

FAULT LINES AND COMMON GROUND:

UNDERSTANDING THE STATE OF CANADA'S URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

By Peter Loewen, Sean Speer
and Stephanie Bertolo



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent U.S. presidential election (and its chaotic post-election tensions) highlight the risks of growing political polarization. This experience ought to be a wake-up call for policymakers and citizens around the world of the destructive consequences of an “us” versus “them” political dynamic and how it may manifest itself in their own jurisdictions.

One potential fault line in Canada is the urban-rural divide. Canadian policymakers should pay closer attention to divergent experiences, perspectives, and voting patterns among urban versus rural populations. Only by understanding what unites and divides us can policymakers hope to govern in a manner that is inclusive and responsive to all Canadians.

This report – the second in a two-part series on the urban-rural divide in Canada – aims to fill an empirical gap in what we know about how urban and rural Canadians think about political and policy issues. The first report sought to understand how urban and rural Canadians perceive the conditions and perspectives of one another. This one analyses the 2019 Canadian Election Study in an attempt to understand the viewpoints of these two groups on a wide range of political and policy topics.

PLENTY OF COMMON GROUND

A deep dive into the data shows that most political and policy disagreements between urban and rural Canadians are a matter of degree rather than fundamental principle. In fact, rural and urban Canadians are on the same side of virtually every policy issue that the survey covers.

The data also reveal that urban and rural Canadians do not fit neatly into conventional left-right political frameworks. Unless we recognize these and other similarities in how the two groups think and live, we risk overstating their differences.

SOME AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Despite the common ground between urban and rural voters, some notable divergences exist. We must unpack these differences to cultivate greater mutual understanding in Canadian society and to encourage more inclusivity and responsiveness in policy and governance. Areas of divergence between urban and rural Canadians include their opinions about the following:

- **Partisan affiliation** – As one example, roughly 40 percent of urban respondents believe the Liberal Party best reflects their views, compared to 28 percent of rural residents.

- **State of the economy** – About 47 percent of rural respondents believe the economy had worsened in the year prior to the 2019 election, compared to 35 percent of urban respondents.
- **Environment and climate change** – About 57 percent of urban respondents support stricter environmental regulations, compared to 47.9 percent of rural respondents.
- **Immigration policy** – Roughly 47 percent of rural respondents agree that Canada should admit fewer immigrants, compared to about 38 percent of urban respondents. The gap is similar on the question of admitting refugees to Canada.
- **Values and tradition** – About 57 percent of rural respondents think Canada would have fewer problems if there were more emphasis on tradition, compared to 48 percent of urban respondents.
- **Trust in government** – Roughly 72 percent of rural respondents agree that the government does not care about people like them, compared to about 64 percent of urban respondents.

CONCLUSION

Policymakers need to be introspective about the global rise in populism and polarization and how these trends may surface in Canadian society. The 2019 federal election reflected deep fault lines between urban and rural voters, and evidence from other jurisdictions points to the risk of neglecting these issues.

A close study of the Canadian Election Study's data shows that while urban and rural Canadians have divergent opinions on many key issues, they also agree to a large extent on key questions of economics, politics and society. By gaining a greater understanding of the differences and commonalities, policymakers can not only find ways to create more inclusive and responsive public policy, but also mine the deep vein of mutual understanding that pervades Canadian society.

 **Policymakers need to be introspective about the global rise in populism and polarization and how these trends may surface in Canadian society.**

INTRODUCTION

“ Polarization is growing across the western world. Political parties are articulating sharper distinctions between themselves. Divisions between citizens are widening, including here in Canada.¹ And the net effect is that politics is assuming a greater “us” versus “them” dynamic than in the past.

HOW MIGHT POLARIZATION INCREASE IN CANADA?

One potential fault line in Canadian society may be between urban and rural Canadians. Voting patterns, for instance, certainly point to different political preferences and values along these lines.^{2,3,4}

Yet, notwithstanding these divergent urban-rural political outcomes, we do not know much about the extent to which urban and rural Canadians actually think differently about politics, public policy, the country's economic prospects or broader social trends. Most commentary on these questions relies on hypotheses or extrapolation based on analysis from other jurisdictions.

This new report for the Public Policy Forum aims to fill this empirical gap. It is the second of a two-part series that analyzes polling data to learn more about urban and rural Canadians and how they view economics, politics and culture, how they view each other and how they view themselves.

The work is part of a year-long programme being led by Prime Minister of Canada Fellow Sean Speer on the urban-rural divide in Canada, and how we can cultivate greater mutual understanding and respect among urban and rural Canadians. The project will comprise a combination of public policy analysis, community engagement and knowledge translation.

The first report sought to understand how urban and rural Canadians perceive the conditions and perspectives of one another. This second report draws on data from the Canadian Election Study (CES), a large-scale survey of Canadian citizens conducted in the context of each federal election, to understand and compare the viewpoints of urban and rural Canadians on a wide range of cultural, economic, political and policy topics.

The survey provides a rich collection of data on Canadians' political attitudes and behaviour on topics ranging from political parties to the role of government in the economy to the place of immigration in our society. This data provides a unique snapshot and record of Canadian society and political life. By analyzing the data based on population density, we are able to discern similarities and differences among urban and rural Canadians.

WHAT DO WE FIND?

Urban and rural Canadians broadly share similar views about economics, politics and culture. Most disagreement is a matter of degree rather than fundamental principle. There are, however, some areas of notable divergence including:


- partisan affiliation;
- state of the economy;
- environment and climate change;
- immigration policy;
- values and tradition; and
- trust in government.

These differences fall broadly along a continuum between optimism and anxiety, openness and closedness, and modernism and tradition. They no doubt reflect to some degree a combination of differing economic circumstances and psychological dispositions rooted in urban and rural experiences and perspectives. The process of self-selection inherent in migration patterns invariably reinforces these differences.⁵ The likelihood, then, is that we will see greater divergence along these continuums in the future.

Urban-rural differences in these areas should not be ignored or minimized. Evidence from other countries points to the risk of neglect. That the rise of global populism has sometimes been characterized as “the revenge of places that do not matter” is a reminder that Canadian policymakers cannot afford to disregard these place-based differences in our society.⁶ It is important that our politics respect and account for them in government deliberations and policy-making. The goal must be an inclusive and responsive politics that reflects the views of all Canadians.

But we also should not exaggerate these differences either. The evidence tells us that there is more that connects us than separates us no whether we live in a big city or a small town. The following pages aim to bring data to bear on these questions with the goal of enabling greater mutual understanding between urban and rural Canadians – and, ultimately, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive politics in Canada.

It is worth recognizing that this report was produced against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected cities, towns and communities across the country. This experience has contributed to a surge of national solidarity in the form of charity, volunteerism and a general togetherness. It has been powerful and moving to see Canadians from different regions and places come together in the face of this profound challenge. It is a reminder that, notwithstanding our different political and policy preferences, Canadians are linked together by our common humanity and shared citizenship.

 **The evidence tells us that there is more that connects us than separates us no whether we live in a big city or a small town.**

DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This report draws from the Canadian Election Study (CES), a large-scale survey of Canadian citizens conducted in conjunction with each federal election. The CES provides a substantial timeseries of repeated questions, allowing scholars to draw dynamic, empirical accounts of Canadian society and political life.

