

How They Map It:

Citizen Perceptions of their State and Representation

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Downstaters have always thought of Chicago as a black hole of street violence and political corruption, sucking up tax dollars generated by honest, hard-working farmers. Chicagoans have always thought of downstate—when they've thought of it at all—as an irrelevant agricultural appendage full of Baptists and gun owners who'd just love to turn Illinois into North Kentucky - (McClelland 2017).

Chicago versus the rest of the state is a common view in Illinois with clear divisions and animosities that run over 200 years (McClelland 2017). Before the state Supreme Court removed it, in 2018, Californians were set to vote on a measure splitting the state into three. The initiative's introduction argued "vast parts of California are poorly served by a representative government dominated by a large number of elected representatives from a small part of our state, both geographically and economically" (Myers 2018). These are just two examples of spats within a state's borders over important factors that cover the gamut of societal issues including political representation, economics, and culture. While perhaps not as drastic as Illinois and California, within every state are competing rivalries for state power and resources based on geographic divides.

Recent research shows how people think and feel about their state matters for a variety of political outcomes (i.e. Wolak 2025; Munis 2021; Pears and Sydnor 2022; Winburn et al. 2024). Usually measured as state attachment or state pride, these feelings of connection to place can influence candidate evaluations, views on gubernatorial performance, trust in government as well as policy preferences. In this paper, I build on these works to examine how people think about different parts of their state and how this relative sense of location may influence perceptions on the quality of representation the state government provides to its citizens. Specifically, this paper maps what people think about their state and uses this measurement to examine perceptions of representation.

Theory and Literature

Importance of Place

How do we consider the importance of where somewhere lives in influencing their political views? There are multiple ways to approach this concept. One approach for understanding space, place, or geography's influence on state level attitudes is to build from the work on the concept of community at the local level. The research in this area, often from sociology, suggests community can be thought of as place, turf, or territory but also as shared ideals and expectations, social ties, and as a collective framework (Keller 2003). Community can take place-based forms rooted in actual territory (Blakely and Snyder 1997) or various physical demarcations located on a map or more of a psychological form based on imagined boundaries of community that do not necessarily translate neatly or at all to existing physical boundaries (Wong 2010).

In political science, the role of place is often situated within the social identity literature with the understanding that people have a belonging to a place or region and may have a shared closeness with a region or area that structures, at least in part, their behavior (Agnew 1987; Elazar 1966; Pred 1990). This is often viewed as a psychological attachment that can be activated into a place-based identity that can influence various political behaviors and attitudes (Conover 1984; Hutchins and Stormer 2013; Williams et al. 2010; Cramer-Walsh 2012). Another line of research focuses on the contextual influence of where someone lives (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). A lot of this work often examines institutional or political changes. For example, Gimpel (1999) shows population changes through geographic mobility produces changes in partisanship and participation while Hero (1998) argues state level social diversity has important influences on state policies.

Some recent work in political science using various approaches shows that place-based identities and geographic context can influence candidate favorability (Jacobs and Munis 2019), voter turnout (Baumann et al. 2021; Panagopoulos, Leighley, & Hamel 2017), campaign donations (Fudge and Armaly 2021), and gubernatorial approval (Winburn, Fudge, Murphy, and Griffin 2024). There is also a long line of work focusing on geography related to changing voting patterns (i.e. Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003) and campaign contributions (i.e. Gimpel, Lee, and Kaminski 2006), among other electoral outcomes. Another important area of recent research considers questions of how people conceptualize the maps in their heads and the importance of this spatial awareness on public opinion (i.e. Wong 2010; Wong et al. 2012; Enos 2017; Christenson and Makse 2015).

This distinction between place-based or contextual influences and imagined boundaries provides the broad theoretical basis for understanding the role of geography on individual political attitudes towards state government. The specific theoretical argument builds from Cramer's (2016) work on rural consciousness. The crux of her argument is that rural residents have a consciousness or an identity as a rural person driven, in part, by an attachment to place. However, it is more than just a social identity of living in a rural place, it is also a perspective that "decision makers routinely ignore rural places and fail to give rural communities their fair share of resources . . ." (2016: 5). I argue this identity and perspective extends beyond rural areas. Every place within a state can provide individuals with a place identity or attachment along with a geographic perspective to frame or influence their political attitudes.

The importance of geography may be subjective in terms of psychological or imagined boundaries but it may also be objective in terms of aspects of the physical territory having

influence on individual attitudes. Another component that plays into both of these is the social and cultural aspects related to place (Elazar 1994).

The theoretical ideas behind understanding how people think about their state is rooted in comparison theory and sense of place. Humans are comparative creatures. People make comparisons across all aspects of life and these social comparisons play an important role in understanding our self-identity and the world around us (Festinger 1954). My argument here is drawing from the excellent work of Condon and Wichowsky (2020) that uses cross-class social comparisons to better understand responses to inequality. They argue “the social comparisons we make, which themselves are a product of the economic and political environment in which we live, are fundamental to how we understand the social world and what we want from our government” (23). Replace social comparison with geographic comparison and I argue how people compare where they live in their state to other areas of the state can also have an influence on political attitudes. This idea of geographic comparison is rooted in the concept of sense of place. “Sense of place is first of all an innate faculty, possessed in some degree by everyone, that connects us to the world. It is an integral part of all our environmental experiences and it is only because we are first in places that we can then develop abstract arguments about environment, economy, or politics. But in addition to this, sense of place can be a learned skill for critical environmental awareness that is used to grasp what the world is like and how it is changing” (Relph 1997: 208).

The role place and geography play within each state is in some ways probably idiosyncratic to each of the fifty states. However, I argue there may be some systematic geographic factors that influence attitudes towards state government. In this paper, I examine public perceptions about how people compare the geography of their state for two reasons: 1) to

test if these views have any influence on perceived state government representation and 2) to serve as a test of empirical validation for the importance of state urban centers in the public consciousness.

For example, in Cramer's (2016) study of Wisconsin she highlights the perceived divides in the state as being between Madison and Milwaukee and the rest of "Outstate" Wisconsin and this divide was common knowledge among her interviewees. The assumption is often that these power centers are dividing up resources and making policies geared towards those areas with less regard for the needs of the rest of the state. It is these assumptions that can lead to varying attitudes toward state government, in part, based on where someone lives in a state.

Perceptions of Representation

To understand attitudes toward state government, I turn to the perceptions individuals have in regards to representation. Much of the literature on representation focuses on policy congruence between the masses and elites and policy responsiveness of the elites to public preferences. Most of what we understand about representation builds from the Miller and Stokes (1963) diamond model of representation with an emphasis on how elites respond to public preferences. Elected officials, being motivated by reelection, attempt to represent the majorities preferences by producing policy in line with those with preferences (Bishin 2009).

