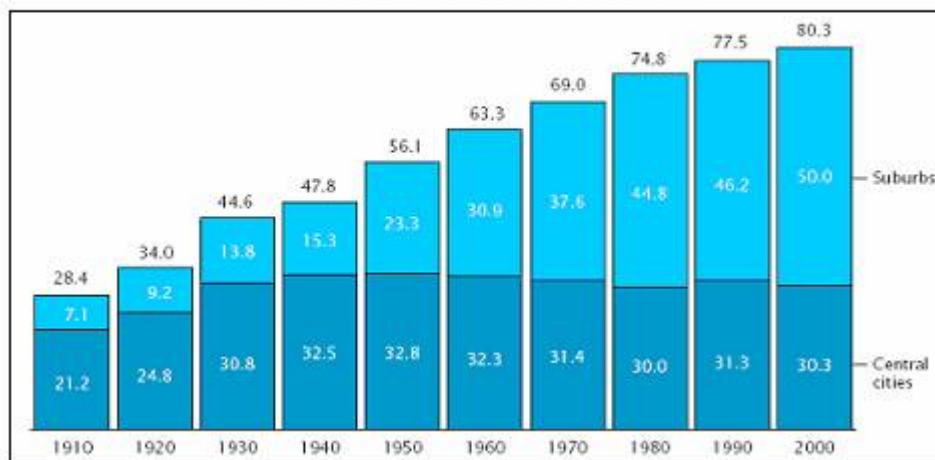
Source: Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, US Census Bureau

In the year 2000, there were actually 10 million *fewer* people living in nonmetro areas than there were in 1910, while the metro population had increased by 200 million.

Quite an imbalance. Obviously the story of US growth since 1910 is all about metro areas. But let's break down the story a bit more: which parts of metro areas have played the leading role in this growth?

In 1910, as mentioned above, 28 percent of the population lived in metro areas. Of that 28 percent, 21 percent was in central cities and just 7 percent in suburbs (Figure 2). Between 1910 and 1940, the share of the population in both central cities and suburbs increased substantially: from 21 to 33 percent in central cities; and from 7 to 15 percent in suburbs.

**Figure 2**  
**Percent of Total Population Living in Metropolitan Areas and in Their Central Cities and Suburbs: 1910 to 2000**



Source: Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, US Census Bureau

### THE SUBURBAN EXPLOSION

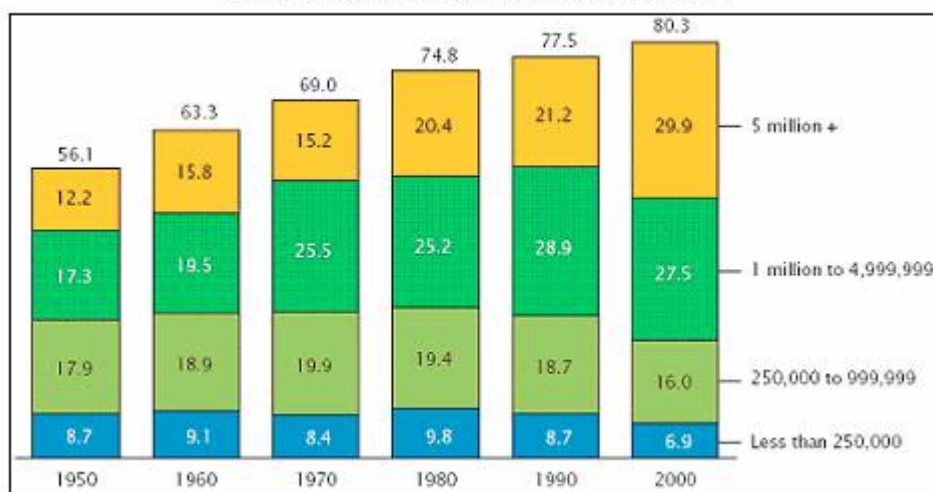
Note that growth in the central cities was actually larger than growth in the suburbs over this period. But 1940, as it turned out, was the end of the era when cities outgrew the suburbs. Thereafter, suburban growth typically far-outpaced city growth. For example, between 1940 and 1950, suburbs increased from

15 to 23 percent of the population, while cities were basically flat at around 33 percent. By 1960, suburbs were up to 31 percent, with cities slightly declining to 32 percent. By 1970, there were, for the first time, more suburban residents (38 percent) than city residents (31 percent). And by 2000, suburban residents were exactly half the nation, while city residents were down to 30 percent of the population.

So, over the 60 years between 1940 and 2000, cities declined from 33 to 30 percent of the population, while suburbs skyrocketed from 15 to 50 percent. Again, quite an imbalance. Clearly, if metro areas have been driving overall growth, it is equally true that suburban growth has been driving metro growth.

Finally, while suburban growth has been driving metro growth in metro areas of all sizes, that growth has been concentrated in large metro areas, those that now have a million or more in population. Between 1950 and 2000, the percent of the US population living in metro areas with under a million in population actually fell from 27 percent to 23 percent. In the same period, the percent of the population living in large metro areas nearly doubled, going from 30 to 58 percent (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
**Percent of Total Population Living in Metropolitan Areas by**  
**Size of Metropolitan Area Population: 1950 to 2000**



### **TRUE EXURBS AND EMERGING SUBURBS**

With these basic facts about suburbanization in hand, we are now ready to ask the question: what is an exurb and how does it differ from an ordinary suburb? To begin with, the term “exurb” did not come into use until the mid-to-late 1950’s, as the postwar surge in suburban growth was gathering steam. In fact, it was not actually coined until 1956, when Playboy Magazine’s associate publisher and general editor, Auguste Comte Sectorsky published his book, *The Exurbanites*. Sectorsky used the term to describe the ring of prosperous rural communities beyond the suburbs that, due to availability via the new high-speed limited-access highways, were becoming dormitory communities for an urban area.

That is still roughly the sense in which geographers use the term today. For example, the definition of an exurb offered by the Outline of American Geography is “A region or district that lies outside a city and usually beyond its suburbs”. Note that this definition, as well as Sectorsky’s original, allude to exurbs being beyond the conventional suburbs—on the very fringes of metro areas and not suburbs in the conventional sense.

This concept of exurbs as being “suburbs of suburbs” is reflected in the approach of geographers Robert Lang and Thomas Sanchez of Virginia Tech’s Metropolitan Institute (MI), who recently broke down the 417 counties in the top 50 metro areas in the US (where over half the total population lives and population growth since 1950 has been heavily concentrated) into five categories: core; inner suburbs; mature suburbs; emerging suburbs; and exurbs<sup>iii</sup>. They characterize exurbs as:

...the most far flung [metropolitan] counties with the lowest—essentially rural—population densities. Large-scale suburbanization is just about to take hold in these places, as they offer even better bargains, and more land (but longer commutes) than emerging counties. Exurban counties are included in metropolitan areas by the census because they share a functional relationship with neighboring counties via commuting. But by appearance, these places are barely touched by urbanization.

