

NATIONAL POLITICS | By Amy Walter, March 17, 2017

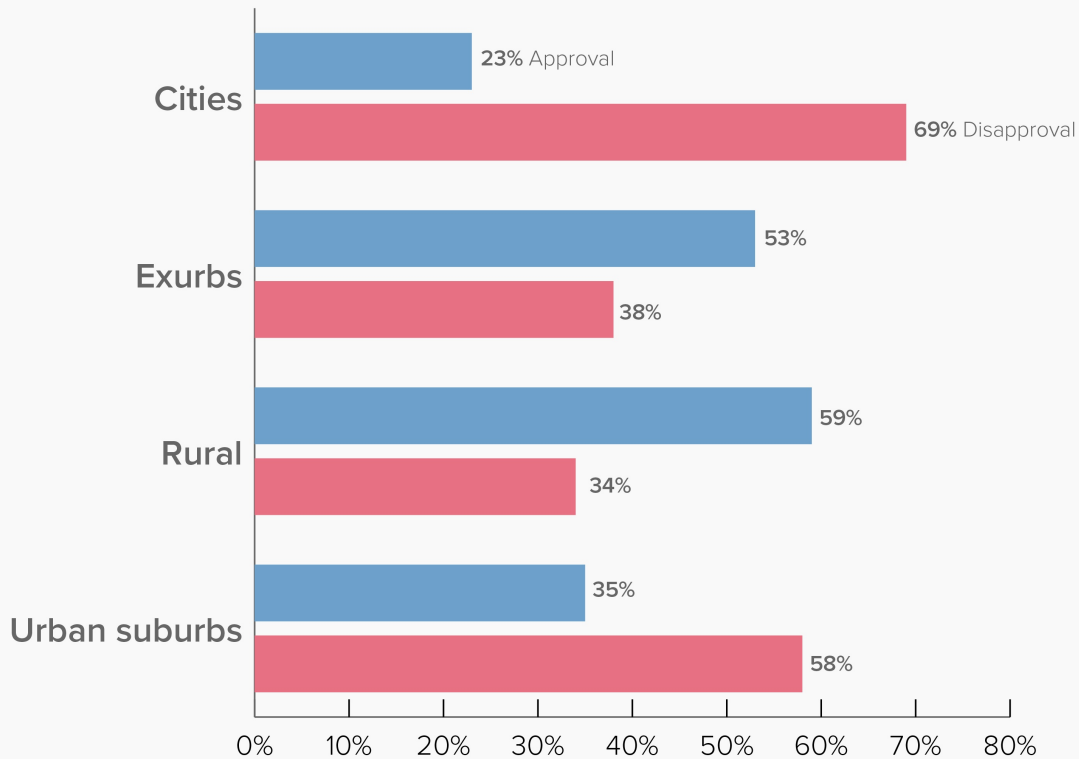
Mind the (Geographic) Gap In 2018



My colleague David Wasserman had a **tremendous piece** last week on the dearth of politically competitive counties in America. In crunching the data from the 2016 campaign, David found that the overwhelming majority of American voters live in counties that are either solidly red or solidly blue. Where you live has become a solid predictor of how you'll vote. And, despite a tumultuous beginning to the Trump era, the geographic divide has shown no signs of budging.

The Wall Street Journal's Dante Chinni breaks down the February NBC/Wall Street Journal poll by region and finds, not surprisingly, that the urban/rural and exurban/inner suburban split we saw in the 2016 campaign is alive and well a month into President Trump's tenure. Those who live in exurban and rural areas give him a 53-59 percent job approval rating, while those in cities and inner suburbs give him subpar job ratings. Just 35 percent of urban suburbanites and 23 percent of city dwellers approved of the job he was doing.

