

# The Brookings Institution

Metropolitan Policy Program  
Alan Berube, Research Director



## Finding Exurbia

North American Regional Science Council  
Toronto, ON  
November 17, 2006

# Pictures at an Exurb-ition

Courtesy: Singer Studios





# Outline

Background

Existing research

Conceptual model and methodology

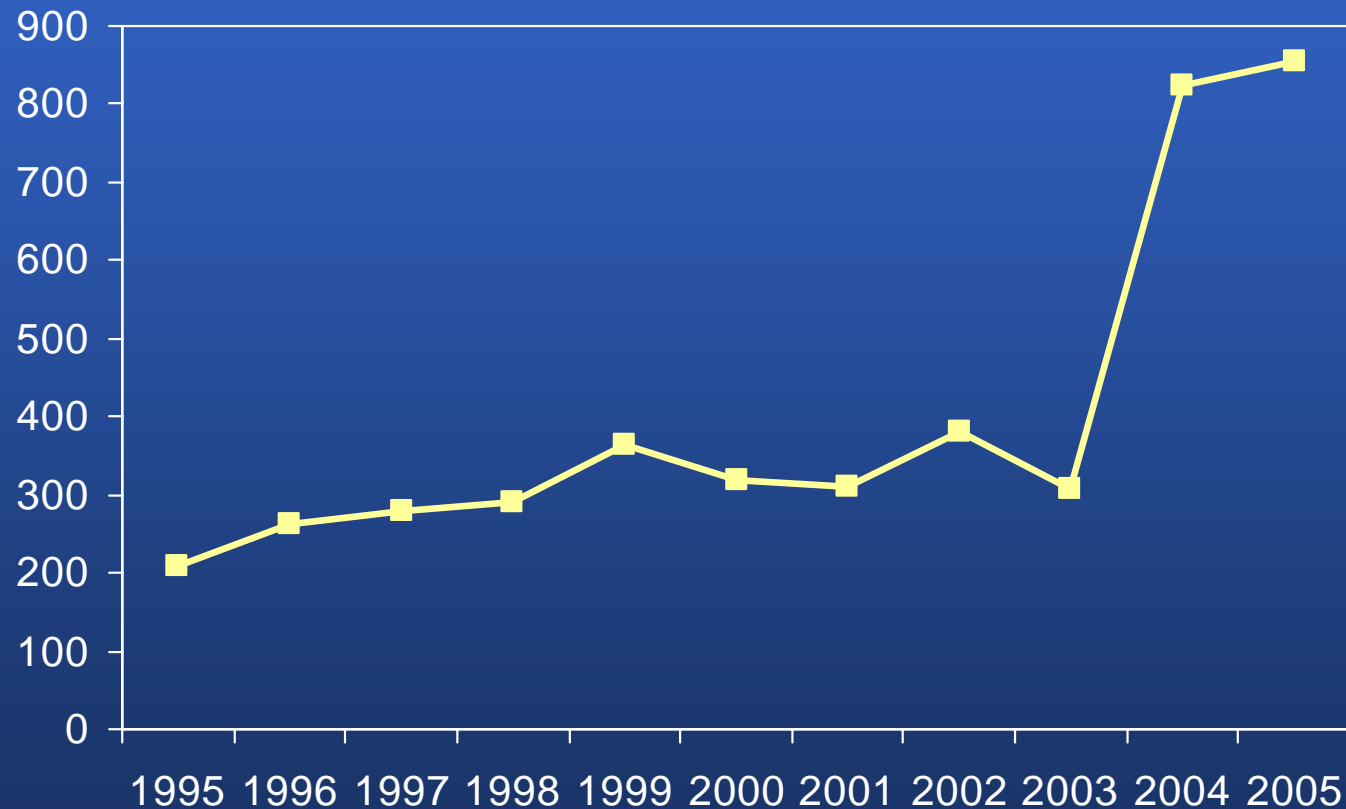
Results—extent of exurbia and its characteristics

Discussion

# The growing popular interest in “exurbs” in the United States gave rise to our research

Citations for “exurbs,”  
“exurbia,” or “exurban”  
in U.S. newspapers,  
1995-2005

Source: Nexis





# In the DC region, the exurbs seem to be everywhere

Emmitsburg Losing Its Country Pace (5/9/04)

New Suburbia Growing in Howard County (7/24/04)

Officials Fear Spread of Gang Activity Into Washington's Exurbs (5/15/05)

Frederick Democrats Vote Down Dougherty (9/14/05)

Departing Twenty-Somethings Leave a Lonely Void in Calvert (10/24/05)

Security Issue Paramount in Virginia's Exurbs (10/31/05)

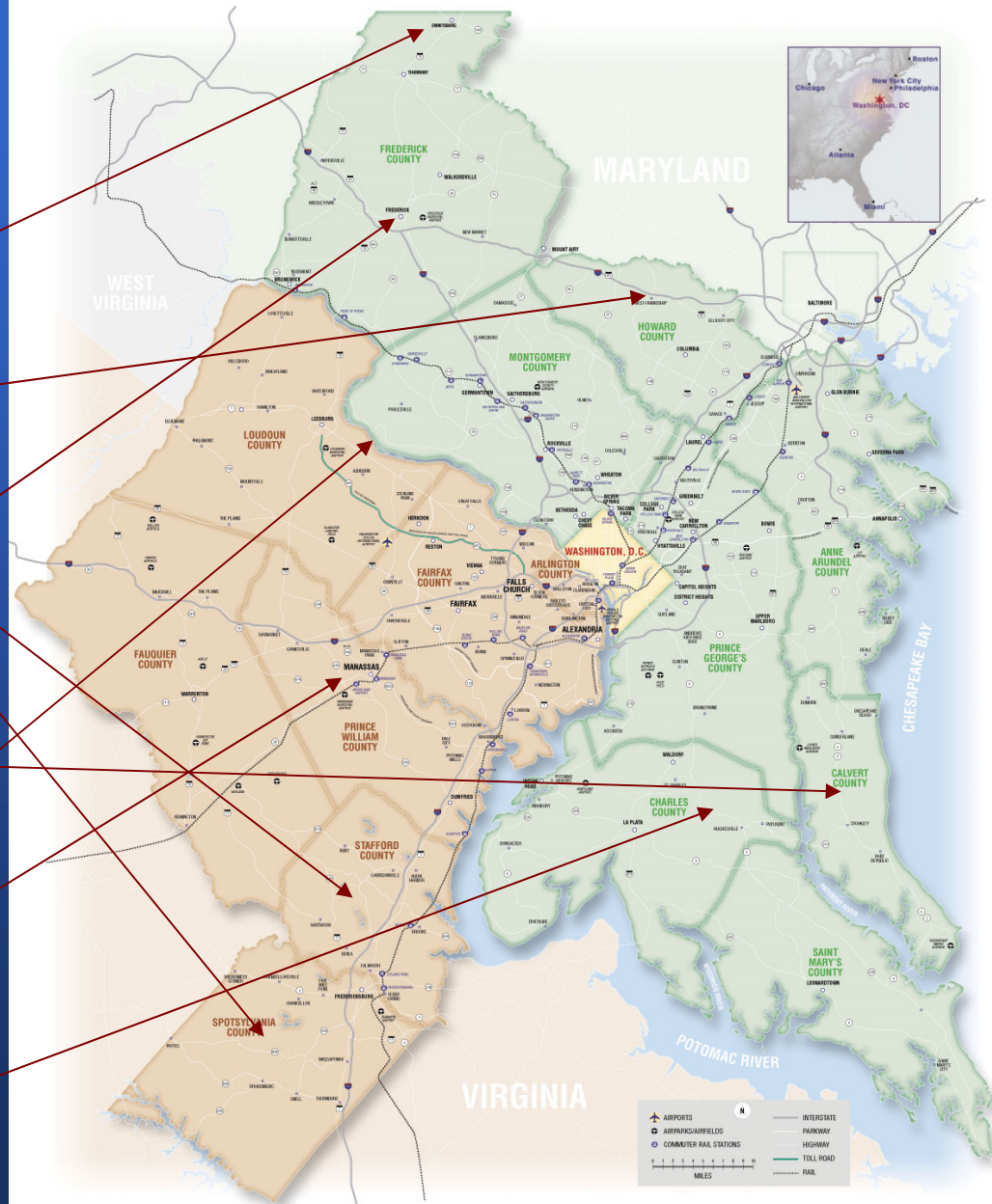
Exurbanites Occupy an Unsettled Place in Virginia Politics (10/24/05)

Broadband Crawling Its Way to Exurbs (5/23/05)

Source: Washington Post

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## GREATER WASHINGTON REGIONAL MAP



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# What are our goals with this study?