We know state policies are responsive to state public opinion (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993) and have gained an understanding of the supply side of representation provided by state officials and institutions, especially state legislators and legislatures. Notably, the states provide the necessary variation to better understand the linkage between policy responsiveness and descriptive representation (See Osborn 2012 and Clark 2019). However, we know much less about the demand, or constituent, side of the representational link (Harden 2016).

In terms of citizen preferences or views towards representation, the work done in this area provides some good starting points for thinking about how individuals may perceive or think about the representation they receive from the state government. Grill (2007) shows citizens have fairly nuanced conceptions of representation and how they think members of Congress should represent them. Harden and Clark (2016) argue “citizens value collective forms of representation over dyadic, primarily because the potential for substantive benefits and symbolic benefits are greater when a group of legislators represents a constituent’s viewpoint” (263). Lauermann (2014) finds symbolic representation is often the most influential factor of constituent evaluations of their members of Congress.

Additionally, work on citizen preferences for representation looks to explain if the public prefers one sphere of representation and to explain the variation in citizen preferences for these different spheres. The most common approach is to use Eulau and Karps (1977) policy, allocative, casework, and symbolic representation typology. Griffin and Flavin (2011) find citizens' priorities towards the representation they want to receive from members of Congress varies among demographic groups. Specifically, they find African Americans and Latinos are less concerned about policy representation than whites while placing more emphasis on allocative representation, and that those with higher incomes care more about policy representation than casework compared to those with lower incomes.

Harden (2016) shows, in perhaps the most detailed investigation at the state level, the multidimensionality in trying to understand both how citizens want to be represented and how legislators attempt to provide representation. He argues how citizens think about government and the role it should play in their lives influences which sphere or type of representation they care

most about and that legislators chose various representational strategies based on the perceived electoral costs and benefits.

In this study, I am interested in how well citizens feel they are being represented by their state government rather than by any one specific elected official or institution. This builds from the collective representation perspective (Weissberg 1978) and Pitkin's (1967: 222) argument that:

Political representation is primarily a public, institutionalized arrangement involving many people and groups, and operating in the complex ways of large-scale social arrangements. What makes it representation is not any single action by any one participant, but the over-all structure and functioning of the system, the patterns emerging from the multiple activities of many people.

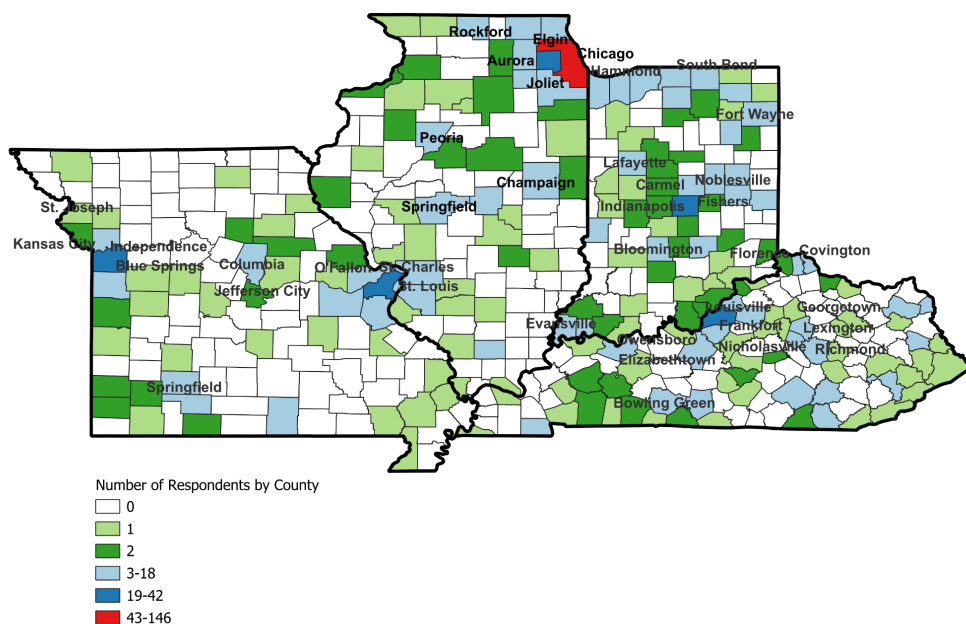
I argue while citizens may have attitudes towards specific components of representation, both dyadically and collectively, they also have generalized attitudes of representation. It is these generalized attitudes I seek to explain in this study. By generalized I mean, citizens have a perception or feeling of how well they are represented by government. This general view encompasses both how well their individual interests are represented but also how they perceive their community to be represented as well. Costa, Johnson, and Schaffner (2018) find individuals can have a more nuanced evaluation of their representatives that includes considering the policy interests of others in their district and not just their own self-interested policy preferences.

Data and Methods

The data comes from a survey of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Missouri residents collected via Cloud Research Connect. The survey was live from February 7-February 18, 2025 with the target of 300 respondents from Illinois, 240 from Indiana, and 208 from both Kentucky and Missouri. The final collection included 300 from Illinois, 240 from Indiana, 200 from Kentucky, and 181 from Missouri. The survey included an attention check question and 97% of

respondents passed. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of respondents by county across the four states. In Illinois, there was at least one respondent from 46 of the state's 102 counties (45%), 62% of Indiana's counties had a respondent (57 out of 92 counties), Kentucky had at least one respondent from 54% of its counties (65 out of 120), and Missouri had the lowest county response rate with respondents from 39% of the state's counties (45 out of 115).

Figure 1: Number of Respondents by County



Appendix Table 1 shows a breakdown by key demographics of the 894 respondents included in the final sample by state in comparison to statewide averages. The sample skews slightly whiter, except in Illinois, more educated, and most likely¹ more Democratic than the state's population. I used these demographic variables along a respondent's urban, rural, suburban coding of their zip code to produce sampling weights that are included in each of the models below.

¹ Kentucky is the only state with closed primaries and party registration.

The primary purpose of the survey was twofold. First, for this paper, it was to measure how individuals perceive their state and to create a measure of geographic comparison. Second, for the larger project, it was to get an empirical measure of the importance of urban centers.

To create the geographic comparison measure, I asked respondents to click on a map (each click placed a dot) of their state in response to three questions. The three questions asked what respondents to click on the location in their state they thought was most representative of their state, least representative of their state, and what they believed out-of-staters thought to be the most representative part of their state (see the Appendix for full question wording).

For each question, the respondents saw a new map of their state. They could place up to five points per question. The geographic comparison analysis below relies on all the map placements by each respondent. Table 1 shows the number of map clicks or points by state and question. As Appendix Tables 3 and 4 show respondents, by and large, did not simply cluster their clicks in one location in the state.

