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The Economic Development Strategy Preferences of Community Leaders in Texas: A Comparative Study of Leaders in Suburbs and Central Cities

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Abstract

The suburb/central city dichotomy has been a conceptual tool used by scholars to differentiate communities in a number of ways, including politics, policy preference, and political ideology. Given the various changes undergone by suburbs and central cities during the past few decades, a renewed investigation into how well this classification actually accounts for differences in the policy preferences of city leaders is beneficial to an overall understanding of urban politics and policy. Using census data and survey results of several types of city leaders in Texas, we examine the ways in which the suburb/central city dichotomy influences the policy preferences of city leaders. Our findings indicate the dichotomy remains a useful conceptual tool for understanding urban policy making particularly with respect to influencing and promoting particular attitudes among city leaders in the important area of economic development.

Keywords

suburbs, central cities, economic development

Introduction

Literature on the suburb/central city dichotomy tends to focus on the respective communities as either residential environments (e.g., Warner, 1973) or commodities to be marketed to the financially affluent (Oliver, 2001). The terms *suburb* and *central city* have come to emphasize differences in these types of communities, and studies tend to rely on accepted paradigms about differences between suburbs and central cities without questioning the extent to which differences between these communities actually exist. This study probes the differences between suburbs and central cities within the context of real policy decisions and the various influences on city leaders engaged in the decision-making process. Our interest in conducting this study was twofold. First, we were interested in determining whether the suburb/central city dichotomy is still a viable paradigm through which to examine city leader decision making. Relatively recent changes in the demographics and economies of suburbs and central cities compel us to question whether post–World War II (WWII) conceptions of suburban "bedroom communities" versus sprawling cities remain applicable to 21st-century urban studies. Second, we were interested in determining the extent, if any, to which the suburb/central city dichotomy influences decision making. Our study's findings not only demonstrate the continued feasibility of the dichotomy to understanding economic decision making but also reveal how the dichotomy informs policy making among community leaders in the important area of economic development, specifically with respect to promoting particular attitudes among city leaders. Our results are noteworthy for what they reveal about how the dichotomy exerts influence and how these influences are contextualized in the environments in which the cities are located.

Our study first sets out to provide accurate contemporary descriptions of the characteristics of the respective communities under investigation. Early scholarly work on suburbs, for example, identified only specific types of suburbs for study while ignoring communities that did not conform to a stereotypical image of suburbs as large new subdivisions built for young, relatively affluent families. As Palen (2005) points out, "The postwar suburban studies were highly selective . . . [and paid] little attention to industrial suburbs, working-class suburbs, or even older established suburbs"

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(p. 130). Likewise, central city conditions today do not necessarily correspond to the stereotypes used in past studies. Not all big cities were equally impacted by deindustrialization, and not all have adjusted and thrived in the context of a new century. Perhaps most significant is the fact that recent studies indicate a general improvement in the living conditions of central cities. There has, for example, been marked decreases in crime (Levitt, 2004); central business districts (CBDs) have increasingly become centers for finance, entertainment, nonprofits, and educational institutions (Strom, 2002); tourism initiatives have (at least in some central cities) increased downtown economic development; and gentrification efforts have had a level of success in pulling middle-class citizens back to or at least near to the central city (Judd & Swanstrom, 2012). The net result of these shifts, according to William H. Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institute, is that "A new image of urban America is in the making."

Suburban Mystique and Central City Despair

Well before WWII veterans returned home, suburbs had become associated in the minds of many Americans as enclaves of privilege, opportunity, and exclusivity (Jackson, 1988; Teaford, 2006). In his history of suburbia, Jackson (1988) notes that the image of suburbs as exclusive enclaves contributed to a "suburban mystique." The emergence of suburban communities began in the United States in the mid-19th century with the development of commercial steamship lines in New York and Boston that allowed the wealthy to remove themselves from the noise and pollution of the central city (Warner, 1973). The development and construction of railways in major metropolitan areas such as Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Chicago in the late 19th century ensured suburbs did not fade from the American landscape. Advances in transportation technology and public infrastructure worked to create even more opportunity for others to follow the wealthy in search of a refuge from the central cities. As Jackson notes, even before the dawn of the "American century" the term *suburb* carried positive meaning in the minds of most Americans. The view of suburbs as distinct and separate community types gained further support in the early 1920s. Before the onset of the Great Depression, real estate professionals engaged in collective efforts to establish suburbs as ideal communities for the upper-middle class (Fogelson, 2007). The suburbanization that began prior to the Depression, and later flourished in post–WWII America, was fueled by a movement by those who could best afford to commute to the city for work because cities were at that time the hubs of American jobs (see Mieszkowski & Mills, 1993). Increasing public investments in infrastructure and widespread middle-class prosperity created an environment that solidified the suburbs in American culture as "bedroom communities" that allowed workers to travel from home to the workplace (Fogelson, 2007).

The image of suburbs as privileged communities continues unabated. As Palen (2005) notes, "Suburbia has become endowed with a long list of physical and even psychological attributes: ranch style houses, neat lawns, SUVs and car pools, good schools, clean, safe neighborhoods, a small town atmosphere, and overscheduled parents and children" (p. 129). The tenacity with which the suburban mystique has continued to exist in the minds of American citizens is a testament to the power this idealized view of suburbs has on the American consciousness. Although the image holds a strong place in American culture, it does not fully capture the reality of contemporary suburban life.

Kunstler (1994) notes that the development of the suburban mystique in the American experience stands in direct contrast to the image of the central city as rife with deterioration. While President Thomas Jefferson argued central cities house all manner of human depredation, Jefferson's view did not always resonate within American culture (Jefferson quoted in Warner, 1973). Kenneth Jackson (1988) notes that even during the initial industrialization of the United States, central cities were seen as centers of opportunity, culture, and learning. Massive immigration to areas such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Cleveland in the early 20th century, however, was accompanied by a perception of central cities as overcrowded slums fueled by desperate immigrants attempting to achieve a better life (Teaford, 2006). Advancement in modern production techniques from the early to mid-20th century further contributed to the emergence of a negative image of central cities. Dominated by large-scale industry, central cities such as Detroit, Chicago, Kansas City, and Cincinnati suffered from the concentration of large-scale industrial activities. Industrialization ensured central cities became home not only to industry but also to pollution and a crowded infrastructure stemming from industrial activities (Jackson, 1988). In the minds of many, such factors made the central city a far from attractive place to reside.