### **EMERGING SUBURBS**

These true exurbs, however, do not typically contain very many people—their median size is under 30,000—do not have the most rapid growth rates and do not actually include the counties most people today think of when they think of exurbs. That distinction goes to another category of counties, the “emerging suburbs”. These emerging suburban counties have a blend of exurban and suburban characteristics and, in fact, are typically on their way from being exurbs to fully-developed suburbs—hence their name. Here is the MI characterization of these counties:

Emerging suburbs are the new “it” county of today. They are mostly the fastest growing counties in the region, and are often found in even slow growing regions such as St. Louis (e.g., St Charles County, MO) and Cincinnati (e.g., Boone County, KY). Emerging suburbs are almost wholly products of the past two decades and are booming with both people and the beginnings of commerce (although they remain mostly commuter zones). Emerging suburbs are both upscale and downscale and may feature everything from McMansions to trailer parks. Residents in emerging suburbs typically see these places as bargains compared to mature suburbs. That is true for households that buy a McMansion over an older and smaller tract home in a mature suburb, or a first-time homebuyer that “drives to qualify” by finding a modest attached dwelling at the edge of the region.

The distinction between true exurbs and emerging suburbs can be further illustrated by referring to some of the well-known counties in these categories. Loudoun county, VA (current population: 256,000), outside of Washington, DC, which had the nation’s second-fastest growth rate between 2000 and 2005, is an emerging suburb, while Fauquier county, VA (current population: 65,000) is an exurb (see map); Douglas county, CO (current population: 249,000), outside of Denver, the country’s growth leader in the 1990’s, is an emerging suburb and Elbert county, CO (current population: 23,000) is an exurb; Anoka county, MN (current population: 324,000), outside of Minneapolis-St. Paul, is an emerging suburb, while Chisago county, MN (current population: 49,000) is an exurb (see map); Warren county, OH (current population: 196,000), outside of Cincinnati, is an emerging suburb and Brown county, OH (current population: 44,000) is an exurb.



suburbs grew by 31 percent, compared to 22 percent in true exurbs (Table 1—see Appendix 1 for definitions of county categories used in tables).

**Table 1**  
**Population Distribution and Recent Growth Rates by County Type**

	Percent of Population	Growth, 2000-05	Growth, 1990-2000
Core Urban	8	-1	3
Inner Suburban	14	3	8
Mature Suburban	17	6	15
<b>Emerging Suburban</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>True Exurban</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>
Medium Metro	20	6	13
Small Metro	10	5	13
Micropolitan	10	3	10
Nonmetro, Nonmicro	7	1	8

Source: Author's analysis of 1990-2005 Census Population Data

Based on past population growth patterns, we can expect that, by the middle of the next decade, the vote share of the emerging suburbs will climb from its current 13 percent to about 15 percent. Combined with the true exurbs, which should remain steady at about 2 percent, that will put about 17 percent of US voters—or about one in six—in exurbia as a whole.

Not surprisingly, both true exurbs and emerging suburbs are heavily nonhispanic white in racial composition. Based on 2000 Census data, exurbs are 84 percent white and emerging suburbs are 79 percent white.

#### **DIVERSITY AND EXURBIA**

It is important to stress, however, that emerging suburbs in particular are rapidly becoming more diverse. Between 1990 and 2000, emerging suburbs went from 85 percent white down to 79 percent white, meaning that the minority percentage of these areas rose at a rate of about six-tenths of a percent per year in the 1990's. (Based on these trends, a reasonable guess is that the minority population of the emerging suburbs has grown by another 3-4 points since 2000, pushing the white percentage of the population down to about 75-76 percent.) True exurbs, in contrast, are much more stable in terms of racial composition; they dropped only from 86 to 84 percent white over the decade (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**White Nonhispanic Population and Growth by County Type, 1990-2000**

	Percent White, 1990	Percent White, 2000	White Growth
Core Urban	51	44	-11
Inner Suburban	62	53	-7
Mature Suburban	75	66	1
<b>Emerging Suburban</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>True Exurban</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>19</b>
Medium Metro	79	74	6
Small Metro	83	79	7
Micropolitan	85	82	6
Nonmetro, Nonmicro	86	84	5

Source: Author's analysis of 1990-2000 Census Data

To get a sense of how rapidly the minority population is increasing in the emerging suburbs, consider these data from the 1990's. Between 1990 and 2000, the white population of these areas grew solidly, by about 21 percent over the decade. But the black population of these counties grew by 50 percent and the Hispanic and Asian populations exploded, growing by 117 percent and 111 percent, respectively. Overall, the minority population grew by 89 percent, substantially faster than minority growth in any other county category, including core urban counties, as well as inner and mature suburbs (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Growth in Minority Population by County Type, 1990-2000**

	Hispanic Growth	Asian Growth	Minority Growth
Core Urban	31	54	19
Inner Suburban	44	47	34
Mature Suburban	66	76	58
<b>Emerging Suburban</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>True Exurban</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>41</b>
Medium Metro	61	39	40
Small Metro	67	55	39
Micropolitan	67	33	31
Nonmetro, Nonmicro	58	69	24

Source: Author's analysis of 1990-2000 Census Data

**WHITE FAMILIES AND EXURBIA**

A related aspect of population growth that's worth stressing is the fairly modest role of married white families with kids in these areas. The typical argument has been that exurban-like areas are busting at the seams with white married households with children who have moved there for more land, bigger houses and a safer, more traditional and (let's face it) less racially diverse environment for their kids (though, as we just saw, getting away from diversity is becoming increasingly difficult in these areas).

But the white families with children argument has a very fundamental problem: white married households with children are not only declining relatively, as a percentage of households, they are also declining *absolutely*—that is, the number of these households is actually falling over time. Reflecting these trends, most types of counties are experiencing negative growth in white families with children and even in the exurbs (3 percent) and emerging suburbs (11 percent), growth in these households in the 1990's was only modest. That's hardly a demographic tsunami.

It's also worth stressing that the demographic *weight* of these households is much less than generally supposed. For example, in 2000, despite all the ballyhoo, white married households with children were still a distinct minority of both true exurban (24 percent) and emerging suburban (23 percent) households.

Finally, the distribution of these households is changing only slowly. In 2000, exurbs and emerging suburbs together contained 18 percent of the nation's white married households with children, up 3 points from 1990. That compares to core urban, inner suburban and mature suburban counties which together contain 30 percent of married white families with kids, down 2 points since 1990. This is change, to be sure, but, contrary to popular belief, not rapid enough to fundamentally alter the basic spatial distribution of white married households with children anytime soon. For the foreseeable future, those families will continue to be found in large numbers in all kinds of counties, including core urban, inner suburban and mature suburban, not just exurban-like environments.

#### CLASS AND EXURBIA

Despite the growing diversity of exurbia, it is still the case that these areas are predominantly white and, indeed, predominantly white working class. According to the 2000 Census, 58 percent of emerging suburban residents and 69 percent of true exurban residents are white working class—that is, are whites without a four year college degree (Table 4). Only 23 percent and 16 percent, respectively, in these areas are college-educated whites.

**Table 4**  
**Class Characteristics of Population by County Type, 2000**

	White Working Class	Income <\$75,000	Not Pro-Man
Core Urban	31	78	64
Inner Suburban	38	75	64
Mature Suburban	45	69	61
<b>Emerging Suburban</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>True Exurban</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>71</b>
Medium Metro	57	69	67
Small Metro	64	84	70
Micropolitan	70	86	73
Nonmetro, Nonmicro	74	90	74

Source: Author's analysis of 2000 Census Data

Looked at by income, 70 percent of households in emerging suburbs and 79 percent of households in true exurbs have under \$75,000 in income. Just 17 percent and 10 percent, respectively, have incomes over \$100,000. Given that these figures are based on 2000 Census data, are they too pessimistic? No, on the contrary, they may be too cheerful—data gathered since 2000 indicate that median household income has actually declined about 4 percent since then.