1. Clarify the notion of exurbs in the public realm
2. Develop finer-grained spatial distinctions in forthcoming demographic work (beyond “suburbs”)
3. Contribute to alternative conceptions/definitions of exurbia in the literature
4. Bolster policy analysis—how should regions think about and deal with exurban development?
5. Examine relevance of these places for electoral politics





## How have others looked at “exurbia?”

### *The residence of “exurbanites”*

- Sectorsky (1955); Gersh (2004)
- Outer suburbs housing specific demographic groups

### *Outer part of metropolitan orbit*

- Lamb (1983); Blumenfeld (1986); Nelson (1992)
- Counties and places within specified distance of metropolitan core

### *People living in rural parts of the metropolitan area*

- Davis and Nelson (1994); Nelson/Sanchez (1997); Clark et al. (2006)
- Part of the metropolis but still rural

### *“Rurified” land in the path of metropolitan development*

- Theobald (2001); Irwin and Reece (2002); Nelson/Sanchez (2005); Wolman et al. (2005)
- Low density (population or housing) as primary characteristic



Literature, consultations, and fieldwork suggested to us three principles for this definitional exercise

1. *Places before people*

- Identify exurbs based on their characteristics as places, and then examine profile of their inhabitants

2. *Places we know*

- Too small—meaningless to casual observers and policymakers
- Too large—gloss over important development distinctions within areas

3. *Useful over time and space*

- Employ data likely to be available in future years
- Allow for possibility that exurbia is point-in-time condition



# Our conceptual model of exurbia: (1) Connection

*Exurbs are “ex” to some “urb”*




Need to exhibit some connection to a large urbanized area

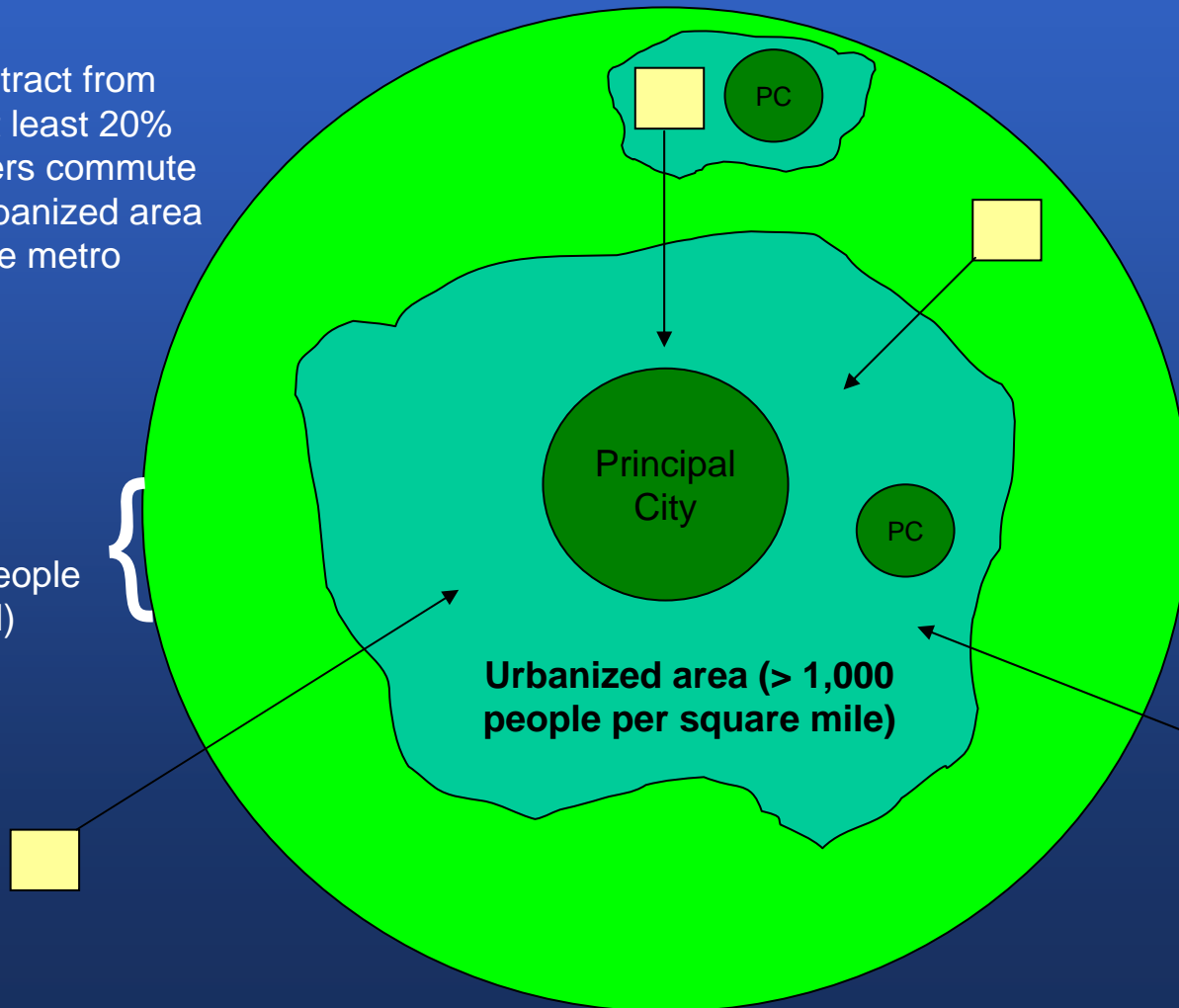
Should be outside the range normally considered “suburban”

Characteristic of development in large metropolitan areas

# Our technical model of exurbia: (1) Connection

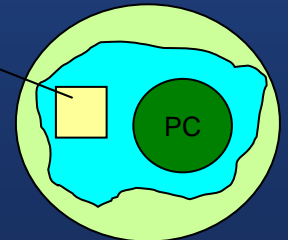
 Census tract from which at least 20% of workers commute to an urbanized area in a large metro

Metro area of at least 500,000 people in 2000 (88 total)



We employ USDA tabulations from the Census 2000 tract-to-tract commuting file to identify tracts with “exurban” commuting patterns

Micropolitan area





## Our conceptual model of exurbia: (2) Density

*Exurbs have a particular “look” to them*



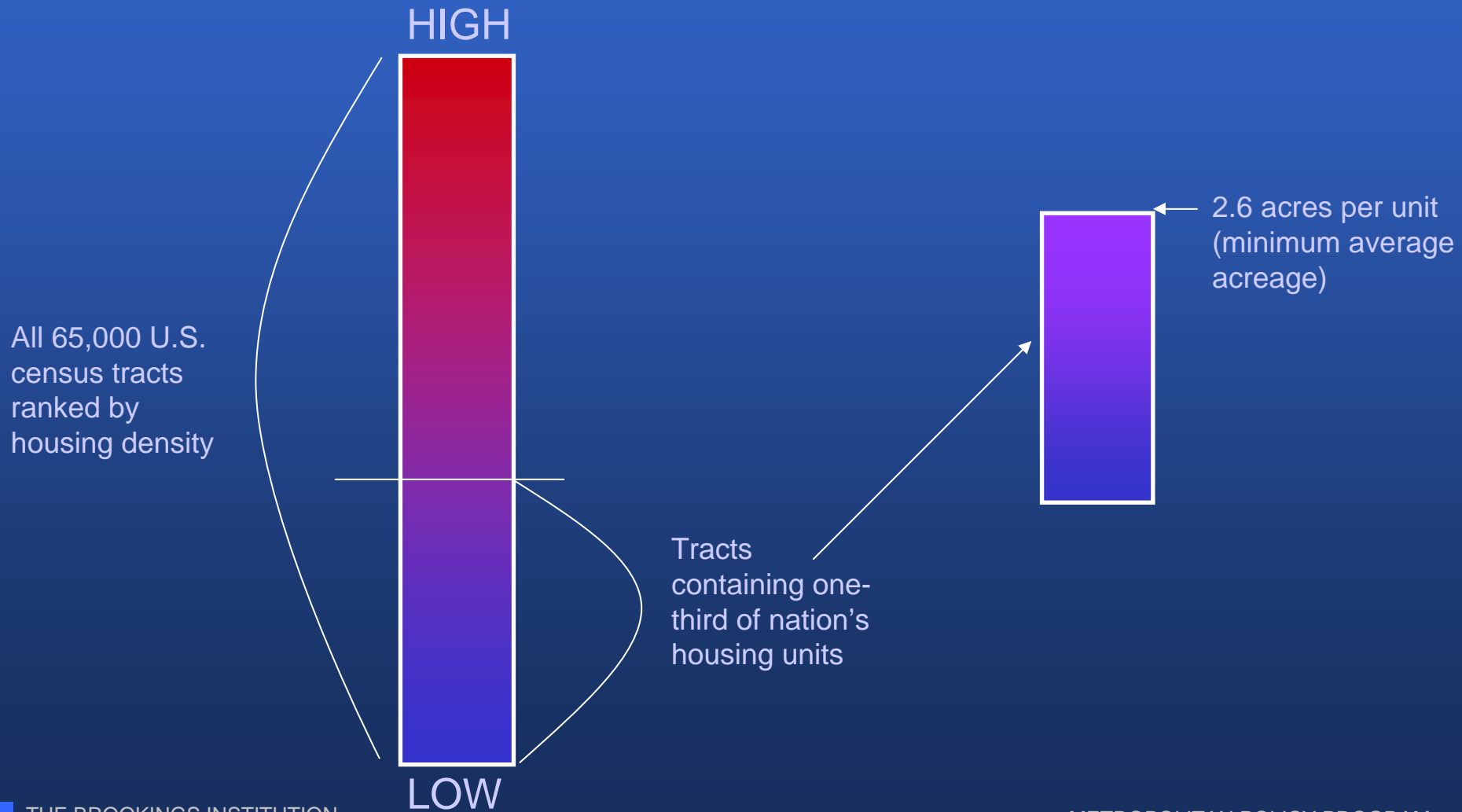
Density of housing, rather than population, defines the physical landscape