The decline in the attractiveness of the central city was further exacerbated by a suburban housing shortage in the 1930s (Fogelson, 2007). Lack of residential housing and construction initiated by the onset of WWII remained unaddressed until the late 1940s. Many returning service personnel and their families continued to reside in the central city until enough housing existed in the suburbs to accommodate them. As Fogelson (2007) notes, the late 1940s saw less criticism of the central city in the popular press; however, post–WWII suburbanization and globalization resulted in a shift in economic sectors that by the 1970s led to deindustrialization in many core urban areas (see Rieniets, 2009). The problems facing central cities became entangled with political rhetoric that did little to build national support for addressing these problems, and the decade of the 1970s witnessed a popular sentiment that government would not be able to address the problems of central cities and, in fact,

would be easier to forget them altogether (Oliver, 2001). Further compounding the general malaise of the 1970s was an unsympathetic response to urban decline expressed by the Reagan and Bush administrations (Kunstler, 1994). As Gainsborough (2001) notes, the combination of industrial, economic, and political influences on and about the demise of the central city led to an unquestioned tendency to portray American central cities as centers for deterioration and blighted physical structures, high crime and taxes, and an undereducated, underemployed, heavily non-White population.

The last two decades of the 20th century looked grim particularly for older central cities as unemployment, poverty, and city expenditures increased, businesses and more affluent taxpayers left, and revenue declined. By the 1990s, urban scholars were describing an urban crisis that appeared almost hopeless. Cadwallader (1996) sums up the general climate and attitudes held about central cities at the time:

> The old and dilapidated building stock of these areas generates increased costs of fire protection, the higher crime rates bring requests for greater police protection, and the general poverty and high rates of unemployment induce increased demands for social services. (p. 39)

The Impact of Central City Despair and the "Suburban Mystique" on Community Leaders and Decision Making: The Ideal of Managed Growth in Economic Policy Development

The image of the central cities as dilapidated would have consequences for the behavior of potential residents of suburbia. Warner (1973) and Jackson (1988) both contend that individuals have been drawn to the suburbs in large part due to a perceived need to escape the ills of the central city. Suburban city leaders, being suburban residents as well, possess heightened recognition of the fact that the quality of life found in suburban communities is paramount to the communities' success. Quality-of-life issues have traditionally been central to the economic development plans pursued by suburban leaders, which leads us to anticipate a link between quality-of-life issues and the policy preferences of suburban leaders. Accordingly, we derive our first hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Suburban leaders will view quality-of-life issues as more important than will leaders of central cities.

Suburbs, despite their attributes, do not contain all the amenities desired by their residents. Recent studies demonstrate that individuals moving to the suburbs find the lack of retail and entertainment facilities to be one of the strongest drawbacks to living in these communities (Klotkin, 2010). Due in part to suburbanites' desires for retail and entertainment facilities there has been a relatively recent movement of retail to the suburbs (Teaford, 2006) as well as an increase in efforts to attract entertainment amenities (Kunstler, 1998). Retail movement and efforts to attract entertainment indicate an acknowledgment among suburban community leaders of the potential benefits of downtown suburban development (particularly with respect to retail development). By contrast, downtown development specific to an economic development item such as retail and entertainment may be of somewhat less importance to central city leaders because cities tend to have a more diverse economy relative to suburbs. Downtown development is, in other words, simply one "ingredient" in a larger central city economic "mix." As Pagano and Bowman (2004) note, there are too few jobs in the central city to allow leaders to focus on one area, which leads to the next hypothesis to be tested.

> *Hypothesis 2*: Suburban leaders will be more concerned with downtown development than will central city leaders.

A high quality of life can only be achieved in a suburban community if the proper type of growth can be achieved, and proper or "managed" growth can only be implemented if city leaders have the tools needed to carry out their economic development goals. Land use planning is a primary tool through which city leaders can institutionalize a perspective to engage in managed growth (Feiock, Jeong, & Kim, 2003), and suburban concern with managed growth leads us to anticipate an emphasis on planning. A comprehensive city plan (aka a general or master plan) normally covers a 20-year time span and establishes among other policy goals the community's fiscal and land use outcomes (Levy, 1997). Long-range outcomes can not only serve as "benchmarks" for suburban leaders to measure present growth but may also act to create parameters within which development can proceed. This leads to our third hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 3*: Suburban leaders will view a city comprehensive plan as more important than will leaders of central cities.

Teaford (2006) notes that economic development in the suburbs focuses not only on creating new jobs but also on trying to engage in economic development that complements the community. Suburban leaders possess an awareness of their communities' quality-of-life concerns and seek to offer potential residents a package of amenities that differ from that of the central city (Hayden, 2004). New jobs, for example, tend to detract from the suburban environment if the new jobs originate within industries that bring unwanted externalities such as increased use of infrastructure and additional pollution. We anticipate that suburban leaders will

view job creation to be less important than will central city leaders because of the emphasis suburban leaders place on managed growth and the negative potential job creation might produce within their communities (such as suburban sprawl). Given the larger population of central cities, it is logical to assume that central city leaders will place greater emphasis on the provision of jobs to support their cities' substantial populations. Our fourth hypothesis is derived from this assumption:

Hypothesis 4: Suburban leaders will be less interested in job creation than will be central city leaders.

Oliver (2001) and Gainsborough (2001) both find that a key value associated with development in the suburbs is reduced cost development. Development often entails additional service provisions in the form of added police protection, road repair, and sewage and water maintenance. Increased services may in turn lead to increased taxes—a move likely to be resisted by fiscally conservative suburban residents as noted by Kruse in his 2005 study. As Oliver comments, suburban residents move to avoid the high taxes they associate with life in the central city. Consequently, economic development that increases the costs of government and in turn leads to increased taxes is a situation suburban leaders are likely to avoid due to the fact that such development might well threaten their political careers. Thus, suburban leaders will likely cast a keen eye on the costs of development via the need for increased services.

