Place-Based Resentment in Contemporary U.S. Elections: The Individual Sources of America's Urban-Rural Divide

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Abstract
Drawing on a unique battery of questions fielded on the 2018 CCES and in two separate surveys—one in 2019 and the other during the 2020 election—we study the extent to which Americans feel animus toward communities that are geographically distinct from their own and whether these feelings explain Americans' attitudes toward the two major political parties and self-reported vote choice. We report results on how place-based resentment predicted vote choice in the 2018 midterm and 2020 general elections and how those feelings relate to other widely studied facets of political behavior such as partisanship and racial resentment. Rural resentment is a powerful predictor of vote choice in both election years examined.

Keywords
place, politics and geography, social identity, 2018 midterms, urban-rural divide, rural resentment

Americans are divided. They belong to different parties, which continue to grow further apart; income inequality is rising, and racial inequities continue to fester. But Americans are also physically divided. They live different types of lives in different types of communities, rooted in particular places. Much of politics is about the efforts to maintain or dismantle the unique aspects of these geographic communities. For that reason, place is powerful; it fills individuals' heads with certain memories—often feelings of nostalgia and homesickness, but other times feelings of bitterness and mistrust. Yet, while scholars have long studied the ways in which other markers of political identity structure public opinion—race, class, and partisanship—it is only recently that they have explored how an attachment to place shapes political attitudes.

We argue that a social identification with one's imagined place-based community is a powerful cognitive predisposition, and one that can become politicized when politicians and media exploit these identities by arguing over real and perceived disparities in wealth, opportunity, and cultural value. These narratives divide places and the people who live in them from one another. Emphasized with a negative valence, an individual's sense of place can ripen into fully-fledged resentment. In the 2018 and 2020 U.S. congressional elections, we find evidence that these priors were primed to such an extent among rural Americans that place-based identities were influential and predictive of vote choice, even when controlling for a range of confounders, such as racial resentment and partisan identity. Moreover, we find that place resentment is strongly associated with attitudes toward the Democratic and Republican parties more generally. These findings provide strong evidence for the ways in which individuals think in spatial terms, and how these attitudes are cognitively distinct from other social identities individuals might also develop. We conclude that place matters in the construction of individuals' political beliefs because place—the social connection individuals feel to a particular locale—is highly amenable to politicization. Political elites and lay-citizens rely on place-based heuristics to create political divisions and build social cohesion, braiding geographic distinctiveness with differing

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notions of deservingness, equality, and value. Place affects mass opinion independently from other social markers (though we do not deny that they are also interconnected in important ways) because it is tied to the individualized experiences affecting a territorially-defined community. People think differently about politics and the ways in which various political phenomena affect the spaces in which they live because those places are different from one another. Race, class, and gender matter because they draw together millions of Americans who have a shared experience. In this paper, we document the shared ways in which Americans, living in different places are drawn together because of how think about communities unlike their own.

Our evidence is drawn from three nationally representative non-probability samples—one collected during the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), another collected independently in March 2019, and a third collected during the final days of the 2020 election. While we build on a growing foundation of scholarly work that has taken the idea of place and place-based resentment seriously (Cramer 2016; Munis 2020; Gimpel et al. 2020; Borwein and Lucas 2021), this study makes several noteworthy advances. First, we are among the first to consider how these particular attitudes impinge directly on vote choice and party affiliation within state- and district-level races. We argue that this represents a hard-case for isolating the relationship between place-based resentment and electoral outcomes in that we are measuring its presence across multiple campaigns, candidacies, and different electoral contexts. The extant literature on place-based resentment is often motivated by a singular event or a particular candidacy and supported by qualitative observation. We point to the national implications of these place-based identities with our focus on elections for the U.S. House, Senate, and various governors' races. By quantitatively measuring place-based attitudes, we are able to distinguish place-based resentment from other prior dispositions, such as feelings of racial animosity, which are highly spatialized (Conn 2014), and we are able to argue that this is not a phenomenon stoked by a single candidate, such as Donald Trump.

We also expand the focus beyond rural America and explore place resentment among urbanites and suburbanites. Scholars have tacitly argued that resentment is a behavior unique to rural residents, but we find evidence that urbanites are similarly motivated by place-based considerations. While our models are especially powerful in predicting behaviors among rural residents, we show that urbanites nevertheless harbor place-based resentments toward communities unlike their own. These documented asymmetries in how rural, suburban, and urban voters use place-based resentment to acknowledge

the need to better understand how elites prime individuals' sense of place in order to create political divisions—creating narratives about the types of communities that are winning or losing, and who is to blame.

Finally, our findings shed important light on one of the most defining features of contemporary American politics: the urban-rural divide. Many scholars of American politics have shown skepticism that place (or anything else fundamentally geographic) is behind this divide. Instead, many appear to believe that the divide is perhaps wholly reduceable to compositional differences between urban and rural areas (e.g., Hertz, Pyle, and Schaffner 2021; Wolbrecht 2017). In other words, although recent work has demonstrated the importance of place as a lens through which voters filter political information (Cramer 2016; Diamond 2021) and as a heuristic for evaluating a wide range of political events (Jacobs and Munis 2020), including electoral ones (Munis 2021; Parker 2014), it has remained unclear until now whether geographic attitudes are central to the growing voting gap between urban and rural America (Hopkins 2017; Kaufman 2021; Scala and Johnson 2017). We do not deny that the urban-rural divide is at least partially driven by compositional differences between rural and urban America—differences in economic growth, partisan sorting, and racial segregation. However, our evidence complements other recent research in demonstrating that compositional differences alone do not explain the gap. Recently, for example, Gimpel et al. (2020) illuminates the role of density-driven socialization differences and shows that they explain variation in outcomes above and beyond compositional differences. Where Gimpel et al. emphasizes socialization effects across different types of communities, our study further demonstrates that compositional effects exist alongside contextual factors—specifically, those place-based identities that can boil over into fully-fledged resentment toward different types of communities in specific electoral contexts. Using a capacious measure of place-based resentment, we empirically demonstrate that for rural Americans, geographic attitudes were salient and predictive of vote choice throughout the country in the various contests that took place in 2018 for the U.S. House, Senate, and Governorships. Moreover, our results show that this was not confined to one election—as rural resentment was politically potent once again during the 2020 races for U.S. House.

Place, Partisanship, and Geographic Polarization in American Politics

Place is a distinct sociological phenomenon (Agnew 1987). While places on the map might share similar economic, political, and social characteristics, an

individual's sense of place is unique because of each place's inherent peculiarity. There is no place, after all, like home. While place is not inherently political, it can be politicized. Government policies and partisan messaging rely on territorial divisions. Electoral districts create separate venues for political contestation, structure various levels of citizenship, and help to hinder or advance participation. Local, state, and federal politicians structure policy in ways that are reflective of prevailing political, social, and economic differences and values. These policies further reinforce geographic cleavages. The politics of place create distinguishable groups in which individuals associate and make sense of government action (Cramer 2016). There are many groups that provide the necessary cognitive heuristics for making sense of politics and policy (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012; Lupia 1994; Zaller 1992), and various social, cultural, and religious identities often intersect with partisan and political divisions in powerful ways (Mason 2018; Achen and Bartels 2016). Place is intertwined with many of these distinctions (Munis 2020), but while the connection between politics and other social groups and identities is well understood, we argue that place has a similar function. Neighbors are engaged in a common enterprise often despite religion or partisanship; they are tied together by the fact that they live near one another and share a set of common experiences. When place is made particularly salient in political messaging, it becomes an additional attitudinal consideration for evaluating candidates and their messages (Jacobs and Munis 2019; Fudge and Armaly 2021).