Low-density development marks exurbs

Longstanding rural towns may emerge as commuting sources for large cities and suburbs, but development impacts are quite different



## Our technical model of exurbia: (2) Density





## Our conceptual model of exurbia: (3) Growth

*Exurbs are “new” growth centers*



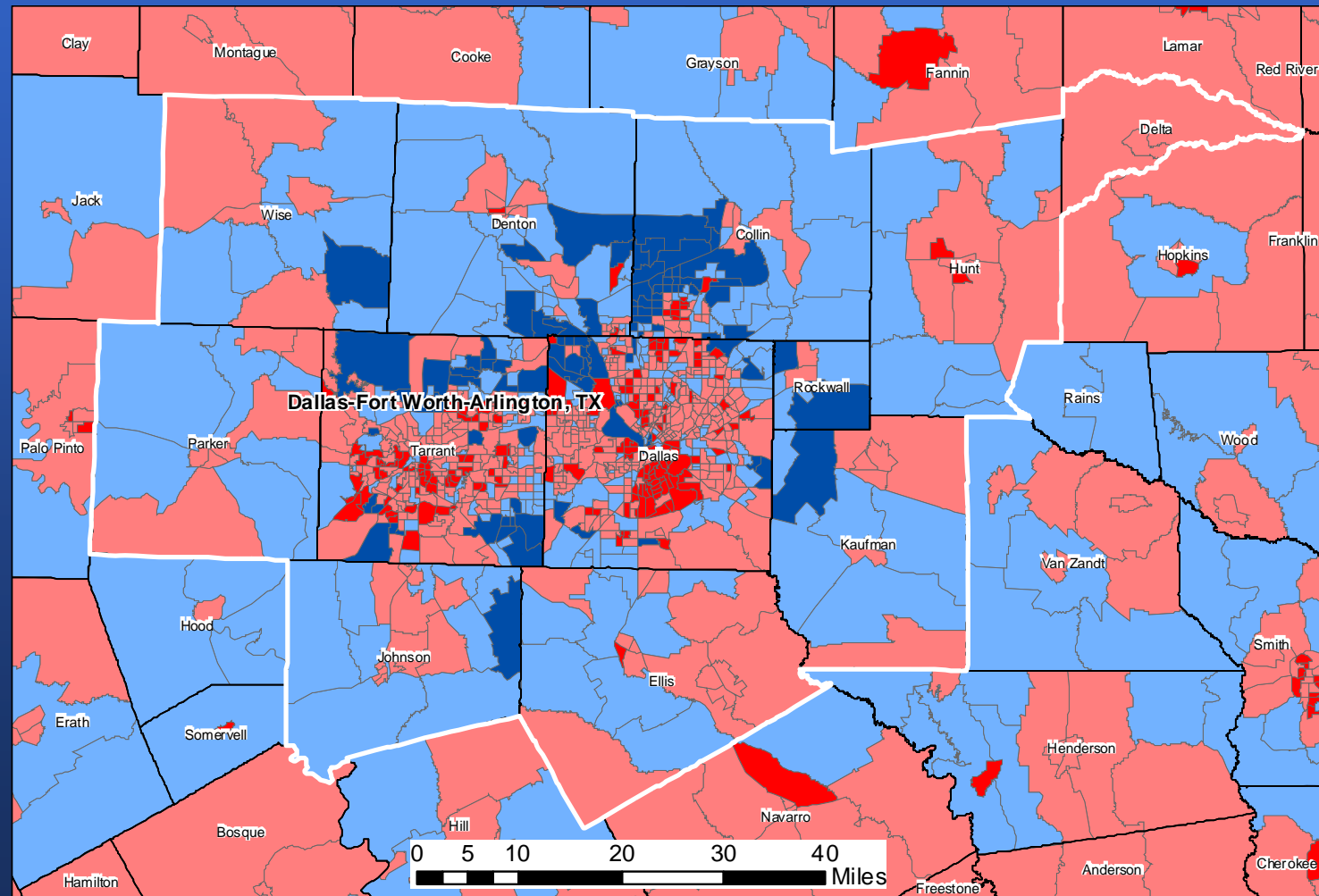
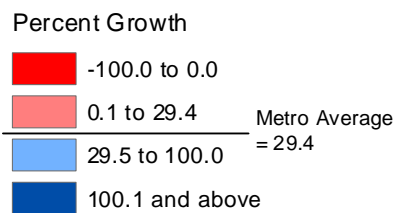
Places and areas themselves are not new, but much of their populations and housing are

Are growing at an above-average pace, sometimes from a small base

# Our technical model of exurbia: (3) Growth

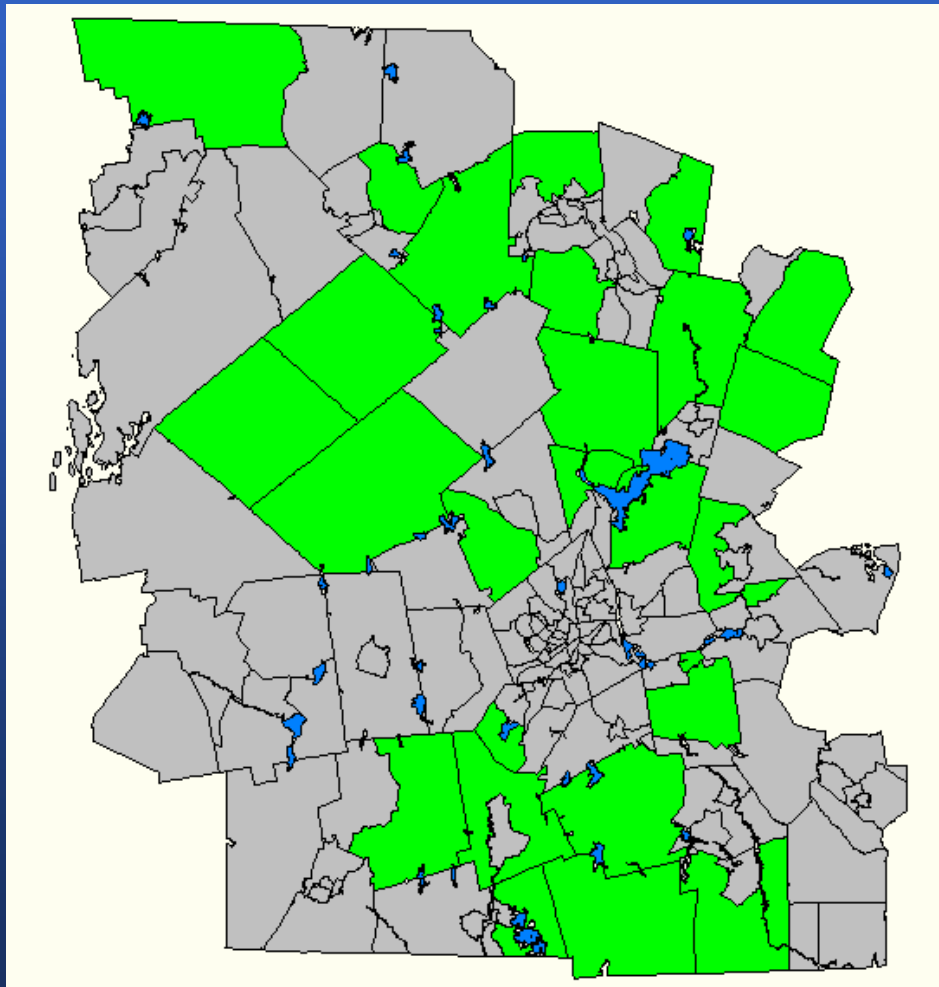
Population growth by census tract, 1990-2000, Dallas-Ft. Worth metro area