In terms of occupation, overwhelming numbers of emerging suburban and exurban workers do not hold professional or managerial jobs—65 percent and 71 percent, respectively. Indeed, in both types of areas, there are more construction and production workers than professionals and way more sales and office workers than managers.

To sum up, the typical resident of exurbia is a white of modest credentials, income and occupation—that is, a member in good standing of the white working class. This may not be the popular image of an exurban dweller but it is a fact nonetheless.

### **THE POLITICS OF EXURBIA**

In the aftermath of the 2004 elections, many argued that the exurban vote was central to Bush’s victory. But such analyses typically shoehorned far more of the country into the exurbs than could possibly be justified by standard geographic criteria. True exurbs, as discussed above, are fringe counties of metropolitan areas that border on being rural. They are *not* another name for any fast-growing county outside of a metro area’s urban core.

Using MI codes allows for a clear, geographically sound demonstration of the limited political importance of true exurbs. Analysis based on these codes also reveals that counties in the transitional part of exurbia—emerging suburbs—were much more important to Bush’s victory *and* are much more contestable by the Democrats.

### **TRUE EXURBS, EMERGING SUBURBS AND THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE**

True exurban counties voted 62-37 for Bush over Kerry, a lop-sided result, to be sure, and a 10 point gain in GOP margin over 2000. But these counties only contributed 9 percent of Bush’s net vote gains between 2000 and 2004, mostly due to their relatively modest population sizes (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Contribution to Bush Vote Shift and Presidential Vote by County Type, 2000-04**

	Contribution	2004 Vote, R-D	2000 Vote, R-D
Core Urban	-9	26-73	24-73
Inner Suburban	-5	42-57	41-56
Mature Suburban	7	47-52	45-51
<b>Emerging Suburban</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>56-43</b>	<b>52-44</b>
<b>True Exurban</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>62-37</b>	<b>56-41</b>
Medium Metro	21	53-46	50-46
Small Metro	16	57-41	55-42
Micropolitan	22	59-40	55-41
Nonmetro, Nonmicro	13	60-39	56-40

Source: Author’s analysis of 2000 and 2004 county-level presidential election data.

The emerging suburban counties were more consequential, though the actual numbers of true exurban and emerging suburban counties, as mentioned earlier, are roughly equal in the MI typology.

The Bush-Kerry split in these counties was less lop-sided (56-43) and represented only a 5 point gain in margin over 2000. But since these emerging suburban counties are much larger than true exurban

counties, they contributed 26 percent of Bush's net vote gains between 2000 and 2004, dwarfing the true exurban contribution.

Of course, 26 percent is a serious contribution to Bush's victory, but even that does not qualify as decisive. Medium (250,000-1,000,000 in population) and small (less than 250,000) metros together contributed more (37 percent) to Bush's net vote gains, as did micropolitan and other rural areas (35 percent).

Besides the relatively smaller GOP margin in emerging suburban counties in 2004, note that the GOP margin in these counties in 2000 was only 52-44 and in 1996 a mere 45-44. It's clear that emerging suburban counties are not only far more important to Bush's coalition than true exurban counties, but also far more contestable by the Democrats, a political reality that I discuss in more detail below.

It's also worth noting that Bush's performance in these emerging suburban counties is not even that impressive compared to earlier GOP victories. For example, in 1988, Bush's father beat Michael Dukakis by 19 points (59-40) in these counties, a margin that Reagan replicated in 1980 in his first election victory. And in his second election victory, Reagan beat Mondale by an overwhelming 29 points (64-35) in these counties.

#### **FAST-GROWING COUNTIES AND THE EMERGING SUBURBS**

The argument here has focused on the political importance of the emerging suburbs. But is that focus misplaced? What about the very-fastest growing counties in the US which, as observers like Ron Brownstein of the LA Times frequently note, lean heavily toward the GOP (Bush carried 97 out of the 100 fastest-growing counties in the US in 2004)? Is that, rather than political trends in the emerging suburbs, the really important story?

No. Start with the fact that many of these counties have relatively small populations and are therefore growing from a small base. For example, almost half (48) of the 100 fastest-growing counties from 2000 to 2005 have populations under 100,000, and 23 of these have populations under 50,000, which limits the political effect of their fast growth. These counties tend to be true exurbs or outside of metropolitan areas altogether.

Then consider the fact that the larger fast-growing counties, whose growth is therefore more politically salient, tend heavily to be emerging suburbs. Indeed, of the 100 fastest-growing counties, 44 are emerging suburbs. These very fast-growing emerging suburbs account for almost two-thirds of the contribution to Bush's net vote gains made by the 100 fastest-growing counties as a whole.

In other words, the political impact of the 100 fastest-growing counties in the US is primarily due to the fast-growing emerging suburban counties that are included within the group. The smaller and more rural counties that round out the group just aren't that important.

#### **EMERGING SUBURBS, FROM RED TO BLUE**

Of course, emerging suburban counties are not equally accessible to the Democrats all over the country. By and large, the "bluer" the state, the better Democrats do in emerging suburbs and the "redder" the state, the worse they do. This can be illustrated by grouping states on a continuum from blue to red and looking at the spatial breakdowns within categories. The results also show that, while Democrats do better in bluer areas, they are only truly noncompetitive in one category, GOP base "solid red" states.

For purposes of this analysis, here is how I group the states (see Appendix 2 for a detailed explanation and motivation of these categories):

1. *Solid blue Democratic base states*: The Democrats have carried these states in the last four presidential elections and the average Democratic margin has been over five points in the last two elections (CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, ME, MD, MA NJ, NY, RI, VT, WA plus DC, for a total of 183 EVs).

2. *Purple leaning blue states*: The Democrats have carried these states in the last four presidential elections and the average Democratic margin has been under five points in the last two elections (MI, MN, OR, PA, WI, for a total of 65 EVs). According to 2005 Gallup data, Democrats have party ID advantages in all of these states: 4 points each in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, 11 points in Minnesota, 12 points in Michigan and 15 points in Oregon.

3. *Pure purple states*: These states have split their support between the two parties in the last two elections (IA, NH and NM, for a total of 16 EVs). Democrats have party ID advantages in each of these states: 6 points in Iowa, 14 points in New Hampshire and 8 points in New Mexico.

4. *Purple leaning red states*: These states have been carried at least once by the Democrats in the last four elections and have been carried by the GOP in the last two elections by an average of 5 points or less (FL, MO, NV and OH, for a total of 63 EVs). Democrats also enjoy party ID advantages in all of these states: a point in Florida, 8 points in Missouri, 12 points in Nevada and 7 points in Ohio.