Place—or symbolic geography—is therefore a basis for group-based mentality. Indeed, it is a basis for social identity (Stedman 2002; Tajfel and Turner 1986). It channels political information and involves a personal sense of attachment and emotional commitment (Conover 1984). And, because physical place often produces a personal and emotional attachment to the spaces where people work, play, and live, these identities provide a powerful heuristic for how Americans interpret political phenomenon that affect those spaces (Cho and Rudolph 2008). Urbanites, suburbanites, and rural people all develop these attachments, and the places in which they live form an important social identity (Lyons and Utych 2021).

While government action affects a variety of social groups, geography structures how politics and policy affect those groups differently. Consequently, the "other" living "over there" can be a powerful source of resentment when one understands their place-based ingroup as being unjustly deprived relative to the "others." Importantly, such animosity is not only targeted toward the political elite, but average citizens who live in different places. Politicians may choose, for example, to provide welfare payments to a defined class of economically disadvantaged individuals. But those payments go to specific areas, and perceptions about those areas—who lives there, what they do, and how valuable their community is—structure individual attitudes about government action. In addition, the experiences of a large social group, for example, Black Americans, may differ across geographies where the degree of coercion, regulation, and violence correspond with varying levels of political empowerment and participation (Soss and Weaver 2017). When government action overlaps with spatial disparities, and when political messaging reifies these spatial divisions, individuals rely on their own sense of place in order to understand their personal stakes and justify their political beliefs, because they live "not just anywhere, [but] somewhere in particular" (Carbaugh and Cerulli 2013, 7).

Given observable inequities in economic growth, and perceived differences in cultural relevance, individuals in the larger American polity make active use of their place-mindedness often at a level of politics outside the national conversation (Wong 2010). Marginalized communities—whether real or imagined—have recourse to many avenues to express their grievances, and political elites seeking to exploit these attitudes are more likely to prime these emotions in a campaign environment structured by pre-existing inequities in power-relations (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Nelson and Kinder 1996). For instance, Cramer (2016) argues that voters in rural Wisconsin talk about and make sense of complicated state-level government policy by drawing upon a strong sense of place infused with grievance unique to rural residents, which she labels "rural consciousness" (6). In this way, place structured how rural communities interpreted why state leaders—"over there" in Madison—took specific actions that discounted the particular set of challenges faced by rural communities. At its most basic level, this aggrieved sentiment, nourished by place, allowed rural Wisconsinites to clearly define who was "one of us" or "one of them" and who deserved political support in the next election (Tajfel and Turner 1986). As Cramer observes, rural Wisconsinites drew upon their distinct sense of place to interpret political messages, situate themselves in socio-economic and political hierarchies, and ultimately vote overwhelmingly for candidates who bespoke their unique situation.

Considering American politics at the national level, clear geographic patterns in vote share are readily apparent. While U.S. elections have long featured regional voting patterns, a more recent phenomenon has been the emergence of an urban-rural divide within regions (Rodden 2019). Indeed, as David Hopkins (2017) has documented thoroughly, the urban-rural divide as we know it today emerged in the mid-1990s and has been intensifying ever since. Left unclear, however, are the attitudinal foundations for this phenomenon; to what

extent did rural animosity toward urban areas drive vote choice, and to what extent did urbanites engage in some form of backlash against rural communities for sending Donald Trump to the White House and majorities of his party to both chambers of Congress?

In order to understand the dynamics of the urban-rural divide, scholars must account for these distinct place-based attitudes, which are largely driven by otherwise paradoxical behaviors among residents of different communities. For example, when economically disadvantaged rural citizens routinely vote against candidates who would increase spending for beneficial government programs, it is because their "reluctance to tax the rich is rooted in a complex narrative in which government action is by very definition an injustice to themselves" (Cramer 2012, 529). In short, these place identities slip into narratives of distrust toward governing officials, indignity toward communities benefiting as a result of those officials' decisions, and growing cynicism toward economic and cultural elites in general—and these narratives, or attitudes, are what scholars refer to as place resentment, as distinct from consciousness or identity (Cramer 2016; Munis 2020). Parker (2014) suggests that individuals beyond rural Wisconsin develop these rationales, and not only do politicians seek to leverage them, but they become an essential component of how members of Congress cultivate a "home-style" reputation that capitalizes on the place-based identities of their constituents (see also, Fenno 1978; Hunt 2020). To the extent that politicians across the nation have deployed arguments about an urban elite and the structural disadvantages facing rural America, these localized attachments and (politicized) identities have contributed to a national schism in the ways different geographic communities vote, which exacerbate the social and economic divisions that may construct the two parties' coalitions.

To be clear, we adopt the position of previous scholarship on place resentment by situating the concept firmly within the social identity theory tradition (Tajfel 1974). Some implications of this that should be stated briefly follow. First, not everyone has a strong sense of place identity, whether the identity in question relates to urban/suburban/rural designations or whether it relates to other symbolic geographies (e.g., municipalities, states, and regions). Indeed, place identities do not even necessarily follow from so-called "objective" geographic designations (Nemerever and Rogers 2021). In other words, not everyone who would self-report as living in a rural or urban area will have an emotional stake in their community and define themselves according to where they are from or where they live. Second, not everyone who identifies with a place will feel grievance stemming from a sense that their place-based ingroup is being unjustly deprived or disparaged relative to other groups. Put

differently, not everyone embodies place identity and, of those that do, not everyone harbors place resentment. However, as properly understood within a social identity framework, those who hold place resentment must have some meaningful place identity, as place resentment stems from place identity that has been politicized through perceived victimhood on the basis of place-based inequity.

Finally, although the "urban versus rural divide" is among the most commonly referenced heuristics by members of the media for characterizing and describing American politics, and while we argue that politicized place identity channeled via place resentment lies at the heart of this geographic divide, we must also grapple with the ways in which place-based resentment is intertwined with perhaps the most central organizing feature of American politics: race (Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Kinder and Sanders 1996). For a variety of historical reasons, Black Americans came to be concentrated in cities throughout the 20th century. Due to legal and extra-legal barriers and efforts regarding housing access, employment, and education, many cities came to be racially segregated—geographic patterns that informed policy-making and land-use decisions, and which racialized urban politics (Taylor 2019; Trounstein 2018; Wilson 2011). These historical facts continue to influence both how the average American views cities and Blacks as a group; in particular, it likely explains the cognitive linkage between racial minorities and cities in the American mind (see Dawkins et al. 2022). This raises the question of whether placed-based attitudes are distinct from racial ones (e.g., Wolbrecht 2017). In the most direct investigation of the link between race and place to date, Dawkins et al. (2022) argue that competition between predominantly white rural areas and significantly less white urban areas fosters racial prejudice, whereas endorsement of those same beliefs regarding geographic inequity facing rural America (i.e., "rural empathy") is driven by a different type of racial attitudes: white consciousness (2022). However, it remains an open question as to whether the structure of place resentment—particularly among rural identifiers—is separate from racial attitudes.