Hypothesis 5: Suburban leaders will be more concerned with the costs associated with development than will central city leaders.

Research illustrates the extent to which residents of suburbs place greater emphasis on managed growth (Oliver, 2001). Because managed growth is viewed by suburbanites as a positive economic strategy, city leaders acting within the managed growth perspective become less likely to accept growth at all costs. Such leaders will be more likely to seek economic policy opportunities that hold the potential for adding revenue to the community without harming the quality of life or generating negative revenue because of substantial changes in infrastructure. Furthermore, city leaders who place greater value on managed growth become agents acting in pursuit of a long-term perspective rather than in response to short-term opportunities (Hayden, 2004). Managed growth efforts to create and maintain a favorable environment combined with empirical evidence demonstrating greater ideological conservatism among suburbanites (Kruse, 2005) lead us to the logical assumption that more than central city leaders, suburban leaders will emphasize revenue generation as an important aspect of economic development.

Hypothesis 6: Revenue generation will be more important to suburban leaders than to central city leaders.

Regionalism as an Approach to Economic Development: The Politics of Autonomy and the Concept of Exclusivity

Harrigan and Vogel (2000) argue suburban city leaders are driven by the need to respond to the "politics of autonomy." The politics of autonomy encapsulates efforts among suburban leaders to ensure that decisions involving their communities reflect the policy preferences of the community and compels leaders to resolve potentially controversial issues within their city's political institutions or through residents deciding issues at the ballot box (Harrigan & Vogel, 2000). Either mechanism works to insulate decision making from outside actors who might seek to impose unwanted or unpopular policy solutions on the community. Only through preventing the imposition of outsiders' policy preferences can suburban leaders assure residents the services and low tax rates they desire (Harrigan & Vogel, 2000). A city leader's willingness to embrace the politics of autonomy substantially impacts whether he or she views regionalism as a desirable strategy for pursuing economic development.

Regionalism, an urban policy approach first advocated in the 1970s, places suburbs within the context of the surrounding metropolitan region (Hayden, 2004). Arguments for a regionalist approach to decision making were originally based on the idea that suburbs were neither concerned with nor effective at addressing problems that faced other communities in their region, particularly those of the central cities. The ability to insulate themselves from the concerns facing central cities created a situation in which suburban policy became less and less effective at addressing problems associated with urban decline, a situation which Miller summarizes as a demonstration of the negative consequences of wasted resources and further dissatisfaction among metropolitan residents (Miller, 1993). In recognition of the negative dynamic between suburb and central city, scholars began advancing a new approach to combating problems facing metropolitan regions and the insular outlook of suburban leaders. The approach came to be known in urban policy literature as "regionalism."

Regionalism advocates that all communities within the metropolitan region contribute to improving the fortunes of the central city, as well as other ailing communities, to prevent significant negative externalities from impacting all communities (Feiock et al., 2003). It is based on the idea that negative externalities arise because of a spatial mismatch between the most significant policy problems faced by a community and the resources needed to address them (Ihlanfeldt, 1995). To address and eliminate the mismatch

between problems and resources, regionalism advances the idea that government institutions be created to reallocate resources to address existing problems and that all communities tie themselves to a central governing institution (Feiock & Carr, 2001). Joining a common governing institution demonstrates a community's willingness to adopt a regional approach to problem solving as well as its commitment to a regional governance policy-making approach that relies on cooperation and coordination among participant community governments rather than government coercion (Feiock & Carr, 2001). The primary drawback to a regionalist approach to governance is that member communities surrender a significant amount of latitude and autonomy over pursuing their policy goals and objectives. Surrendering control (to whatever degree) over the policy agenda limits the member communities' freedom, as well as that of their community leaders, to unilaterally pursue development goals, maintain resources, and establish tax rates. Decreased autonomy creates a negative environment for suburban leaders because the benefits of their actions no longer concentrate solely on their immediate community (Harrigan & Vogel, 2000).

Harrigan and Vogel (2000) argue that community leaders' desire to maintain control over the policy agenda and resources of their respective communities represents the real "politics of autonomy." Suburban leaders are driven not only by the need to maintain control over the agenda and resources of their communities but also by a desire to insulate their communities from the outside in order for their residents to feel their environment is protected (Hayden, 2004; Kunstler, 1994). Whereas the politics of autonomy involves a community seeking to politically separate itself from other communities, the politics of exclusivity indicates a population's desire to distance itself from other populations (Harrigan & Vogel, 2000). Exclusivity may be pursued on a number of grounds, including race and socioeconomic status (Teaford, 2007). The dual emphasis on separation (autonomy) and distance (exclusivity), as well as potential negative consequences of regionalism such as additional costs that government entanglement might present to residents (Miller, 1993) and outside attempts to circumvent or counteract what the member community is attempting to accomplish (Pagano & Bowman, 2004), lead us to expect that suburban leaders will be uninterested in taking a regional view of economic growth. Central city leaders, however, will be more inclined to adopt a regionalist view of economic growth given the economic circumstances most central cities face and in light of the fact that central cities still tend to serve as the primary centers of regional development. This leads us to hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 7*: Suburban leaders will be less interested in regional economic development issues than will leaders of central cities.

The relative homogeneity of suburban communities dampens the need for suburban leaders to actively engage in coalition building among diverse interests. Hayden (2004) argues that coalitions generally do not exist in suburbs because city leaders are drawn from pools of residents from which the leader does not significantly diverge. The homogeneity of suburbia and their suburban leaders stand in marked contrast to central city leaders, who must confront greater complexity and diversity within their communities. The heightened degree of complexity and diversity of interests in central cities requires central city leaders to include consensus building in their economic development policy agendas, while the relative homogeneity of suburbs places consensus building further down on the policy agendas of suburban city leaders. This leads us to our final hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 8*: Suburban leaders will view coalition building as less important than will leaders of central cities.