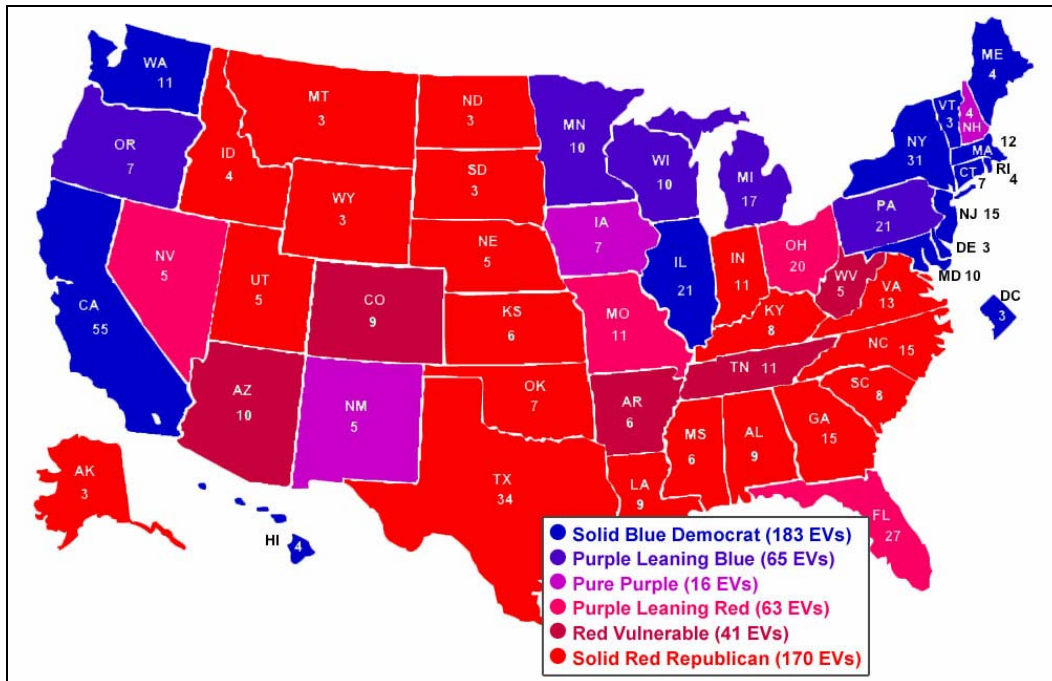
5. *Red vulnerable states*: These states have been carried at least once by the Democrats in the last four elections and the average GOP margin in the last two elections has been between 5 and 10 points (AZ, AR, CO, TN, WV, for a total of 41 EVs). Here Democrats have a 5 point party ID deficit in Arizona, are dead-even in Tennessee and lead by 11 points in Arkansas, 3 points in Colorado and 13 points in West Virginia.

6. *Solid red GOP base states*: These states have been carried by the Republicans in the last four presidential elections or have been carried by the GOP by an average of 10 points or more in 2000 and 2004 (AL, AK, GA, ID, IN, KS, KY, LA, MS, MT, NE, NC, ND, OK, SC, SD, TX, UT, VA, WY for a total of 170 EVs).

Starting with the solid blue, Democratic base states, Kerry lost emerging suburban counties in these states by only 51-48 (Table 6). In purple leaning blue states *and* purple leaning red states, he did just a bit worse in these counties, losing 53-46, while Clinton in '96 actually managed to carry the emerging suburbs in both these groups of states. And there are states in these categories, of course, where the Democrats have done far better than this average in the emerging suburbs. Significantly, one such state is Florida, where Kerry lost the emerging suburbs by only a single point (50-49) in 2004.

**Table 6**  
**The Emerging Suburban Presidential Vote by State Category, 1996-2004**

	2004 Vote, R-D	2000 Vote, R-D	1996 Vote, R-D
Solid Blue	51-48	47-49	41-48
Purple Leaning Blue	53-46	50-45	41-46
Pure Purple	49-50	47-47	39-49
Purple Leaning Red	53-46	50-47	43-46
Red Vulnerable	58-41	54-42	48-44
Solid Red	67-33	65-33	56-36



Source: Author's analysis of 1996-2004 county-level presidential election data.

In pure purple states Kerry actually beat Bush by a point in the emerging suburbs, 50-49--but there were only two such counties, so not much should be made of this. And even in red vulnerable states, Kerry was still within a 58-41 margin in these counties, while Clinton in '96 lost them by only 4 points.

The solid red, GOP base states are a different matter, however. Kerry lost the emerging suburbs in these states by a crushing 34 points (67-33) and even Clinton in '96 lost these counties by 20 points. This does not sound promising, though there are GOP base states like Virginia where emerging suburban counties were a great deal closer than this overall margin and, as we shall see, are already demonstrating their political potential for the Democrats.

**POLITICAL VIEWS OF EMERGING SUBURBAN VOTERS**

These data provide considerable evidence that the emerging suburban part of exurbia is potentially competitive for the Democrats in wide swathes of the country. But to clinch the case suggested by these

voting patterns, it would be useful to know more about the political views of residents of these areas and how they might be potentially compatible with a Democratic message.

Looking first at data from the 2004 election, neither the exit polls nor the National Election Study provide county-level identifiers that would allow the data to be grouped and examined by county type. But Democracy Corps was kind enough to provide a copy of their 2004 post-election survey data that did include county identifiers. My analysis of their data indicates that, despite the 13 point margin Bush obtained in the emerging suburbs in 2004, voters in these areas were quite a bit less conservative—even at the time of that election—than generally supposed.

For example, while terrorism and security was the most important issue to these voters, they still believed, by 50-38, that “America’s security depends on building strong ties with other nations”, rather than “Bottom line, America’s security depends on its military strength”. They also believed, by 52-43, that the Iraq war has made us less, not more, secure and, by 50-46, that the way we’ve waged the war on terror has made us less, not more, secure. Clearly, while these voters were more comfortable with Bush than Kerry on security issues in 2004, they already had their doubts about how things in that area were going.

It’s also interesting to note that a narrow plurality of voters (44-42) in the emerging suburbs felt that homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted, rather than discouraged, by society. While this falls short of the forthrightly liberal stance of voters in the most urbanized areas, it is nevertheless considerably less conservative than the views of rural voters.

On domestic issues, these voters tended to be fiscally conservative, but showed considerable interest in investment in education, health care and energy independence if the deficit could be kept under control. Health care reform, in particular, was highly attractive to these voters—78 percent said they support fundamental reform of the health care system to control rising costs, rather than relying on increased competition (20 percent).

Data collected in 2005-06 extend the themes noted from the 2004 postelection data. In December, 2005-March, 2006 Democracy Corps polling, emerging suburban voters agreed, by 55 percent to 41 percent that the war in Iraq hasn’t been worth the cost of US lives and dollars. In addition, they felt, by 57-38, that the economy was going in the wrong direction and, by 56-39, that the country as a whole was off on the wrong track.

Emerging suburban voters have also soured on President Bush, with disapproval (50 percent) now higher than approval (47 percent). And, by 53-44, these voters said they wanted the country to go in a significantly different direction, rather than continue in the direction Bush is headed.

One such area where a different direction is sought is health care. By 53-31, emerging suburban voters said they preferred the Democrats to the Republicans on health care generally and, by 46-33, preferred the Democrats on prescription drugs. Another is retirement and social security, where these voters preferred the Democrats by 48-34.

Data from a Center for American Progress/Americans for Health Care survey, conducted in November, 2005, also highlight the strong possible appeal of the health care issue in the emerging suburbs. In that survey, health care costs was both the top national economic concern *and* top personal economic concern among residents of these counties. Moreover, 93 percent agreed that “with costs rising out of control and the quality of health coverage declining, the health care system in our country is broken, and we need to make fundamental changes” and an impressive 63 percent agreed that “we can provide affordable health

coverage for all Americans within the current system, and without government taking a significantly larger role in the health care system”.