In short, geography imposes tangible and perceptible divisions on people, and in this way, the creation of local, or subnational, spaces has always mattered in American politics—particularly among those who live a way of life that is different from the average American's (Huckfeldt 1979; Key 1949). American institutions further reify those divisions and elections act as the leading venues for individuals to express those differences (Enos 2017; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004; Hopkins 2017; Rodden 2019). Our study provides an opportunity to look at how individuals' perceptions of those differences have transformed into a form of place-based resentment, and how

this has mattered in the two most recent national elections. To examine the relationship between place resentment and voting patterns, we test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Among all respondents, place-based resentment will predict vote choice in the U.S. House, Senate, and Gubernatorial Elections. Respondent's place of residence will moderate the directionality of resentful attitudes toward specific parties running for office.

Measurement

The 2018 CCES identified respondents' primary place of residence as either urban, suburban, or living in a town or rural area—that is, community type for each respondent is based upon self-report depending on how each respondent understands their community in relation to others (as either being urban, suburban, small town, or rural).[1] In both the 2019 and 2020 Lucid samples, respondents indicated whether they lived in an extremely urban, somewhat urban, more urban than rural, more rural than urban, somewhat rural, or extremely rural community. We then conditioned question wording to those responses, so that self-identifiers of each geographic community type were asked only about their geographic outgroup; rural self-identifiers were asked about urban areas, and urban self-identifiers were asked about rural areas. We elaborate on suburbanites' conditions below.

To measure place resentment, we use a multi-measure place resentment scale that captures each of the substantive-political facets of place resentment identified by Cramer (2016), namely perceptions of cultural disparagement, political inequality, and maldistribution of public resources. More specifically, the place resentment scale allows us to capture how individuals use geographic divisions to make sense of the following four considerations: 1. The distribution of political power within respondent's state; 2. the deservingness of different communities in respondent's state; 3. the appreciation for people who choose to stay in communities unlike their own; and 4. the evaluation of work-habits and the economic worth of different places. Importantly, this measure of place resentment is well validated, with prior research showing that it is a distinct attitude separate from other attitudinal measures, such as populist attitudes and racial resentment (Munis 2020; c.f., Dudas 2017; Wolbrecht 2017).[2]

Because we are interested in how place resentment factors into elections taking place within state and congressional districts, we adapted the place resentment measure to ask about perceived geographic inequities in those contexts. Specifically, our statement wording was conditioned by each respondent's state of residence and the postal town or city associated with each ZIP code in the United States. By conditioning the question wording

to each respondent's particular state and locality, we narrow respondents' considerations to those issues most intimately related to the place-based divisions primed in the current election contest (House, Senate, and Governorship).

Although the urban-rural divide is commonly invoked, little work to date has focused on urban identities and the possible emergence of place-based resentment among those who identify with urban locales. To remedy this, we investigate urban resentment toward rural areas. This is a natural decision given that rural resentment is operationalized as measures of rural grievance and hostility toward urban areas. There are multiple reasons to expect that a sizeable share of urbanites might resent rural areas and those who live in them. First, the predominance of the aforementioned media narrative may itself stoke resentment—that is, if the media casts urban areas as being in conflict with rural areas, then this could lead to outgroup hostility among urban voters. Second, and related to the first point, is that urban voters are likely increasingly aware that rural areas have an outsized voice in American politics due to institutions like the Senate and Electoral College (although this pathway to resentment may be confined at the present moment to the most politically engaged). Third, the prevalence of anti-rural stereotypes casting rural Americans as unintelligent, culturally backwards, and bigoted have long been a feature of American and other Western, which may provide fertile soil in which resentment could bloom (Eriksson 2010; Gimpel and Karnes 2006; Stenbacka 2011; Wray 2000).

Additionally, while suburbanites sit in the middle of urban and rural communities, there is strong reason to believe that they feel stronger degrees of resentment toward urban areas; most residents and their families have a history of leaving urban areas for the suburbs (whether they themselves left a city or are descended from those who did).[3] Additionally, suburbanites are more likely to be aware of the various programs and initiatives that exist to enhance urban districts, neighborhoods, schools, and other infrastructure, which they may see urbanites as being undeserving of. These possibilities are supported by data, which are summarized in Table A5, finding that when the outgroup is randomized (urban or rural), suburbanites assigned to the urban outgroup condition report significantly higher (nearly 17% higher, in fact) levels of resentment than do those assigned to the rural outgroup condition.[4] As with rural respondents, we asked suburbanites about their respective feelings toward urban areas, when measuring acrimonious feelings. Importantly, our modeling approach treats each category as a separate indicator, so the estimated relationship between urban resentment and rural resentment is not a part of any continuous scale across these three distinct geographies.

Internal consistency for each index used is satisfactory across all respondents; the full list of questions used across the various studies is available on page 2 of the appendix. On the 2018 CCES survey, we use a four-point measure of place-based resentment. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure = 0.67. In 2019 and 2020, we used a greater number of items, detailed below, which were consistent at $\alpha = 0.86$ and $\alpha = 0.84$, respectively. In each dataset, responses were summed to create an additive index, which was then normalized on a scale of 0 to 1.

In each of our models, we also control for a range of potential confounding variables. The list of confounders in all of our models are largely identical, though there are some slight differences owing to minor differences in question wording as well as question availability on the Lucid surveys (which we did have a great deal of control over) versus the 2018 CCES data (which we had markedly less control over). In each of the models, we control for partisan identification, racial identity, age, gender identity, education level, region of residence, and household income level (and/or income change from the previous year). Ideological identity was also controlled for in the 2018 CCES and 2020 Lucid models, but not in the 2019 Lucid models as it was not measured on that survey. Gender attitudes are included as an additional control variable in models using the 2018 CCES data (the only dataset used in this paper that includes that measure), while measures of populist attitudes, affective polarization, and place identity are utilized as controls in the 2019 Lucid data. Altogether, this list of control variable provides ample coverage of the litany of variables that prior research has identified as being strong explanatory factors regarding candidate and party evaluation.[5]

In the remainder of this paper, we present each of these representative samples in turn, beginning with the 2019 Lucid sample, which measured affect toward the two parties. We then present the results of the 2018 CCES study, which considered place-based resentment as a determinant of vote choice is Senate and Congressional midterm elections. We close with the most recent study, fielded in late October, 2020, which models congressional vote choice for candidates running in that election year. Information regarding the demographic composition of each of our samples can be found in Table A1 of the Appendix.