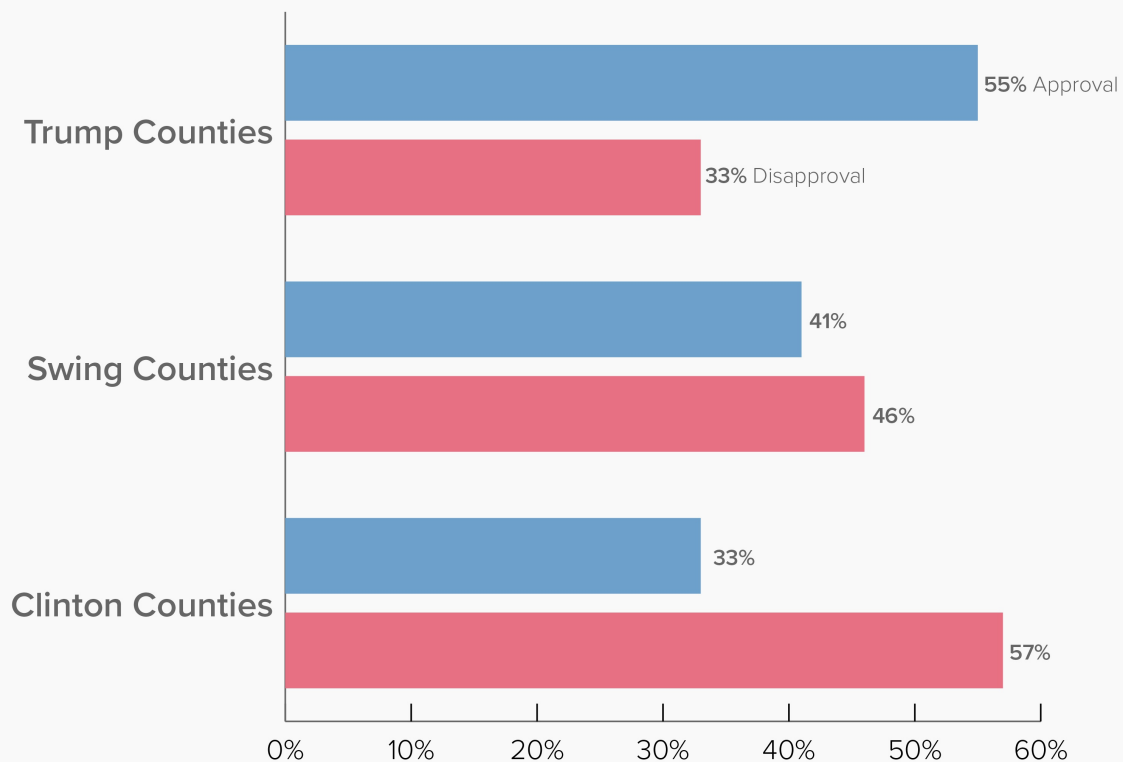
Trump Approval by Geographic Region



Source: February NBC/Wall Street Journal Polling

A **Monmouth University** poll from March 2-5 found a similar divide. In counties Trump carried by ten points or more, his job approval rating is a healthy 55 percent. In those counties Hillary Clinton carried by ten points or more, Trump's approval ratings are deeply underwater (33 percent approve to 57 percent disapprove). In the 'swing counties,' those that neither candidate won by more than single digits," voters are pretty evenly divided with 41 percent approving of the job Trump is doing and 46 percent disapproving.

Trump Approval by County Type



Source: Monmouth University Poll, March 6, 2017

The empirical data, as well as those from **focus groups** on the ground reporting, suggests that voters in these Trump counties are willing to give the President a pretty long leash. Unlike the breathless commentators on cable TV, most of these folks have more to worry about than the latest twist and turn in a Washington, DC drama. They aren't setting an arbitrary "100 days" deadline for Trump to accomplish his goals. Of course, we don't know how deep their patience runs. For now, however, they aren't showing signs of "buyers remorse."

As we look to the upcoming midterm elections, this geographic divide will be a critical one to watch. It also means that I am less interested Trump's national approval rating number than I am in how he's perceived in states, regions and congressional districts. I'd rather know Trump's approval ratings in upstate New York than the results of the national New York Times/CBS poll. After all, Democrats can't win control of the House or hold their seats in the Senate if they don't win in areas where Clinton didn't.