Qualifying tracts (in blue) grew faster than the metropolitan average





We first analyze the extent of exurbia at the census tract level, aggregating by region, state, and metro area



Exurban tracts must meet all three of the criteria: connection, density, and growth

Worcester County, MA

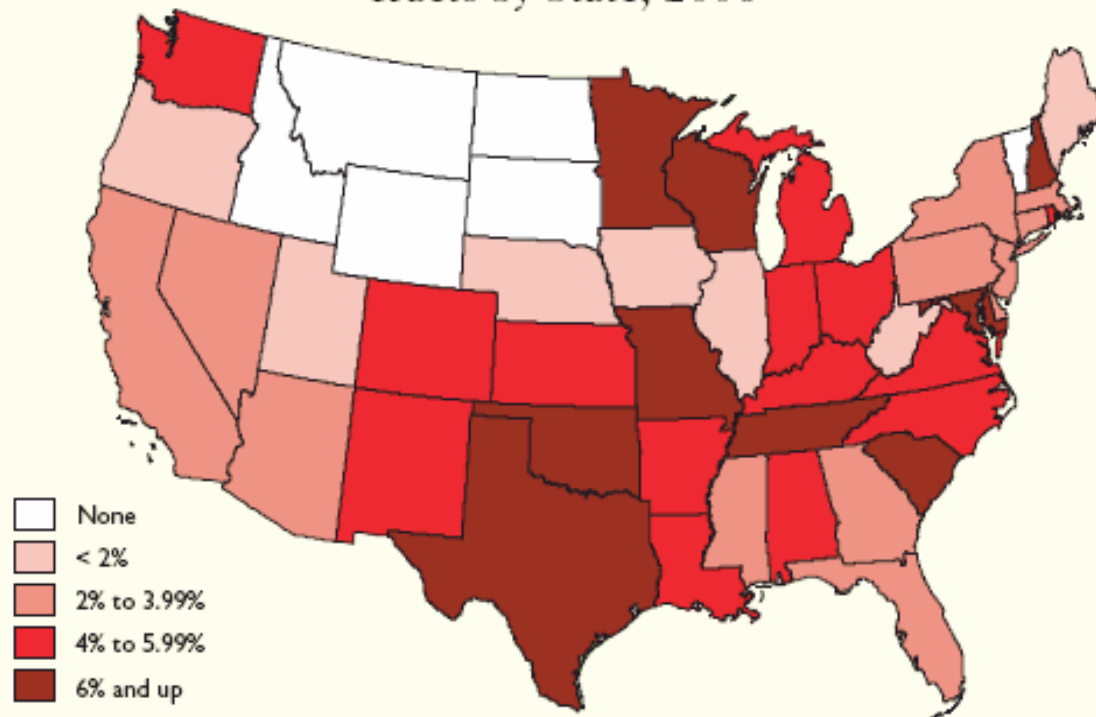
# 6 percent of large-metro residents live in exurbs; the South and Midwest are more exurban than the Northeast and the West

Census Division	Population in Exurban Tracts	% Large-Metro Pop in Exurban Tracts
New England	494,084	4.8
Middle Atlantic	1,005,709	3.1
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>1,499,793</b>	<b>3.5</b>
East North Central	1,790,439	6.7
West North Central	835,705	10.4
<b>Midwest</b>	<b>2,626,144</b>	<b>7.5</b>
South Atlantic	2,235,117	7.4
East South Central	922,158	16.9
West South Central	1,874,031	10.0
<b>South</b>	<b>5,031,306</b>	<b>9.3</b>
Mountain	554,883	5.6
Pacific	1,051,152	3.0
<b>West</b>	<b>1,606,035</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>10,763,278</b>	<b>6.1</b>

Source: Analysis of Census 2000 data

South Carolina has the largest share of its residents in exurban areas; Texas has the largest number of exurbanites

Figure 2. Percentage of Population Living in Exurban Census Tracts by State, 2000



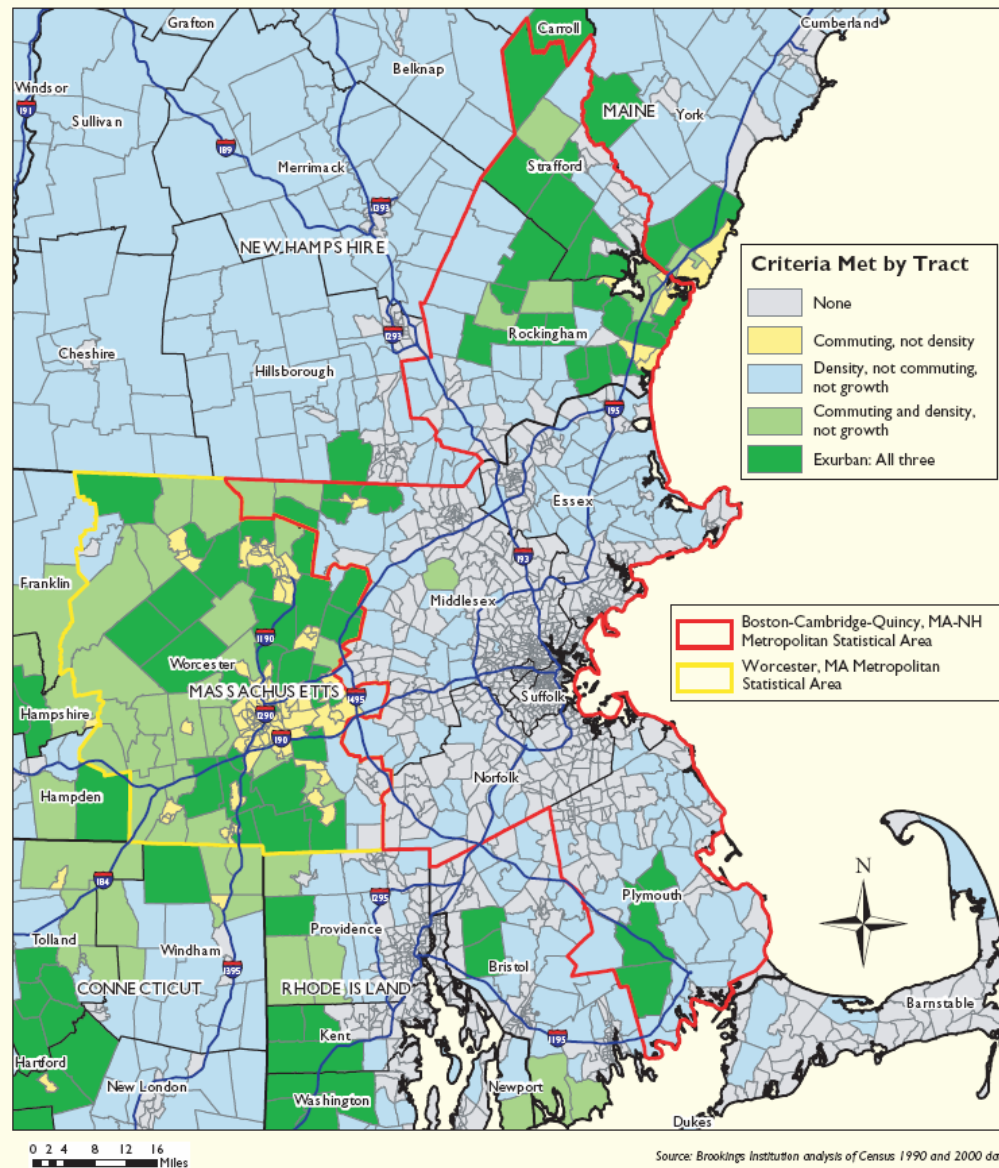
Source: Brookings Institution analysis of Census Bureau data

Note: Alaska has no exurban population, and less than 1 percent of Hawaii's population lives in exurbs

Highly exurban metros tend to be medium-sized (e.g., Knoxville) or satellites to nearby mega-metros (e.g. Poughkeepsie)