Study 1: Place-Based Resentment and Evaluations of the Parties

First, we investigate whether place resentment is significantly associated with voters' evaluations of the two major political parties in the United States. Based on previous research suggesting that Americans' partisan

tendencies have polarized geographically, with rural voters seemingly increasingly attracted to the Republican Party and urbanites becoming more Democratic (Hopkins 2017), we expect that greater levels of place-based resentment will be associated with a positive difference in party evaluation (favoring the Republican Party) among rural voters, whereas higher degrees of place resentment among urbanites will be associated with a negative difference in party evaluation (favoring the Democratic Party). The data used for this study features a nation-wide sample of Americans ($N = 2,000$), drawn via Lucid's Theorem sampling profile, conducted online during the Spring of 2019.[6]

Cofounding and Competing Priors. We ran a series of OLS regression models to assess whether place resentment (measured with three separate sets of items across these models) significantly accounts for variation in attitudes toward the two political parties; see pages 5–6 in the appendix for the model specifications. This dependent variable was measured using the difference in feeling thermometer ratings of the Democratic and Republican parties as the dependent measure; supporting analyses of attitudes toward the parties individually are also discussed. In all models, place resentment is a significant factor that accounts for unique variation in attitudes toward the parties across at least some part of the urban-rural continuum, holding constant the effects of racial resentment, populist orientations, affective polarization, place identity, and a vector of control variables. That place resentment significantly predicts individual attitudes toward the parties even after accounting for the influence of these other variables is rather remarkable considering the large volume of existing evidence that suggests these factors to be highly predictive of attitudes toward the parties and their candidates (e.g., Abramowitz 1994; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Miller, Shanks, and Shapiro 1996; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta 2018; Tesler 2016).

Results: Affective Polarization. Regressing the difference in respondents' thermometer score ratings of the two parties on an interaction term of place resentment and subjective place type (i.e., where respondents locate themselves on the urban-rural continuum) reveals that the relationship between place resentment and evaluation of the two parties is divergent across the urban-rural divide.[7] Marginal effects estimates are listed in Table 3 AQ3 and predicted values are plotted in Figure 2. Marginal AQ4 effects results indicate that, on average, a high level of place resentment is associated with a significant shift in evaluations of the parties that favors the Republican Party among rural Americans. This boost in evaluations favoring the Republicans is largest—an estimated 31

point swing—among those who identify as living in "very rural" areas. The marginal effect of place resentment among the most urban respondents is negative (favoring Democrats), but insignificant. As we see below, however, place resentment does matter systematically for urbanites, For instance, the marginal effect of place resentment, after accounting for all other variables in the model, was 20 points greater among those identifying as very urban and 10 points greater for those identifying as somewhat urban. In other words, when urbanites were more resentful toward rural people and rural places, they have relatively more favorable views of the Democratic Party (Figure 1).

Differences in evaluations are primarily driven by sharp divergences in attitudes toward the Democratic Party as a function of place resentment moderated by geographic self-identification. The relationship between place resentment and evaluations of the Democratic Party are presented in Table 1 and Figure 2. Marginal effect estimates indicate that, on average, a one standard deviation increase in place resentment among self-identified urbanites is associated with substantial positive increases (estimate for those living in "very urban" areas = 23.11, $p < 0.01$) in evaluations of the Democratic Party. Among most rural respondents, marginal effects estimates are negative and insignificant, though it is worth noting that the estimate among "very rural" respondents is substantively large and statistically significant (estimate = -17.73, $p = 0.03$).

Study 2: Place-Based Resentment and Vote Choice in the 2018 Elections

This study considers the ways in which place-based resentment is associated with individuals' vote choice in the 2018 Congressional midterm elections and the various contests held for state governor in that year. While place matters for a variety of political behaviors, in modeling vote choice we can account for the individual-level complexities that are filtered by geographic variation in voters' livelihoods (what issues are important and how information about those issues is localized), while acknowledging the many influences on vote choice—the most widely studied aspect of American political behavior.
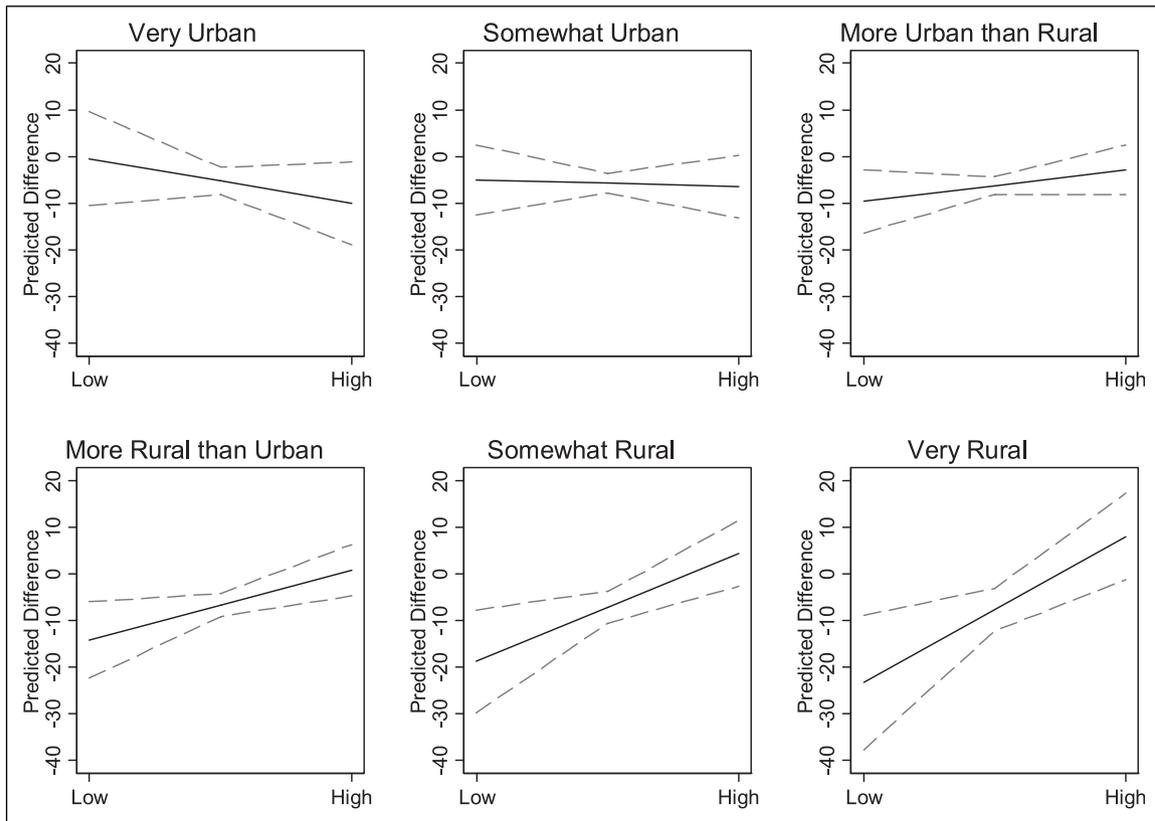

Figure 1. Predicted values of difference in party evaluation by place resentment. Figure note: The dependent variable is the difference, Republican minus Democratic, in expressive evaluations of the two parties (captured by 101 point feeling thermometers). Higher values of the dependent variable are interpreted as indicating a stronger preference for the Republican Party over the Democratic Party.

Moreover, because voting in the United States is highly geographic, we can account for differences in scale across different elections, accounting for the fact that place might matter in some political contexts, but not others. As the authors of *The American Voter* first acknowledged, Americans are members of a "variety of political sub-communities. Each of these communities is a pervasive medium within which behavior must occur. And each leaves some characteristic impress on that behavior" (Campbell et al. 1960, 266). In this study and the next, we consider how the American voter is defined by their membership in geographic subcommittees.