In light of these sentiments, it is unsurprising that 87 percent of emerging suburban residents said they would actually support “reforming our current health care system to provide affordable health coverage for all Americans”, including 69 percent who would strongly support such reform. Even more impressive, 58 percent in the emerging suburbs said they would support such reform even if it meant paying more in taxes *and* a much larger government role in the health care system. That kind of support gives the lie to the idea that those who choose to live in exurbia are quasi-libertarian and viscerally opposed to new government programs.

Residents of the emerging suburbs voters are also dissatisfied with the economy in general, as shown by data from a March, 2006 survey for the Rockefeller Foundation’s Economic Resiliency Group (a consortium of the Economic Policy Institute, Good Jobs First, the Center for Economic and Policy Research and the Financial Markets Center). In that survey, which had 55 percent disapproving of Bush’s overall job performance and 61 percent saying the country was off on the wrong track, 52 percent said they disapproved of Bush’s job performance in the specific area of the economy. Moreover, 63 percent described national economic conditions as “only fair” or “poor” and as many (44 percent) thought the economy would be worse a year from now as thought it would be better.

In terms of how ordinary Americans are faring in today’s economy, as opposed to the wealthy and corporations, 55 percent in the emerging suburbs agreed that “Most people today face increasing uncertainty about employment, with stagnant incomes, paying more for health care, taxes, and retirement, while those at the top have booming incomes and lower taxes”, compared to 42 percent who thought “Our economic faces ups and downs, but most people can expect to better themselves, see rising incomes, find good jobs and provide economic security for their families”. In addition, 61 percent felt “Companies are getting away with too many unethical or irresponsible practices. Government needs to do a better job of controlling bad corporate behavior”, rather than “The economy is not doing as well as it could because companies have to deal with too many regulations and too much red tape “ (36 percent).

#### **POLITICAL VIEWS IN MINNESOTA’S EMERGING SUBURBS**

The national data suggest substantial openness on the part of emerging suburban voters to progressives and progressive approaches on domestic issues like the economy, health care and retirement. Available state-level data help flesh out the views of these voters on domestic issues. An interesting 2004 study by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) of Minnesota politics included both a general state-wide survey and a special survey of voters in counties they defined as “exurban”. As it happens, these latter counties (Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Olmsted, Rice, Scott, Sherburne, Washington, Wright) are basically Minnesota’s emerging suburban counties, so data from this survey provide a very useful window onto the views of emerging suburban residents in a particular state.

As the GQR report notes:

Exurbanites are conservative, but they are not reactionary. They are ideologically diverse; some are socially liberal, while others are strongly pro-life. They are economically populist with intense concerns about corporate America, but favor the Republican Party over the DFL.

Specific data from the survey further illustrate the complexity of these voters’ views. While they were concerned about taxes and moral values, they were actually more concerned about the state of education

and health care. And while they were worried about the impact of immigrants, they were more worried about the declining quality of schools.

These emerging suburbanites expressed considerable ambivalence about government and many felt government tended to be bureaucratic and have the wrong priorities. But they overwhelmingly agreed that paying taxes was worth doing “to make sure we have public schools, clean streets, public safety and a clean environment” rather than that those taxes were wasted due to government inefficiency and handouts. And they expressed particular support for the use of tax money for the public schools (the top choice), controlling health care costs and transportation infrastructure.

Along the same lines, emerging suburbanites strongly agreed (59-35) that recent declines in the quality of life in Minnesota were “because we don’t invest resources in our schools, the health care system or transportation infrastructure the way we used to” and strongly disagreed (59-32) that life in Minnesota had improved because “we don’t spend so much government money on programs that don’t work”.

These voters also endorsed a role for government regulation in improving safety and protecting consumers and the environment (54 percent) rather than a call for government to “stop trying to tell people what to do” (41 percent). And they felt more that “the American Dream is out of reach for most families” due to good jobs going overseas, college prices rising and government favoring the wealthy over the average American (54 percent) than they felt that “the American Dream is possible again for middle class families” due to middle class tax cuts and government stimulation of the economy.

#### **VIRGINIA’S EMERGING SUBURBS AND THE KAINE CAMPAIGN**

More recent public opinion data were collected in Virginia in conjunction with the 2005 gubernatorial election between Democrat Tim Kaine and Republican Jerry Kilgore. Virginia, as mentioned earlier, is one GOP base state where emerging suburbs appear to be within reach for Democrats. The 2005 data confirm this assessment, as do results from the actual election. And it is striking how much the views of emerging suburban voters in Virginia appear to have in common with the views of voters in the same areas in Minnesota.

For example, in a statewide poll for the Kaine campaign conducted in May, 2005 by Benenson Strategy Group, voters in Virginia’s emerging suburbs (Chesterfield, Gloucester, Henrico, James City, Loudoun, Mathews, Prince George, Prince William and York counties plus Chesapeake, Fredericksburg, Manassas City, Manassas Park, Poquoson City and Suffolk) said, by 66-27, that they preferred a candidate who would make increasing funding for education a higher priority than eliminating the car tax, rather than one who would prioritize eliminating the car tax over education. Similarly, by 54-35, they preferred a candidate who said the previous year’s budget agreement (which included raising taxes) should be kept in place because it “balanced the budget while increasing investments in education and public safety” over a candidate said the current year’s budget surplus showed the previous year’s tax increases were unnecessary. Finally, by 66-21, these voters preferred a candidate who said it was necessary to do more to protect Virginia’s environment over one who said “increased efforts to protect the environment will hurt job growth in Virginia.

In the May poll, 56 percent of emerging suburbanites also said abortion should be legal with limited or no restrictions (22 percent) or with restrictions (34 percent). Another 30 percent said that abortion should be generally illegal but allowed in special cases like rape, incest and to save the life of the mother. Just 11 percent wanted to ban abortion outright. On other social issues, these voters were split about evenly between the Kaine and Kilgore positions on gay adoption, though they did give the Kilgore position a 20 point advantage over the Kaine position on the death penalty.

A more extensive GQR poll of Virginia voters taken after the November election deepens this portrait of Virginia's emerging suburbanites. By 52-35, these voters said the country was off on wrong track, rather than headed in the right direction. And they only gave Bush a 43 percent approval rating, with 53 percent disapproval (note that these voters supported Bush over Kerry, 57-42, in the 2004 presidential election).

These voters were asked to rate a number of issues for their importance to their vote for governor. The top two issues were the economy and jobs (68 percent extremely or very important) and education and Virginia's schools (64 percent). In contrast God (the candidate's religious background and values), guns (gun owner rights) and gays (gay marriage) rated far, far lower in importance (24 percent, 33 percent and 26 percent respectively). And the death penalty, which Kilgore tried to make a signature issue and a central attack on Kaine, was rated extremely or very important by only 28 percent of emerging suburban voters. Thus, Kilgore was unable to transform an issue on which he had a substantial advantage among emerging suburban voters into a high salience issue for the election.

