

THE FUTURE OF THE SUBURBS: POLICY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN CANADA

SUMMARY

Canada is often described as a highly urbanized country. Increasingly, however, researchers recognize that Canada is in fact a suburban nation. This recognition has sparked a new research agenda on the Canadian suburbs from a variety of disciplines and perspectives.

In this collection of essays, five leading scholars of the Canadian suburbs discuss the opportunities and challenges of suburbanization for Canadian public policy. The essays include:

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CANADA IS A SUBURBAN NATION

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Canada is a suburban nation. Our research shows that two-thirds of the country's total population lives in some form of suburb (Gordon and Janzen 2013; Gordon et al. 2018). Even in the largest metropolitan areas (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver) the portion of suburban residents is over 80 per cent. So all Canadian cities must deal with the difficulties caused by low-density, auto-dependent suburban growth.

HOW WE MEASURED THE SUBURBS

Our research is based on techniques tested in earlier studies that classified the neighbourhoods of all 34 Canadian metropolitan areas (Gordon 2017b) into four types:

1. **Exurbs:** Very low-density rural areas where more than half the workers commute to the central core. They live in rural-estate subdivisions or along country roads and comprised about eight per cent of the metropolitan population in 2016.
2. **Automobile suburbs:** These are the classic suburban neighbourhoods. Almost everybody commutes by car, there is little transit use and hardly anyone walks or cycles to work. They include about 67 per cent of metropolitan populations.
3. **Transit suburbs:** Neighbourhoods where a higher proportion of people commute by transit, comprising about 12 per cent of metropolitan populations.
4. **Active cores:** Downtowns and other neighbourhoods where a higher proportion of people walk or cycle to work. These neighborhoods, which most international observers would consider "urban," make up only 14 per cent of Canadian metropolitan populations.

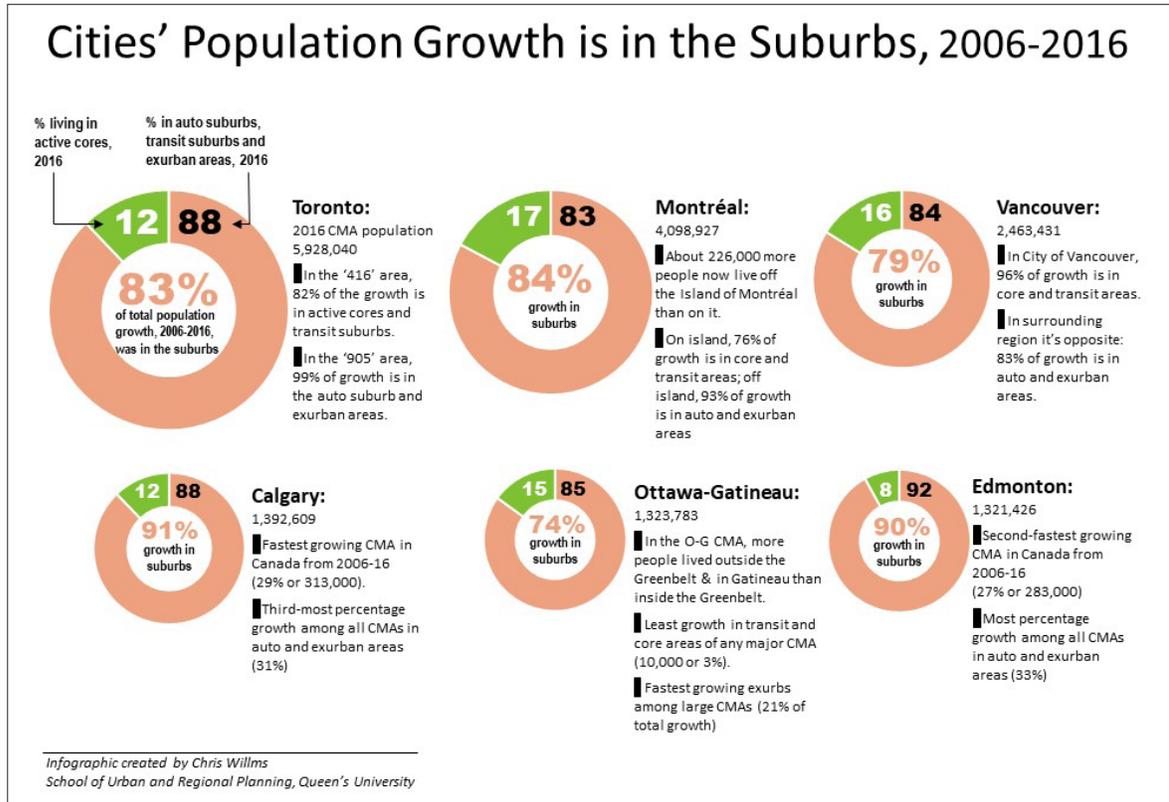
This method allows the structure and growth of Canada's 34 metropolitan areas to be compared¹ and allows nationwide estimates of the size of the suburban population. We estimated that over 23 million Canadians (68 per cent of the total population) lived in some form of suburb in 2016 (Gordon et al. 2018).

¹ See the digital atlas at www.canada.com/news/infographics/suburbs.

GROWTH TRENDS:

The population of all Canadian metropolitan regions grew much faster on their outside edges than in their active cores (Figure 1). Canada's eight biggest CMAs saw their active cores grow by 10 per cent, from 2006–16, with Toronto and Vancouver leading the way, due to their well-publicized booms in condo apartments. In contrast, the automobile suburbs and exurbs accounted for 73 per cent of population growth during the same period (Gordon et al. 2018).