Data and Method

Testing the validity of our hypotheses required us to combine data from multiple sources, including a combination of survey, census, and geographical sources. First, our survey was constructed with an eye toward gathering attitudinal and demographic information about leaders of Texas cities. Regarding attitudinal information, the autonomy enjoyed by city leaders in Texas creates a clear conduit through which preferences can be translated into policy goals. As Burby and May (1997) note, Texas maintains a dominant laissez-faire political culture that "prefers to place land use issues in the hands of local governments" (p. 76). Because of the high degree of autonomy Texas extends to its local governments, the expressed priorities of local leaders reflect viable policy options for city government. Information on the economic development concerns of city leaders as well as demographic information on these leaders (including age, gender, and level of education) comes from a 2005 and 2006 survey of city leaders in Texas. Second, information on city population characteristics (including income, unemployment, and education) comes from U.S. Census reports. Third, geographic information was obtained by considering the proximity of a given suburb to a central city. Utilizing these several types of data enabled us to construct a model for examining how attitudinal influences prompted by community type impacted the economic development perspective of individual city leaders.

A mail-out survey of city leaders across the state of Texas was administered in October 2005 and in March 2006. Respondents for the survey were drawn from community leaders respectively representing the 337 Texas cities identified as having at least 5,000 citizens in the 2000 Census. Our analysis employed responses generated from this survey. The respondents were leaders of incorporated municipalities in census-defined metropolitan areas (these were not census-defined places or communities in rural areas but were distinct, separate, incorporated metropolitan entities).

We classified cities as either suburb or central city based on census-defined central cities (U.S. Census Bureau, July 1999, revised January 2002). There were 159 responses from city leaders in metropolitan areas (23 mayors, 21 city managers, 47 council presidents, 34 chamber of commerce presidents and 23 economic development corporation [EDC] directors). These leaders were drawn from 115 suburbs and 44 central cities. Not every city had every leadership position (an EDC director, for example); but, in lieu of a definitive list of cities with a population of 5,000 or above for each position, we found it expedient to send a survey to each city for each position. Three hundred and thirty-seven surveys were mailed for each office.[1]

Our survey possessed several desirable features for examining the impact of city type on the economic development concerns of city leaders. Unlike other surveys, our survey included an extensive cohort of city leaders for each community. The inclusion of an extensive leadership cohort was important to our study because it allowed for a strong test of a "suburban" mind-set that shapes decision making by city leaders residing in suburbs. Using the politics of managed growth, exclusivity, and autonomy as our foundation, we expected the influences exerted by the nature of suburbia to be sufficiently strong that leaders, regardless of their position, would respond to stimuli in a similar manner. Survey data that included multiple leaders allowed our hypothesized relationships to be found if they do in fact exist and prevented our analysis from being skewed in any one direction because of the particular leadership position held by respondents.

A second benefit of our survey instrument was that it contained a number of items specifically designed to address a multitude of factors that could influence a leader's approach to economic development beyond the respondents' attitudes on the subject. Respondents were asked to report basic demographic information such as their age, gender, and level of education. Including these items in our survey instrument enabled us to obtain information that would allow us to measure the level of professionalism displayed by respondents or their experience. The inclusion of respondents' orientations toward economic development in conjunction with both personal and professional characteristics strengthened our database, and thereby allowed us to gain information that would provide a more complete picture of the factors that influence approaches to economic development. The inclusion of demographic data also reduced the likelihood that the power of suburbia might be misinterpreted in an overly positive way.[2]

To gauge the economic development concerns of city leaders we asked respondents to rank 13 economic development considerations in the context of how important each consideration was when responding to new economic development project proposals or when seeking to attract new development to their city (derived from Lewis's, 2001, study of city administrators in California; see appendix for the question wording and economic development considerations). When ranked from 1 through 13, the lower the assigned rank-order value, the greater the level of importance given to a specific economic development consideration. To make interpretation of findings more intuitive, the score on each consideration was reversed (through $14 - y$) so that a higher score signified a greater level of importance. This rank-order value model resulted in a measure in which a 13 indicates the item is the most important economic development consideration and a 1 indicates the item is the least important economic development consideration.

For purposes of our analysis, we conceptually classified the 13 considerations into five economic development categories as follows: Coalition Building (support from local business, support from other city leaders, and support from citizens and citizen groups), Quality of Life (effect on the environment, effect on traffic, and community aesthetics), Regional Considerations (regional economic growth and views of nearby local government leaders), Planning (city's general plan), and Traditional Concerns (job creation, revenue generation, additional cost of municipal services, and downtown development). Although conceptually categorized, we opted to treat each of the 13 items as a distinct dependent variable in our subsequent analyses. We considered this approach to be optimal for identifying specific economic development concerns that most differentiated suburban and central city leaders.[3]

Our analyses were conducted in several stages. The first step consisted of comparing the demographic profiles of central cities and suburbs. The demographic profile for each community included the percentages of the unemployed, Hispanic residents, African American residents, individuals living in poverty, and those with college degrees (see Table 1 for the descriptive statistics of these variables) to determine the extent to which central cities and suburbs were, in fact, distinct from each other. Basic comparisons of mean tests established that suburbs and central cities are in fact demographically different (see the following section and Table 2).

Next, 13 multivariate models were estimated to determine the role the dichotomy played in shaping respondents' attention to quality-of-life concerns, planning goals, need for professional support, and traditional development concerns in attracting development. We ran these multivariate models to determine whether city type affected a leader's preference for economic development strategies. Basic ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to test the multivariate model with all models being tested for heteroskedasticity, which was not found to be present in any of the models. We included most of the independent variables from the bivariate analysis as control variables in the multivariate model with the one exception of including only one indicator of the economic conditions of the city. Unemployment was selected because, unlike the other indicators that came from the 2000 Census, we obtained the unemployment figures from the 2005 Bureau of Labor