Table 1: Summary Statistics for Geographic Comparison Questions

	<u>Most</u>		<u>Least</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Points</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Points</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Points</i>
Illinois	288	1243	284	1189	288	1058
Indiana	218	1035	221	960	224	953
Kentucky	191	834	192	749	196	776
Missouri	176	810	178	763	180	735

Using QGIS and heatmap² in Stata, I construct a series of heatmaps based on the mapped points within each state. The heatmap analysis also provides statistics for the groupings or bins used to create the heatmaps. The data include each plotted point by a respondent based on the x

² Ben Jann, 2019. "Heat (and hexagon) plots in Stata," [London Stata Conference 2019](#) 24, Stata Users Group.

and y coordinates and heatmap generates binned combinations of points based on location. The results for the top category or most frequent location is included in the tables below along with the percentage of points included within that binned xy location.³

Analysis

Geographic Comparison

In the first step of the analysis, I show respondent's perceptions about their state. Figures 2-4 show heat maps based on all plotted points or map clicks from respondents by state for each of the three questions. Starting with perceptions of the areas of the state that are most representative of the state, Figure 2 shows that in each of the four states major urban areas emerge as the most representative of the state. In Illinois, Chicago is the most dominant area with only a scattering of lighter red shading in places like Springfield, Peoria, and Champaign-Urbana with virtually no shaded areas south of Springfield. In Indiana, Indianapolis is the most dominant area; however, there are noticeable, albeit lighter, heat signatures spread throughout the state from Evansville in the southwest to Fort Wayne in the northeast of the state. Lexington and Louisville are the two most shaded areas in Kentucky with a noticeable ring around Bowling Green, the state's third largest city, and Frankfort, the capital. Kansas City and St. Louis also have the most noticeable shading in Missouri with Springfield, the state's third largest city, also quite noticeable as well as a smaller shading in the capital, Jefferson City.

Turning to the least representative parts of the states, Figure 3 shows that in Illinois the green tint is faint but noticeable throughout most of the state, especially in southern Illinois and around the East St. Louis area. Chicago is also shaded green. In Indiana, the opposite trend emerges with the most dominant green shade in Gary and some faint heat signatures in other areas of the state. Covington, in northern Kentucky, and Louisville have the darkest green areas

³ I examined binned locations that were proximate to each other and combined bins when necessary.

with fainter shading throughout the rest of the state. Finally, in Missouri, Kansas City and St. Louis have the darkest shading with areas around the perimeter of the state also having noticeable signatures.

The third question asked about how respondents their perception of how people from outside their state thought about the state. The results in Figure 4 are strikingly similar to how the respondents perceived the most representative parts of their state.

While Figures 2-4 showed the full heat map plots, Table 2 shows the results for the location categorized as having the largest percentage of points for each state by question. The results in Table 2 match the visual description of the heat maps above, but provide some context for the variation or clustering of respondent's perceptions. For example, in Illinois, Chicago is both the most and least representative part of the state. However, for the most category Chicago had over 11% of the plotted points while it had just over 2% of the points for the least category. This shows the respondents from Illinois had a lot of variation in what they considered the least representative part of Illinois.

Table 2: Perceptions, Overall

	<u>Most</u>	<u>Least</u>	<u>Others</u>
Illinois (291)	Chicago (11.34)	Chicago (2.02)	Chicago (15.22)
Indiana (224)	Indianapolis (7.54)	Gary (9.79)	Indianapolis (8.29)
Kentucky (196)	Lexington (5.63)	Covington (7.08)	Louisville (13.40)
Missouri (180)	St. Louis (8.02)	St. Louis (7.20)	Kansas City (12.52)

[illegible]