FIGURE 1 CANADIAN METROPOLITAN AREA GROWTH TRENDS, 2006-16



Source: Statistics Canada 2006 and 2016 census data; analysis by David Gordon; drawn by C. Willms.

However, the downtown population-growth patterns of Canada's mid-sized metropolitan areas are quite different from the biggest cities. The total population in active core neighbourhoods *declined* by two per cent across Canadian mid-sized metropolitan areas from 2006-11 (Gordon 2017a). These inner-city neighbourhoods are the historic hearts of their metropolitan areas and their declines can have both symbolic and economic consequences. The pattern of population growth in mid-sized metropolitan areas is strongly focused in the automobile suburbs and exurbs. That is not a healthy pattern.

These mid-sized communities can expect expensive increases in infrastructure costs due to suburban expansions at the edge of the metropolitan area, while inner-city schools will close due to declining enrolment. Downtown businesses will be stressed by lower populations in adjacent neighbourhoods. In the worst cases, there can even be vacant downtown stores and abandoned inner-city housing, similar to problems experienced in Saint John, N.B. a decade ago.

The combination of rapidly expanding suburbs and declining downtown populations is particularly expensive in mid-sized cities. These cities lack the fiscal capacity to simultaneously deal with the expense of extending infrastructure to low-density suburbs on the urban fringe and to reverse the decline of downtown neighbourhoods. Provincial, regional and municipal governments will need to monitor their intensification and sprawl policies closely.

IMPLICATIONS OF CONVENTIONAL SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

Conventional suburban development is considered to be unsustainable from economic, environmental, public-health and infrastructure-efficiency perspectives. There are substantial economic costs involved with suburban sprawl. Greenfield development on a city's periphery requires significant new infrastructure investments, which are difficult to accurately forecast and recover through development charges because of the physical degradation of the infrastructure over many decades (CSCE 2016). The municipality is then burdened with the lifetime maintenance and capital repairs for the infrastructure that provides service to the low-density development (Thompson 2013; Blais 2010).

Sprawling suburban areas are witness to higher rates of automobile use and vehicle ownership (Ewing et al. 2002). In such areas, people own more cars, drive longer hours, and commute less by public transit. Extensive automobile use leads to more air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to commuting by transit, walking, or cycling (Newman and Kenworthy 2015). The suburban dependence on automobiles contributes more to climate change emissions, which makes transportation Canada's highest sector for contributions to GHG emissions (Environment Canada 2013).

Finally, there is a growing body of evidence that suburban lifestyles are correlated with higher obesity rates in children and adults. The lack of a built environment that promotes physical activity has shown to be a contributing factor to obese and overweight children and parents (Saelens, et al. 2012; Papas, et al. 2007). Furthermore, there is evidence that shows a positive association between the frequency of commuting by transit and physical activity. It was found that frequent and infrequent transit users partake in more physical activity through active transportation to and from transit stops (Lachapelle et al. 2011).

If two-thirds of Canada's population currently lives in suburban neighborhoods, then plans for infrastructure programs, environmental sustainability, public health, land use, and community design must take this phenomenon into account. Future researchers of these issues may wish to use a more refined understanding of the active core, suburban, and exurban components of metropolitan areas.

Preliminary 2016 census analyses in some CMAs show that the past decade of municipal intensification policies is finally having an effect in the location of dwelling units, but the large majority of population growth still continues to occur in automobile suburbs and exurbs. The new units in these peripheral neighbourhoods have substantially higher household sizes than inner-city condominium apartments. In many inner-city

neighbourhoods and transit suburbs the condo construction boom is barely keeping ahead of the long-term, nationwide decline in household size.²

But even if urban development trends were to become significantly more intense, the current suburban neighborhoods will comprise the bulk of the nation's housing stock well into the 21st century. Thus, it appears that Canada is destined to remain a suburban nation in the decades ahead.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Monitor the edges of metropolitan areas more than the centre.
- Set growth and intensification targets using both population and housing units.
- Calibrate infrastructure programs to shape suburban population growth — use bus rapid transit and light rail transit, rather than subways.
- Don't conflate the Toronto and Vancouver condo booms with the experience of mid-sized cities. Mid-sized cities need *more* investment in their inner-city neighbourhoods, not investment controls.