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables

	M	*SD*	Range	*n*
Dependent variables				
Coalition building				
City leaders	7.4	3.0	1-13	151
Local business	6.1	3.1	1-13	152
Citizens	8.5	3.3	1-13	151
Quality of life				
Traffic	6.1	3.1	1-13	151
Community aesthetics	6.3	2.0	1-12	151
Environment	5.3	2.8	1-12	151
Regional				
Regional economic growth	6.4	4.0	1-13	150
Views of nearby communities	2.5	2.3	1-12	151
Planning				
City comprehensive plan	8.0	3.2	1-13	153
Traditional				
Job creation	10.4	3.2	1-13	153
Revenue generation	11.0	2.2	2-13	153
Cost of additional services	8.1	3.2	1-13	152
Downtown development	5.6	3.3	1-13	150
Independent variables				
Population	68,102	163,785	5201-1,188,580	159
% with bachelor's degree	21.9	12.1	3.4-80.5	159
Per capita income	19,691	6,803	7,287-63,414	159
% individuals in poverty	13.3	7.5	0.4-35.5	159
% unemployment	3.7	1.4	1.1-7.5	159
% Black	11.4	14.3	0.1-72.6	159
% Hispanic	24.8	22.8	2.8-96.4	159
% age 18 and above	71.9	4.9	51.5-94.7	159
Distance (suburb to city)	25.8	16.2	2.9-89.5	115
Population difference (city – suburb)	792,346	586,496	40,154-1,947,922	115

Note: Descriptive information is based on our 159 observations. The *n* is less than 159 on some survey variables because of incomplete surveys. The smaller *n* on the distance and population difference variables is because only suburbs are reported; central cities were coded as 0.

Table 2. Socioeconomic Differences Between Surveyed Suburbs and Central Cities

	Suburbs (*n* = 115)	Central cities (*n* = 44)
Mean population	26,482 (39,483)	172,308 (270,462)***
% bachelor's degree	22.2 (13.7)	21.3 (6.2)
Per capita income	20,636 (7,622)	17,222 (2,725)***
% individuals in poverty	11.4 (7.3)	18.3 (5.8)***
% unemployment	3.4 (1.3)	4.6 (1.0)***
% Black	8.8 (12.2)	18.1 (18.9)***
% Hispanic	21.8 (21.0)	32.5 (25.6)**
% age 18 and above	72.4 (7.3)	74.8 (3.9)***

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.
Difference of means, $^{**}p \leq .05$. $^{***}p \leq .01$.

Statistics. This measure was temporally the closest measure of the economics of the city, and because all three measures were highly correlated with one another, we opted to include only unemployment in our multivariate models.

Finally, in addition to the demographic control variables in the model we included three variables that captured the difference between suburbs and central cities. The first variable was a dichotomous variable with suburbs being coded as 1 and central cities coded as 0. The second variable was a measure of geographic proximity of suburbs to central cities. This variable indicates the miles between the central city and the suburb. If the city is a central city, the variable is coded

Table 3. Characteristics of Surveyed Suburban and Central City Leaders

	Suburbs	Central cities
% mayor	15.7 (18/115)	11.4 (5/44)
% manager	20.9 (24/115)	20.5 (9/44)
% city council	31.3 (36/115)	22.7 (10/44)
% EDC director	13.0 (15/115)	18.2 (8/44)
% chamber president	19.1 (22/115)	27.3 (12/44)
% Black	0.9 (1.115)	4.8 (2/42)
% Hispanic	7.3 (8/115)	14.3 (6/42
% < bachelor's degree	27.6 (30/109)	9.5 (4/42)
% > bachelor's degree	32.1 (35/109)	49.6 (20/42)
% female	20.0 (22/110)	18.2 (8/44)
Average age	54.8 (10.9)	55.7 (7.6)

Note: EDC = economic development corporation. The number of cases is in parentheses, except age which is the standard error. Difference of means in average age, $p = .577$.

as 0 as there is no distance between the city and a central city. The third variable we included was a measure of population differential between central cities and suburbs. We included this variable to account for the idea that all suburbs might not behave in the same manner based on their size compared with the central city in the region. The descriptive statistics for the variables used in our analysis are shown in Table 1.

Findings

Table 2 compares the socioeconomic characteristics of the suburbs and the central cities in which our surveyed city leaders work (i.e., "surveyed" suburbs and central cities).

Suburbs are on average wealthier and less populous than central cites with higher per capita income and lower levels of poverty and unemployment. Suburban populations also tend to be less Black, less Hispanic, and slightly younger than central city populations. There is, however, no reliable difference in education level between suburbs and central cities. Slightly more than one fifth of suburb and central city residents age 25 and above have a bachelor's degree. Education level does, however, vary more among suburbs than among central cites.

Table 3 compares the characteristics of our surveyed suburban and central city leaders. A proportionately higher rate of city council members from suburbs responded to our survey, and a proportionately higher rate of EDC directors and chamber presidents from central cities responded. As a group, our suburban leaders are less Black and less Hispanic compared with central city leaders. Although suburban and central city leaders are highly educated, suburban leaders are somewhat less educated compared with leaders of central cities. One third of suburban leaders report master's or PhD levels of education compared with one-half of central city leaders. There is little gender difference and no reliable difference in age between surveyed suburban and central city leaders. City leaders across-the-board tend to be middle-age males.

Table 4 reports multivariate model results for the importance city leaders place on support from fellow leaders, local business, and citizens and citizen groups (community), when considering economic development proposals for their respective cities. In addition to survey and census data on the demographic characteristics of the city, the multivariate models presented in Table 4 (and throughout the remainder of our multivariate models) include measures of suburban geographic distance and population size difference from the central city. The Distance variable was calculated as the number of miles from a census-defined suburb to the nearest central city. The Population Difference variable is the difference in population between a census-defined suburb and the nearest central city (expressed as central city population – suburban population). For Distance and Population Difference variables, central cities were included in the multivariate analysis, coded as 0.

The findings reported in Table 4 support our expectation that coalition building is most important to central city leaders. Suburban leaders place less emphasis on support from fellow city leaders (Equation 1) and local business (Equation 2) than do central city leaders. Ethnicity plays an additional role insofar as the importance of support from fellow city leaders increases as the percentage of the population that is Hispanic decreases, whereas the importance of support from local business increases as the percentage of Hispanic and the percentage of Black decrease. The importance of community support is not reliably associated with the suburb/central city dichotomy (Equation 3). The importance of community support increases as the percentage of bachelor's degrees decline and the percentage of Hispanic declines. The coalition building models account for 7% to 16% of the variation across the three coalition items.