The most recent CES was conducted in the context of the 2019 federal election. It involved a rolling cross-section survey of roughly 40,000 individuals from across the country. The sample is nationally representative and large enough for subgroup and constituency-level analysis.¹

The CES collects data on a wide range of issues, including (but not limited to):

- party preferences;
- state of the economy;
- policy areas such as education, environment, taxes, defence and criminal justice; and
- socio-cultural issues such as the definition of marriage and abortion.

This data has spawned dozens of academic papers over the years, including by those directly involved in the CES and other scholars who use data from the study to carry out their own work. But the data has not, to our knowledge, been used to compare urban and rural perspectives. We have sought to carry out this analysis by organizing the data along urban-rural lines.

We recognize upfront that definitions of urban and rural are complex. There exists no universal set of definitions.⁷ Most statistical agencies and academic scholars use a mix of criteria, including population density, proximity to major urban centres and even self-identification. Statistics Canada is a good example. It uses an urban-rural continuum based on a community's proximity to a major urban centre to produce a "rurality" score ranging from 1 to 8. Places that fall between 3 and 4 serve as the cut-off between urban and rural.⁸

Remember the CES is based on riding-level analysis. This precludes us from using a "rurality" test and instead requires that our own analysis be organized along riding-level lines.

For the purposes of this report, therefore, we have defined rural as the 20 percent of ridings with the lowest population density in the country. These include places such as Abitibi-Témiscamingue (Quebec), Cape Breton-Canso (Nova Scotia), Kamloops-Thompson-Cariboo (British Columbia), Nipissing-Timiskaming (Ontario) and Yellowknife (Northwest Territories). In total, our analysis is organized based on 84 rural ridings and 264 non-rural ridings. The full list of rural ridings is provided in Annex A.

¹ Readers can find more information about the 2019 Canada Election Study at <http://www.ces-eec.ca/>.

We recognize that this definition has its limitations. Some rural communities contained in more densely populated ridings are excluded from the analysis. But targeting 20 percent of federal ridings comes close to matching the overall share of the population that lives in a rural area according to the 2016 Census.ⁱⁱ This enables us to organize the data in the CES using definitions for urban and rural that broadly conform to the overall national distribution.

It is also worth recognizing that our report does not render judgment on how much of any urban and rural difference is a function of where one lives versus other factors, such as ideology or partisanship. We recognize that causality is complicated. Urban and rural differences are no doubt greatly attributable to the fact that rural areas tend to have higher concentrations of Conservative voters, and cities tend to have more Liberal voters.ⁱⁱⁱ

But it seems to us that the explanation for these differences matters less than establishing the extent to which they exist. Put differently: The concentration of differing political preferences and economic experiences in urban versus rural places is highly relevant for Canadian policymakers. It does not matter whether these differences are shaped by where people live or whether where people live is shaped by what they believe.

Accordingly, what we provide below are simple mean differences between urban and rural voters on a range of issues and attitudes. We do not present these figures net of other factors, such as partisanship, wealth, education or gender. Those variables are certainly differently distributed in rural and urban areas, and we allow those differences to be absorbed into our simpler bivariate comparisons. Readers can find more information about the CES survey and the questions and data used in this report in annex B of this paper.

ⁱⁱ According to the 2016 census, 6.6 million Canadians (or 18.7%) live in rural areas. See Statistics Canada (n.d). [Population and Dwelling Count Highlight Tables, 2016 Census](#). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

ⁱⁱⁱ Analysis by the Pew Research Center, for instance, attributes a significant share of urban-rural differences in the United States to partisanship. Parker, K. et al. (2018). [Urban, suburban and rural residents' views on key social and political issues](#). Pew Research Center.

COMMON GROUND BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL CANADIANS

One key takeaway from the data is that most disagreement between urban and rural Canadians is a matter of degree rather than fundamental principle. Unless we analyze the data with care – and recognize the considerable overlap in urban-rural views about economics, politics and culture – we risk overstating the differences.

It is notable, for instance, urban and rural majorities are on the same side of virtually every policy issue covered in the Canadian Election Study (CES) survey. There are some differences of course. Sometimes these differences can even be significant, as we discuss in later sections. But the data tells us that there is ultimately more that connects than separates urban and rural Canadians.

Consider income inequality as an example. Just under 70 percent of urban and rural Canadians believe that income inequality is a “big problem” in Canada. These similar opinions extend across issues ranging from assisted suicide to free trade.

In fact, of the roughly 65 policy-related questions that our analysis covers, urban and rural responses were within 5 percentage points of one another in more than three-fifths of cases. The average urban-rural difference is a mere 2.7 percentage points in these responses.

Most disagreement between urban and rural Canadians is a matter of degree rather than fundamental principle.

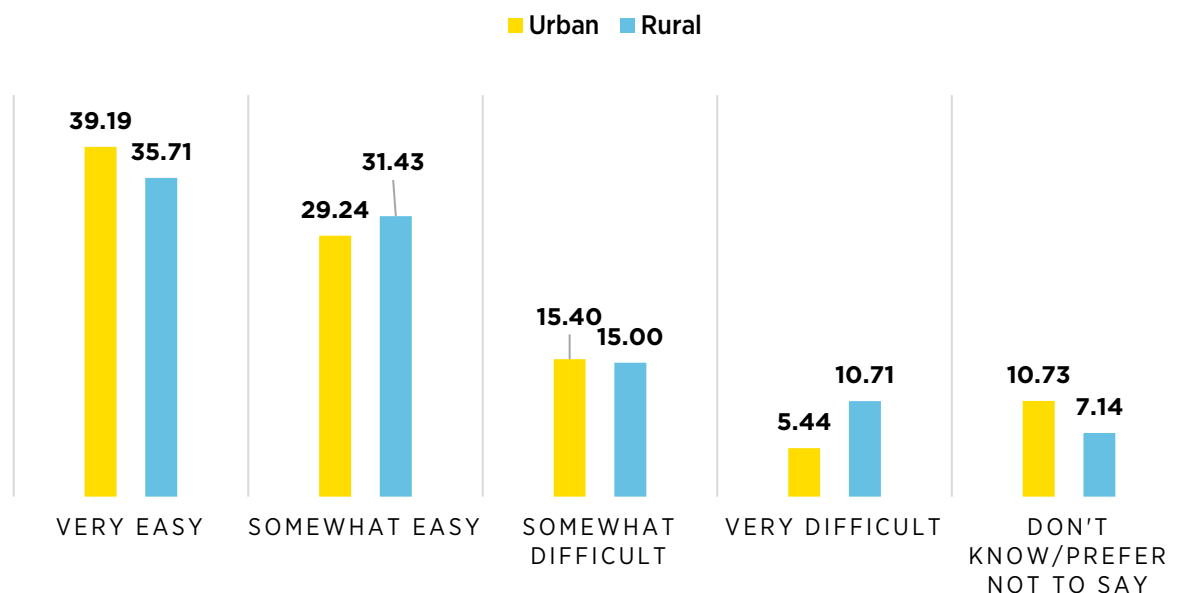
There are 25 questions where the gap exceeds 5 percentage points. The average difference for these responses is 8.4 percentage points. As we will discuss in subsequent sections, these differences fall broadly on a continuum between optimism and anxiety, openness and closeness, and modernism and tradition. These differences are real and should not be disregarded by policymakers – especially since it is quite possible that the differences will grow over time due to migration patterns and increasing urban concentration.

But we would be remiss if we did not emphasize the degree of convergence in the data. Some common ground exists even in areas where one might assume greater difference. This highlights the risks of relying on stereotypes or importing data or experiences from other jurisdictions.