Figure 3: Least Part of the State

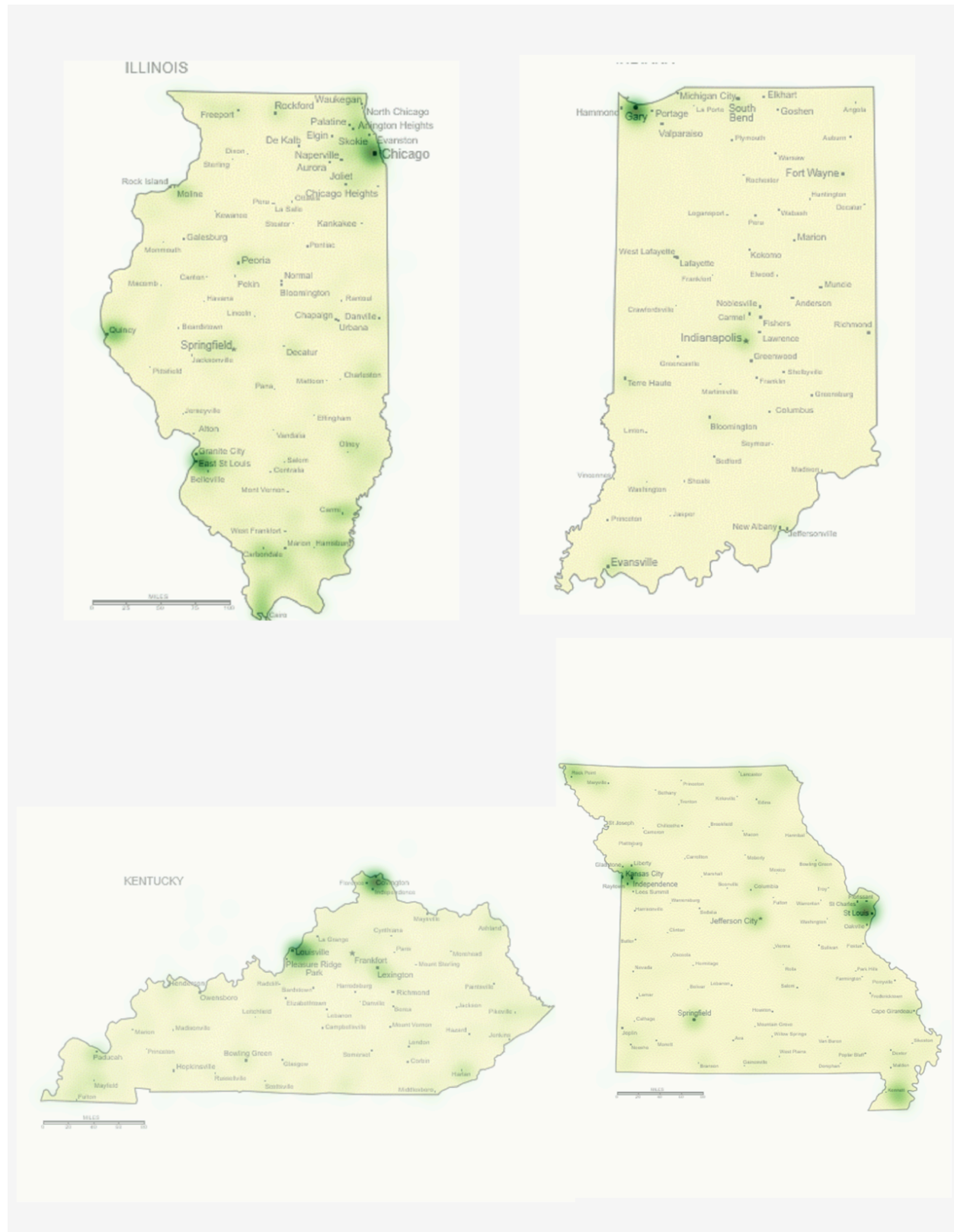
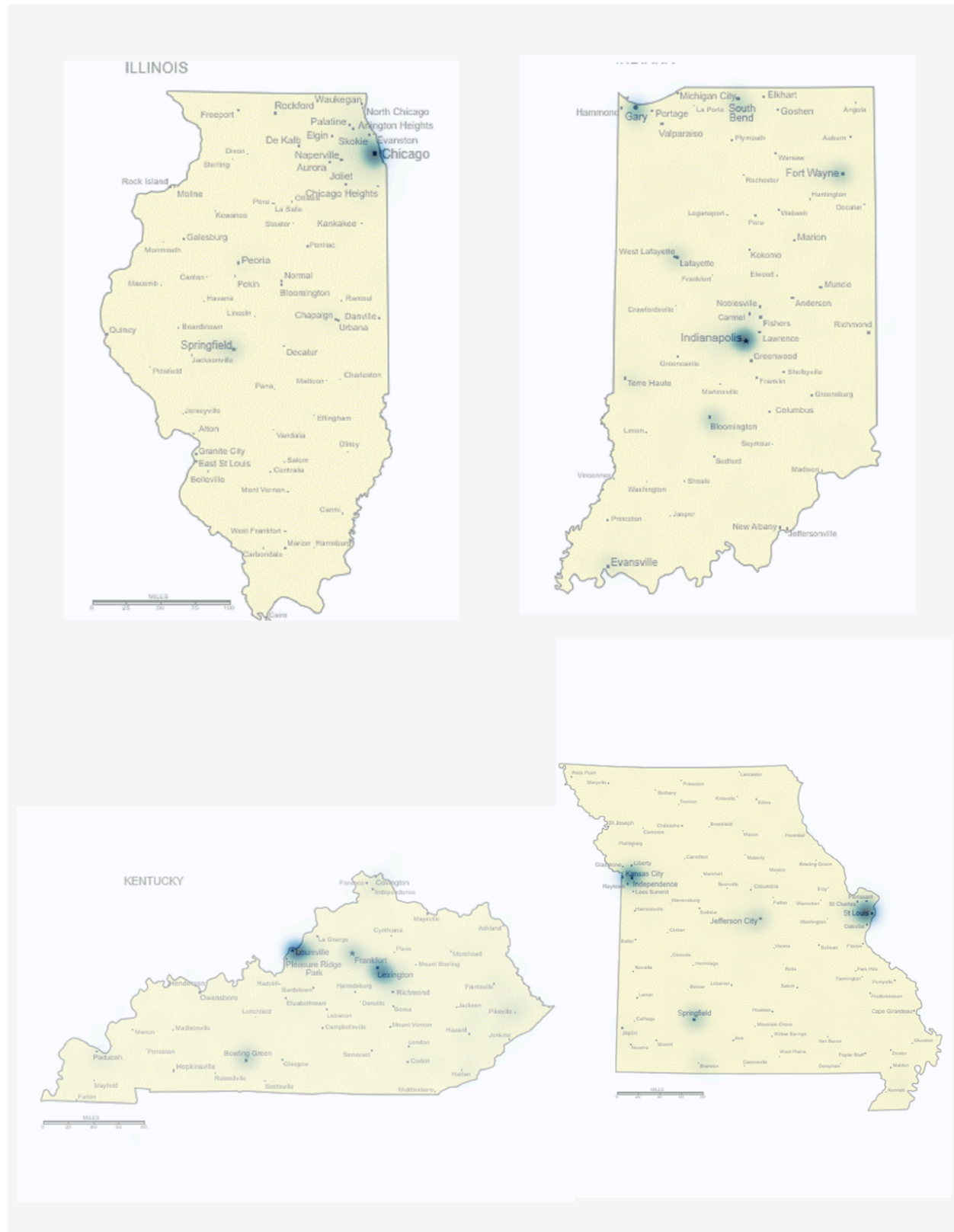


Figure 4: Perceptions of How Out-of-States Think of the State



I break the respondents out by three different metrics to see if these patterns of perception change based on where someone lives in their state or their partisan affiliation. Table 3 shows the results for the area in the highest concentration bin by if where the respondent lives is urban, suburban, or rural.⁴ Looking across the four states, the results are generally similar across geographic location of the respondent; however, there are a few interesting differences. In Illinois, urbanites, who mostly live in Chicago, consider East St. Louis to be the least representative part of the state, while rural residents considered both Chicago and Springfield to be the most representative. Hoosiers are generally in agreement with one another except that rural residents perceive Gary to be where people living outside the state most associate with Indiana. Kentuckians all agree that Louisville is what people outside the state associate with the state, while urbanites perceive Louisville to be most representative while suburbanites and rural residents consider that to be Lexington. However, across each of the categories both cities were ranked either the highest or second highest. Finally, rural residents think of Louisville as the least representative part of the state while urbanites and suburbanites ranked Covington the highest. In Missouri, there is little variation across location type with the exception of rural Missourians ranking Kansas City higher than St. Louis in how they think others see the state. It is interesting that St. Louis is considered both most and least representative across geographic location. Given the scale and static nature of the statewide maps provided in the survey, there is no way to determine if respondents were attempting to differentiate between areas of a city. For example, it may be that in Missouri, a respondent may believe St. Louis County is actually the least or most representative while the city of St. Louis is the opposite.

⁴ This categorization is based on the respondents zip code.