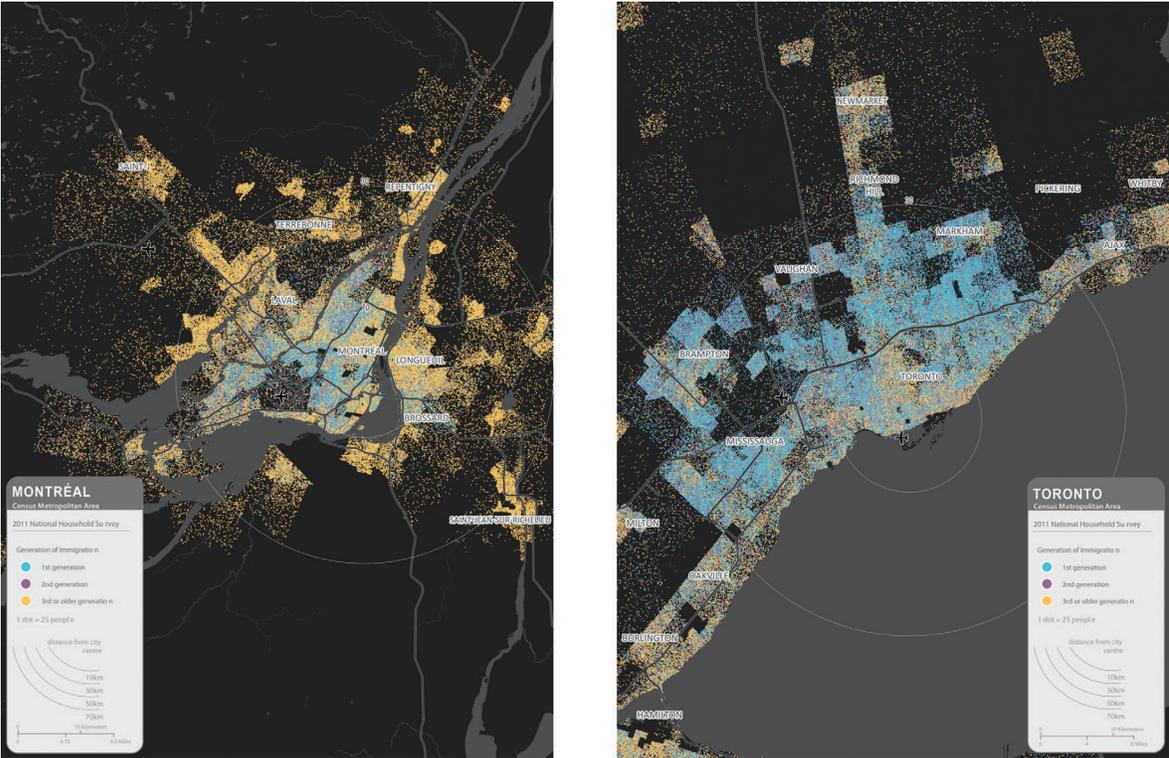
² Please stay tuned to CanadianSuburbs.ca for more news on the 2016 census analysis.

VOICES FROM THE EDGES: POLICY INSIGHTS FROM YOUNG SUBURBANITES

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Canadian suburbs are no longer homogeneous landscapes, if indeed they ever were. In particular, the suburbs surrounding our major metropolitan areas are home to increasingly diverse populations, housing forms, and land uses (Keil 2018; Moos and Walter-Joseph 2017; Figure 1). Although the geography of young adults is highly associated with urban ways of living, there still remain a large number of young people in the suburbs (Moos 2015). Yet the stories of young suburbanites are rarely told.

FIGURE 1 GEOGRAPHIES OF IMMIGRATION BY GENERATION, MONTREAL AND TORONTO (MOOS AND WALTER-JOSEPH 2017)



In this essay, we aim to amplify the voices of young suburbanites and highlight their residential preferences and the challenges confronting them. We cannot look at all different kinds of young suburbanites separately here. Therefore, we focus our story on the cohort as a whole, although we use two samples that highlight different segments of the young-adult population: One, more highly educated and white; another, more ethnically diverse, including more immigrants.

As more young adults of the millennial generation are moving in with partners and having children, their residential preferences are shifting towards communities with larger homes generally found in the suburbs (Myers 2016; Kotkin 2013). However, as a large share of millennials prefers to live in walkable areas with transit access (Moos et al. 2017), it has become essential to reconsider how we can plan our suburbs to support these aspirations.

RESIDENTIAL PREFERENCES IN NUMBERS

Survey data from a larger research project help shed light on the factors young adults value in their location decisions (see Moos et al. 2017)³. The survey includes young adults from across Canada, but those from Quebec and those without university degrees are underrepresented, while respondents from southern Ontario and caucasians are overrepresented. Seventy-seven per cent of respondents indicated that they reside in an urban location, whereas 23 per cent reside in a suburban location.

As shown in Table 1, 54 per cent of current suburbanites foresee living in the suburbs 10 years from now, while the remaining 46 per cent predict an urban location. Only 15 per cent of current urbanites in the sample foresee living in the suburbs in 10 years. While it is likely difficult for most people to predict their preferences 10 years out, the responses nonetheless provide some sense as to where young people see themselves in the future.

Among the respondents from our survey, some movement toward the suburbs is predicted, but the more dominant trend is a preference toward urban locations. Yet these numbers do suggest that, at least among respondents, there will also be continuing demand for suburban housing, even among young adults that largely fall into the millennial generation that is often stereotypically portrayed as a wholly urban demographic.

TABLE 1 PER CENT OF URBAN AND SUBURBAN SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY THEIR PREFERRED LOCATION 10 YEARS FROM NOW

| | | Current location | |
|-------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| | | Urban | Suburban |
| 10 years from now | % | | |
| | Urban | 85 | 46 |
| | Suburban | 15 | 54 |