Attitudes about abortion is a good example of this convergence. Pew Research data from 2018 shows a large urban-rural gap on attitudes about abortion in the United States – 61 percent of respondents in urban areas, compared to 46 percent of respondents in rural areas indicated that abortion should be legal in all or most

cases.⁹ Yet the gap is much smaller here in Canada, with 68.4 percent of urban respondents and 67.1 percent of rural respondents indicating it should be “very easy” or “somewhat easy” for women to obtain abortions (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON ABORTION IN CANADA (%)
Survey question: How easy or difficult should it be for a woman to get an abortion



68.4 percent of urban respondents and 67.1 percent of rural respondents in Canada said it should be “very easy” or “somewhat easy” for women to obtain abortions.



We should not expect urban and rural Canadians to organize their policy preferences according to strict ideological or partisan lines.

Urban-rural similarities also do not generally fit neatly into conventional left-right political frameworks. Urban and rural Canadians, on one hand, broadly agree on income inequality, a redistributive role for government and higher taxes on corporations and high-income earners. On the other hand, both support free trade, economic integration with the United States and more spending on law enforcement and criminal justice. These differences illustrate that we should not expect urban and rural Canadians to organize their policy preferences according to strict ideological or partisan lines. The CES data remind us that politics in the real world are messy.

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

The rest of this report will focus on key areas of divergence and what they may mean for Canadian politics and policy. It is important that we unpack urban-rural differences to cultivate greater mutual understanding in Canadian society as well as more inclusivity and responsiveness in our governance and public policy. At the same time, the existence of these differences should not obscure the significant common ground between urban and rural Canadians that the data reflect. The evidence tells us that there is more that connects us than separates us, whether we live in a big city or a small town.

PARTISAN AFFILIATION

Much of the post-2019 election analysis has highlighted the voting patterns of urban and rural Canadians.¹⁰¹¹ Differences in voting patterns certainly exist and our first-past-the-post system accentuates them.

Analysis by UBC economist Werner Antweiler, for instance, finds a significant difference in population density among the ridings won by the Liberal Party and Conservative Party. The median population density for the 157 Liberal ridings was more than 38 times higher than for the 121 Conservative ridings.¹²

Antweiler's analysis aligns with the CES data.^{iv} The survey asks several questions related to partisan preferences. The results show a strong correlation between urban and rural residency and one's voting behaviour.

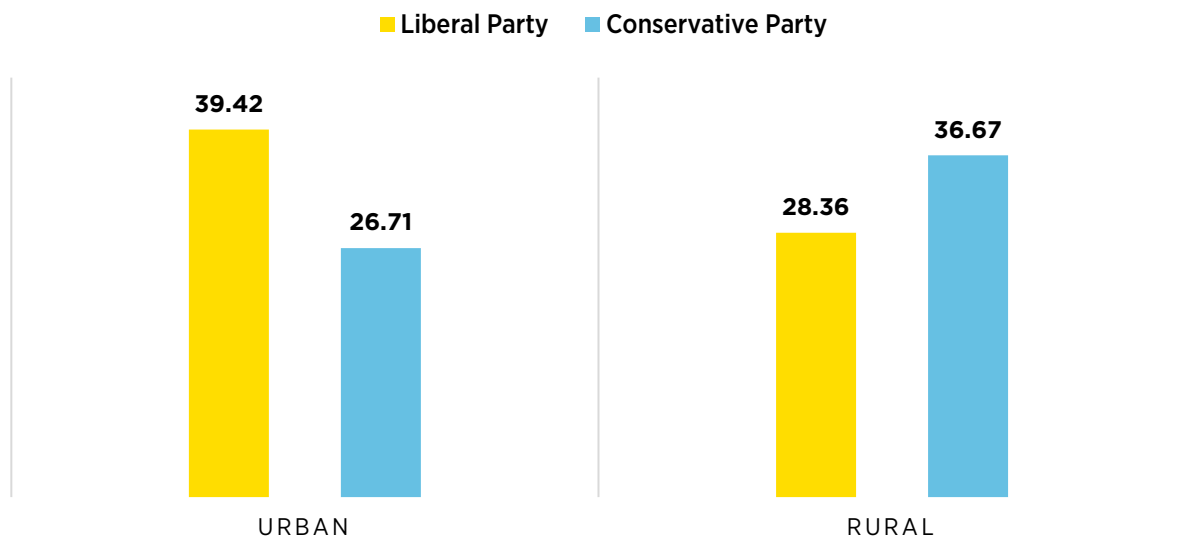
Consider, for instance, that 26.7 percent of urban respondents indicated that the Conservative Party best reflects their views, compared to 36.7 percent of rural respondents. This translates to 20.3 percent and 35.3 percent voter intention for the Conservative Party among urban and rural respondents, respectively.

The Liberal Party performs more strongly among urban voters. Just under 40 percent of urban respondents believe that the Liberal Party best reflects their views, compared to less than 28.4 percent of rural residents. (see **Figure 2**) This translates to 42.4 percent and 26 percent voter intention for the Liberal Party among urban and rural respondents, respectively.

For the New Democratic Party (NDP), incidentally, there is no gap between urban and rural voter intentions. Roughly 12 percent of urban and rural respondents say they would vote for the NDP.

^{iv} Of the 84% of ridings defined as rural for the purposes of our analysis, 23 elected a Liberal MP, 43 elected a Conservative MP and 18 elected other candidates.

FIGURE 2: URBAN-RURAL POLITICAL VIEWS (%)
Survey question: Which political party represents your views best?



Just under 40 percent of urban respondents believe that the Liberal Party best reflects their views, compared to less than 28.4 percent of rural residents.

The two major political parties are basically inversions of one another. The main difference is that the Liberal Party's urban-rural support is more electorally efficient than the Conservative Party's because of the interaction between population density and the first-past-the-post system. The "politics of demography" has therefore tended to trump the "politics of geography" in Canadian federal politics.¹³

These urban-rural differences are reflected in competing views about the performance of the current Liberal government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Two thirds of rural respondents – compared to just over half of urban respondents – believe that Prime Minister Trudeau failed to live up to his 2015 election promises. At the time of the 2019 election, only 33 percent of rural respondents were satisfied with the Trudeau government's performance, compared to 44.8 percent of urban respondents.

These partisan differences may inform how people feel about Canadian politics and governance. Nearly 45 percent of rural respondents said they do not believe the current Liberal government (following the 2019 election) has a legitimate mandate to govern, compared to only 36.8 percent of urban respondents. One can certainly attribute much of this sentiment to partisanship. But, as we will discuss in a later section, policymakers must be attentive to public trust in the government and whether the public perceives the government to be responsive.