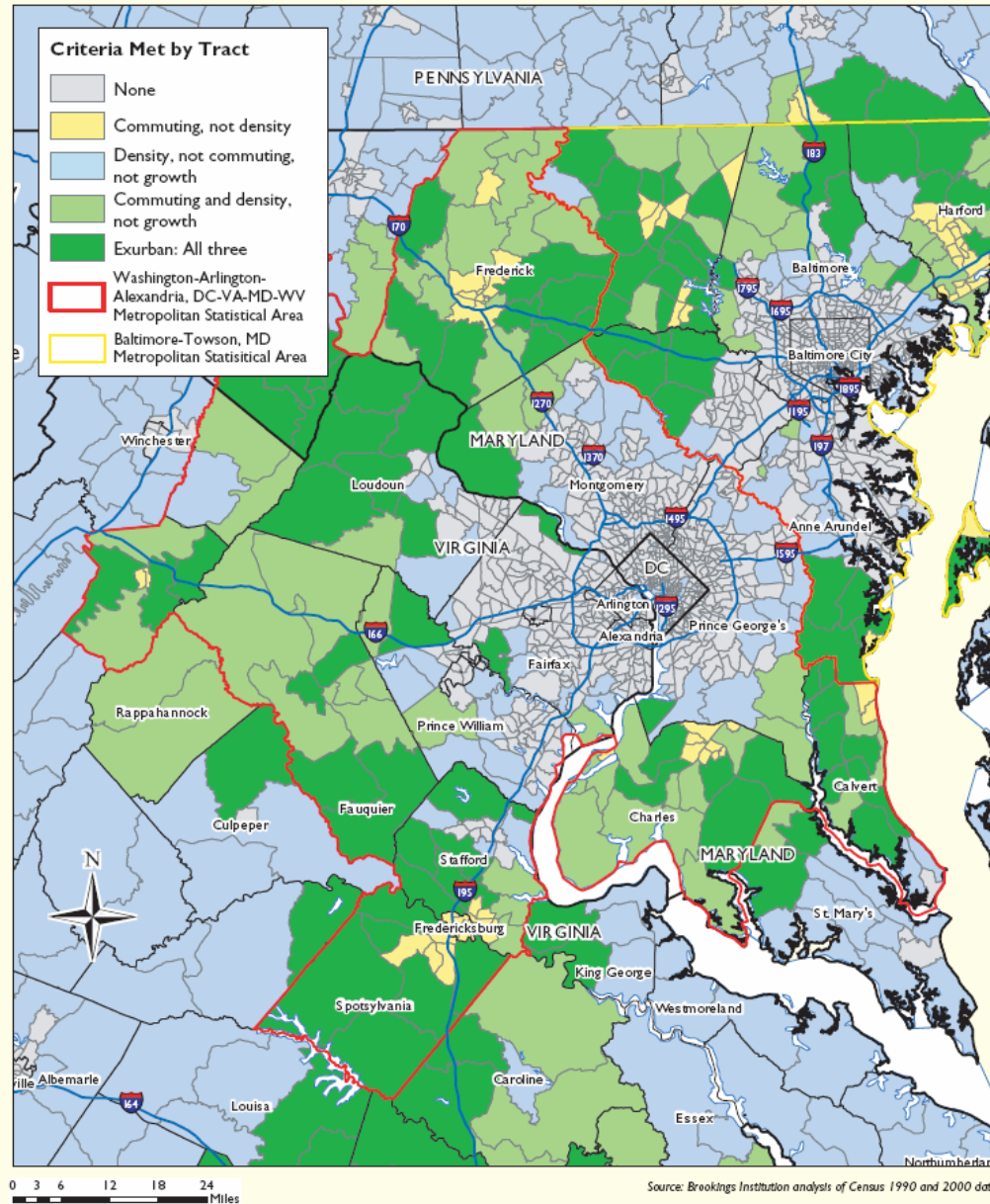
	Metro area	Population (2000)	Exurban population (2000)	% exurban (2000)
1	Poughkeepsie, NY	621,517	200,728	32.3%
2	Little Rock, AR	610,518	144,328	23.6%
3	Grand Rapids, MI	740,482	168,523	22.8%
4	Greenville, SC	559,940	123,734	22.1%
5	Madison, WI	501,774	110,127	21.9%
6	Birmingham, AL	1,052,238	224,129	21.3%
7	Knoxville, TN	616,079	129,497	21.0%
8	Worcester, MA	750,963	149,104	19.9%
9	Nashville, TN	1,311,789	253,100	19.3%
10	Austin, TX	1,249,763	221,611	17.7%

Map 1. Exurban Character of Census Tracts in the Greater Boston Area  
Based on Commuting Ties, Population Growth, and Housing Density



Greater Boston's exurbs extend into southeastern New Hampshire and through much of eastern Worcester County

Map 4. Exurban Character of Census Tracts in the Greater Washington Area  
Based on Commuting Ties, Population Growth, and Housing Density



Washington, D.C.'s exurbs are found on all sides of the region, in three different states





# What are people saying about exurban residents?

In one sense, these exurbs are just suburbs that take a longer time to drive to....With these, white flight has nothing to do with it. It's all housing prices.

--John Husing, CA

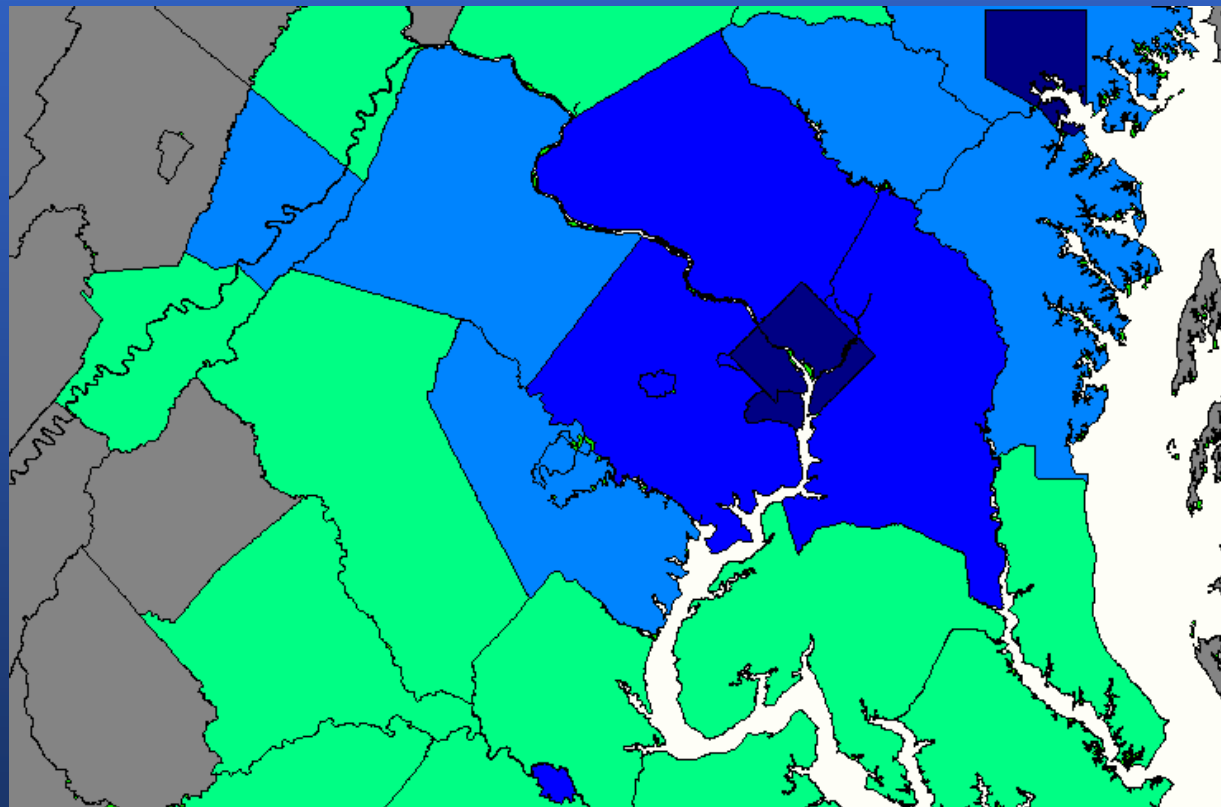
They are having three, four or more kids. Their personal identity is defined by parenthood. They are more spiritually, emotionally and physically invested in their homes than in any other sphere of life, having concluded that parenthood is the most enriching and elevating thing they can do.

--David Brooks [on exurban “natalists”]

The importance of exurbs to Republicans is less well known, but equally striking. When people move to these areas, they tend to start voting Republican by significant margins.