Table 3: Perceptions by Urban, Suburban, Rural

	<u>Most</u>	<u>Least</u>	<u>Others</u>
<i>Illinois</i>			
Urban (182)	Chicago (12.63)	East St. Louis (3.59)	Chicago (25.17)
Suburban (71)	Chicago (10.06)	Chicago (7.62)	Chicago (24.44)
Rural (38)	Chicago (6.94) Springfield (6.94)	Chicago (9.15)	Chicago (33.55)
<i>Indiana</i>			
Urban (45)	Indianapolis (7.54)	Gary (9.79)	Indianapolis (8.29)
Suburban (109)	Indianapolis (14.36)	Gary (12.18)	Indianapolis (18.13)
Rural (70)	Indianapolis (8.24)	Gary (10.18)	Gary (9.41)
<i>Kentucky</i>			
Urban (39)	Louisville (15.08)	Covington (7.48)	Louisville (16.02)
Suburban (49)	Lexington (14.15)	Covington (8.33)	Louisville (22.51)
Rural (108)	Lexington (9.78)	Louisville (5.61)	Louisville (13.75)
<i>Missouri</i>			
Urban (48)	St. Louis (13.79)	St. Louis (8.76)	St. Louis (23.66)
Suburban (80)	St. Louis (11.65)	St. Louis (8.36)	St. Louis (24.99)
Rural (52)	St. Louis (11.76)	St. Louis (8.97)	Kansas City (19.21)

The second geographic metric is based on major urban area media markets (Table 4). In Illinois, I compare respondents living in the Chicago media market to those that do not, and in Indiana, the comparison is between those living in the Indianapolis media market and those that do not. For both Kentucky and Missouri, I compare the two major urban areas of the state (Louisville and Lexington and Kansas City and St. Louis, respectively). In Illinois, the only difference is that those living in the Chicago media market have no set view on what is the least representative part of the state with Quincy and Cairo tied in the highest ranked category with only 1.95% of the map clicks. There are no differences in Indiana; however, the

Non-Indianapolis respondents have a lower percentage ranking Indianapolis the most representative area of the state.

Table 4: Perceptions by Media Market

	<u>Most</u>	<u>Least</u>	<u>Others</u>
<i>Illinois</i>			
Chicago MMA (218)	Chicago (9.65)	Quincy (1.95) Cairo (1.95)	Chicago (15.76)
Non-Chicago (73)	Chicago (6.74)	Chicago (6.01)	Chicago (19.72)
<i>Indiana</i>			
Indianapolis MMA (95)	Indianapolis (11.80)	Gary (13.06)	Indianapolis (13.47)
Non-Indy (129)	Indianapolis (6.30)	Gary (9.07)	Indianapolis (13.23)
<i>Kentucky</i>			
Louisville MMA (59)	Lexington (11.59) Louisville (10.87)	Covington (9.17)	Louisville (16.03)
Lexington MMA (58)	Lexington (11.74)	Covington (8.84)	Lexington (16.66)
Neither (79)	Lexington (9.64)	Louisville (5.10)	Louisville (18.69)
<i>Missouri</i>			
Kansas City MMA (41)	St. Louis (15.38)	St. Louis (4.19)	Kansas City (18.40) St. Louis (17.79)
St. Louis MMA (84)	St. Louis (12.04)	St. Louis (7.63)	St. Louis (21.64)
Neither (55)	Kansas City (11.38) St. Louis (11.38) Springfield (10.98)	St. Louis (9.50)	St. Louis (17.83)

To see if these perceptions vary beyond geographic location, Table 5 shows the breakdown by partisanship. In Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri, there is very little variation by party. In Illinois, Democrats, Republicans, and others all have Chicago as the most representative part of the state as well as how others see the state. Although Republicans are at a lower percentage than the Democrats and others. Democrats perceive East St. Louis as the least representative part of the state; although there is quite a bit of variation among Democrats as the

highest ranked category only had 2.48% of the map clicks. In Indiana, there is no variation by party; however, in the least category the highest ranked category for Gary has a larger share of Republican clicks (15.24%) compared to Democrats (6.20%) and others (9.73%). In Missouri, the only variation by party is that Democrats see Kansas City (4.61%) and Kennett (4.34%) as the least representative part of the state while St. Louis is the highest ranked in all other categories regardless of party. In Kentucky, there is some variation by party. For the most representative part of the state, both Democrats and Republicans see it as Lexington while others had a tie between Lexington and Louisville while Democrats and others both had Lexington as top ranked in the others question with Louisville being top ranked among Republicans. It is in perception of the least part of the state where there is partisan divergence. Democrats had Covington (10.40%) as the least representative, Republicans had Louisville (12.83%), and Mayfield (8.41%) was top ranked by others.

Table 5: Perceptions by Party

	<u>Most</u>	<u>Least</u>	<u>Others</u>
<i>Illinois</i>			
Dems (178)	Chicago (18.31)	East St. Louis (2.48)	Chicago (25.36)
Reps (70)	Chicago (7.19)	Chicago (14.78)	Chicago (16.24)
Others (43)	Chicago (18.5)	Chicago (7.30)	Chicago (32.43)
<i>Indiana</i>			
Dems (123)	Indianapolis (7.61)	Gary (6.20)	Indianapolis (17.5)
Reps (74)	Indianapolis (5.85)	Gary (15.24)	Indianapolis (14.38)
Others (27)	Indianapolis (15.63)	Gary (9.73)	Indianapolis (15.83)
<i>Kentucky</i>			
Dems (101)	Lexington (9.24)	Covington (10.40)	Lexington (14.92)
Reps (68)	Lexington (11.85)	Louisville (12.83)	Louisville (14.64)
Others (26)	Lexington (15.00)	Mayfield (8.41)	Lexington (16.51)

	Louisville (14.17)		
<i>Missouri</i>			
Dems (89)	St. Louis (12.76)	Kansas City (4.61) Kennett (4.34)	St. Louis (23.08)
Reps (57)	St. Louis (13.46)	St. Louis (10.29)	St. Louis (19.50)
Others (33)	St. Louis (14.29)	St. Louis (12.00)	St. Louis (21.58)

Overall, these results show very similar perceptions across various geographic and political dimensions. It seems people have a somewhat shared understanding of the location dynamics within their state, especially in how they think about the most representative part of their state. This suggests a type of conventional wisdom or public consciousness that the major urban areas are the important parts of their state and matches a lot of the rhetoric within state political debates.

Views of Representation

The second part of the analysis examines respondent views on representation with a focus on the influence of geographic comparison. The dependent variables of interest are individuals' perceptions of the level of representation they receive from their state government. Both questions are purposefully broad or vague to elicit generalized or diffuse feelings toward state government as each individual thinks about it rather than about any specific branch of the state government or elected position. The first question captures perceived representation by asking: How much do you agree with the following statement:

The state government in {STATE CAPITAL} represents my interests.⁵

The second dependent variable examines perceived relative representation based on the following question:

⁵ The name of the capital city was piped in on both questions based on each respondent's state.

How much do you think your state government in {STATE CAPITAL} cares about your area compared to other areas of the state?

The intent of this question is to measure respondents' perceptions of the relative representation they feel they receive compared to those living in other areas of their state.