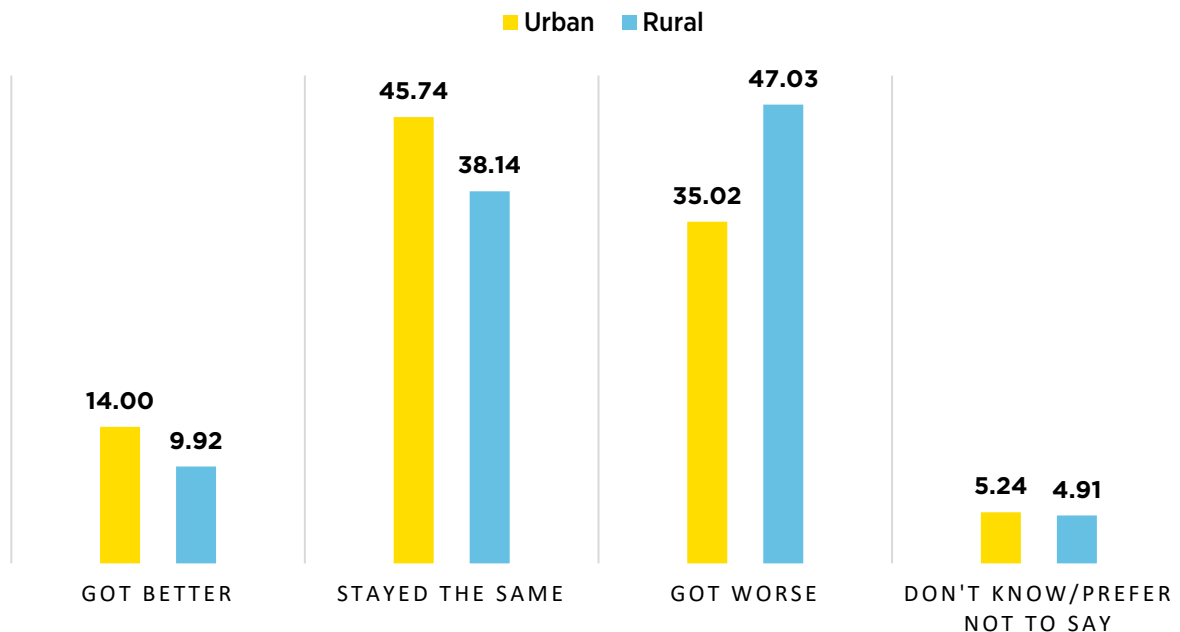
STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Different studies and reports have documented the growing divergence in urban-rural economic outcomes in Canada.¹⁴ These trends are reflected in a wide range of economic and labour market indicators over the past two decades. Consider, for instance, that rural employment is still below the pre-recession levels of 2008–2009, and yet it is up by almost 15 percent in urban centres.¹⁵ This divergence is not a short-term blip – it is a sign of long-term stagnation in rural and remote communities.

It is no surprise, therefore, that urban and rural respondents would have different perceptions about the state of the economy. Some of this may be shaped by partisanship, but there is obviously more to the issue. Rural respondents are reflecting the economic trends that they are witnessing in their regions and communities.

The result is a considerable gap in how urban and rural Canadians feel about the state of the economy. As of the 2019 election, more than 47 percent of rural respondents believe that the economy has gotten worse over the previous year, compared to 35 percent of urban respondents (see **Figure 3**). This aligns with the 46.4 percent of rural respondents who believe that the Trudeau government's policies have worsened the economy, versus 34.5 percent of urban respondents who hold this view.

FIGURE 3: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY (%)
Survey question: Over the past year Canada's economy has...



More than 47 percent of rural respondents believe that the economy has gotten worse over the previous year, compared to 35 percent of urban respondents.

These differing perspectives on the state of the economy can manifest themselves as an optimism gap. That is certainly the case in the United States. A 2018 report by the Pew Research Center, for instance, found that 46 percent of urban residents were optimistic about their financial futures compared to only 36 percent of rural residents.¹⁶ This is important because economic pessimism seems to correlate with populist politics.^{17,18} It was, for example, a notable characteristic of Trump voters in the United States.¹⁹



Differing perspectives on the state of the economy can manifest themselves as an optimism gap.

Future PPF research will aim to measure the optimism-pessimism gulf (what is sometimes referred to as an “expectations gap”²⁰) between urban and rural Canadians. But the takeaway from these data is that urban and rural Canadians have differing perceptions of the economy and the government’s economic agenda, and that these differences are broadly consistent with economic outcomes.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

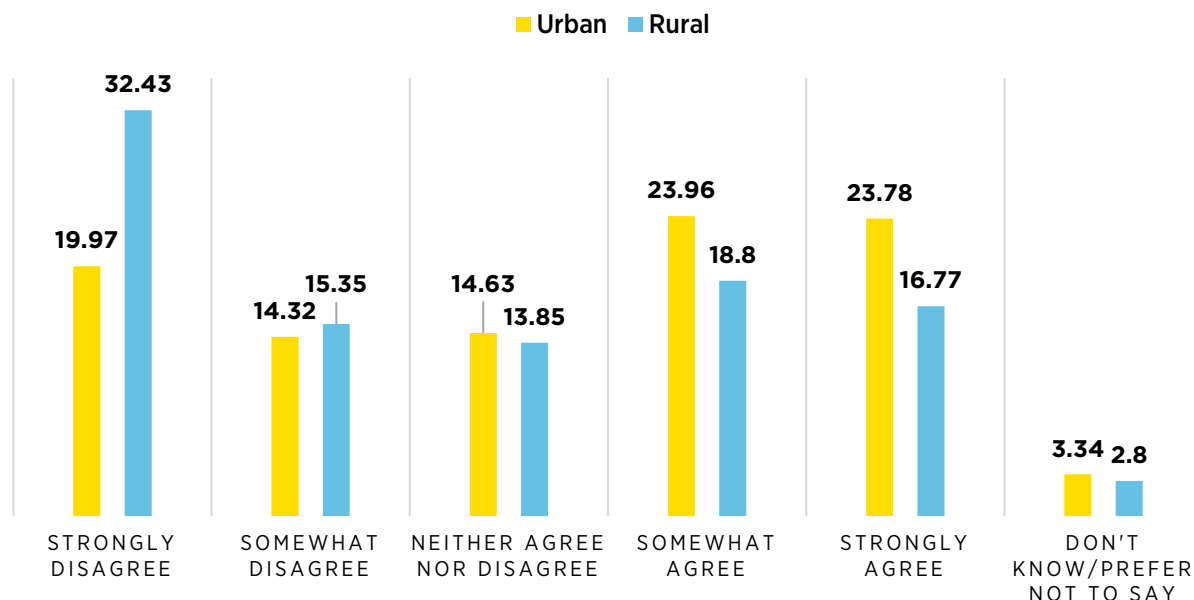
The environment and climate change are another source of urban-rural divergence. According to the CES data, this issue may in fact be the largest source of policy disagreement between urban and rural Canadians.

The CES survey asks several questions about climate change, public policy, and the trade-offs between economic activity and environmental action. The gap in urban and rural responses exceeds 5 percentage points in all except two, which have gaps of 4.83 percentage points and 4.93 percentage points. Urban and rural respondents seem to think differently about the causes and risks of climate change and how policymakers should respond to it.

Start with the causes of climate change. There is a 10-percentage point gap between urban and rural respondents on the role of human activities in causing climate change. Nearly three-quarters of urban respondents believe human activities are the main cause, compared to 65 percent of rural respondents.