--Mark Gersh, NCEC

We go on to classify counties within large metropolitan areas for comparative demographic analysis



**Urban county**—highly urbanized AND contains largest city/cities in metro

**Inner suburban county**—either highly urbanized OR contains largest city/cities

**Outer suburban county**—metro counties not otherwise classified

**Exurban county**—at least 20% population lives in exurban tracts

Washington metro area and environs by county type

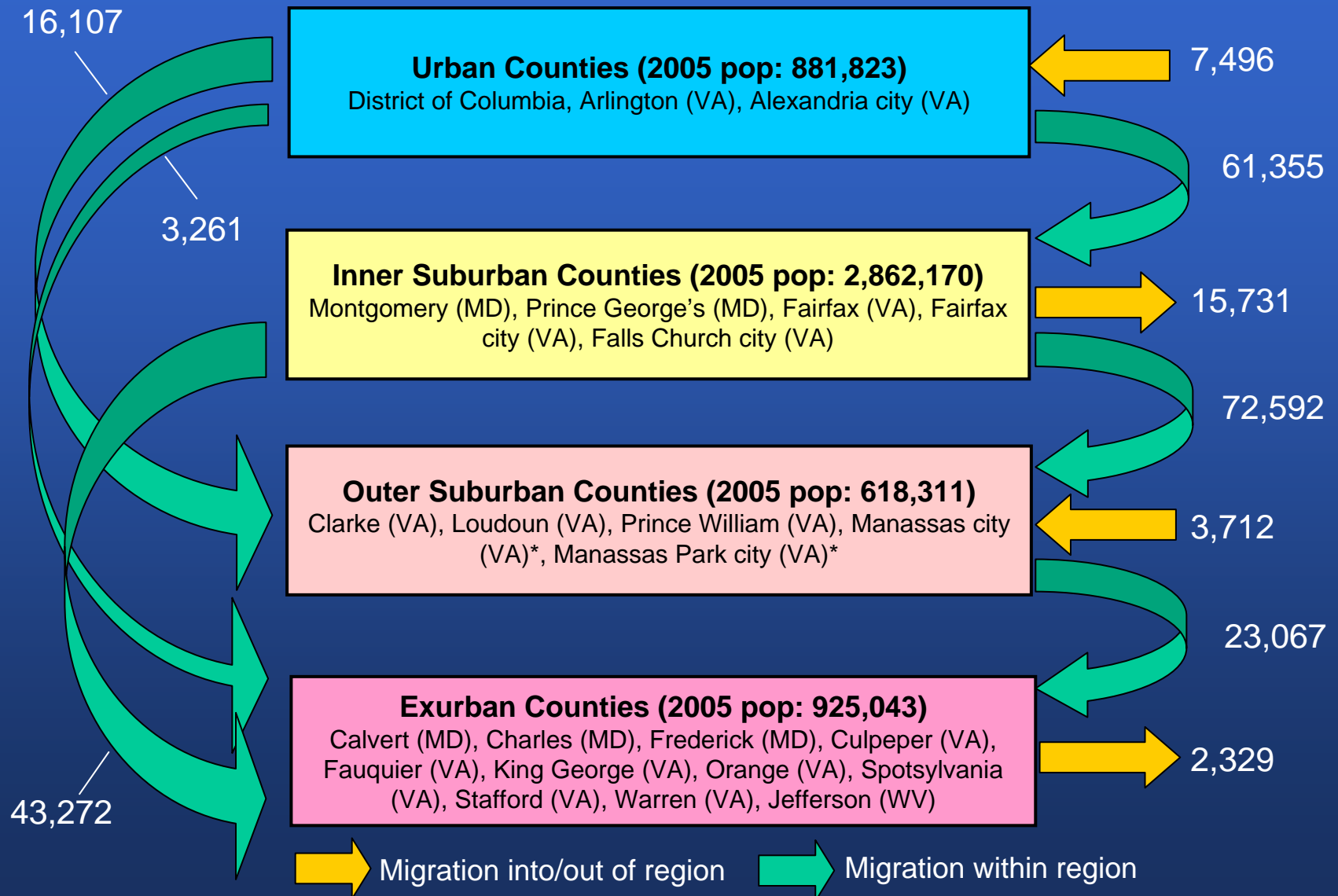


## Population growth: Exurbs do continue to grow faster than other metropolitan counties

County Type	Counties	Population 2000 (000s)	Population 2005 (000s)	Change 2000-2005 (000s)	% Change 2000-2005
Urban	40	44,279	45,582	1,303	2.9%
Inner Suburban	82	69,144	71,913	2,769	4.0%
Outer Suburban	211	50,638	55,178	4,540	9.0%
Exurban	245	14,454	16,227	1,773	12.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>178,515</b>	<b>188,900</b>	<b>10,385</b>	<b>5.8%</b>

Source: Analysis of Census Population Estimates Program data

# Exurbs in the DC region 2000-2004 gained population largely through in-migration from other metropolitan suburbs



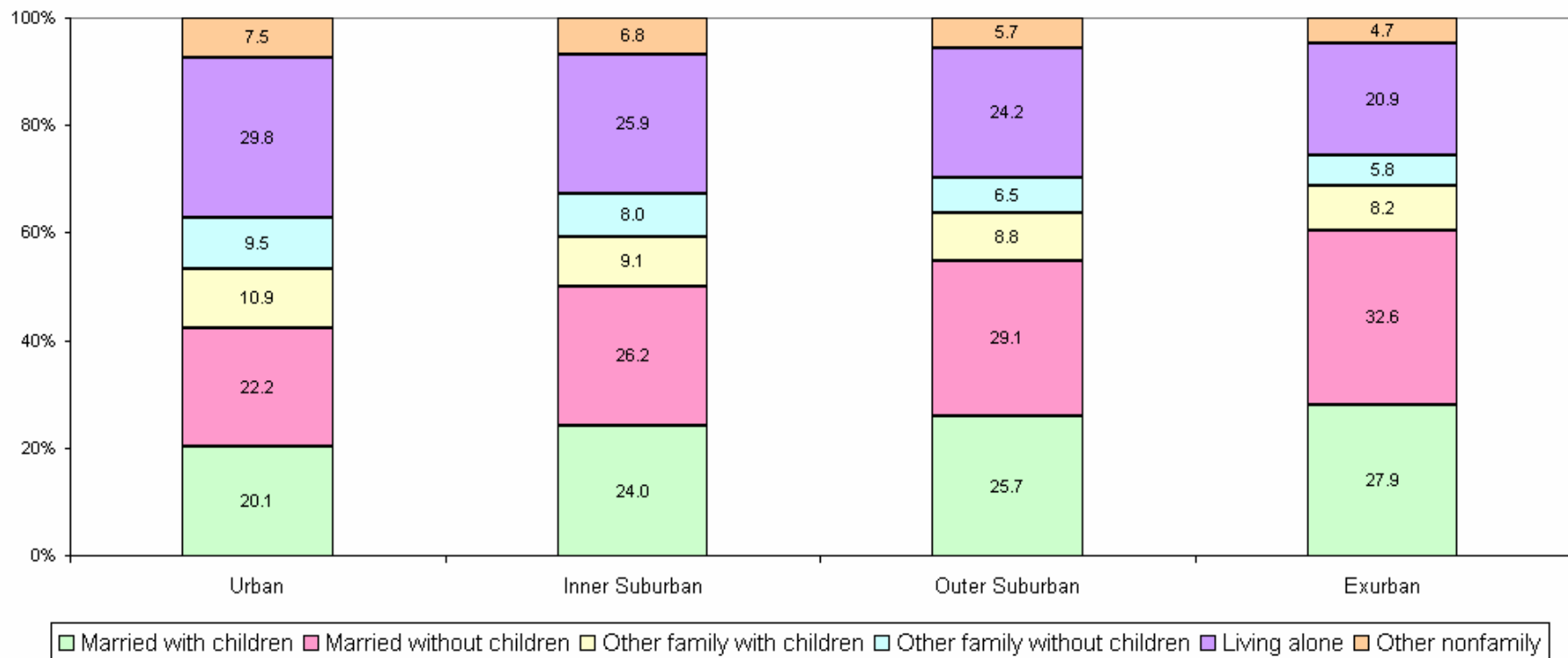
Source: Analysis of Internal Revenue Service data

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# Household types: Exurbs have larger shares of married-couple households than other suburbs

Figure 4. Household Types by County Type, 2000



Source: Brookings Institution analysis of Census 2000 data;

"Children" refers to own children under the age of 18



Income: Exurban counties span a wide range of incomes, but most fall somewhere in the “middle”

	County	Metro Area	Median AGI (\$)	% over 100k
1	Stafford, VA	Washington	47,214	17.5%
2	Scott, MN	Minneapolis	46,218	15.3%
3	Sussex, NJ	New York	45,673	16.4%
4	Calvert, MD	Washington	45,531	17.5%
5	Carver, MN	Washington	45,215	17.5%
241	Anson, NC	Charlotte	21,348	2.3%
242	Okmulgee, OK	Tulsa	21,189	2.2%
243	Union, TN	Knoxville	21,125	2.0%
244	Washington, MO	St. Louis	21,110	1.3%
245	Torrance, NM	Albuquerque	20,429	2.0%