Table 5 reports multivariate model results for the importance city leaders place on quality-of-life issues when considering economic development proposals for their city. The findings generally support our expectation that suburban leaders ascribe greater emphasis to quality-of-life issues.

Suburban leaders reliably view a proposal's impact on traffic congestion (Equation 1) and community aesthetics (Equation 2) to be more important components of economic development than do their central city counterparts. The level of importance suburban leaders assign to potential traffic congestion, however, declines as distances from a central city increase. Leaders of distant suburbs place less emphasis on a development proposal's effect on traffic than do central city leaders. In addition, the importance of potential traffic congestion increases as the percentage of the population with a bachelor's-level education increases. The association between environmental concerns and suburban status, however, is contrary to the result we anticipated. Suburban leaders place less emphasis on the environmental effect of a development proposal than do central city leaders

Table 4. Multivariate Models of the Importance of Coalition Building

Support from	Equation 1 City leaders	Equation 2 Local business	Equation 3 Community
Suburb	−2.464*** (0.802)	−1.709** (.870)	−0.068 (0.770)
Distance	0.021 (0.020)	−0.028 (0.018)	−0.013 (0.017)
Population difference	4.26E-07 (6.72E-07)	−1.01E-07 (5.51E-07)	3.99E-07 (5.66E-07)
% unemployment	0.004 (0.275)	0.326 (0.316)	−0.072 (0.287)
% bachelor's degree	−0.035 (0.030)	−0.024 (0.023)	−0.059** (0.025)
% Black	−0.031 (0.023)	−0.034* (0.021)	−0.033 (0.022)
% Hispanic	−0.024* (0.014)	−0.025* (0.014)	−0.027** (0.012)
Constant	11.372*** (1.540)	8.287*** (1.753)	10.025*** (1.493)
Model *p*	.044	.000	.146
Adjusted R^2	.073	.164	.066
n	151	152	151

*$p \leq .10$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$.

Table 5. Multivariate Models of the Importance of Quality-of-Life Considerations

Effect of development on	Equation 1 Traffic	Equation 2 Community aesthetics	Equation 3 Environment
Suburb	2.095*** (0.775)	1.974** (0.817)	−1.494** (0.750)
Distance	−0.031** (0.016)	−0.023 (0.022)	0.013 (0.014)
Population difference	3.53E-07 (4.47E-07)	1.05E-07 (6.05E-07)	1.23E-06*** (4.36E-07)
% unemployment	−0.006 (0.252)	0.133 (0.231)	−0.028 (0.285)
% bachelor's degree	0.059*** (0.021)	0.037 (0.023)	0.026 (0.023)
% Black	−0.013 (0.019)	−0.022 (0.021)	−0.006 (0.022)
% Hispanic	−0.004 (0.014)	0.005 (0.012)	0.005 (0.013)
Constant	3.867*** (1.409)	4.087*** (1.467)	4.882*** (1.405)
Model *p*	.000	.025	.033
Adjusted R^2	.167	.094	.084
n	151	151	151

**$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$.

(Equation 3), although the smaller the suburban population relative to the central city population, the more importance suburban leaders give to the environment. The quality-of-life models account for 8% to 17% of the variation across the three quality-of-life items.

Table 6 reports multivariate model results for the importance city leaders place on regional considerations and planning when considering economic development proposals for their city. As anticipated, suburban leaders are less concerned with regional considerations than their central city counterparts and accord less importance to their region's economic growth than do central city leaders (Equation 1). The importance ascribed by suburban leaders to regional economic growth reverses, however, as the geographic distance between the suburb and central city increases. Leaders of distant suburbs are more concerned with their region's economic growth than are central city leaders. Furthermore, while the emphasis given to the views of nearby government leaders is not reliably associated with suburban status, it is reliably associated with suburban distance from the central city (Equation 2). Leaders of more distant suburbs place less importance on the views of nearby government leaders as compared with leaders of central cities. These models of regional economic growth and nearby communities account for 6% and 10% of the variation on these two items, respectively.

As expected, an association exists between planning and the suburb/central city dichotomy (Equation 3). This predicted association, however, contains important qualifiers. Although suburban status is not reliably associated with planning per se, the greater the suburban distance from a central city, the greater the emphasis placed on conformity with the city's general plan. In other words, leaders of distant suburbs are more concerned with planning than are central city leaders. Furthermore, planning is less important to suburban leaders as the size differential between the suburban unit and its central city increases. Third, planning is reliably associated with citywide education level. The importance assigned to planning increases as the percentage of bachelor's-level education increases. Our planning model accounts for 13% of the variation in the importance that city leaders accord their city's comprehensive plan.

Table 7 reports multivariate model results for the importance city leaders place on traditional economic development concerns when considering economic development proposals for their city.

Table 6. Multivariate Models of the Importance of Regional Considerations and Planning

Importance of	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3
	Regional economic growth	Views of nearby communities	City's general plan
Suburb	−2.447** (1.082)	0.737 (0.706)	1.006 (0.818)
Distance	0.046** (0.0199)	−0.043*** (0.010)	0.028** (0.014)
Population difference	−2.61E-07 (7.64E-07)	−5.43E-07 (3.62E-07)	−9.13E-07* (4.96E-07)
% unemployment	−0.014 (0.356)	0.195 (0.209)	−0.099 (0.268)
% bachelor's degree	0.000 (0.033)	−0.018 (0.014)	0.095*** (0.021)
% Black	0.0123 (0.029)	0.002 (0.018)	0.016 (0.020)
% Hispanic	−0.004 (0.016)	−0.001 (0.011)	0.014 (0.013)
Constant	7.508*** (2.064)	2.159** (1.108)	4.999*** (1.426)
Model *p*	.144	.002	.000
Adjusted R^2	.061	.095	.127
n	150	151	153

*$p \leq .10$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$.