There are also differing viewpoints on climate policy questions. The highest-profile example may be the carbon tax. Nearly 48 percent of rural respondents believe that the federal government should repeal the carbon tax, compared to 34.3 percent of urban respondents. The intensity of rural responses is also notable: nearly one-third of rural respondents strongly disagree with the carbon tax, compared to roughly one-fifth of urban respondents (see **Figure 4**). This may partly reflect the distributional effects of carbon taxes, which tend to disproportionately affect rural residents due to higher transportation costs and the limited availability of public transit.²¹

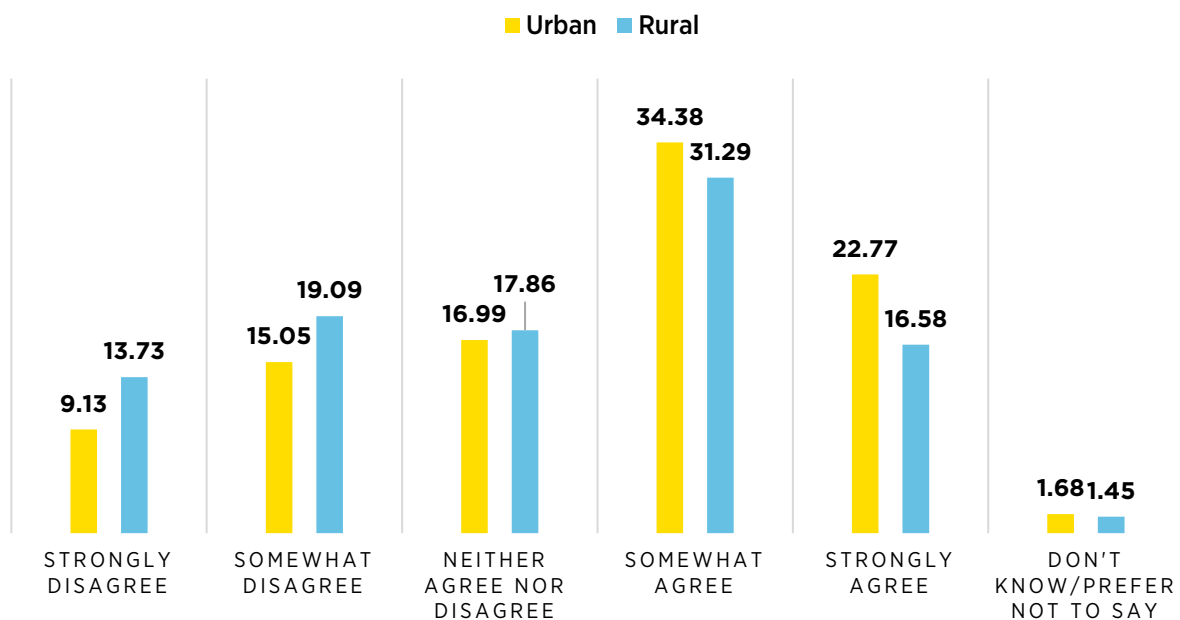
FIGURE 4: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON CARBON TAXES (%)
Survey question: To help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the federal government should continue to implement a carbon tax.



Nearly one-third of rural respondents strongly disagree with the carbon tax.

But, even more generally, the data points to differing urban-rural views about environmental and climate policy and how it interacts with the economy. More than 57 percent of urban respondents, for instance, support stricter environmental regulations, even if such regulations lead to higher consumer prices, compared to 47.9 percent of rural respondents (see **Figure 5**). When environmental policy conflicts with job creation, 43.4 percent of rural respondents say the federal government should prioritize jobs, compared to 38.7 percent of urban respondents.

FIGURE 5: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON BALANCING THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY (%)
Survey question: Environmental regulation should be stricter, even if it leads to consumers having to pay higher prices.



More than 57 percent of urban respondents support stricter environmental regulations, even if such regulations lead to higher consumer prices, compared to 47.9 percent of rural respondents.

These different viewpoints on climate policy may reflect the disproportionate role that the natural resource sector plays in rural employment.²² An estimated 500 rural communities across the country depend on mining, forestry and energy for their livelihoods.²³ It is no surprise, then, that 58 percent of rural respondents believe that the federal government should do more to support the energy sector, compared to 47.4 percent of urban respondents.

The point here is that urban-rural differences on climate change are at least in part a reflection of differing economic interests and, in turn, divergent interpretations of the benefits and costs of climate action. As one of us will discuss in a subsequent commentary, this has various implications for policy-making, including the design of emissions abatement policies and broader steps to support affected workers and communities.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

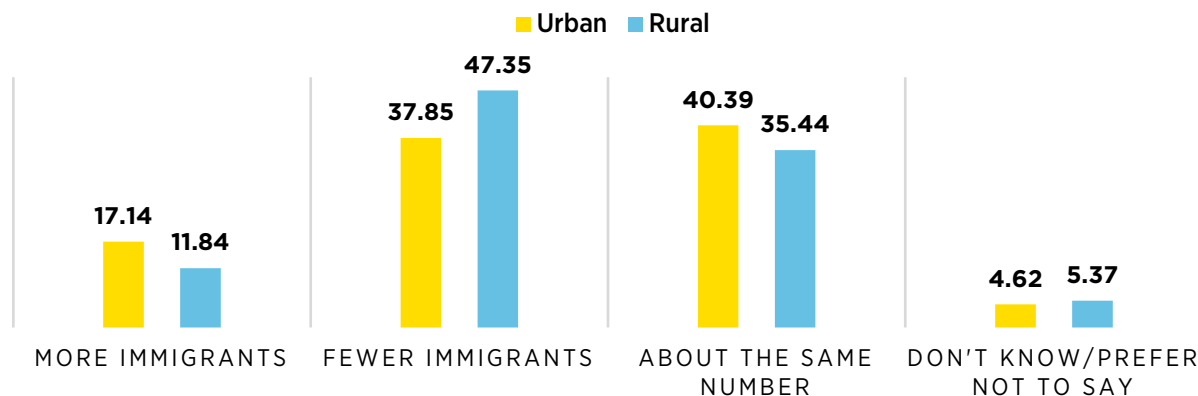
Canada is an outlier around the world on its attitudes towards immigration. A 2019 report by Pew Research, for instance, found that more Canadians view immigration as a strength for the country than in any other jurisdiction surveyed.²⁴

Yet Canadian attitudes are not monolithic. The CES data shows differing views among urban and rural respondents on issues such as immigration levels, refugee policy, and integration and settlement. Of the eight questions related to immigration, there was at least a 5-percentage point gap in four cases.

These divergent views are not unique to Canada. A major poll conducted by the Washington Post and Kaiser Family Foundation in 2017 similarly found that attitudes about immigration represent one of the widest gulfs between American cities and rural communities.²⁵ Evidence from other countries finds similar urban-rural attitudes.²⁶

The most basic difference here in Canada is on overall immigration levels. More than 47 percent of rural respondents agree that Canada should admit fewer immigrants, compared to 37.9 percent of urban respondents (see **Figure 6**). The gap is mostly unchanged with respect to refugees, with 50.3 percent of rural respondents saying that Canada should admit fewer refugees, compared to 43.3 percent of urban respondents.

FIGURE 6: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION ADMISSION LEVELS (%)
Survey question: Do you think Canada should admit...



More than 47 percent of rural respondents agree that Canada should admit fewer immigrants, compared to 37.9 percent of urban respondents.