Table 6: Dependent Variables Summary Statistics

<u>Perceived Representation</u>	IL	IN	KY	MO	Overall
Disagree	31.74	59.38	43.88	52.78	45.58
Neither	23.55	19.64	29.08	20.56	23.18
Agree	44.71	20.98	27.04	26.67	31.24
<u>Perceived Relative Representation</u>	IL	IN	KY	MO	Overall
Less	37.88	52.23	50.76	47.78	46.31
About the Same	35.84	31.25	34.01	37.78	34.68
More	26.28	16.52	15.23	14.44	19.02

Table 6 shows a summary of the responses collapsed into three categories⁶ by state and for the sample overall. In looking at *perceived representation*, overall, 46% of respondents disagree with the idea that the state government represents their interests with 31% agreeing with the statement. There is variation across the four states with Hoosiers being most likely to disagree (59%) with the statement and Illinoisians the most likely to agree (45%). For *perceived relative representation*, overall, 46% of respondents believe the state cares less about their area of the state compared to other areas, 35% said about the same, and 19% said they lived in an area where the state government cares more about where they live than other areas of the state. The

⁶ For both questions, I used a five-point scale. For ease of interpretation and presentation, I use the collapsed three-point scale here. The results are substantively the same using the five-point scale.

results are similar across Indiana, Kentucky, and Missouri while Illinoisians were more likely to answer “More” to the question (26%).

The independent variables of interest are two created from respondents' perceptions or comparisons of their state (discussed above) and their level of state attachment. Starting with the perceptions of the state, I include two measures. The first is how close the respondent lives to the area they think is most representative of their state⁷ and the second is how close they live to the area deemed most representative of their state by the entire sample of state respondents.⁸ To account for differences in state size, these measures are standardized from 0-1 with 0 representing living closest to a location and 1 being the farthest away from a location in the state's sample. These two measures capture if views of representation are influenced by the individual's sense of place regardless of how others see the state or if there is an influence based on a broader sense of how citizens think about the state.

This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1a: Individuals living closer to their most part of the state are more likely to think the state represents their interests.

H1b: Individuals living closer to the overall most part of the state are more likely to think the state represents their interests.

H1c: Individuals living closer to their most part of the state are more likely to think the state cares more about their area of the state compared to other areas.

H1d: Individuals living closer to the overall most part of the state are more likely to think the state cares more about their area of the state compared to other areas.

⁷ Since respondents could mark multiple locations, only the closest selection is used.

⁸ The location listed in Table 2.

The second geographic measure looks at state attachment. Place-based attachment is often viewed as a psychological attachment that acts as a type of social identity that can influence political behaviors and attitudes (See Winburn et al. 2024 for more details). The state attachment measure is a mean score from the following four questions all asked on a 5-point strongly disagree to strongly agree scale:

- I feel emotionally attached to [piped in state name]
- I feel loyal to [piped in state name]
- I have loyal obligations to other people from [piped in state name]
- Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave [piped in state name].

Hypothesis 2 looks at the influence of state attachment.

H2a: Individuals with higher state attachment are more likely to think the state represents their interests.

H2b: Individuals with higher state attachment are more likely to think the state cares more about their area of the state compared to other areas.

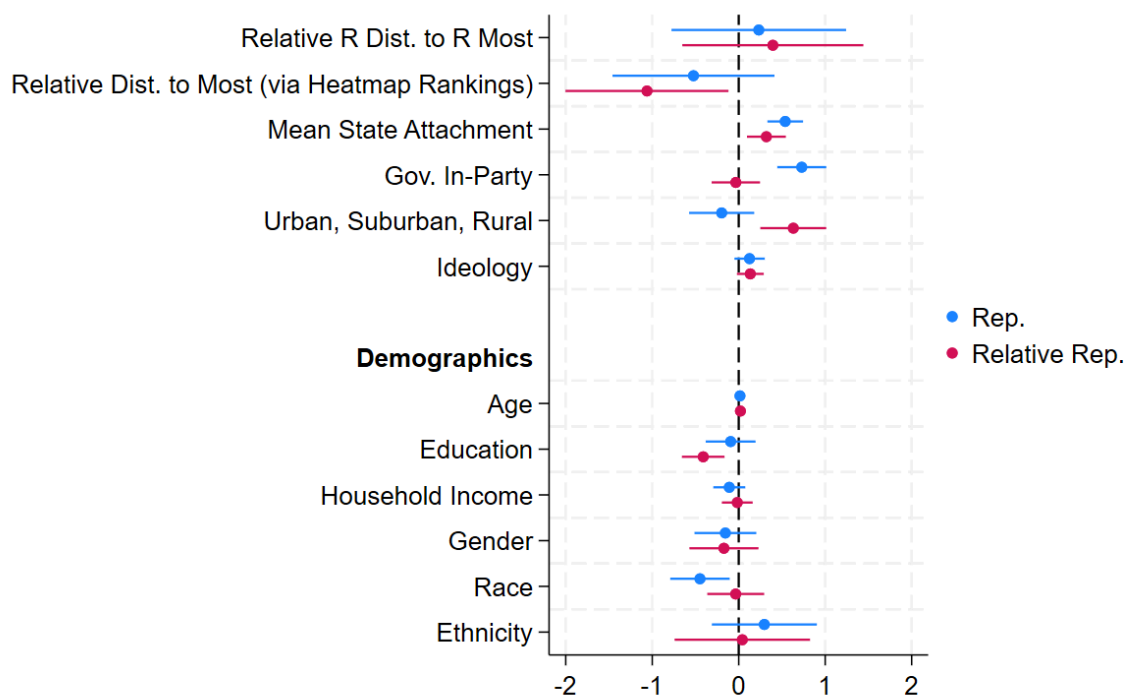
The models also include controls for if the individual lives in an urban, suburban, or rural area, if they are co-partisans with the state's governor (Winburn et al. 2024), their ideology, and a host of demographics: age, education, income, gender, race, and ethnicity.

To test these hypotheses, I run ordered logit models with robust standard errors clustered by state with sampling weights applied. Figure 5 shows the results for the two models. Focusing on distance from the most location in the state, there is no influence for how close respondents live to what they consider to be the most representative part of their state in either model. However, how close respondents live to the overall most representative part of their state has a

statistically significant negative influence on their perceived relative representation. The closer someone lives to the overall most representative part of their state the more they think the state government cares about their area of the state.

State attachment is a significant predictor for both perceived representation and perceived relative representation. In both models, higher state attachment leads to higher levels of thinking the state represents their interests and thinking the state cares more about their area of the state than other areas.