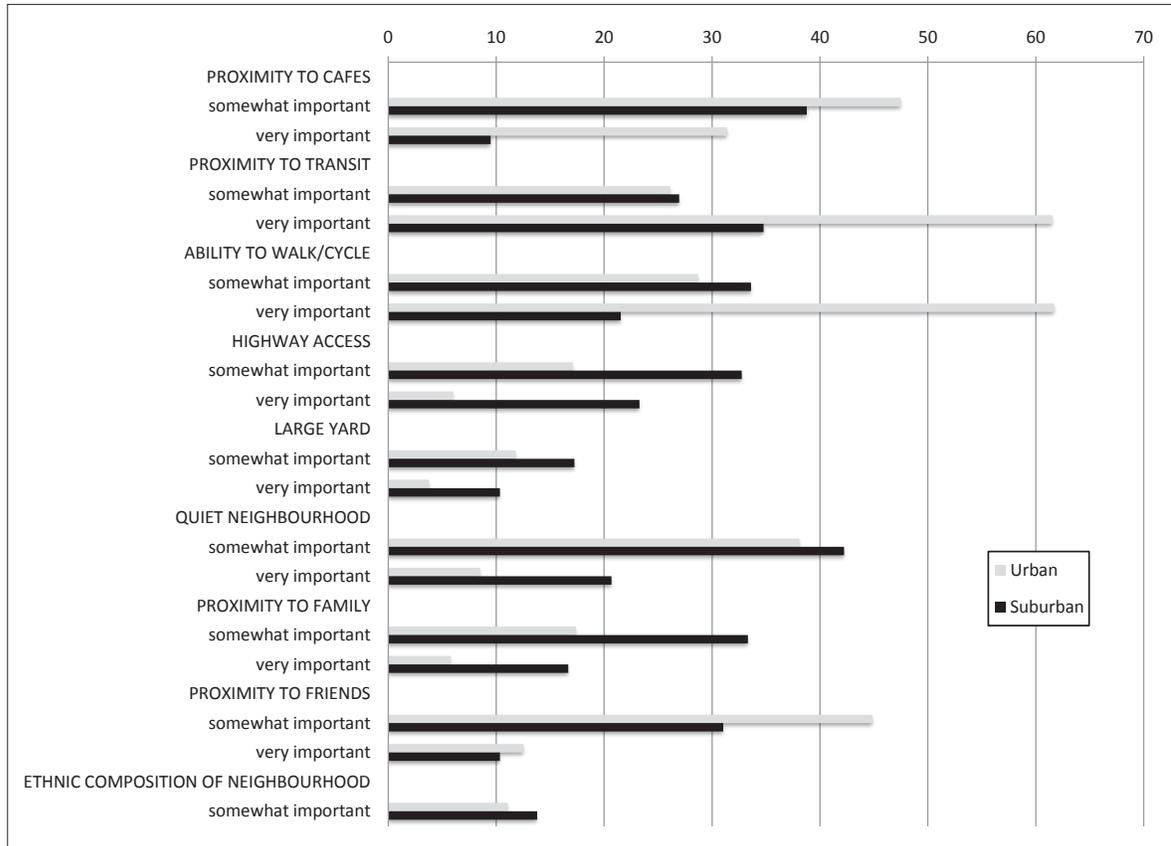
Perhaps not surprisingly, a larger share of urban respondents valued proximity to cafés, transit, and friends, and the ability to walk or cycle as important (Figure 2). In contrast, a larger share of suburban respondents valued highway access, large yards, quiet neighbourhoods, and proximity to family as important. Most respondents did not express preferences for a specific ethnic composition of their neighbourhood.

It is important to note that a majority of suburban respondents still place importance on location attributes typically associated with urban living. For instance, 62 per cent of suburban respondents find proximity to transit as somewhat or very important in their

³ The data were obtained from an online survey of 18 to 40 year olds in the U.S. and Canada, but only those from Canada are included in the analysis in this paper. The survey included 80 questions on demography, housing, employment, and transportation. There were a total of 1,413 responses collected between February 2015 and April 2016. Respondents were recruited via targeted social-media advertisements, traditional media coverage and posters placed in targeted locations.

current residential location. Fifty per cent of suburban residents value the ability to walk or cycle as somewhat or very important. Forty-eight per cent of suburban residents value proximity to cafés as somewhat or very important. The location attributes these suburban respondents value do not conform to the stereotypical consumer of low-density, car-oriented suburbs.

FIGURE 2 PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS VALUING LOCATION ATTRIBUTES AS SOMEWHAT OR VERY IMPORTANT BY CURRENT URBAN AND SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL LOCATION



LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SUBURBAN TRANSIT RIDERS

In general, young adults are among those most mobile in terms of trip frequency and total time of travel. Young adults, however, are often limited in their mode choice because of their lower earnings, and many rely on walking for shorter trips and public transit for long-distance trips. Here we discuss the travel patterns and transit experience of a segment of the young suburbanite population (aged 18 to 35) in Toronto (Prayitno 2017). These are young adults living in high-rise apartments that are located close to a rapid transit station with an overrepresentation of immigrant families, visible minorities, students and university and/or college educated individuals.

The heavy reliance on transit is encapsulated in the following quote:

“If I’m looking for work, I personally keep an eye out... is TTC (transit) accessible? Is it easily accessible? Because otherwise I know I can’t make it there. And there are significant chunks of the city which aren’t as accessible and there are buses which come every 45 minutes... and that does prevent me from ... having employment.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by many young suburbanites in the study, a group that is often left out of the conversation regarding the future of suburban mobility and policy (Pitter and Lorinc 2016). More generally, two overarching but interrelated issues are identified.

The first concern with Toronto’s suburban transit system expressed by respondents is the lack of rapid-transit interconnectivity between suburban neighbourhoods. The problem with the current subway system has to do with the initial design of the network aiming to connect suburban communities to the downtown core. With increasing opportunities in the suburbs today, commutes from one suburb to another are not accounted for by the network, forcing residents to rely on bus service, despite living close to a subway station. Many young suburbanites in the sample are facing this issue. One noted:

“So (my sister has to take) three buses (to reach her school in Scarborough – another suburban community). And the buses each take a while. She gives herself an hour and a half to two hours morning and night time to come back. But if there was a way for the subway to connect and make it a lot shorter for her, then that would have been so much better for her.”

The second issue relates to the increasing cost of travel by transit, measured by time and monetary constraints. Long commutes are attributed to heavy reliance on bus service, which are prolonged by extreme weather conditions. This issue, coupled with regular fare increases, creates an unfavourable transit environment for young suburbanites and may hinder access to job opportunities, as explained by one respondent below:

“I was planning (to take transit to Markham, an outer suburb of Toronto) because I got (a) job there, but when I calculated everything, it was quite expensive for me and time consuming. I said no to that job because of (the) \$7 I’m going to pay in the morning; \$7 in the afternoon; and plus I have to wait for (the) bus (for) 40 minutes.”