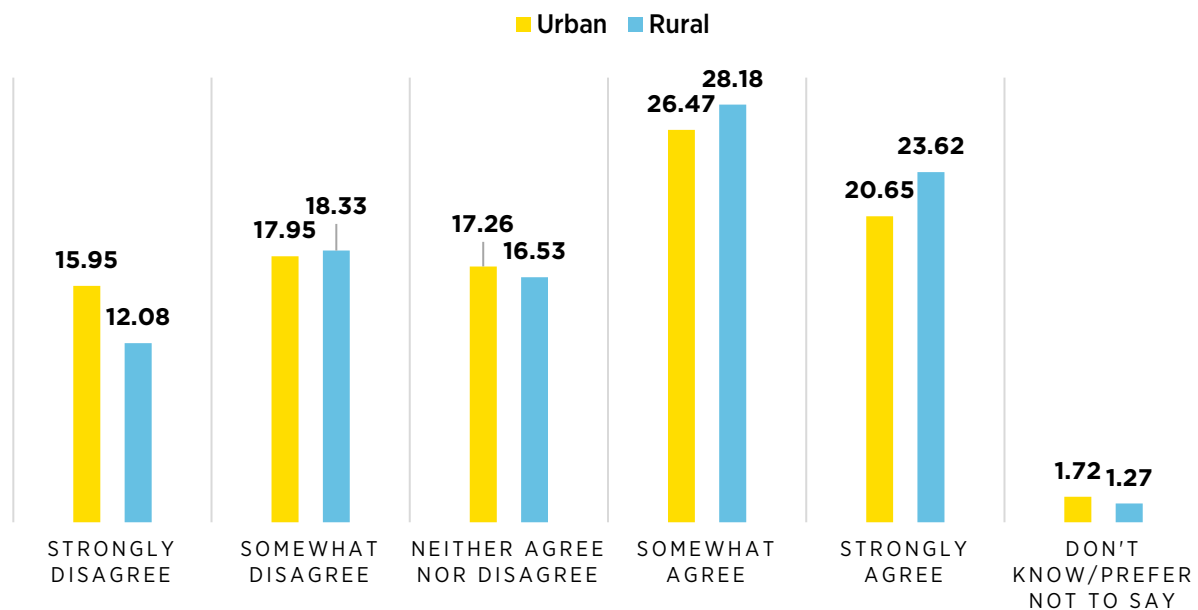
These views then manifest themselves in different positions on immigration-related programs and spending. More than half of rural respondents say the federal government should spend less on immigrants and minorities, compared to 39.2 percent of urban respondents.

It is difficult to fully discern from the CES data the cause of these attitudes towards immigration. The survey asks both about cultural integration and employment effects from high levels of immigration. There are

urban-rural differences in the responses to these questions, but they do not self-evidently point in the direction of an economic or cultural explanation.

About one-quarter of rural respondents believe that immigrants take jobs from other Canadians, compared to roughly one-fifth of urban respondents. More than half of rural respondents believe that too many recent immigrants do not assimilate into Canadian society, as do 47.1 percent of urban respondents (see **Figure 7**). Neither set of responses seems to fully explain the urban-rural differences on immigration-related issues.

FIGURE 7: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION (%)
Survey question: Too many recent immigrants just don't want to fit into Canadian society.



More than half of rural respondents believe that too many recent immigrants do not assimilate into Canadian society, as do 47.1 percent of urban respondents.

The key takeaway here is that Canadian policymakers would be wrong to assume that our current immigration policy faces no opposition or that the source of such opposition is limited to rural areas. It is a reminder that we cannot take Canada's immigration policies for granted. Maintaining relatively high levels of public support for relatively high levels of immigration will require that policymakers be attentive to urban and rural perspectives.

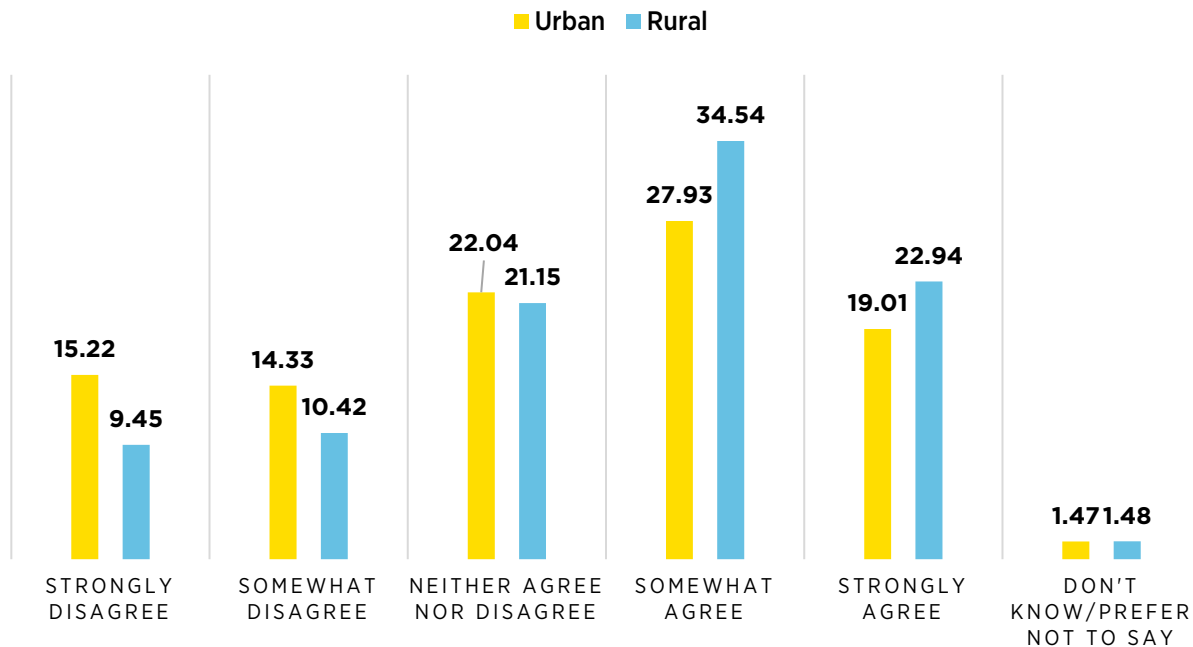
VALUES AND TRADITION

The CES data points to some urban and rural differences on questions of values and tradition. These differences are not necessarily comprehensive – remember, there was considerable urban-rural overlap on abortion – but there does seem to be evidence of differing views on the tensions between modernism and tradition in overall terms.

This insight can be found in other polling and analysis. Research by the U.S.-based Kellogg Foundation, for instance, found that rural residents are generally more traditional in their outlook and values than urban residents.²⁷ Similarly, research in Canada has distinguished between urban and rural values along an “open-ordered axis.”²⁸ The idea here is that urban residents are generally more progressive and more comfortable with modernism, and rural residents are generally more conservative and more rooted in tradition.

It is possible to overstate these differences, but the CES data certainly affirms the basic insight. The most powerful example is a question about the role of tradition in our society. More than 57 percent of rural respondents believe that the country would have fewer problems if there were more of an emphasis on tradition, compared to 47 percent of urban respondents (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF TRADITION IN SOCIETY (%)
Survey question: This country would have many fewer problems if there was more an emphasis on tradition.