Table 7. Multivariate Models of the Importance of Traditional Concerns

Importance of	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4
	Job creation	Revenue generation	Additional service costs	Downtown development
Suburb	−2.790*** (0.679)	2.025*** (0.598)	2.346*** (0.797)	0.767 (0.948)
Distance	0.043*** (0.015)	−0.017 (0.013)	−0.015 (0.019)	0.021 (0.021)
Population difference	−1.62E-07 (6.07E-07)	−8.28E-08 (3.03E-07)	1.24E-07 (5.48E-07)	−1.60E-06*** (5.82E-07)
% unemployment	−0.086 (0.295)	−0.070 (0.242)	−0.393 (0.328)	0.123 (0.304)
% bachelor's degree	−0.034 (0.032)	0.012 (0.016)	−0.035 (0.028)	−0.011 (0.023)
% Black	0.033* (0.017)	0.027** (0.011)	0.016 (0.024)	.021 (.024)
% Hispanic	0.025** (0.011)	0.007 (0.010)	0.021 (0.013)	0.006 (0.014)
Constant	11.789*** (1.554)	9.303*** (1.184)	8.108*** (1.641)	4.962*** (1.644)
Model *p*	.000	.002	.005	.036
Adjusted R^2	.205	.128	.128	.082
n	153	153	152	150

*$p \leq .10$. **$p \leq .05$. ***$p \leq .01$.

As predicted, suburban leaders view job creation to be less important than do central city leaders (Equation 1). However, the importance of job creation for suburban leaders increases as distance from the central city increases. Leaders of distant suburbs place more importance on job creation than do leaders of central cities. In addition, increases in the Black percentage of the population as well as increases in the Hispanic percentage of the population have a reliable positive association with the importance given to job creation. Also as anticipated, suburban leaders are more concerned with revenue generation (Equation 2) and the additional cost of municipal services (Equation 3) than are leaders of central cities. Increased concern with revenue generation is also associated with increases in the Black percentage of the population. Whereas downtown development is not associated with suburban status per se, increased emphasis on downtown development is reliably associated with suburb/central city population difference (Table 7, Equation 4). Leaders of smaller suburbs, relative to their central city, are less concerned with downtown development than are leaders of central cities. The model of job creation accounts for 21% of the variation on this item. The remaining three models account for 8% to 13% of the variation across traditional economic development concerns.

Discussion and Conclusion

Conventional understanding of the suburb/central city dichotomy holds that these two types of communities are subject to different concerns and needs which promote different attitudes among their respective community leaders. Although our analysis did not test for city policy outcomes, our findings did demonstrate that attitudinal differences are associated with the type of community a leader governs. Attention to these attitudinal differences adds depth to the collective understanding we hold about how each community type makes certain responses among office holders more likely. Our study also revealed that the suburb/central city dichotomy remains a viable model for understanding differences between city leaders in the important area of economic development as well as the importance city leaders assign to coalition building, quality-of-life issues,

regional economic growth, planning, and "traditional" economic development considerations. Anticipated differences in these areas were derived from key features of suburban politics—the politics of managed growth, autonomy, and exclusivity. Once influences such as distance from a central city, difference in population size, and city economic, social, and ethnic characteristics were taken into account, reliable differences in the economic development attitudes of suburban and central city leaders were empirically verified.

Our results are noteworthy in terms of what they reveal about how the suburb/central city dichotomy exerts influence on city leaders and how these influences are contextualized in the environments in which the cities are located. Recent treatments of the suburb/central city dichotomy hold that city leaders in general find coalition building advantageous in promoting greater economic growth. Our findings are compatible with this understanding with respect to central city leaders; however, suburban leaders place less importance on garnering support from fellow city leaders and from local business than do central city leaders when considering economic development proposals for their city. Governing smaller and relatively more homogeneous communities, suburban leaders operate in a context in which members of the leadership cohort are "on the same page" at the start of the economic development policy formulation process.

Our study also demonstrates that with respect to the effects of economic development on quality-of-life issues, the impact of development on traffic is of greater concern to suburban leaders than to central city leaders. The relevance of traffic diminishes in importance, however, for leaders of suburban communities that are more distant from a central city. Furthermore, suburban leaders are more concerned with the impact of development on community aesthetics than are central city leaders, a finding that lends support to the view that central city leaders have other concerns that exert greater pressure on their policies agendas and priorities. Suburban leaders are, however, less concerned with the impact of development on the environment than are their central city counterparts, and concern for the environment is even lower among leaders of relatively less populous suburbs. This finding may suggest suburban leaders view quality-of-life issues more through the lens of the environment in which their communities are located, or they have greater confidence that regulations designed to protect the environment are better and more efficiently administered through administrative agencies than suburban city government. Both interpretations are supported in the literature; but, as our study reveals important differences in city leaders' concern with economic development and environmental issues, additional research on the influence of the suburb/central city dichotomy in this area would prove important to our understanding of economic decision making by city leaders.

Our study further identified differences among city leaders with respect to regionalism. When considering economic development proposals for their city, suburban leaders are less concerned with regional economic growth than are central city leaders, but suburban leaders' concern for regionalism increases as the geographical distance of the suburb from the central city increases. This finding echoes the contemporary reality that central cities' fortunes are increasingly connected directly to the health of other cities within the region. While leaders of more distant suburbs are more concerned with regional economic growth, they are also less interested in the views of nearby government leaders. These simultaneous findings might well indicate a tension between the benefits of regionalism and the politics of autonomy that is perhaps most acutely felt by leaders of more geographically distant suburbs. As new suburban areas are developed and, by necessity, situated further and further away from the central city (such as McKinney, Allen, and Frisco in the Dallas Metropolitan Area) further study on the relative weight assigned to regionalism and autonomy by suburban policy makers would prove beneficial to understanding economic and noneconomic policy making by urban leaders.

Planning is more important to suburban leaders than to central city leaders but only under certain conditions. Compared with central city leaders, planning is more important to leaders of suburbs that are more distant from their central city, but less important to leaders of relatively small suburban units. This finding, combined with the continued suburbanization of large parts of Texas, suggests that leaders of suburbs on the periphery of the metropolitan region are more sensitive to economic development concerns as suburbanization finally reaches their communities. For leaders of previously isolated small towns, the economic character of the community was largely determined by reactionary responses to geography and/or historical development. But, as population growth reaches these communities, leaders have had an opportunity to proactively confront the challenges of economic development.