BUILDING THE SUBURB OF THE FUTURE

Our brief snapshot of two samples of young adults’ housing and transportation patterns shows that while young adults continue to reside in suburbs, many of them express distinct preferences for urban ways of living, particularly walkability and transit provision. Young adults’ growing tendencies to prefer living in neighbourhoods with attributes historically characterized as “urban” are in alignment with current planning ideals that aim to increase development densities and transit provision in the suburbs. The preferences for proximity to transit, connectivity among suburban areas, affordable transit, and the ability to walk or cycle ought to be increasingly important considerations in designing the suburb of the future (Moos and Walter-Joseph 2017).

Based on our research, we propose two interrelated policy priorities. First, we argue for the continued need to measure and analyze the changing needs and preferences of a diversity of young adults as they will be the next group of consumers and citizens to inhabit our suburban areas. Second, we promote an inclusive approach to city (suburban) building that brings a diversity of voices into the decision-making process. This includes asking young adults about their residential preferences and transportation constraints, as we have done here, as opposed to inferring demand from existing housing stock shaped by prior policies and generations. But the approach needs to be expanded on to also explicitly include the voices of specific marginalized populations, both young and old.

Canada's future is going to be suburban (Keil 2018). The shape of these suburbs is ours to determine through a combination of democratic, market and government processes.

Planners and other policy-makers often look to the ideas of Jane Jacobs for guidance on matters of “good planning” (Jacobs 1961). While her voice is an important one, it cannot remain our sole inspiration — not least since Jacobs barely wrote about suburbs at all, aside perhaps from expressing her disdain for them. The Jane Jacobs of the future needs to hold her eyes firmly upon the suburbs.

THE FUTURE OF THE SUBURBS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN MUNICIPAL FINANCE

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There has been recent interest in the fiscal health of cities, including funding options for infrastructure. This article highlights that land-use planning and municipal finance are closely linked. In general, the fiscal health of a region pertains to the ability to provide service levels that meet government standards without putting significant financial burden on the residents. This pertains to urban and suburban municipalities. This article, however, focuses on the suburban context.

Good municipal fiscal health requires a number of important ingredients: adequate transfers from senior levels of government for appropriate services that are delivered by local governments; adequate revenue (tax) tools and authority; a reasonable assessment balance between residential and non-residential assessment as the basis for levying property taxes; and authority for and application of fiscal tools such as user charges and other land-value-capture tools.

In examining the fiscal health of the suburbs, it is necessary to define what is meant by suburbs. There have been several attempts to define and classify suburbs both in the U.S. and Canada (Forsyth 2012; Gordon and Janzen 2013). Of the four typologies identified by Gordon and Janzen, there are two areas that will be the focus of this commentary: transit suburbs and auto suburbs. However, the definition used here may slightly differ. I will view the auto suburbs as newer areas that have significant greenfield development and are low density. The transit suburbs, on the other hand, are generally older suburbs that may have initially been designed to be auto-oriented but would now benefit from transit upgrades such as subways, light rail transit (LRT), or bus rapid transit (BRT) as they densify. The idea is that transit upgrades are essential to increase mobility and reduce the associated congestion that came along with development and rapid growth.

While infrastructure needs differ between newer and older suburbs, the principles of municipal fiscal health are similar. All new development, both the old inner suburbs and the more recent greenfield development suburbs, require basic infrastructure to be built. This includes hard services (such as sewer, water and roads) as well as soft services (such as parks, athletic facilities, community centres, libraries, schools and health-care facilities). For the auto suburbs that have more recently been built as greenfield developments, the first condition to develop is to have the necessary growth-related infrastructure in place.

Municipal fiscal health requires that a municipality has adequate revenue sources to provide these services, both in the short term and over the long term. Long-term considerations include upgrades, expansions repair and replacement costs.

The older suburbs, built from the 1950s up through the 1980s, benefited from federal and provincial infrastructure funding such as the South Peel servicing scheme and the York Durham servicing scheme, which were funded, respectively, by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. and the province of Ontario (Bircham and Bond 1984). More recently, however, there has been greater reliance on the use of development charges to fund growth-related capital infrastructure in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Halifax (Baumeister 2012; Amborski and Kaplinsky 2018). In a number of jurisdictions across Canada, some type of development-charge application is used, representing a form of user charges for growth-related capital costs. The charges also have the potential to be land-value-capture tools if the charges are capitalized into pre-development land values to take advantage of the expected rise in land values as development occurs. The charges are generally applied on an average-cost basis across the new municipal growth. It has been argued that this application would be more efficient if it was undertaken on an area-specific basis for engineering services to better approximate marginal-cost pricing. It has been argued that current applications for development charges need improvement to represent a more rational pricing approach (Blais 2010).

While both older and newer suburbs need funding for public transit infrastructure, it is a more pressing issue for older suburbs. Recent expansions have been in the form of LRT or subways. Examples include the new LRT in Ottawa, the Kitchener LRT, the Hurontario Line in Mississauga, and Toronto's York-Spadina subway and the controversial proposal for a Scarborough subway line, much of which have drawn heavily from local government-financing tools due to insufficient federal and provincial funding. In addition to user charges from transit revenue, some land-value-capture tools have been considered by local governments and transit agencies (Trillium 2009; George Hazel Consultancy 2013 and 2014). Land-value-capture tools can include special assessments/taxes, joint development, public-private partnerships, tax-increment financing and other related tools, some of which have been used in Canada (Alterman 2012; Amborski 2016). Development charges are allocated to transit financing in Toronto and a form of tax-increment financing is being considered for Toronto's Smart Track. Private-public partnerships have been successful in supporting transit development in B.C.

