



BIG BOX MALLS: The new sprawl people don't live in cities, don't work in cities, and don't share the values of urban culture. They shop in giant malls and their politics are moderately Republican.

The Brawl in the Sprawl

If Democrats look down on the values of the outer suburbs, they'll soon see red. || by **David Brooks**

■ FOR A LONG TIME, I BOUGHT the argument that the emerging majority in this country was Democratic. The key forces, it seemed, were the rising Hispanic population, which everybody talks about, and the rising professional population so well described by John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira. In upscale regions across America—on the Main Line outside of Philadelphia, in the North Shore suburbs outside of Chicago, and in Silicon Valley—there is a sharp and significant swing to the Democrats.

But now I am not so sure about this Democratic trend.

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In fact, I'd bet that the emerging majority is a Republican one—or at least it can be.

Consider just one statistic: In 1979, less than 15 percent of the office space in America was in the suburbs. Today, almost half of the office space is in suburbs, often in those low-slung office parks you see near the airports and along the highways. That means that we now have a whole tribe of Americans, a majority in fact, who not only don't live in cities, but don't work in cities, don't go to movies or restaurants in cities, and don't have any regular contact with urban life.

The Democrats are strong in urban "blue state" America and Republicans are strong in rural "red state" America. But this new tribe of people is not red or blue but is a mix—a purple America. These are the sprawl people, and they are the swing voters who will shape the destinies of both parties. At the moment their values are moderately conservative, when they think about politics at all.

We are in the midst of a great period of suburban growth. Sure, some cities rebounded in the 1990s, but the suburbs grew twice as fast. The suburbs around Atlanta now sprawl for hundreds of miles. In a few decades the greater Phoenix area will have almost 10 million people; it will be a more sig-

nificant city than Chicago. Already, Mesa, Ariz., has a larger population than St. Louis, Cincinnati, or Minneapolis.

Moreover, the opportunities and goodies that will attract people in the future are all in the suburbs. The biotech revolution is taking place in towns like Rockville, Md.; other innovations will take place in Douglas County, Colo., and King of Prussia, Pa. The populations of these office park communities are exploding.

But it's easy to miss the significance of this development because our image of suburbia is motionless. We think of the suburbs as a place where people with families go to live. In fact, a majority of households in suburbia have no kids. We think of suburbia as white. But in fact, the majority of Asian-Americans live in suburbia; half of all Hispanics live in suburbia; and 40 percent of all African-Americans live in suburbia.

Teixeira and Judis seem to assume there is still such a thing as a coherent metropolitan area. That blurs a key distinction: The most important political divide in the coming decades will not be between coastal and inland regions, or between urban America and rural America. It will be between one kind of suburb and another: inner suburbs, which have large numbers of people at the top and the bottom of the income scale and are hence Democratic, and the faster-growing outer suburbs, which have greater similarity of incomes and are hence Republican.

The really crucial question is this: As new people move to the outer suburbs and sprawl areas, will they bring their cultures and voting patterns with them, or will they adapt to the local suburban culture?

I used to believe that people would keep their old voting patterns. After all, I figured, there is no such thing as a culture of fast-growth suburbs. The sprawl areas, I thought, were a blank slate to be filled in by the cultures of people moving there. But with the explosion of office park people and institutions, a new culture is emerging. And people who are part of that culture tend to adopt the values of George W. Bush, regardless of the values they had in their old towns. These include order and neatness over disorder and dysfunction; achievement, sports, and competition; and a sense of responsibility and success. It's a jock culture filled with talk of college football, NASCAR, and kids' sports teams that travel. It's a culture in which seeker-sensitive mega-churches are part of the atmosphere, even if you never set foot in one. It's a culture of big-box mega-malls with parking lots as big as nuclear test sites where sprawl people gather to brag about how much they're saving by buying in bulk.

In this culture, politics plays a small role. Sprawl people show an active dislike for labor unions, jobs-for-life civil ser-

vants, and professional ethnic agitators—many of the groups that are identified with the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. This is a culture that is extremely intolerant of racial spoils systems and of people who try to get by without acting entrepreneurially.

Such is the culture of suburban sprawl. Its inhabitants are acutely aware of the fact that many of the people who write for and read *The New York Times*, or who live in university towns, look down on suburban sprawl, disdain big-box malls, sneer at Olive Garden restaurants, and are completely ignorant of Pentecostalism, NASCAR, country music, golf, beltless slacks, and the rest of boom suburb culture. They resent those people for being snobs and know they tend to be Democrats.