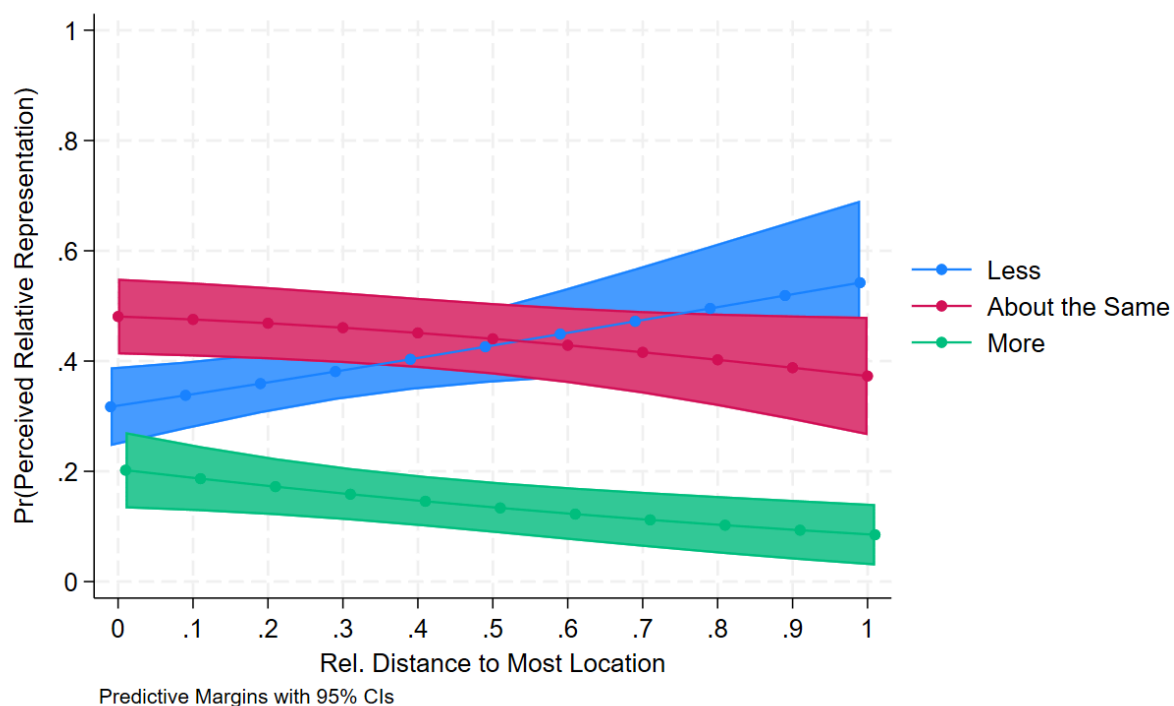
Figure 5: Model Results



Notes: Ordered Logit with robust standard errors clustered by state. Sample weights applied.

Turning to the substantive results of these statistically significant results, Figures 6-8 show the predicted probabilities across the range of distance to the most location and state attachment for the average respondent in the sample. Starting with the geographic perceptions of the most representative part of the state, Figure 6 shows that as individuals live further away from the most representative part of their state they are less likely to say the state cares more about their area. There is a 12% decline across the range of distances. They are much more likely to say the state government cares less about their area the further they live from the most representative part of the state. There is a 23% increase across the range of distances.

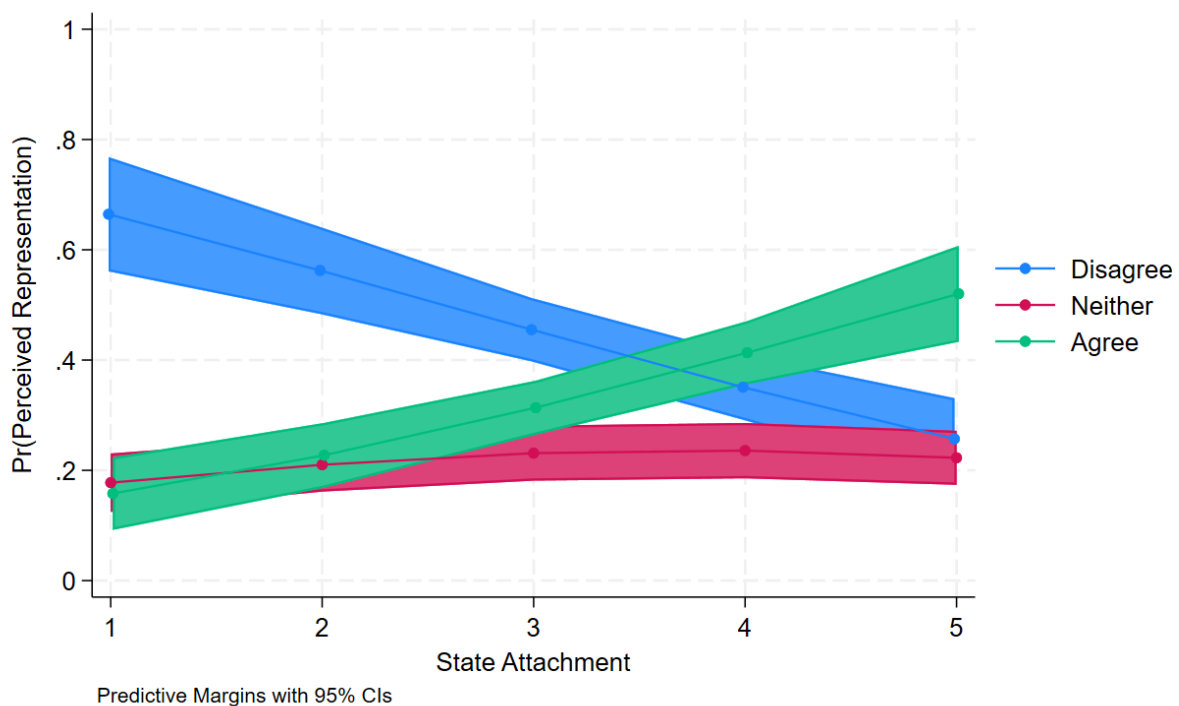
Figure 6: Predicted Probabilities for Distance from Most Representative Part of State



Figures 7 and 8 show the influence of state attachment. In the perceived representation model (Figure 7), there is a 36% increase in agreeing that the state government represents their

interests across the range of state attachment and this is a 16% increase for those saying the state cares more about their area in the perceived relative representation model. This finding is similar to previous work examining questions of representation and gubernatorial approval (Winburn 2023; Winburn et al. 2024).