Finally, by 46-35, these voters said they worried more that Kilgore was too close to right wing special interest groups than that Kaine was too liberal and out of touch with Virginia. And, by a larger 54-36 margin, they said they agreed with Kaine that "education should be Virginia's top priority and we should invest more in our public schools" rather with Kilgore that "education is important, but we already spend a lot on the schools and we should control spending to provide tax relief".

Additional useful data are provided by a post-election GQR poll of voters in Loudoun county, conducted for Communities for Quality Education. Loudoun county was the fastest-growing county in the country between 2000 and 2004 and is probably the county most-associated with Northern Virginia's exurban growth.

The poll found the following. The most important issues to Loudoun voters in the gubernatorial election were transportation/roads and education. The least important was the death penalty. On the issue of education, Loudoun voters preferred Kaine over Kilgore by a 51-28 margin and on transportation/roads favored Kaine by 49-32. They also preferred Kaine by 44-33 on the economy/jobs and even on abortion by 40-30. Kilgore had small leads on taxes (43-41) and on immigration (37-31). His largest lead was on the death penalty (42-33) but, as mentioned, this was the least important issue to Loudoun voters.

The poll asked the same question as in the statewide poll (though without mention of candidate names) on whether "education should be Virginia's top priority and we should invest more in our public schools" or "education is important, but we already spend a lot on the schools and we should control spending to provide tax relief". In Loudoun, voters gave a lop-sided 61-36 endorsement to the first, pro-education investment statement.

Perhaps the most interesting internal pattern in these data, both from the Virginia statewide poll and from the Loudoun poll, is that the newer voters in emerging suburbs—that is, those who had lived in their county for under five years—were more Democratic, less ideologically conservative, more liberal socially and more favorable toward government programs, especially on education, than residents who had lived in these counties for longer. This suggests that, even as these counties grow, the very source of their growth—the influx of new residents—is gradually making them more accessible to a less conservative, more Democratic politics.

These data on how emerging suburban voters viewed issues make the actual election results in the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial election easier to understand. In the election, Kilgore, after running a bruising, culture wars-driven campaign, lost Loudoun to Kaine by 3,400 votes, 51 percent to 46 percent. In contrast, John Kerry lost this county in 2004 by 13,000 votes, 56 percent to 44 percent. And even Mark

Warner, Kaine's Democratic predecessor, lost Loudoun by 53 percent to 46 percent in his successful 2001 gubernatorial bid.

The same pattern can be seen in neighboring Prince William county, the largest emerging suburban county in Virginia. While Kerry in 2004 and Warner in 2001 went down to defeat in this county, Kaine pulled out a victory, 50 percent to 48 percent. Given that Kaine absolutely cleaned up in Democratic strongholds like the mature suburb of Fairfax county, carrying it by 60,000 votes--a far wider margin than either Kerry or Warner were able to manage--the GOP desperately needed big wins in counties like Loudoun and Prince William to counterbalance Democratic strength.

### **THE GOP AND EMERGING SUBURBAN VOTERS**

That they did not suggests that, far from "getting" these voters on a deeply psychological level--as David Brooks remarked in 2002--Republicans have misinterpreted their past success in these areas as evidence that these voters endorsed and wanted an anti-government, stridently socially conservative agenda. But, as the data reviewed above strongly suggest, that was not a warranted assumption.

Instead, these data indicate that emerging suburban voters are tax-sensitive and concerned about government waste, but not ideologically anti-government. Similarly, while they tend to be religious and family-oriented and hold some conservative social views, they are socially moderate in comparison to rural residents. They are also not anti-business, but do hold populist attitudes toward corporate abuse and people who game the system. And these voters worry more about concrete issues like public education than they do about whether politicians have the "correct" stance on various values issues.

That's the real voter in suburbs like Loudoun. No wonder Kilgore couldn't connect. His campaign was built on cultural wedge issues like the death penalty and illegal immigration when emerging suburban voters were looking for solutions on education, transportation and other problems they face in their communities every day. Kaine, in contrast, spoke clearly to these voters about such solutions and famously did not hide his views on values issues, even when some of them (capital punishment) were not popular. Kaine bet voters in the emerging suburbs would be more interested in whether he could help solve their community's problems than in whether he agreed with them on a series of highly personal values issues. In light of the survey data reviewed above and the actual election results, he bet right.

Shrewder voices in the GOP are recognizing the implications of Kaine's successful approach. As Representative Tom Davis, a moderate Republican from northern Virginia, put it, the GOP reliance on cultural issues may be popular with rural voters, but "you play to your rural base, you pay a price"; these issues "are just blowing up" in suburban and exurban communities.

Does this mean the Democrats now have the advantage among voters in exurbia? Not at all. But it certainly means that these voters are contestable and should not be considered GOP property, especially now that Bush's special status as leader of the war on terror has been drastically eroded. Smart Democratic campaigns that offer solid solutions to the everyday problems of exurbia, particularly in the emerging suburbs, present a relatively moderate stance on social issues and seem culturally comfortable with the exurban way of life can have every expectation of performing well among these voters. Conversely, if the GOP continues to pursue an ideologically anti-government agenda that compromises government services, while pandering to the far right on social issues, they can have every expectation of shrinking margins among these voters.

What would shrinking margins in exurbia do to the GOP? Quite a bit, since it would take the one demographic weapon out of their hands that they do have (even if the voting power of exurbia has been exaggerated; as we saw earlier). And it would dramatically reduce their margin for error in more

Democrat-friendly inner and mature suburbs and core urban areas—which now seem to be turning even more heavily toward the Democrats (see Fairfax county, above). And that means they’d have to do even better in rural areas than they have—which might lead them to rely even more heavily on cultural wedge issues—which would make them perform even worse in exurbia and the rest of suburbia. Such a vicious cycle would be very bad news indeed for the GOP, as they head into the very challenging elections of 2006 and 2008.

### **EMERGING SUBURBAN VOTERS AND THE 2006 ELECTION**

At this point, it is worth asking how well the Democrats will have to do among emerging suburban voters in 2006 to achieve electoral success in key statewide contests. A careful look at recent voting patterns indicates they need to do substantially better than they did in the 2004 presidential contest. For example, consider Missouri and Ohio, which have two of the most hotly contested Senate races in this election, races the Democrats must win to have any chance of taking back the Senate. Moreover, the two states are in the critical “purple leaning red” category described earlier which will make them front-line targets for the Democrats in 2008. Indeed, if the Democrats do manage to carry Missouri and Ohio’s 31 electoral votes in 2008, it is reasonable to project that they will win that election. So the stakes are very high indeed in these two states, both in 2006 and 2008.

Begin with Missouri, where Claire McCaskill is challenging incumbent Republican Jim Talent. In 2004, Kerry lost the emerging suburbs in Missouri--the counties of Clay and Platte around Kansas City and the counties of Franklin and St. Charles around St. Louis--by 57 percent to 42 percent, while winning the rest of the rest of the suburbs around Kansas City and St. Louis and their urban cores by 58-41. But in the 2000 Missouri Senate contest, where the late Mel Carnahan defeated John Ashcroft, Carnahan lost the emerging suburbs by a much narrower 52-47 to go with his 59-40 victory margin in the rest of the Kansas City and St. Louis urban-suburban counties. Note that in this winning effort, Democrats did not actually carry the emerging suburbs but merely lost them by a narrower margin.