This culture wins out over the culture the newcomers left behind for several reasons. One is that new arrivals are hungry to connect and form communities, which creates powerful social pressures for new bonds and a high degree of conformity. As these fast-growth suburbs transform the immigrants, they create Republicans, mainly moderate Republicans. The already Republican suburbs just become more Republican. In states like Colorado, the suburban

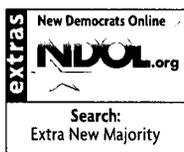
This **new tribe** of people is not red or blue but is a mix—a **purple America**. These are the sprawl people, and they are the swing voters who will shape the **destinies** of both parties.

Republican surge in fast-growth Douglas County is counterbalancing the Democratic advantage in Denver and Boulder. In Virginia, the Republican surge in Loudon County counterbalances the Democratic advantage in Arlington.

Right now much of the Democratic Party is being driven by antipathy for George W. Bush and the people who are perceived to be his corporate cronies. The people in growth suburbs are never going to hate Bush. They are disgusted by corporate greed, but they are never going to be disgusted by country club communities, gated suburbs, and SUVs. In fact, those are the things they are striving for. George W. Bush fits right into their picture of the world.

Growth suburb culture is a powerful thing. And it will grow more powerful as the years pass. You take, say, a Hispanic family that now votes Democratic. You put them in a suburban development with a name like Falcon Crowne Point, and I suspect that over several years you will see them conforming to the local mores and building their identity around institutions that are more identified with the Republican Party than the Democratic Party—country clubs, business groups, Pentecostal-influenced modes of worship, and so on. They will not become ardent conservatives with a taste for culture war, but they will make certain judgments about which party shares their values.

My warning to Democrats is this: The party that alienates the sprawl people will reap what it sows. ♦



Would you be more or less likely to vote for a Democratic candidate who...

Q. Understands the future. Suppose Democrats said, the Democratic Party is the party of the future, understanding that in a rapidly changing world, we need new approaches to make sure America remains peaceful and prosperous and that opportunity is available to all those willing and able to work. This means a strong national and homeland defense ensured through a vibrant and modern military force. This means a sound fiscal policy that keeps interest rates low. It means helping families balance work and family, increasing opportunity by making college affordable and helping workers get the skills training they need to stay competitive, providing affordable healthcare and prescription drugs and investing in research and technology to encourage innovation throughout the economy.

ALL	DEM	IND	OFFICE PARK DADS	RURAL MEN	ECON RIGHT TRACK	ECON WRONG TRACK
59/25	91/3	55/19	52/36	53/30	36/36	76/16

Q. Takes a populist stance. Suppose Democrats said they are looking out for the people's interests, not the special interests. Democrats will defend Social Security from Republicans who are draining \$2 trillion dollars from the Social Security trust fund for tax cuts aimed at the wealthiest one percent of Americans and big business. And Democrats support rolling them back to keep us out of deficits. Democrats want to give a prescription drug benefit for all seniors, protect workers from future Enrons, punish corrupt corporate executives cut down on the high cost of healthcare, and protect the environment from the big polluters and corporate interests that have too much influence in Washington.

ALL	DEM	IND	OFFICE PARK DADS	RURAL MEN	ECON RIGHT TRACK	ECON WRONG TRACK
51/28	85/2	41/23	50/45	67/8	35/47	61/18

Q. Emphasizes "kitchen table" issues. Suppose Democrats said we need to secure America's future for all of our families. Democrats are committed to winning the war on terrorism and making our country more secure. And Democrats are committed to making families more secure, by protecting Social Security, pension and retirement savings, investing in America to create good jobs, cutting prescription drug costs and providing Medicare drug coverage for every senior, improving education by reducing class size with new qualified teachers, and keeping our air and water clean.

ALL	DEM	IND	OFFICE PARK DADS	RURAL MEN	ECON RIGHT TRACK	ECON WRONG TRACK
49/29	83/6	42/22	34/47	66/18	32/45	57/20

THE RIGHT AGENDA,
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who are generally satisfied with the economy or to opportunity-oriented voters such as the office park dads.

As the table above shows, a message about opportunity and the future brings Democrats even with Republicans among people who are optimistic about the economy while also winning the support of three in four voters who believe the economy is headed in the wrong direction. The populist and kitchen table messages are relatively less appealing among these "wrong track" voters and also fail

to attract Democrats, even among those voters who are satisfied with the economy. As such, the "future" message is the only one of the three that works in economic good times as well as bad. Just as important, the future-oriented message appeals to the growing segments of the electorate while the other messages appeal primarily to declining segments.