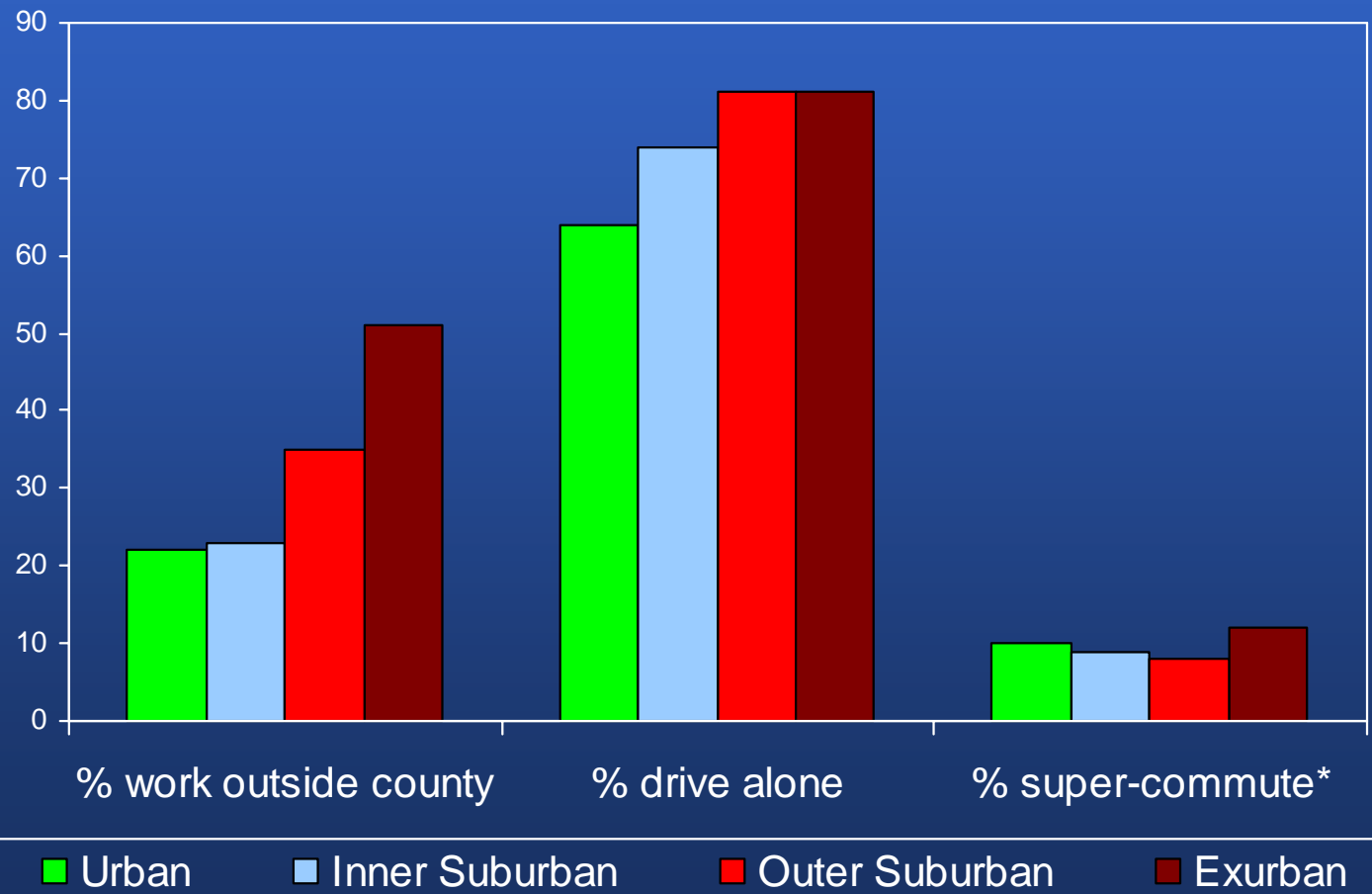
Source: Analysis of Internal Revenue Service data





## Commuting: Exurban residents are more likely than suburbanites to work outside their county of residence, and to drive long distances

Commuting  
characteristics by  
county type, 2000

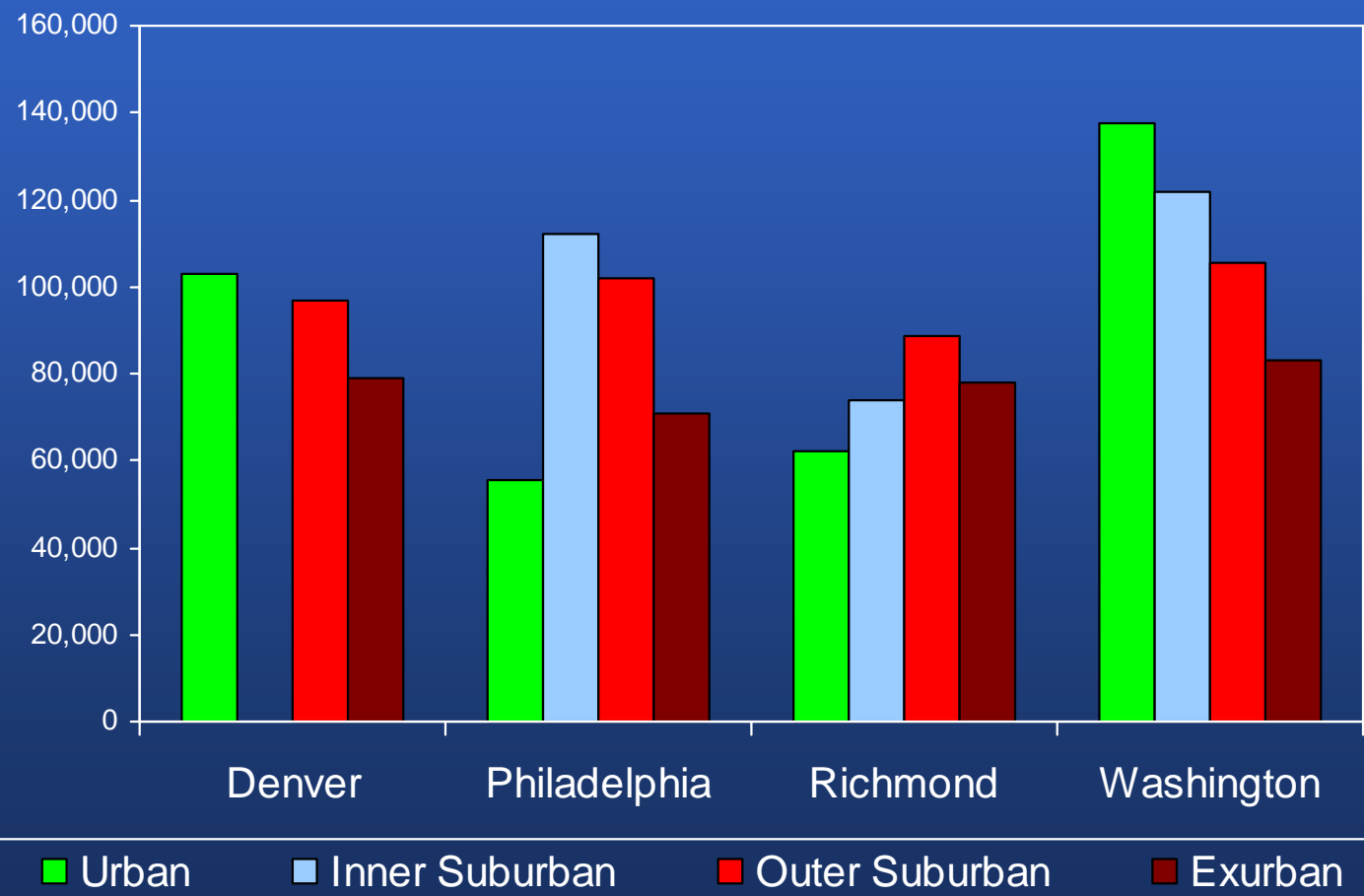


\* 60 or more minutes in one direction  
Source: Analysis of Census 2000 data

# Housing: Exurbs often represent the “middle-class housing frontier” in their metro areas—in some metros more than others