However, there can be more efficient forms of financing infrastructure in Canada. For instance, land-value-capture tools are not being used to their full potential. User charges such as development charges, transit fares or even congestion charges could be better designed to promote greater efficiency and equity.

It has also been suggested that current applications for development charges could be restructured. An alternative to increasing development charges would be the use of full-cost pricing. Full-cost pricing is a measure that would shift the cost of infrastructure: rather than showing up in the final price of a home, the cost would be embedded in the user price for services from newly built infrastructure. This would help to relieve some upward prices on

new housing to the extent that development charges are passed onto the price of new homes (Clayton 2014).

This brief commentary suggests that there are some economic principles that can be used to guide the way in which infrastructure and services can be best financed. Economists strongly support the general idea that users should pay for infrastructure (Bird and Slack 2017). The challenge is to apply these tools to provide both efficiency and equity in financing services. This requires both using the right tools, such as user charges, and getting the pricing right. In addition, there are some underutilized financial tools and concepts, especially land-value-capture tools, that have proven to have some success on other jurisdictions. These tools provide opportunities and they should be considered for application in the Canadian context.

SUBURBANIZATION AND POLITICS

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It is now often said that elections hinge on the shifting preferences of suburban voters (Gainsborough 2001; Lassiter 2013; Ströbele 2012). CBC poll analyst Éric Grenier has written that party competition in federal elections is “all about the suburbs” (Grenier 2017). Especially in Ontario and British Columbia, recent changes in government have occurred when opposition parties improved their standing in the increasingly numerous districts in outer metropolitan areas — the “905” belt around Toronto and the Fraser Valley east of Vancouver (Eidelman 2010; Warnica 2007). Edmonton Journal columnist David Staples writes that the cyclical redrawing of electoral boundaries in Alberta meant that “the stars are aligning for suburban voters in Alberta to stop getting a raw deal in terms of their political power” (Staples 2017). Parties and their leaders are understood to target suburban voters with distinct messages and policies (Press 2015; Delacourt 2013). In short, the notion of a suburban electorate is now commonplace.

To better understand the relationship between suburbanization and politics, I will first situate suburbanization historically. When did suburban voters become sufficiently numerous to be worth courting by political parties, and how have parties specialized in relation to location-based appeals? I will then discuss whether the apparent suburbanization of Canadian politics is about places or the people who live in them. I will conclude with some observations about what these trends might mean for the future of Canadian politics and public policy.

1. WHEN DID THE CORE-SUBURB DIVIDE EMERGE?

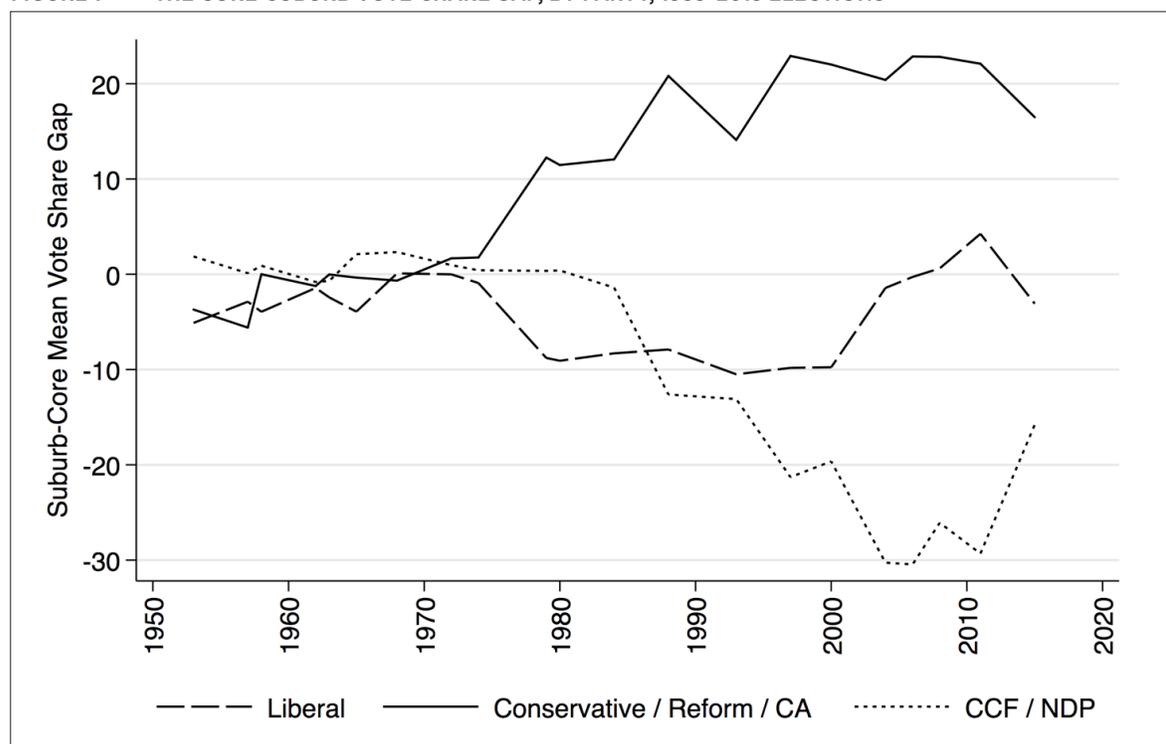
Core and suburban support for the main parties has diverged since the Second World War. To illustrate this, I coded non-rural ridings as “core” or “suburban” based on when the majority of their housing stock was constructed: before or after 1946.⁴ This zonal approach is crude, to be sure; as the other contributors to this collection suggest, places can be more or less “urban” and “suburban” — that is, (sub)urbanity is a variable, not a binary category.⁵ Nonetheless, this approach provides us with a useful general sketch of how space has shaped national politics.