Taking advantage of long-term national demographic trends has often been difficult for Democrats. Sometimes they have simply gotten them wrong. When President Lyndon Johnson announced his War on Poverty he predicted that 95 percent of Americans would one day live in cities.

Instead, our suburbs have grown at the expense of both our urban and rural areas.

Today's demographics are delivering a clear message. Trends towards voter independence, diversity, tolerance, and affluence, as well as support for private-sector opportunity, can produce a long-term Democratic majority. But the positive Democratic trends of the 1990s did not happen automatically; they were the product of a carefully thought-out political strategy and a bold national agenda to promote it. In an ever-more-complex society of the 21st century, it will take the same kind of political shrewdness and policy innovation to produce victory. ♦



Making the case on Iraq

resident Bush is determined to force the issue on Iraq before the midterm elections. That sets up the most consequential foreign policy vote since Congress authorized his father to launch the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

For Democrats who had been hoping to contest the elections on the more favorable ground of corporate crime, anxious

markets, and prescription drugs, the timing looks suspicious. Well, the party needs to get over it. National security is the dominant issue in U.S. politics now and for the foreseeable future. Instead of trying to change the subject to domestic issues, Democrats also will have to compete with Republicans on the basis of which party has the best ideas for making Americans safer.

The 1990 vote revealed a Democratic Party still afflicted with post-Vietnam doubts—unwarranted, as it turned out—about America's ability to use force effectively or legitimately. Democrats must do better on the next test of national resolve.

Some consultants will urge Democrats to back whatever Bush proposes, to neutralize Iraq as a campaign issue and allow them to dwell on domestic issues. But letting themselves be stampeded by a popular commander in chief will do little to burnish Democrats' reputation for toughness. On the contrary, Democrats as the opposition party have a public duty to grill administration officials, probe flaws in their arguments, and demand clarity about how they intend to change the regime in Baghdad.

More fundamentally, though, Democrats need to take their own distinctive stand on Iraq. As internationalists rather than unilateralists, Democrats are in a strong position to challenge the international community to live up to its responsibility to settle accounts with Saddam Hussein's outlaw regime.

For starters, Democrats need to resist the argument that only the discovery of new evidence against Saddam—the acquisition of nuclear weapons or clear involvement in anti-U.S. terrorism—would justify action against the dictator. That reasoning implies that a statute of limitations has expired on Saddam's long catalogue of past crimes. What we already know is bad enough: Saddam is a serial aggressor—he's attacked no fewer than four neighboring countries—and an implacable enemy of the United States who is desperately seeking nuclear weapons to complement his deadly arsenal of biological and chemical weapons. Democrats should make it clear to the public that the status quo is intolerable, that the old policy of containing Saddam has failed, and that leaving him free to

acquire nuclear weapons is a risk that neither we nor the civilized world can afford to take.

Momentum has been gathering for weeks to open Iraq to U.N. arms inspectors. A highly intrusive and unfettered inspection regime, the argument goes, can satisfy the world that Saddam is not developing nuclear and biological weapons.

Democrats certainly should support aggressive inspections, but stopping Saddam's drive for nuclear weapons isn't enough. Our ultimate aim should be to liberate Iraqis from Saddam's nightmarish "Republic of Fear." As the debate unfolds, Democrats should reaffirm their support for a regime change in Iraq, even as they reserve the right to differ with the White House over timing and means.

It's a measure of how badly the Bush administration has bungled its case against Iraq that the burden of proof has shifted from Saddam and his apologists to the United States. Throughout the summer, conversation abroad focused not on Saddam's repeated violations of civilized norms, but on whether the United States is an out-of-control hyperpower answerable only to itself.

Such canards—which British Prime Minister Tony Blair bravely labeled "straightforward anti-Americanism"—demand a response from Democrats. As authentic heirs to America's great internationalist leaders—Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman, and Kennedy—they can remind the world that it is not American power but Saddam's odious dictatorship that poses an unavoidable challenge to the basic values that Europe and America share.

In opposing regime change in Iraq, many Europeans profess a punctilious regard for international law. But it's Saddam who has defied a series of U.N. resolutions requiring him to end his quest for mass destruction weapons and missiles and open his country to inspection. The Bush administration has made no secret of its disdain for U.N. impotence and its determination to act against Iraq without its sanction. Democrats should insist that the Security Council enforce its own long train of mandates imposed on Iraq.

The challenge for Democrats, then, is neither to blindly support nor reflexively oppose Bush's plans toward Iraq. It is to articulate their own case against Saddam, one that is grounded in the party's tradition of progressive internationalism and that allays any lingering public doubts about its willingness to confront those who threaten our country, our friends, and the ideals we share. ♦

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