Cofounding and Competing Priors. The CCES also provides a comprehensive list of covariates that comprise their "common content," including the respondent's, age, sex,

race, level of education, geographic region, and partisan identity. We include each of these variables in the vote choice models (see page 2 in the Appendix for a full model specification).

There are three additional constructs that bear further specification. First, we include a measure of respondent attitudes toward sexual equality, as measured by their agreement or disagreement with the following question (CC18_422c): "when women lose to men in a fair competition, they typically complain about being discriminated against." We also include a measure of respondent's economic condition, but forgo the traditional measure of annual income, and instead include the respondent's self-identified change in economic condition (CC18_302)—whether it increased, decreased, or stayed the same. While there are many

Table 1. Marginal Effect of Place Resentment on Party Evaluations.

| Place perception	Difference between the parties (GOP- Dem)			Democratic Party		
	$\frac{\delta y}{\delta x}$	P>|t|	95% confidence interval	$\frac{\delta y}{\delta x}$	P>|t|	95% confidence interval
"Very urban"	−9.61	0.29	[−27.56, 8.33]	23.75	0.00	[9.07, 37.27]
"Somewhat urban"	1.43	0.84	[−15.03, 12.17]	15.45	0.00	[4.47, 25.40]
"More urban than rural"	6.75	0.26	[−4.85, 18.35]	7.15	0.10	[−1.78, 15.16]
"More rural than urban"	14.93	0.03	[1.86, 28.00]	−1.16	0.81	[−10.80, 7.71]
"Somewhat rural"	23.11	0.01	[5.98, 40.24]	−9.46	0.13	[−22.08, 2.51]
"Very rural"	31.29	0.01	[8.87, 53.72]	−17.76	0.03	[−34.41, −1.63]
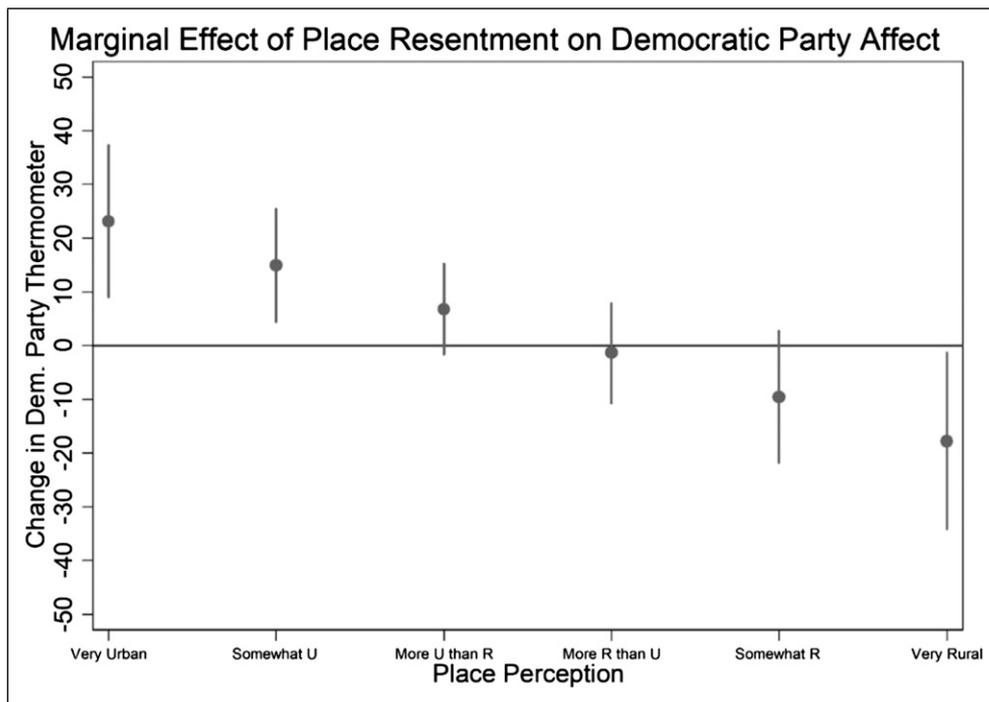
Figure 2. Marginal effect of place resentment on evaluations of the Democratic Party.

ways to operationalize income and sexism, these measures more clearly suggest antagonistic attitudes, and provide a more arduous test against place-based resentment.

Finally, we include a multi-faceted measure of racial resentment.[8] Racial attitudes imbue the American psyche, and distinguishing race from other dispositions is a complicated endeavor (Tessler 2016; Kinder and Sanders 1996). In survey research, this has proven especially problematic, given findings that document how even the terms "inner city" and "urban" are racialized (Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). Given the long history of racial segregation within and between places, it is all the more difficult to extrapolate feelings of racial animosity from feelings that capture other contextual differences. Race is highly contextual and scholars of place-consciousness have made this clear in pointing to the limits of their own research, especially as it relates to rural attitudes toward urban areas. As Cramer (2016) acknowledges, "cities are often shorthand for people who are not white."

By including this measure of racial resentment in the vote choice model alongside the measure of place-based resentment utilized in this study, we are able to parse out unique variation in outcomes that each of these predispositions explains. We are not suggesting that race did not matter for vote choice or that some rural (or urban, or suburban) residents are not racist, or that some were not primarily motivated by race when supporting a particular candidate. However, when averaged over levels of racial resentment, a statistically significant and substantively robust relationship between vote choice and place-based resentment would suggest that place is operating as a distinct identity, separate from one's own racial hostility or the fact that most rural communities are overwhelmingly white.

Results: Vote Choice in the 2018 Midterms. All models were fitted to a binary-probit linear specification where the dependent variable took on a value of 1 if the respondent voted for the Democratic candidate in each of the 2018 midterm races the CCES measured: U.S. House, U.S. Senate, and state governor. Not every individual lives in a state where there was a gubernatorial or Senate election in 2018, although we conclude that this selection is unrelated to the underlying process of creating place-based resentment, because no strong regional differences emerged in our descriptive analysis of where these elections took place in 2018.

Each of the dichotomous dependent variables was then regressed on a normalized measure of place-based resentment, which was interacted with an ordered categorical measure indicating where the respondent lives along the urban-rural continuum. The interaction term captures variability in the effect of place-based resentment among self-identifying urbanites, suburbanites, and ruralites. Given that interaction term in the model, we present the results of the marginal effect of place-based resentment.