⁴ Note that due to high levels of residential in-fill and redevelopment in centrally located downtowns and waterfronts, some inner-city ridings are coded as “suburban” in more decades. This deserves further investigation. On the one hand, one could argue that centrally located areas should be coded as “core” on the basis of their location. On the other hand, one could argue that neighbourhood change may permit people to live out more “suburban” (i.e., auto-dependent and privatistic) lifestyles in centrally located areas.

⁵ This coding rule is similar to that used by Walks (2005), who examined the 1947–97 period and yields generally similar results. McGrane, Berdahl and Bell (2017) also employ a zonal approach, differentiating inner-city from suburban space within census metropolitan areas based on distance from city hall, and treat small cities separately from larger metropolitan areas. Roy, Perella, and Borden (2015) code survey respondents based on self-reported place of residence.

Figure 1 shows each party's core-suburb support gap. Positive scores mean that a party receives a higher overall vote share in the suburbs than in the core, and negative scores mean the reverse. Zero means that a party is equally competitive in suburbs and core urban areas. Each of the three major parties' core and suburban vote shares was about the same in core and suburban ridings during the nine elections held between 1953 and 1974, after which they diverged. Starting in 1979, conservative parties became more successful in the suburbs while the NDP received higher vote shares in urban cores. The Liberals vote-share gap was modest, tilting toward the core during the 1980s and 1990s before returning to parity in the 2000s.

FIGURE 1 THE CORE-SUBURB VOTE-SHARE GAP, BY PARTY, 1953-2015 ELECTIONS



Positive values mean the suburban vote share exceeds the core vote share and negative values mean the reverse. Progressive Conservative, Reform, and Canadian Alliance vote shares are combined for comparability across time.

2. IS THE CORE-SUBURB PARTISAN GAP ABOUT PLACES OR PEOPLE?

Some theorize that core and suburban voters favour different parties because they have different policy interests. Core areas are dense and therefore support much lower automobile use in favour of transit and active transportation, and they feature a mix of land uses, housing types, and housing tenures. In postwar suburban areas, lower-density, single-family detached housing tends to predominate, and home ownership and automobility are the norm. Homeowners have a stronger interest than core-area renters in preserving property values. At the same time, the individualist experience of detached-home ownership and automobile commuting has been correlated with lower political support for redistribution and collective benefits in Canada and other countries. The characterization of the suburbs as politically conservative derives in part from the lifestyles generated by

physical environments and associated mobility systems (Fischel 2005; Moos and Mendez 2015). Depending on the issues at stake in particular elections, these place-based interests may structure political competition and behaviour.

Core-suburb divergence is also produced by the spatial clustering of like-minded socio-economic, demographic, and ethno-linguistic groups. To the extent that they lean toward one or another party, concentrated groups may determine riding-level electoral outcomes in a majoritarian, district-based electoral system like Canada's.

In recent years, media commentators and academics have focused on the political influence of rapidly growing concentrations of immigrants in suburban Toronto and Vancouver ridings. Figure 2 shows that this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before the 1990s, very few ridings had a majority of voters that were foreign born or visible minorities (a proxy for recent immigration). Without in any way implying that recent immigrants vote as blocs — in fact, new Canadians come from many places around the world, speak many different languages, and practice a wide range of cultures and religions — immigrant groups have at least the potential to play a decisive role in ridings where they are numerically dominant and unified in their political attitudes.

Parties have recognized this. The concentration of immigrants in a growing number of geographically proximate ridings makes their support a prize worth fighting for. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, Canada's conservative parties purged earlier anti-immigrant rhetoric. The Conservatives, under leader Stephen Harper, aggressively courted specific communities they believed to be aligned with their fiscal and social conservative agenda (Marwah et al. 2013; Tolley 2017; Delacourt 2017). As shown in Figure 3, the Liberals had a virtual lock on the mostly suburban majority-foreign-born ridings from 1968 through 2008, then lost many of them to the Conservatives in 2011, and then took most of the newly created majority-immigrant ridings in the 2015 election.