This point can be made in an even stronger form by looking at Ohio, where Sherrod Brown is attempting to oust incumbent Republican Mike DeWine. In the 2004 presidential election, Kerry ran a very high deficit of 65-35 in Ohio’s emerging suburbs (Warren and Clermont counties outside of Cincinnati, Geauga and Medina outside of Cleveland and Delaware, Fairfield and Licking outside of Columbus), but carried the rest of the Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus suburbs and their urban cores by 55-45. Looking back to the last successful Democratic effort in Ohio, Clinton lost to Dole in Ohio’s emerging suburbs by the still-substantial, though significantly narrower, margin of 53-36, while carrying the rest of the Cincinnati-Cleveland-Columbus urban-suburban counties by 50-40. This underscores the idea that it is not necessary for Democrats to win the emerging suburbs; significantly narrowing the GOP advantage in these areas should suffice.

Another interesting example to look at is Colorado. Among the red vulnerable states, this is the one that is most clearly trending toward the Democrats. And the Democrats appear to have an excellent chance of capturing the Colorado governorship this year, as Bill Ritter challenges Republican Bob Beauprez for the open seat. But, in the 2004 presidential contest, of course, the Democrats did not prevail.

In that contest, Kerry lost Colorado’s emerging suburbs (Adams and Douglas counties outside of Denver) by 57-42, while carrying the rest of Denver’s suburbs and the urban core by 58-41. By contrast, Ken Salazar, the victorious Democratic Senatorial candidate in 2004, did substantially better in both categories, losing the emerging suburbs by a narrow 50-48 margin, while carrying the rest of Denver’s urban-suburban counties by 62-36. Again, note the significant compression—though not elimination—of the GOP’s advantage in the emerging suburbs.

## **MOBILIZING THE DEMOCRATIC VOTE IN EXURBIA**

The demographic, voting and attitudinal data reviewed so far strongly suggest that Democrats can and should compete in exurbia. With the right kind of campaigns, they can substantially shave GOP margins in these areas, which would make an important contribution to Democratic electoral success. Indeed, to cede exurbia to the Republicans at this point verges on political malpractice.

But *how* to compete? Clearly part of this is what was described earlier: the content of campaigns must be actively responsive to the problems and concerns of exurbia, which takes considerable and painstaking research. But any message, no matter how responsive, still has to reach the actual, physical voters in these areas in order to turn potential support into votes on election day.

The most fundamental point in doing this is the simplest. We might call it the Woody Allen Lesson. As he pointed out in one of his movies: “90 percent of life is just showing up”. That applies to politics as well. Democrats can’t compete and win in exurbia unless they show up. They famously didn’t do that in the 2004 presidential campaign, preferring to work in areas with higher concentrations of sure Democratic votes.

That approach will have to be discarded. To compete and win in exurbia, Democrats will have to venture into areas where they feel less comfortable and where finding Democratic votes takes a bit more effort. To succeed in these areas, in fact, they will have to develop a new model of voter mobilization that goes beyond traditional precinct-based methods and reaches out to the newer voters and others who lean their way, but who are dispersed throughout their communities, rather than conveniently concentrated within specific precincts.

The beginnings of a new model can be seen in the 2005 Kaine campaign. Using the traditional approach to GOTV, the campaign would have sought to identify voters in precincts that have historically performed at 65 percent or better for Democratic candidates. But that presented a slight problem for their work in exurbia, particularly with their most important targets: *in the entire counties of Loudoun and Prince William, there is not a single such precinct*. The Kaine campaign, working with Copernicus Analytics, came up an innovative solution to this problem. Here is the basic approach as summarized by Ben Yuhas of Copernicus:

In early summer and in collaboration with the Kaine campaign and its pollster, Pete Brodnitz, Copernicus helped develop and execute a large-scale survey to obtain an early indication of overall voter preferences. The size of the poll created a robust sample for modeling purposes and also provided insight into the preferences and attitudes of smaller voter segments.

Advanced analytic techniques were then used to build three mathematical models: (i) a model to identify likely Kaine supporters; (ii) a complementary model to identify likely Kilgore supporters; and (iii) a model to target individuals based on likelihood to vote. The models provide individual-level model scores for 2.7 million individual registered voters on the Virginia voter file (for whom we had the requisite data).

The models were successful in differentiating among voter segments. Analysis shows that, for the Kaine support model, targets scoring in the top 10% were **seven times more likely to support Kaine** than those in the bottom 10%. The Kilgore support model shows similar results.....

The development of validated support and turnout models allowed the campaign to dramatically expand its universe of targets, including **more than doubling the universe of targets in key battleground counties** over traditional precinct-level turnout metrics. The models also provided targets in traditionally weak Democratic areas, allowing the campaign to enact a door-to-door persuasion program in Republican-leaning precincts for the first time in a Virginia race.

Note that the approach outlined by Yuhas generates benefits well beyond its costs and, given the requisite technical expertise, widely applicable. It provides a way Democrats can efficiently mobilize Democratic votes throughout exurbia, even where, as in Loudoun and Prince William, there are no 65%+ Democratic precincts at all. With this method, Democrats can create *virtual* 65%+ precincts by grouping voters who, in aggregate, can be expected to vote Democratic at a 65 percent rate or higher, even where no such precincts exist in the real world.

The dramatic expansion this method affords of the GOTV universe is illustrated by data provided by Yuhas. In Loudoun, the method took the GOTV universe from zero to about 10,000 voters and, in Prince William, from zero to about 15,000 voters (Table 7). And in a battleground group of seven counties (Loudoun, Prince William and three other emerging suburban counties—Chesapeake, Chesterfield and Henrico—plus Fairfax and Virginia Beach), the GOTV universe expanded 138 percent, from 84,000 to 200,000 voters.

**Table 7**  
**Increase in GOTV Universe, Battleground Counties**  
**Virginia Gubernatorial Race, 2005**

County	65%+	Model	Increase	Growth Factor
Fairfax	27,806	80,156	188%	2.9
Prince William	0	14,984	inf	inf
Loudon	0	10,029	inf	inf
VA Beach	5,025	26,004	417%	5.2
Chesapeake	17,160	19,293	12%	1.1
Chesterfield	3,296	16,571	403%	5.0
Henrico	30,796	33,291	8%	1.1
<b>Battleground</b>	<b>84,083</b>	<b>200,328</b>	<b>138%</b>	<b>2.4</b>

Source: Ben Yuhas, Copernicus Analytics

It's also worth stressing that this method provides a way of identifying weak supporters of the other side, so the campaign can directly target the most persuadable segments of the electorate to supplement mobilization of its strongest supporters. Again, this is particularly important in exurbia, where the other side generally starts with an advantage.

These are the kind of approaches Democrats will need if they hope to take advantage of their potential political support in exurbia. They must go where their voters are, not expect them to find the party on their own. This is, to be sure, a significant challenge to a party not notably innovative in its campaigning techniques. But the data presented here indicate strongly that, if they are willing to embrace innovation and new models of campaigning, they stand an excellent chance of competing strongly—and even winning—in exurbia, their next political frontier. The voters are out there. All the Democrats have to do is find them.