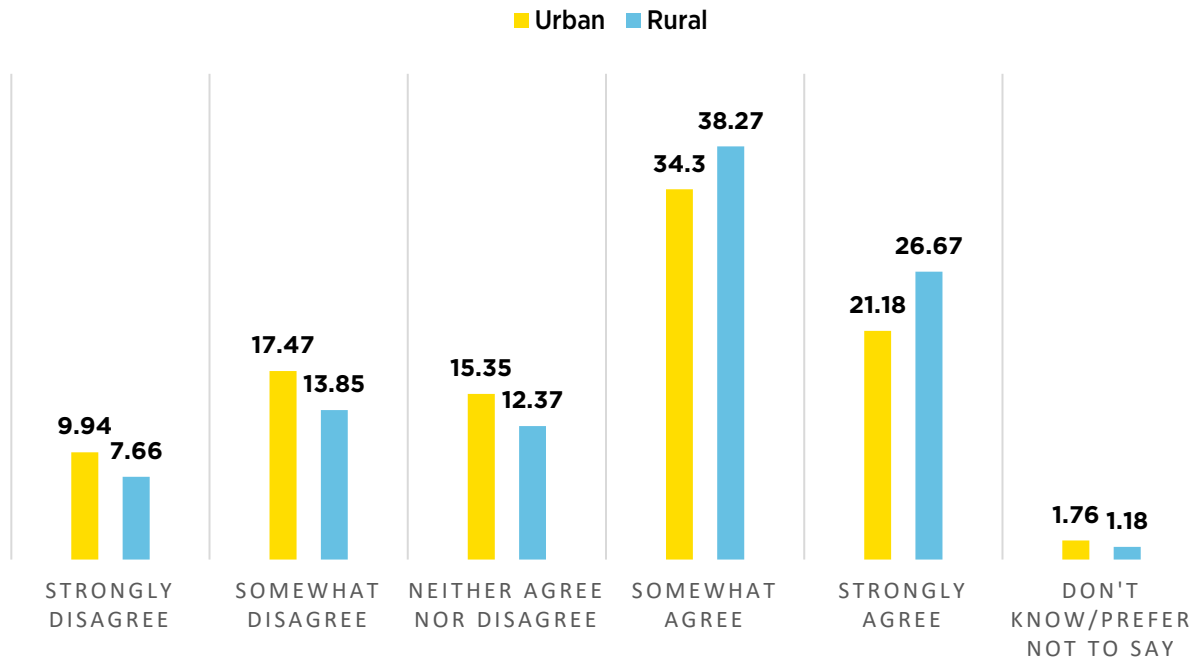


More than 57 percent of rural respondents believe that the country would have fewer problems if there were more of an emphasis on tradition, compared to 47 percent of urban respondents.

There are also differences in how urban and rural Canadians think about the role of personal responsibility and the potential disincentives of social welfare spending. Just under two-thirds of rural respondents believe that the welfare state reduces self-sufficiency, compared to 55.5 percent of urban respondents (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON THE WELFARE STATE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (%)

Survey question: The welfare state makes people less willing to look after themselves.



Just under two-thirds of rural respondents believe that the welfare state reduces self-sufficiency, compared to 55.5 percent of urban respondents

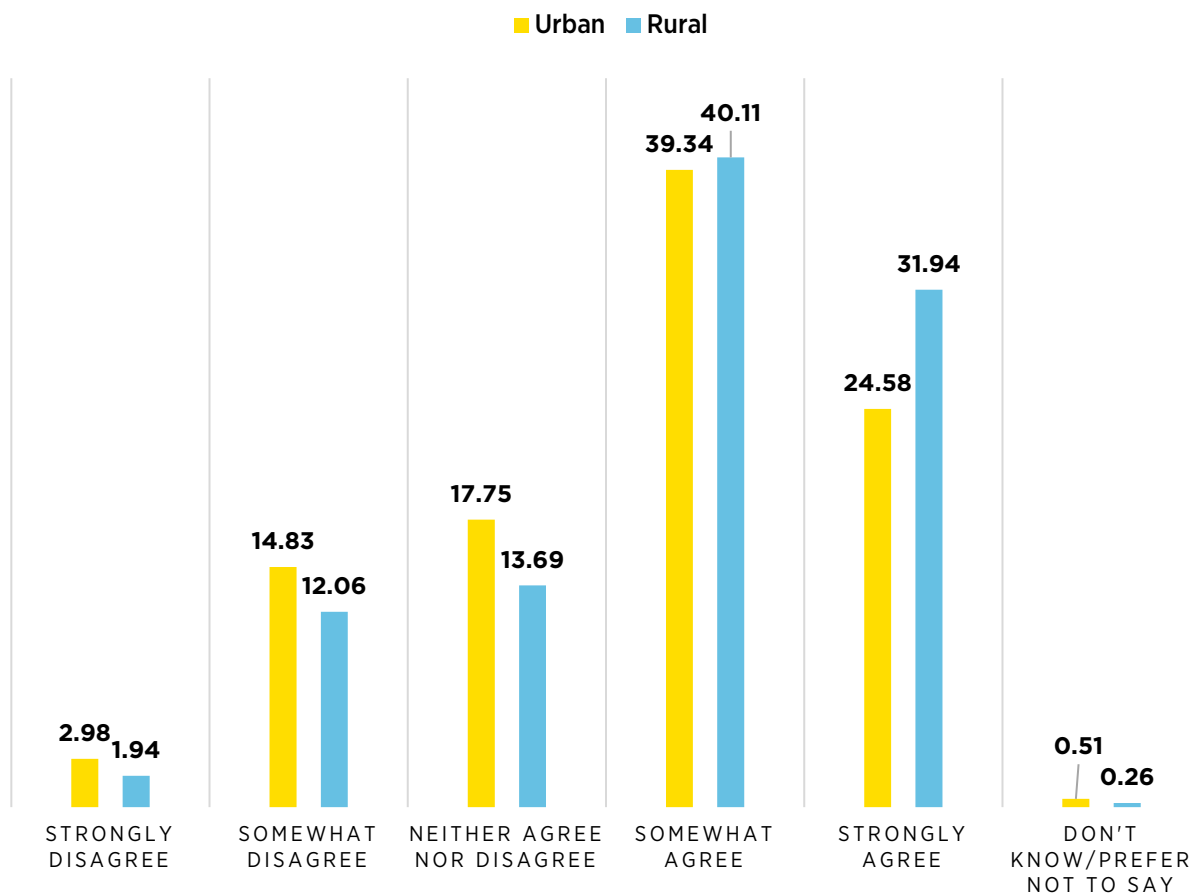
Other survey questions reflect this modernism-tradition continuum among urban and rural respondents. The gap varies depending on the issue, but the overall trend points in the direction of urban-rural differences on values and tradition that are relevant for policymakers.

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Trust in government and perceptions of the responsiveness of politics have been documented as key drivers of the rise of political populism.²⁹ It is important, therefore, that policymakers be cognizant of public perceptions of governance and public policy.

The CES asks several questions that provide insight into these perceptions. The data shows that rural respondents generally have lower levels of trust in government and negative views about political responsiveness. It is notable, for instance, that 72 percent of rural respondents agree that the government does not care about people like them, compared to 63.9 percent of urban respondents (see **Figure 10**). Similarly, two-thirds of rural respondents believe that people like them do not influence government policy, compared to three-fifths of urban respondents.

FIGURE 10: URBAN-RURAL VIEWS ON THE RESPONSIVENESS OF CANADIAN POLITICS (%)
Survey question: The government does not care much about what people like me think.



72 percent of rural respondents agree that the government does not care about people like them, compared to 63.9 percent of urban respondents.

These viewpoints are reflected in low levels of trust in government. This is seen, for instance, in a lack of confidence in politics and politicians. Nearly 60 percent of rural respondents agree that most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful, compared to 54 percent of urban respondents. Meanwhile, 47.8 percent of rural respondents indicate that “politicians are the main problem in Canada,” compared to 32 percent of urban respondents.

This data should concern policymakers and the general public. Declining public trust in politics and governance can have far-reaching implications for national unity, policy reform and political civility.