FIGURE 2 THE NUMBER OF MAJORITY-FOREIGN-BORN AND MAJORITY-VISIBLE-MINORITY RIDINGS IN EACH ELECTION SINCE 1968

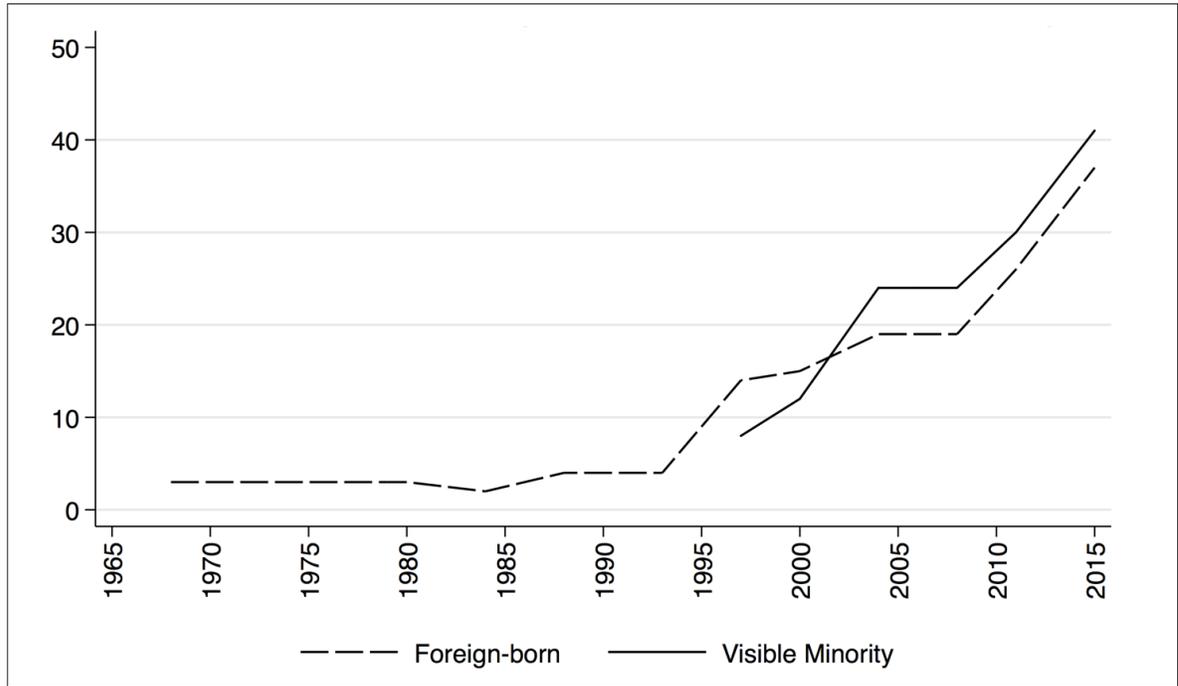
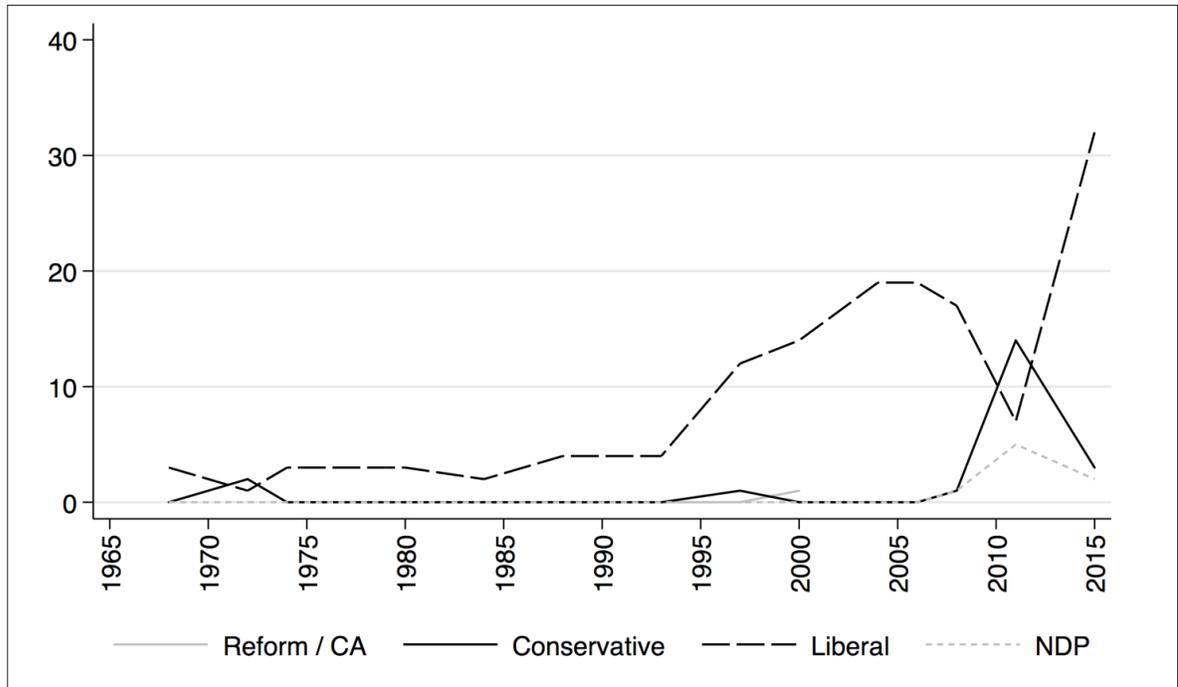


FIGURE 3 THE NUMBER OF MAJORITY-FOREIGN-BORN RIDINGS WON BY EACH PARTY SINCE 1968



3. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN POLITICS AND POLICY?

Most Canadians live in suburban spaces, and an increasingly large proportion of suburbanites are immigrants. But in what sense are Canadian politics and policy increasingly *suburban*? And what impact might this have on Canadian politics, now and in the future?

The preceding sketch suggests that the suburbanization of Canadian politics is produced by two social processes. The first is the political expression of the distinct interests generated by the physical characteristics of core and suburban places. The second is the concentration within these spaces of groups with more or less coherent political behaviour. Both are filtered through our single-member-plurality electoral system, which magnifies the influence of concentrated groups. This gives parties an incentive to court suburban residents *as groups*, as they seek to build a winning electoral coalition, riding by riding. If Canada's political battlegrounds are suburban, as opposed to prewar core or rural areas, it is because the suburbs are where the largest — and growing — groups of new voters and flexible partisans are concentrated. The party that durably binds these rapidly growing groups to its coalition will dominate in the long term.

But Canadian elections are not inevitably about immigrants. Internationally, and perhaps increasingly in Canada, place-based interests and identities have been shown to emerge from localized economic transformations. Neighbourhoods and regions in decline are found to be more supportive of defensive populist agendas, while the geographic winners of globalization and post-industrialization are generally more supportive of collective benefits, open trade and immigration (Inglehart and Norris 2017; Rodrigues-Pose 2018; Gest 2018). This phenomenon deserves further investigation in the Canadian context given growing income and wealth inequality.

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