## Appendix 1: Categorizing Counties

The first five categories I use in my analysis are based on codes developed by Robert Lang and Thomas Sanchez of Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute (MI). The MI codes break down the 417 counties in the top 50 metro areas in the US (where over half the total population lives) into five categories: core urban areas; inner suburbs; mature suburbs; emerging suburbs; and exurbs. These metro areas coincide with those that have over a million in population. Below this population level, metro areas are typically too small to meaningfully differentiate emerging suburbs and exurbs from inner and mature suburbs.

Here are brief descriptions of these five categories, as defined by MI:

*Core Urban:* Core counties are...very densely populated principal cities. Examples include New York County (Manhattan), NY, San Francisco County, CA, and the District of Columbia...Counties that contain both the principal city and a sizable ring of the suburbs, such as Fulton County, GA (home of Atlanta) did not qualify under this category.

*Inner Suburbs:* Inner Suburban counties consist of mostly first ring suburbs of principal cities. But note that the urban fringe of many principal cities share the qualities of Inner Suburbs. Because of annexation, these cities have grabbed the first, and many times second or third, rings of suburbanization. Therefore many inner suburban counties as identified under this scheme contain the principal city, with its suburban neighborhoods, plus older independent suburbs. Much of the housing in this county type was built before WWII, with build out coming in the first two decades of the post-World War II era.

*Mature Suburbs:* Mature Suburbs represent the current midpoint in the American metropolis. Many of these places have been fast growing as recently as the past two decades, but have now slowed considerably...Mature Suburbs are made up mostly of subdivisions, but an emerging process of mixed-use urban infill development is rapidly changing these places by giving them a more urban character. But so far these infill projects represent islands of urbanity in seas of more conventional single-use and automobile dominated suburbia.

*Emerging Suburbs:* Emerging suburbs are almost wholly products of the past two decades and are booming with both people and the beginnings of commerce (although they remain mostly commuter zones). Emerging suburbs are both upscale and downscale and may feature everything from McMansions to trailer parks. Residents in emerging suburbs typically see these places as bargains compared to mature suburbs. That is true for households that buy a McMansion over an older and smaller tract home in a mature suburb, or a first-time homebuyer that "drives to qualify" by finding a modest attached dwelling at the edge of the region.

*True Exurbs:* [T]he most far flung [metropolitan] counties with the lowest—essentially rural—population densities. Large-scale suburbanization is just about to take hold in these places, as they offer even better bargains, and more land (but longer commutes) than emerging counties. Exurban counties are included in metropolitan areas by the census because they share a functional relationship with neighboring counties via commuting. But by appearance, these places are barely touched by urbanization.

The other four county categories are defined as follows:

*Medium Metro:* Counties in metropolitan areas with between 250,000 and 1,000,000 in population.

*Small Metro:* Counties in metropolitan areas with under 250,000 in population.

*Micropolitan:* Any nonmetro county with an urban cluster of at least 10,000 persons or more plus any outlying counties where commuting to the central county with the urban cluster is 25 percent or higher, or if 25 percent of the employment in the outlying county is made up of commuters from to the central county with the urban cluster.

*Nonmetro, Nonmicropolitan:* All other nonmetro counties.

## Appendix 2: Categorizing States

In the last four elections, the Democrats have carried 18 states (CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, ME, MD MA, MI, MN, NJ, NY, OR, PA, RI, VT, WA, WI) and DC for a total of 248 electoral voters (EVs). Should all these states be considered part of the Democratic base?

Well, it's certainly non-trivial that each of these states has supported the Democratic candidate for president four times running—Clinton twice, then Gore, then Kerry. That shows considerable loyalty to a basically Democratic vision of where the country should go. But, as is well-known, some of these states have been much, much closer than others and the subjects of a very vigorous competition between the parties.

One way of quantifying this distinction is to average the Democratic margin in the last two presidential elections and assign those where the average margin has been over 5 points to the Democratic base and those under 5 points to a more contested or “purple” category. This procedure gives intuitively pleasing results: the northeast corridor (without NH, which is not on the above list, and PA, which is usually thought of as more of a Midwestern state) and the west coast (without OR) plus Illinois are assigned to the Democratic base and four of the five Midwestern states listed above (MI, MN, PA, WI) plus Oregon are assigned to the purple category.

The leaves us with a narrower, but probably more accurate, definition of the Democratic base as including 13 states (CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, ME, MD, MA NJ, NY, RI, VT, WA) plus DC with 183 EVs and a purple shading blue category of five states (MI, MN, OR, PA, WI) with 65 EVs.

Moving to the red side of the country, in the last four elections, the Republicans have carried 16 states (AL, AK, ID, IN, KS, MS, NE, NC, ND, OK, SC, SD, TX, UT, VA, WY) for a total of 135 EVs. This is substantially less, especially in EV terms, than the 18 states (plus DC) and 248 EVs carried by the Democrats in all four elections.

But this GOP base should be adjusted to reflect their exceptionally strong performance in some states in the last two elections. One way to do this is to add states (besides those included in the above list) which the Republicans have carried by an average of 10 points or more in 2000 and 2004. Using this procedure, I add Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana and Montana, making a total of 20 states with 170 EVs.in the GOP base.

I divide the remaining states (that is, outside of the GOP base and outside of the Democratic base and purple leaning blue categories described earlier) into three categories. First, there is a small category of three “pure purple” states that have split their support between the two parties in the last two elections: Iowa, New Hampshire and New Mexico. These states have a total of 16 EVs.

Next, there is a very significant group of states—Florida, Missouri, Nevada and Ohio—where the average GOP margin in the last two elections has been 5 points or less. This purple leaning red category has a total of 63 EVs.

Finally, there is a very interesting group of five states—Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Tennessee and West Virginia—that might be characterized as “red vulnerable”. In these states, the average GOP margin in the last two elections has been less than 10 points (though more than 5). And, by definition, they are also states that have been carried by the Democrats at least once in the last four elections. They have a total of 41 EVs.

That these suggestions of GOP vulnerability are not completely fanciful is indicated by the latest Gallup party ID figures by state. Democrats have the party ID advantage in every state in the pure purple, purple leaning red and red vulnerable categories, save Tennessee (which is dead-even) and Arizona (where they have a 5 point deficit). In the pure purple states, they lead by 6 points in Iowa, 14 points in New Hampshire and 8 points in New Mexico. In the purple leaning red category, they lead by a point in Florida, 8 points in Missouri, 12 points in Nevada and 7 points in Ohio. And in the red vulnerable states, they lead by 11 points in Arkansas, 3 points in Colorado and 13 points in West Virginia.

Looked at by region, the GOP base is entirely in the south (defined here as the 11 states of the Old Confederacy plus Kentucky and Oklahoma) and in plains and mountain states. It does not include a single Midwestern (except Indiana), northeastern, southwestern or western (except Alaska) state. With the two exceptions noted, all states in those areas are either in the progressive base/purple leaning blue categories or in purple or red categories that suggest GOP vulnerability. In addition, there are two southern states—Arkansas and above all Florida—that also seem vulnerable.

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<sup>i</sup> November 10, 2002

<sup>ii</sup> All figures in this section from Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, US Census Bureau, November, 2002, pp. 32-36.

<sup>iii</sup> Robert E. Lang and Thomas W. Sanchez, “The New Metro Politics: Interpreting Recent Presidential Elections Using a County-Based Regional Typology”, Metropolitan Institute 2006 Election Brief, Virginia Tech, February, 2006.

<sup>iv</sup> Lang And Sanchez, op. cit.