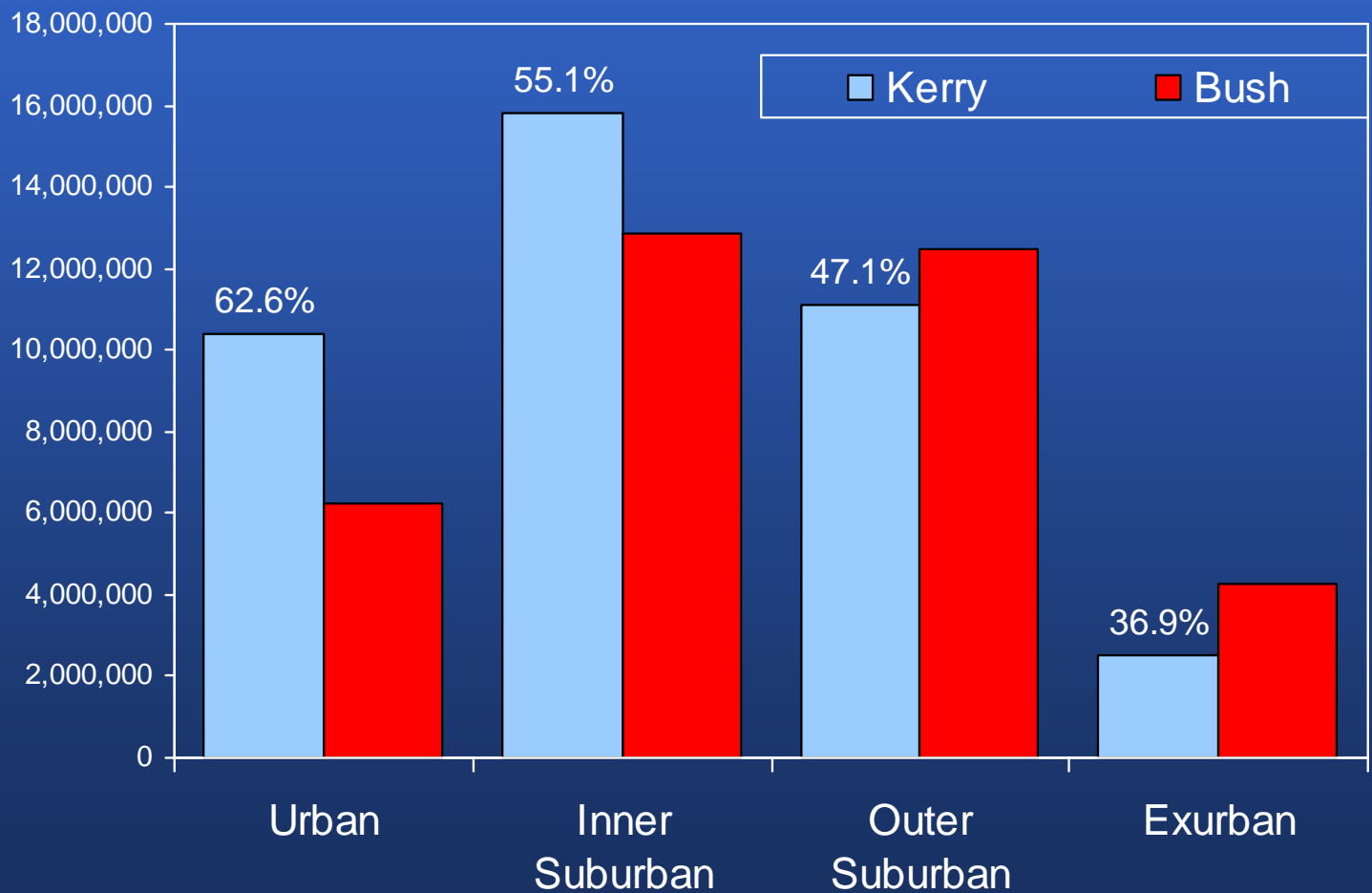
Average income, owners of new homes\* by metro areas, 2000

\*Constructed between 1995 and 2000  
Not all metro areas contain all county types  
Source: Analysis of Census 2000 data

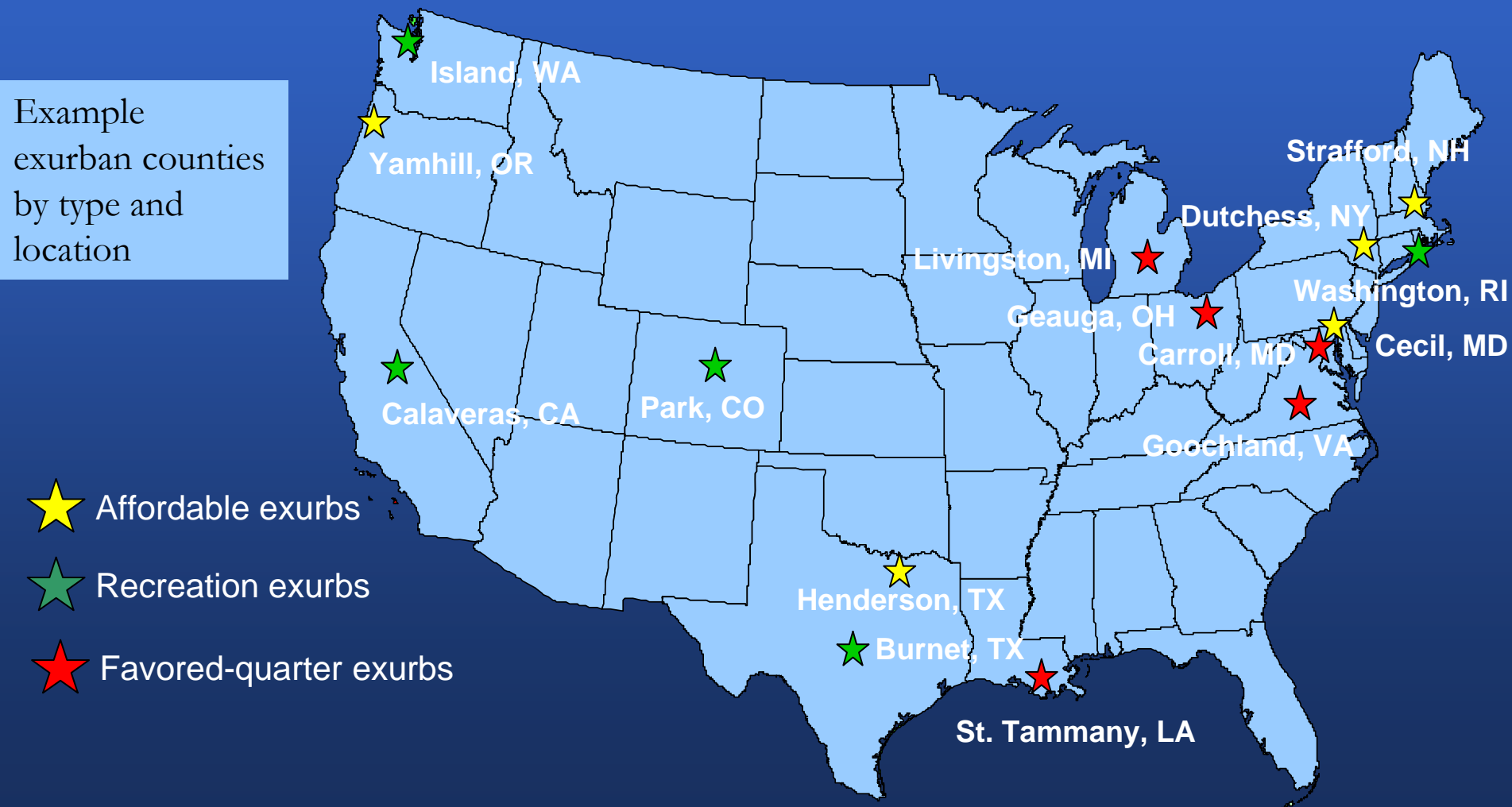


# Voting: Yes, exurbs vote Republican—but they comprise a small share of the overall electorate

Presidential vote totals by candidate and county type, 2004



This preliminary scan suggests at least a few types of exurbs, with different implications for policy and planning

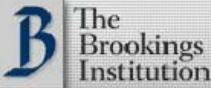




## Future inquiries

1. More refined analysis of exurban types (clustering)
2. Migration analysis within other metro areas to examine sources of exurb population gains
3. Search for exurbs in smaller metro areas, with tailored criteria
4. Relate degree of exurbanization to other important measures of metro health (commuting, segregation, affordability)

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read an open letter from Brookings President Strobe Talbott

#### METROVIEW

**Deficits by Design Plague Metro**  
by Robert Puentes  
*The Washington Times*  
June 21, 2004

[News Index](#)

### METROPOLITAN GROWTH

#### Mechanisms for Market-Based Land Use Control

Using case studies and a national survey, this paper examines transfers of development rights (TDRs) and other market-based land preservation techniques like mitigation banking and density transfer fees.

### IMMIGRATION

#### Washington Goes Polyglot

Metro Washington's "limited English proficient" (LEP) population

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