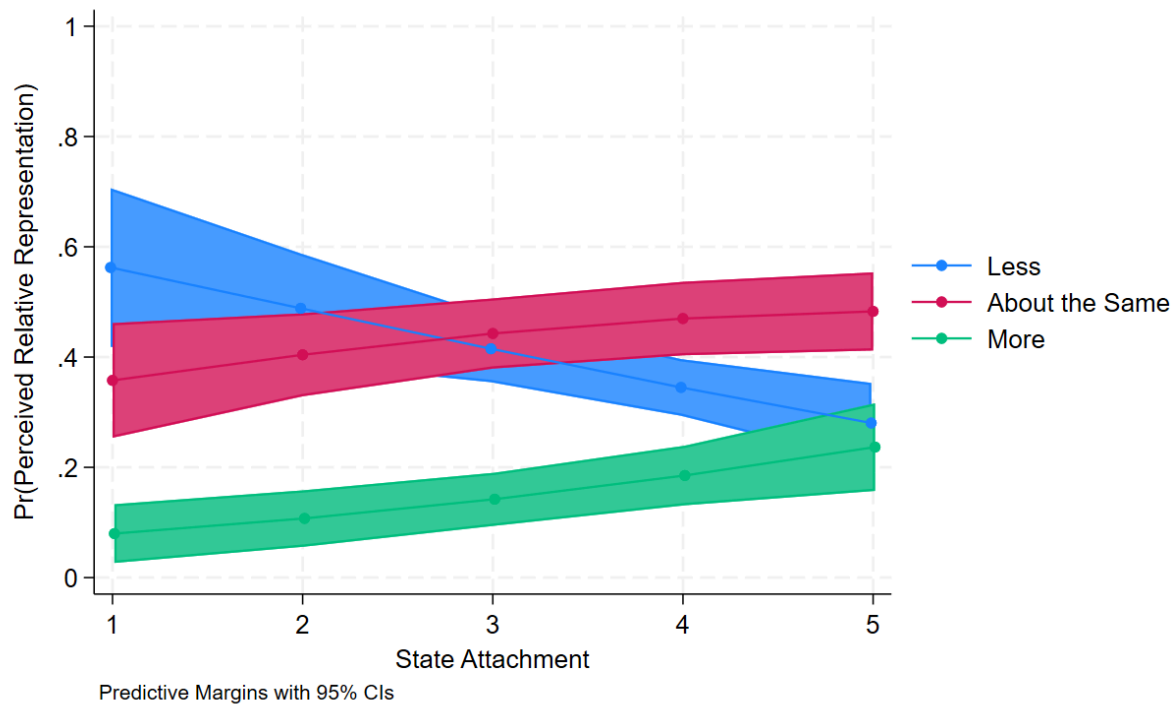
Figure 7: Predicted Probabilities for State Attachment on Perceived Representation



Conclusion

This paper provides a new measure of how individuals perceive areas of their state. Overall, respondents think the largest cities in their state are the most representative of their state and there is more variation for how people think about the least representative area of their state. This provides an empirical validation of the importance of urban centers within states and builds into the larger project. Specifically for this paper, the results show the distance from an

Figure 8: Predicted Probabilities for State Attachment on Perceived Relative Representation



individual's own closest most representative location does have an influence on either perceived levels of state representation nor perceived relative levels of state representation. The distance from the state's overall most representative location does not influence perceived representation; however, does have a statistically significant influence on perceived relative representation model. Individuals that live further away from the most representative part of the state are less likely to think the state represents their area of the state more than other areas of the state. This finding suggests that there exists a type of conventional wisdom of how parts of the state are perceived and that urban areas seem to be the primary area citizen's relate to their state.

A next step in this project is to expand on the relationship between geographic location and the urban/rural divide. These findings provide some empirical support for the generalized argument that rural citizens often feel ignored or left behind in politics, even at the state level.

However, it is not simply an urban/rural divide as it may be more about this public consciousness that some parts of the state are more representative of the state. For example, it is not simply about living in rural Illinois that may influence feelings of not being well-represented by the state government, but living outside the Chicago area in forgotten parts of the state, large or small.

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APPENDIX

Table A1: Sample Demographics

	Illinois	Indiana	Kentucky	Missouri
% Female	50.51	54.26	58.38	58.89
Median Age	36	37	38	40
% White	72.07	88.84	92.39	86.67
% Bachelor's	42.81	37.05	30.46	36.11
% Democrat	61.43	54.91	52.04	49.72
Census (2023)	Illinois	Indiana	Kentucky	Missouri
% Female	50.59	50.39	50.44	50.65
Median Age	39.4	38.2	39.4	39.3
% White	76.02	83.7	86.67	82.39
% Bachelor's	38.3	30.2	27.8	33.2
% Democrat			41.88	

Table A2: Case Selection

	Illinois	Indiana	Kentucky	Missouri
Capital Location	Center of State	Center of State		Center of State
Urban Centers	1	1	2	2
Urban Center(s) Location	Edge of State	Center of State	Proximal	Edges of State
Urban Center Same as Capital	No	Yes	No	No
<i>Political Characteristics</i>				
2024 Presidential Vote	Harris (54.4%)	Trump (58.6%)	Trump (64.5%)	Trump (58.5%)
Governor	Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
Legislature	Democrat	Republican	Republican	Republican

Table A3: Mean Clicks by State and Question

	<u>Most</u>	<u>Least</u>	<u>Others</u>
Illinois	4.32	4.19	3.67
Indiana	4.75	4.34	4.25
Kentucky	4.37	3.9	3.96
Missouri	4.60	4.29	4.08
Overall	4.49	4.18	3.97

Table A4: Mean Distance of Clicks by State and Type

	<u>Most</u>		<u>Least</u>		<u>Others</u>	
	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Range</i>
Illinois	350 (164)	48-802	420 (223)	54-1302	301 (190)	25-819
Indiana	440 (180)	49-968	549 (257)	50-1225	491 (186)	50-1212
Kentucky	367 (156)	52-849	415 (237)	47-992	343 (153)	51-974
Missouri	556 (158)	73-961	683 (272)	64-1887	646 (160)	80-989
Overall	419 (182)	48-968	509 (267)	47-1887	437 (219)	25-1212

Geographic Perceptions Question Wording:

For each question, the respondent's state was piped into the question:

Most

In thinking about [piped in state name], place up to 5 dots (a click on a spot on the map will place a dot in that place) in the areas of the state you believe to be MOST representative of the values, traditions, and cultures of the state. In other words, what do you think is the most "[piped in state name]" part of your state.

Least

In thinking about [piped in state name], place up to 5 dots (a click on a spot on the map will place a dot in that place) in the areas of the state you believe to be the LEAST representative of the values, traditions, and cultures of the state. In other words, what do you think is the least "[piped in state name]" part of your state.

Others

In thinking about [piped in state name], place up to 5 dots (a click on a spot on the map will place a dot in that place) in the areas of the state you believe that people living outside the state most associate with [piped in state name].