Across the three elections, the models indicate strong evidence to confirm our hypothesis, although the results are not completely conclusive. Place-based resentment predicts electoral outcomes in the U.S. House, Senate, and gubernatorial contests, but only among the rural subset of the American population (Figure 3). Moreover, given the limiting nature of the Senate and gubernatorial contests (just 61.3 percent of the sample voted for a Senate candidate, and 51 percent of the sample voted for governor), these results, while confirmatory, are nevertheless limited by the ungeneralizable nature of the contests held in the 2018 midterms.[9] (Table 2)

Taking a closer look at the U.S. House and Senate elections, rural resentment predicted vote choice against Democratic candidates across the country. Going from the lowest levels of rural resentment to the highest, there was a 13.5 point decrease in the probability of voting for the Democratic House candidate ($p = 0.05$) and a 48.6 point decrease of voting for the Democratic Senate candidate ($p = 0.000$). In comparison, racial resentment is associated with an 18.8 percentage point decrease in the probability of voting for Democratic candidates in U.S. Senate elections among rural identifiers ($p = 0.000$). The outsize influence of place resentment in U.S. Senate elections relative to U.S. House elections may be due to the vastly larger sums of money that U.S. Senate elections garner and how that excess money translates into heightened levels of voter exposure to campaign related communications across various media. Much of this spending (even more so than in U.S. House races) from one state to another is on behalf of the national parties and aligned groups that are likely drawing on the same standardized tactics and strategies that tap into place resentments in similar fashion throughout the country.[10]

Place resentment also predicts opposition to Democratic candidates in the 36 gubernatorial contests held in 2018. As with the U.S. House and Senate elections, higher levels of rural resentment were associated with a 45.6 percentage point decrease in the probability of voting for a Democrat ($p = 0.01$). Moreover, a strong linear relationship exists among different places across the three elections, and while no statistically distinguishable relationship exists among urbanites, point estimates are positive in the state-wide contests. This hints at the possibility, although it does not confirm, that higher levels of urban
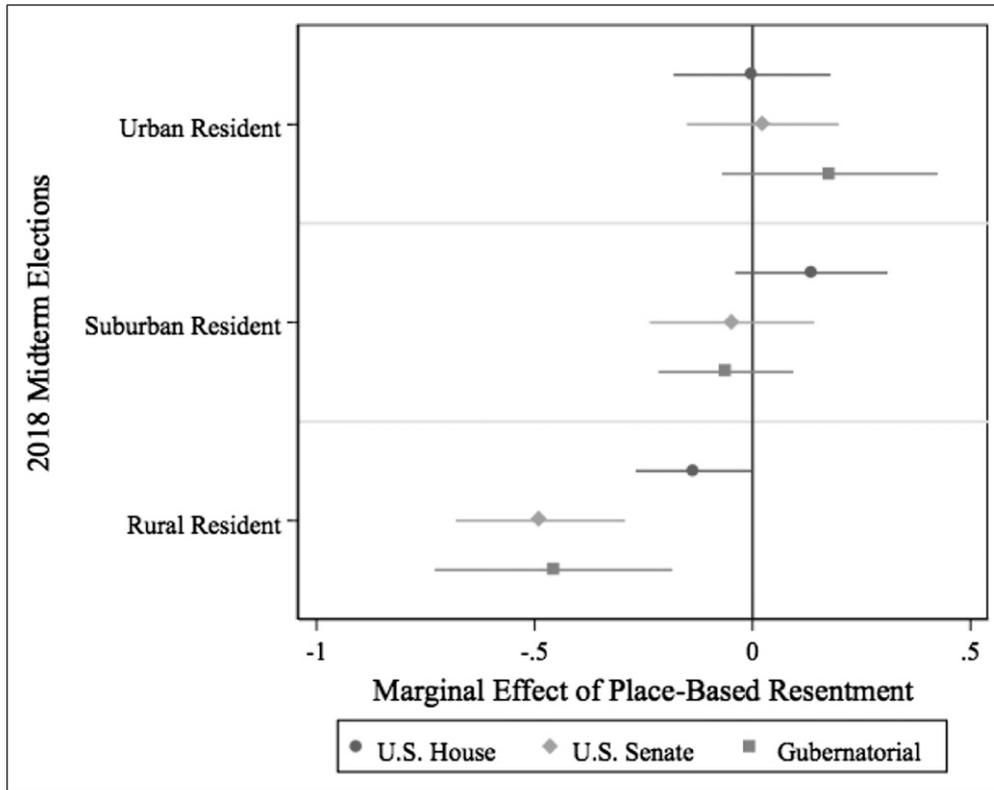
Figure 3. Marginal effect of place-consciousness on 2018 midterm elections. *Note:* The marginal effect of place-based resentment on supporting a Democratic candidate in each of the three races is plotted by respondent's place of residence. 95% confidence intervals are mapped on top of each point estimate. Survey weights applied.

Table 2. Marginal Effect of Place-Based Resentment on Voting Democratic in 2018.

Place of residence	2018 U.S. House		2018 U.S. Senate		2018 Governorships	
	$\frac{\delta y}{\delta x}$	95% confidence interval	$\frac{\delta y}{\delta x}$	95% confidence interval	$\frac{\delta y}{\delta x}$	95% confidence interval
Urban	−0.001	[−0.181, 0.179]	0.024	[−0.150, 0.198]	0.177	[−0.069, 0.424]
Suburban	0.135	[−0.039, 0.310]	−0.047	[−0.236, 0.141]	−0.061	[−0.216, 0.094]
Rural	−0.135	[−0.267, −0.002]	−0.486	[−0.680, −0.292]	−0.456	[−0.729, −0.184]
	N = 568	$R^2 = 0.80$	N =438	$R^2 = 0.80$	N = 450	$R^2 = 0.77$

resentment are associated with an increased probability of voting Democratic.

Study 3: Place Resentment and Vote Choice in the 2020 Congressional Elections

In Study 3, we model the relationship between place resentment and vote choice in the 2020 congressional elections. Doing so allows us to the determine whether and to what extent the relationship between place resentment and vote choice that we observed in the 2018 midterm elections (Study 2) held in the 2020 general