In regards to "traditional" economic development considerations, suburban leaders are less interested in job creation than their central city counterparts. The country is becoming more suburbanized and, as a result, increasing numbers of citizens may well be bringing jobs into the suburbs to which they relocate. Inner suburbs in effect add jobs to their communities through little more than a by-product of population growth. The interest in job creation among suburban leaders is, however, greater in more geographically distant suburbs. And, when compared with central city leaders, suburban leaders are more concerned that development generate revenue and more sensitive to the potential for development to increase the costs of municipal services. As Gainsborough (2001) and Oliver (2001) note, voters in these communities have a different set of political preferences, and leaders must reflect these views to prevent political pressure from being mobilized to stop what they view as unwanted economic development. Finally, suburb and central city leaders differ in the importance they place on

downtown development but only under certain conditions. Leaders of suburban communities with small populations are less concerned with downtown development, relative to their central city counterparts.

Although our hypotheses were generally confirmed, several specific findings were contrary to our expectations. Suburban leaders place less emphasis than central city leaders on garnering support for an economic development proposal from other city leaders and local business, but there is no reliable difference in the level of importance given to garnering citizen support for development efforts. Historically, local economic development in the United States is an elite activity, with the general public often discouraged from getting involved or becoming only peripherally involved at the back-end of the process to legitimize elite decisions or to make the public a stakeholder in the long-term success of a project. What we see among city leaders in Texas fits this historic mold. City leaders in Texas apparently view the public as generally irrelevant to a proposal's success, at least in the early stages of the process. While local economic development in the United States tends to involve collaboration between local public leaders and leaders of business, and while the level of importance city leaders in Texas attach to one or another of these development partners may vary, in general, the public is not part of the economic decision-making equation.

Our study focused on determining whether the suburb/central city dichotomy influences or encourages different perspectives among their city leaders. Our findings suggest suburbs and central cities are, in fact, distinct. We did not, however, offer a mechanism by which city leaders' policy preferences are translated into action. Future research is needed to take these differences to their final conclusion to determine how leaders of each type of community translate their preferences into action. Systematic differences among city leaders' perceptions will have consequences for the task of attracting economic development to the community, but for now we can only speculate on what form such actions might take. Still, our study does lend support to the expectation that suburb and central city communities promote particular attitudes among their respective city leaders.

Appendix

Question Wording

Question

"In order to determine how your city responds to new economic development project proposals and/or seeks to attract new development, please rank the following 13 considerations in order of importance with 1 being what is most important to your city and 13 being what is least important to your city (or your city's Chamber of Commerce; please do not give the same numeric ranking more than once)."

___ Conformity with your city's general plan
___ Contribution to your region's economy
___ Views of other nearby local governments
___ Creation of jobs for your city's residents
___ Generation of additional revenue for your city
___ Cost to your city of providing additional municipal services
___ Improvement in community aesthetics
___ Effect on traffic in your city
___ Impact on the environment
___ Support from other business leaders in your region
___ Impact on downtown redevelopment
___ Support from citizens or citizen groups in your city
___ Support from your mayor or other city leaders

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Notes

1. Three hundred and thirty-seven surveys were mailed for each surveyed office; therefore, a precise response rate for each position was difficult to determine. Texas cities do, however, have a mayor and council calculation response rate of 10.4% for mayors and 19.3% for council members. Hurricane Rita devastated parts of Texas in September 2005 and likely accounts for the overall low response rate. Cities in Texas that reach the 5,000 population threshold can adopt a home rule charter that allows greater taxing flexibility, along with greater flexibility in areas such as government organization and annexation, by comparison to cities with a population below 5,000 that operate under a general charter. Regarding our set of surveyed city leaders, prior research points to the role played by city managers and mayors in city economic development (see, for example, French, 2003; Liu & Vanderleeuw, 2004; McCabe, Feiock, Clingermayer, & Stream, 2009; McGovern, 1997; Svara, 1987) as well as the involvement of city councils (Zemmering, 2008), chambers of commerce (Cox & Wood, 1994), and economic development corporations (EDCs; Jarmon, Vanderleeuw, Pennington, & Sowers, 2012). Texas is somewhat distinct from other states in its extensive use of city-level EDCs. Utilized in more than 600 cities, state law empowers cities to establish an EDC (which we consider very much in line with Texas state government's hands-off approach to local development). An EDC is established at the city's discretionary power to use a portion of city tax revenue to fund

various development projects (as established by state law). City EDCs are semiautonomous in that they are separate from city hall and do not need council approval to make decisions, although council members may in some cities comprise a portion of an EDC governing board (for a full discussion of city EDCs in Texas, see Jarmon et al., 2012).

2. Our survey clearly embraces the reality that Texas cities do not possess the same arrangement of leadership positions. Given the fact that some state governments, including Texas, allow their cities extensive discretionary authority over the arrangements of city leadership positions, we argue that the portrayal of the relationship between suburbia and economic development is one in which people adopt a similar logic toward economic growth for a particular setting. Thus, we would expect any given city leader to respond similarly to the idea of adding "new" economic jobs or maintaining an attractive physical environment regardless of their position. Even if one was not willing to accept the position that influence exerted by suburbia is relatively strong, there is little guidance in the literature to posit how these positions would vary in response to the suburban influence. We hold it is better to model influences on city leaders' decision making as they are currently modeled in urban policy literature and test the validity of our hypotheses in terms of identical influences on city leaders, regardless of their respective leadership positions.
3. The ordering of the 13 economic development items was identical on all surveys, which may have produced some response bias. However, our survey cohort consisted of professional administrators and political leaders with experience and institutional responsibilities. Professionalism and experience, combined with the prominence of economic development activities in city life in the United States, indicate that the office holders surveyed were highly aware of the their city's resources, the economic development concerns facing their city, and the various economic development options available to them. It is highly unlikely our survey cohort would have been substantially swayed by the order of response categories.

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