 **Declining public trust in politics and governance can have far-reaching implications for national unity, policy reform and political civility.**



CONCLUSION

The global rise of populism and increases in affective polarization as evidenced in the recent U.S. presidential election should cause introspection among policymakers in Canada about potential fissures in our own society. Our goal must be to strengthen the inclusivity and responsiveness of our politics and governance to protect against polarization and disaffection. To do so, politicians have to be on the lookout not only for existing fault lines, but new ones which may be opening up.


One potential fault line in Canadian society may be between urban and rural Canadians. This Public Policy Forum report has aimed to bring an empirical lens to this issue. By drawing on data from the Canadian Election Study, this report has sought to better understand the viewpoints of urban and rural Canadians and how they compare on economic, politics and culture.

Urban and rural Canadians actually broadly share similar views on economic, political and cultural matters. Most disagreement is a matter of degree rather than fundamental principle. There are, however, some areas of notable divergence including:

- partisan affiliation;
- state of the economy;
- environment and climate change;
- immigration policy;
- values and tradition; and
- trust in government.

These differences fall broadly along a continuum between optimism and anxiety, openness and closedness, and modernism and tradition. Urban-rural differences in these areas should not be ignored or minimized. Evidence from elsewhere, including the United States and United Kingdom, points to the risk of neglect. It is important that our politics aim to respect and account for these differences in government deliberations and policy-making. The goal must be an inclusive and responsive politics that reflects the views of all Canadians.

But we also should not exaggerate these differences either. The evidence tells us that there is more that connects us than separates us no matter whether we live in a big city or a small town. Our hope is that this report will help to further a mutual understanding between urban and rural Canadians and, ultimately, contribute to a more inclusive and responsive politics in Canada.

 **Our goal must be to strengthen the inclusivity and responsiveness of our politics and governance to protect against polarization and disaffection.**

ANNEX A: LIST OF RURAL RIDINGS

- Abitibi–Baie–James–Nunavik–Eeyou
- Abitibi–Témiscamingue
- Acadie–Bathurst
- Algoma–Manitoulin–Kapusking
- Avalon
- Avignon–La Mitis–Matane–Matapédia
- Banff–Airdrie
- Battle River–Crowfoot
- Battlefords–Lloydminster
- Beauport–Côte-de-Beaupré–Île d’Orléans–• Charlevoix
- Bonavista–Burin–Trinity
- Bow River
- Brandon–Souris
- Cape Breton–Canso
- Cardigan
- Cariboo–Prince George
- Carlton Trail–Eagle Creek
- Central Nova
- Central Okanagan–Similkameen–Nicola
- Churchill–Keewatinook Aski
- Coast of Bays–Central–Notre Dame
- Courtenay–Alberni
- Cumberland–Colchester
- Cypress Hills–Grasslands
- Dauphin–Swan River–Neepawa
- Desnethé–Missinippi–Churchill River
- Foothills
- Fort McMurray–Cold Lake
- Fundy Royal
- Gaspésie–Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine
- Grande Prairie–Mackenzie
- Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock
- Hastings–Lennox and Addington
- Joliette
- Jonquière
- Kamloops–Thompson–Cariboo
- Kootenay–Columbia
- Labrador
- Lac-Saint-Jean
- Lakeland
- Laurentides–Labelle
- Long Range Mountains
- Madawaska–Restigouche
- Manicouagan
- Medicine Hat–Cardston–Warner
- Miramichi–Grand Lake
- Mission–Matsqui–Fraser Canyon
- Montmagny–L’Islet–Kamouraska–Rivière-du-Loup
- Moose Jaw–Lake Centre–Lanigan
- Mégantic–L’Érable
- New Brunswick Southwest
- Nickel Belt
- Nipissing–Timiskaming
- North Island–Powell River
- North Okanagan–Shuswap
- Northwest Territories
- Nunavut
- Parry Sound–Muskoka
- Peace River–Westlock
- Pontiac
- Portage–Lisgar
- Prince Albert
- Prince George–Peace River–Northern Rockies
- Provencher
- Red Deer–Mountain View
- Regina–Qu’Appelle
- Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke
- Rimouski–Neigette–Témiscouata–Les Basques
- Saint-Maurice–Champlain
- Sault Ste. Marie
- Selkirk–Interlake–Eastman
- Skeena–Bulkley Valley
- Souris–Moose Mountain
- South Okanagan–West Kootenay
- South Shore–St. Margarets
- Thunder Bay–Rainy River
- Thunder Bay–Superior North
- Timmins–James Bay
- Tobique–Mactaquac
- West Nova
- West Vancouver–Sunshine Coast–Sea to Sky Country
- Yellowhead
- Yorkton–Melville
- Yukon

ANNEX B: LIST OF QUESTIONS FROM THE CANADIAN ELECTION STUDY (CITED IN THE REPORT)

If you could vote in this election, which party do you think you would vote for?

- Liberal Party
- Conservative Party
- NDP
- Bloc Québécois (Quebec residents only)
- Green Party
- People's Party
- Another party (please specify) _____
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

How satisfied are you with the performance of the federal government under Justin Trudeau?

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Not at all satisfied
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

How much should the federal government spend on criminal justice and law?

- Spend less
- Spend about the same as now
- Spend more
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

How much should the federal government spend on immigrants and minorities?

- Spend less
- Spend about the same as now
- Spend more
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

To help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the federal government should continue the carbon tax.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

The federal government should do more to help Canada's energy sector, including building oil pipelines.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Environmental regulation should be stricter, even if it leads to consumers having to pay higher prices.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

When there is a conflict between protecting the environment and creating jobs, jobs should come first.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

There should be more free trade with other countries, even if it hurts some industries in Canada.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Over the past year, has Canada's economy:

- Got better
- Stayed about the same
- Got worse
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Do you think Canada should admit:

- More immigrants
- Fewer immigrants

- About the same number of immigrants as now
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Do you think Canada should admit:

- More refugees
- Fewer refugees
- About the same number of refugees as now
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Justin Trudeau kept the election promises he made in 2015.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Given the results of the October 21 election, does the winning party have a legitimate mandate to implement its policies?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

The government does not care much about what people like me think.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

This country would have many fewer problems if there was more emphasis on traditional family values.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Too many recent immigrants just don't want to fit in to Canadian society.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Immigrants take jobs away from other Canadians.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Do you think Canada's ties with the United States should be...

- Much closer
- Somewhat closer
- About the same as now
- Somewhat more distant
- Much more distant
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Which party represents your views best?

- Conservative Party
- Liberal Party
- NDP
- Green Party
- People's Party

How satisfied are you with the way Elections Canada runs federal elections?

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Not satisfied at all
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Most politicians are trustworthy.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know / Prefer not to answer

Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know / Prefer not to answer

How much should each of the following pay in taxes?	Much more	Somewhat more	About the same as now	Somewhat less	Much less	Don't know/Prefer not to answer
Small business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Big Corporations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Middle Class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wealthy Canadians	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poor Canadians	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The welfare state makes people less willing to look after themselves.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

Is income inequality a big problem in Canada?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Not sure
- Probably not
- Definitely not
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

How much do you think should be done to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in Canada?

- Much more
- Somewhat more
- About the same as now
- Somewhat less
- Much less
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

What do you think is the main cause of climate change?

- Human activities such as burning fossil fuels for energy
- Natural changes in the environment
- Other
- Don't know/ Prefer not to answer

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