election. To study this relationship, we utilize survey data from a nationally representative sample of roughly 3,100 respondents recruited via Lucid in early November of 2020. Instead of "Theroem," which contains a limited number of panels available for academic research at a fixed price, we accessed Lucid's larger marketplace available for corporate accounts. There, we set regional-specific quotas, interlocking age and sex, and increased our cost of interview paid for harder to reach populations. As with the other two samples, we developed post-estimate weights to balance our sample across the 2019 American Community Survey
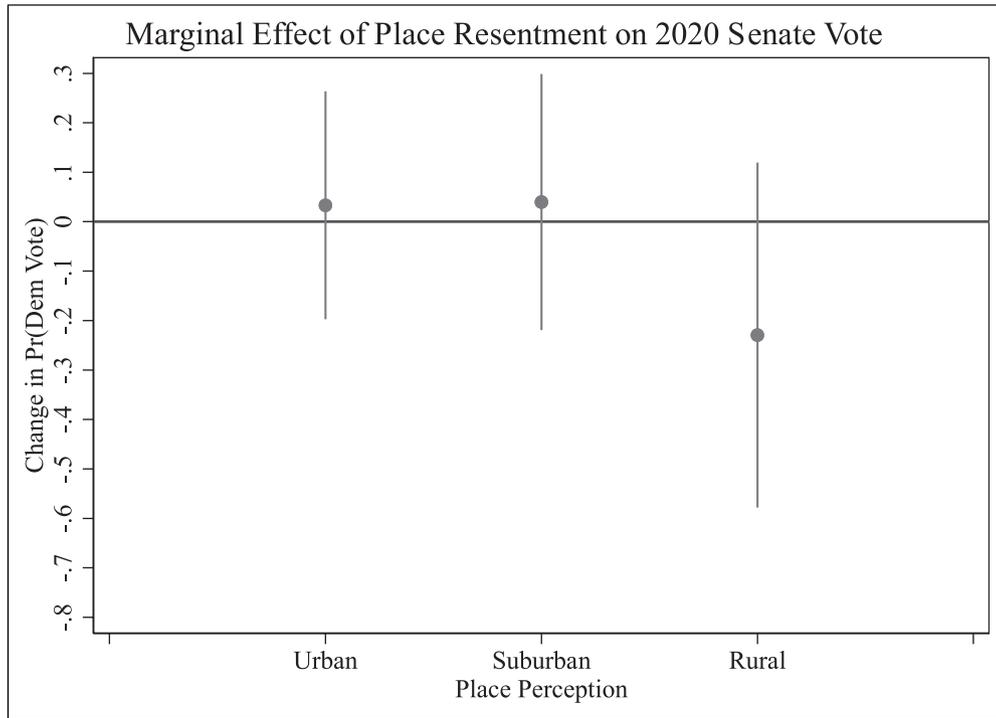
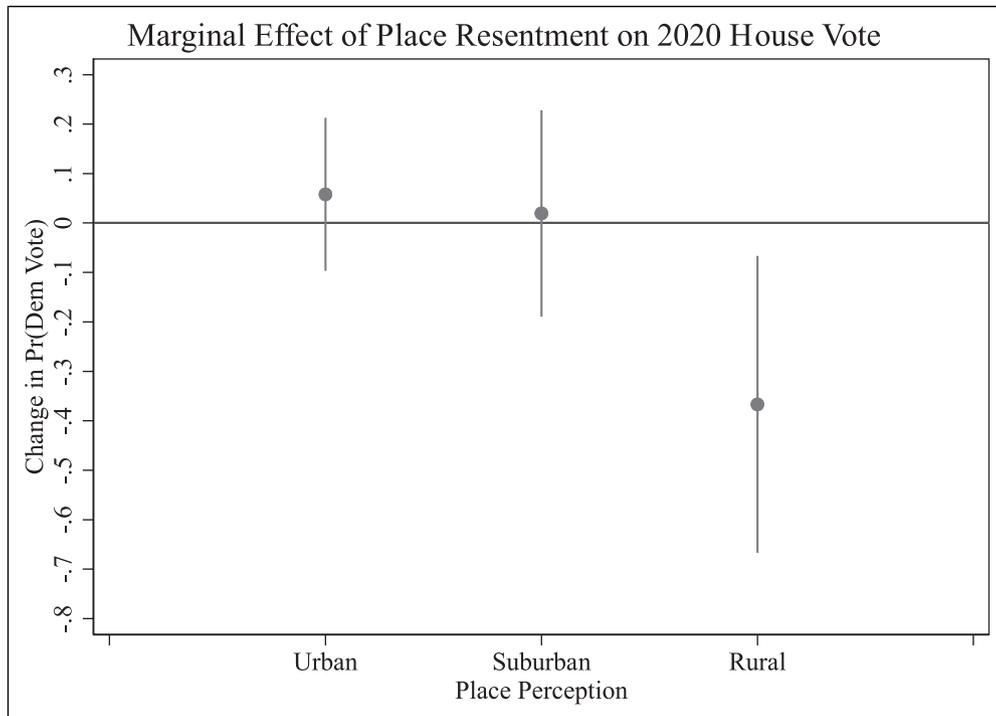**Figure 4.** Place-resentment and vote choice in 2020 U.S. House races.

Figure 5. Place-resentment and vote choice in 2020 U.S. Senate races.

estimates for age, sex, region, and race. With the exception of sexism attitudes, we control for the same list of potential confounders that we did in the 2018 model discussed above.

To determine the relationship between place resentment and vote choice in the various U.S. House and U.S. Senate contests during the 2020 general election, we estimate a logistic regression model largely identical to the model utilized in Study 2. In this study, we randomly conditioned the question wording among suburbanites; half responded to questions about rural power, while the other half responded to questions about urban power. There was no substantive difference in how suburbanites responded compared to study 2. Results indicate that, among rural identifiers, place resentment predicts voting against Democratic congressional candidates running for the U.S. House (see Figure 4). In keeping with results from our 2018 midterms model (study 2), place resentment is not a significant predictor of vote choice among non-rural respondents, however. We observe a similar pattern when considering vote choice in U.S. Senate contests, although neither coefficient is statistically significant (Figure 5). These results suggest that rural resentment persisted as a significant explanatory in the two most recent congressional elections and, therefore, is likely an important component of the emergent urban-rural divide in American politics.

Discussion and Conclusion

Americans have always been divided—a consequence of the country's extraordinary racial, political, and economic diversity. Yet, scholars disagree on whether the public is actually polarized, or if it is just better "sorted" into the two parties (Levendusky 2009). We are interested in the very literal sorting of dispositions across space, based upon the division of individuals into different types of communities across the country, especially as these geographic distinctions are growing starker (Hopkins 2017; Kinsella, McTague, and Raleigh 2015; Lang and Pearson-Merkowitz 2015; Rodden 2019; cf. Abrams and Fiorina 2012). Economic opportunity is highly stratified by region, and within particular states (Pew 2012). Rural America continues to grow older, poorer, and sicker— urban America wealthier and more diverse. These stark material divisions have contributed to partisan schisms, as individuals increasingly live in places that are politically homogenous. A consequence of this is that, as Bishop (2009) concludes, Americans "have become so ideologically inbred that we don't know, can't understand, and can barely conceive of 'those people' who live just a few miles away" (40).

These demographic trends implicate a variety of political phenomenon, and previous research has shown the ways in which place-consciousness has filtered some peoples' world-views. This article builds off of these prodigious insights and extends the theoretical framework on place-based attitudes by considering the influence of place resentment with recent electoral politics. Our data point to several new insights, including the continued relevance of place-based resentment among rural voters in the 2018 and 2020 elections, and outside of presidential election contests. In addition, we find variation across different elections that is reflective of the contests' differing geographic scales. We conclude that Americans are members of multiple places, not just neighborhoods and states, and that place-based animus fluctuates with the geographic context of the election. Furthermore, given the allowable modeling strategies, we have more fully distinguished place-based resentment from other predictive predispositions, most significantly, racial resentment. While racial resentment drove much of the 2018 and 2020 election results, we find that place exists as a distinct cognitive construct, and accounts for variation separate from that explained by racial attitudes, net other confounders such as partisanship and education.

Prior research has found that place-based considerations appear to be more consequential to rural voters than to urban and suburban voters (Jacobs and Munis 2019; Jacobs and Munis 2020; Lyons and Utych 2021). Our results, which show that place resentment was only consistently predictive of vote choice for rural voters in 2018 and 2020, adds more evidence that this is the case. While it is impossible to be certain, given the nascent state of the literature on this topic, clues as to why rural voters are seemingly uniquely motivated by place resentment can be identified in place-specific studies, and existing experimental research. Namely, evidence suggests that politicians are more likely to explicitly appeal to rural voters on the basis of place and to greater effect, largely because of narratives that emphasize rural America's decline (Cramer 2016; Jacobs and Munis 2019). However, there are clear avenues through which urban resentment could be channeled. Recent emphasis placed on the disproportionate voting power of "rural states" in the Electoral College is orthogonal to animosities over urban America's disparate political influence and anti-rural stereotypes (e.g., "those backward hicks") have long been pervasive in America and many other Western societies (e.g., Eriksson 2010; Gimpel and Karnes 2006). While not predictive of vote choice, our results show that urban Americans are thinking about rural areas in a negative sense, and we find evidence that this is a significant predictor of the intensity of affection toward the Democratic Party.

On a related note, our findings add further validation to the centrally important insight of Gimpel et al. (2020) and provide strong evidence that there is, in fact, a distinctly

geographic component that contributes to the urban-rural divide. In other words, the urban-rural divide is not simply an artifact of compositional differences between urban and rural communities. It is not wholly an epiphenomenon. While we do not deny that compositional differences are a large part of the story (indeed, our results show clearly that they are), we do stress that they are not the whole story. Consequently, any argument about compositional differences between urban and rural areas must interrogate the influence of geographic *attitudes*, alongside other markers of group identity. Place resentment, or rural resentment more specifically, appears to be a powerful explanatory factor in understanding the urban-rural divide that now so strikingly characterizes American politics, beyond the fact that rural areas are simply whiter, older, and more likely to have Republican partisans.

Naturally, several limitations apply to the current study. First, it should be noted that our findings buttress recent research on the nationalization of American politics (Hopkins 2018) as well as the mass social sorting of America's political parties (Mason 2018). This impressive body of literature amasses an array of data to support the idea that context increasingly matters less in American politics. It is noteworthy that we find a generalizable (nationalized) attitude among rural voters and support for Republican Party politics. This is reflective of recent trends in American partisanship and the growing social and ideological coherence of the two major parties. Our findings which that geographic attitudes stemming from geographic identities suggest the geographic identity should be considered as part of the social sorting framework (Mason 2018). Geographic communities are not simply bins filled with varying shares of different types of people—they serve as a meaningful basis for social identification, ingroup bias, and outgroup resentment. Regarding nationalization, in an era where candidates from both parties might have been able to more clearly distinguish themselves from national party reputations, resentment might not have held its predictive power, as modeled in this paper.

Furthermore, the data here do not fully flesh out the sources of resentment—whether they are highly conditional to the specific campaign and news environment (which has nationalized), or whether they are a more inherent feature in a democratic polity still defined by federalism, territorial elections, and strong regional variation. More work is clearly needed, especially in teasing out how place-based resentment varies in subnational political contexts, such as intra-state urban-rural divides, and regional variation in place-based consciousness. Finally, some readers might take issue with the operationalization of suburban resentment in this paper, since we specified urbanites as the outgroup; theoretically, suburbanites might simultaneously feel resentment to rural residents as well. Ideally, experimental work with varied question wording between rural and urban outgroups could help future researchers identify the source and target or suburban-consciousness. Similarly, future work should examine the extent to which urbanites harbor resentment toward suburbs and the political ramifications of those feelings; again, experimental variation in place-based messaging would allow researchers to draw these types of distinctions.

Notwithstanding these potential reservations, our results provide a pathway forward to better understand the full set of attitudes and emotions that have contributed to recent political developments. To the extent that leaders play upon these divisions, place-based resentment is another dimension of the affective partisan and ideological polarization that defines the current era of American politics. Indeed, as these attitudes translate to competing policy proposals and disparate partisan support, it is likely that the relevance of place-based resentment to American politics will increase, even as technological advances "flatten" the country's social network. Resentment captures feelings of grievance as well as jealousy that Americans feel toward places unlike their own. Yet, an individual's "sense of place" is also deeply implicated in that changing political structure. Rural resentment—and potentially suburban and urban resentment—is a hallmark of growing populist discontent in the American public. Nationalization is not just a description of a temporal political process; it quite possibly—and paradoxically—contributes to an individual's sense of place-based resentment. Future research should recognize the fact that Americans continue to think in highly spatial ways, as evidenced here. But it is concerning to think about how these place-based identities intersect with documented trends of governmental centralization or political nationalization, which often fail to take these powerful identities into account.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. For the purpose of our analysis, we collapsed the "town" and "rural" distinctions. In our sample, approximately 13.55 percent of respondents indicated that they lived in a "town," while 18.78 percent of respondents reported living in a "rural area." The CCES provides no guidance for specifying the distinction between town and rural areas, although a post-hoc analysis of respondent ZIP codes reveals that "town" respondents were much closer to "rural" respondents than "urban" respondents; see pages 11 and 12 in the Appendix for details.

2. Internal consistency of the measure is satisfactory in each of our samples. On the 2018 CCES survey, we use a truncated version of the measure as recommended by previous research (Munis 2020). The Cronbach's alpha for measure utilized in the 2018 CCES survey data= 0.67, whereas the value was equal to 0.86 in the 2019 Lucid data and 0.84 in the 2020 Lucid data). In each dataset, responses were summed to create an additive index, which was then normalized on a scale of 0 to 1.

3. Historically, the suburbs were defined by what they were not: cities. Indeed, suburbs were initially attractive to many precisely because they were not cities (Phillips 1969). That said, many suburbanites today (perhaps even a majority) are lifelong suburbanites—after all, American residential mobility has largely been in continuous decline since 1950 (Frost 2020). With that said, to the extent that Americans are moving, most Americans who move (and who switch community type) move to the suburbs. Indeed, between the years 2000 and 2014, cities and rural areas both posted net domestic population loss (−5.4% for urban areas and −1% for rural areas) whereas the suburbs posted net domestic migration gains of +6.4% (Pew 2018).

4. We acknowledge, however, that suburban identity as well as the political-geographic attitudes that might stem from it are likely quite complicated (likely more so even than those of urbanites and ruralites). We believe that more research directly investigating the politics of the suburbs is needed.

5. Importantly, a strong case can be made for each of these variables being associated with both our independent variable of interest (place resentment) and our various dependent measures that we investigate.

6. Lucid is a relatively new firm facilitating academic surveys. However, Lucid provides researchers access to panels that yield high quality, nationally representative data. In a recent **[AQ8]** validation study, Coppock and McClellan (2019) find that Lucid results track well with high quality samples well-regarded by the political science community, including the American National Election Study (ANES), Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP), and Survey Sampling International (SSI).

7. For the sake of space, interaction models using only the full 10 item measure are discussed here. Findings do not diverge in any noteworthy way when using the 5 item or 4 item measures.

8. The racial resentment battery on the CCES follows the standard four-question measure (CC18_422e-g), from which we construct an additive index, normalized on a scale of 0–1.

9. In our alternative specification that drops suburbanites, we find statistically significant relationships between vote choice in the governor's race and place-based resentment. Furthermore, the relationship is strongly moderated by resident place, with urbanites more likely to vote Democratic the more place-resentful they are, while rural identifiers are less likely to vote Democratic the more place-conscious they are.

10. For example, see Soo Rin Kim and Kendall Karson, "Out-of-state contributions dominate high-dollar fundraising in top Senate races," ABC News, July 16, 2020. Also compare U.S. House vs. U.S. Senate out-of-state fundraising percentages to see that U.S. Senators raise a far higher percentage than U.S. House members: https://www.opensecrets.org/elections-overview/in-state-vs-out-of-state

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