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The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) works to improve the quality of life for rural residents by partnering with public and private agencies on local development and enhancement efforts.



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Illinoisans' Perceptions about their State Government, Economy, and Healthcare During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has almost stopped social and economic activities in Illinois; the IMF predicts 3% contraction in the global economy, a much larger impact than the 2008-2009 great recession¹. In earlier Research Briefs, we highlighted Illinoisans' emotions or feelings about Covid-19². In this paper, the all-round effects of the virus on Illinoisans are discussed³; topics range from Illinoisans' beliefs about the ability of the healthcare sector to effectively deal with the virus to government responses in tackling the pandemic (Table 1). Results are presented for both the metro and the nonmetro population; Chi-square is used to test for differences in responses between regions.

¹ See <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/>

² See http://www.iira.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TrackingCovid-19_April162020.pdf, and http://www.iira.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Twitter-Conversations-about-SARS-Cov-2_April-2020.pdf

³ Data are from Pew Research Center: American Trends Panel Wave 64. This national survey of adults 18+ years old, had 11,537 respondents; see <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/u-s-survey-research/american-trends-panel/>. We weighted the sample responses to be representative of the population of Illinois.

Table 1: The Impact of Covid-19: Topics Discussed in the Paper

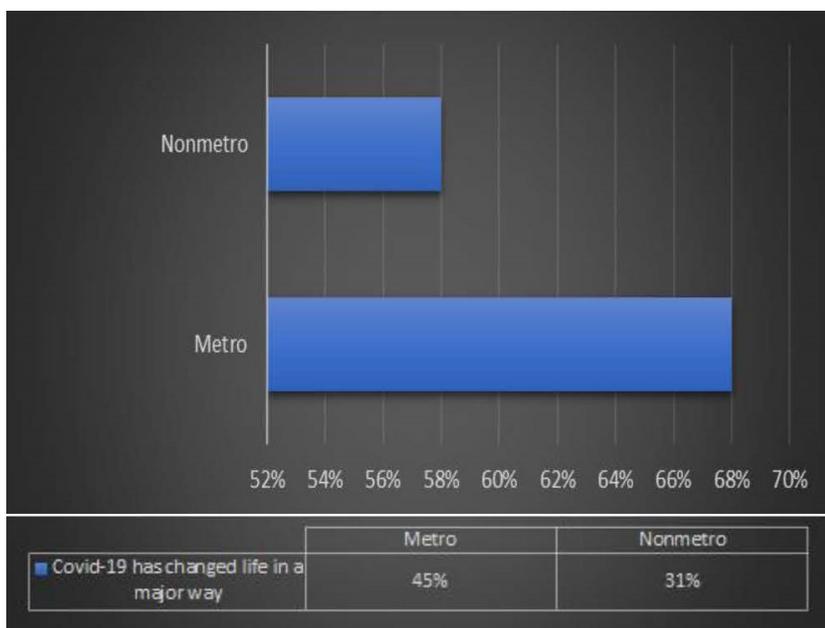
Topic	Components of Topic, Examples
Personal Life	<p>(un)comfortable in engaging in acts such as eating out in restaurants, attending a crowded party, and going out to the grocery store;</p> <p>Information search about the virus: searched online for information about Covid-19, and used social media to share or post information about the virus.</p> <p>Physical wellbeing: in the past seven days have had trouble breathing, or nausea when thinking about Covid-19.</p>
Healthcare	<p>Confidence in the system: ability of hospitals and medical centers to handle the medical needs of people who are seriously ill because of Covid-19.</p>
Government	<p>Performance of elected officials: the job the president is doing responding to the virus outbreak; performance of state elected officials, and local government.</p>
Economy	<p>Work: has been laid off; the virus will cause a recession, or an economic depression.</p>

A. Personal Life

Covid-19 and Dissatisfaction with the Happenings in the Country
 Sixty-six percent of Illinoisans are dissatisfied with the “way things are going in the country”; a larger proportion of these are metro residents, 67%. For the metro residents, the dissatisfaction is correlated with the virus outbreak, they believe that Covid-19 has changed their personal life

in a major way. In contrast, a majority of rural residents (55%) believe that the Coronavirus outbreak has changed their personal life only “a little bit” (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of Illinoisans Dissatisfied with the Way Things are Going in the Country⁵



Note: Daily growth rate for the virus is the median value, computed across metro and nonmetro counties.

⁵ Chi-square test confirmed differences in responses between metro and nonmetro residents

Physical Reactions to Cognitions about Covid-19

Slightly more than one-in-ten residents of metro regions (16%) experienced bodily reactions such as sweating, trouble breathing, nausea, or a pounding heart for a day or more, during the latter half of March 2020, when they thought about Covid-19. This is in contrast to the non-metro residents where the thought of the virus elicited physical reactions only in 7% of the people. One reason for this variation could be the differential

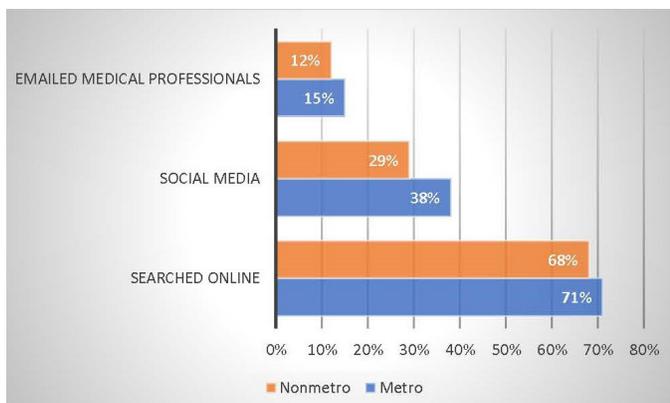
rate of spread of Covid-19 in metro and nonmetro regions; as at April 23, 2020, the average growth rate for the virus in metro is 13% and in rural it is 9%. A consequence of this lower rate of spread of the virus in rural regions is the perception among nearly one-half of rural residents that Covid-19 poses only a minor threat for the health of the US population (Table 2).

Table 2: Physical Reactions to Thinking about Covid-19, and Perceptions about the Threat of the Virus for the Health of the US Population

	Metro	Nonmetro
Experienced bodily reactions such as sweating, troublebreathing, etc. for a day or more on the thought of Covid-19	16%	7%
Daily growth rate of the virus as at April 23, 2020	13%	9%
The virus is only a minor threat for the health of the US population	32%	46%

Note: Daily growth rate for the virus is the median value, computed across metro and nonmetro counties.

Figure 2: Sources of Information about Covid-19



Information Sources about the Virus

Both metro and nonmetro residents provided similar responses to the question, "Have you done any of the following as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak"; response categories included: searched online for information about the virus, used social media to share or post information about the virus, and used email to connect with doctors or other medical professionals (Figure 2).

(Un)comfortable Acts

Illinoisans are comfortable engaging in activities such as grocery shopping, and visiting a close friend during the Covid-19 outbreak; residents would even feel comfortable eating out in a restaurant, if the restaurants are open for dining (Table 3). However, majority of residents (71%) believe that it is necessary to close nonessential businesses to contain the outbreak, and it is necessary to avoid gathering in groups of ten or more people (86%).

B. Government and Healthcare

Rating Government Responses to Covid-19

When asked to evaluate government responses to the outbreak, metro

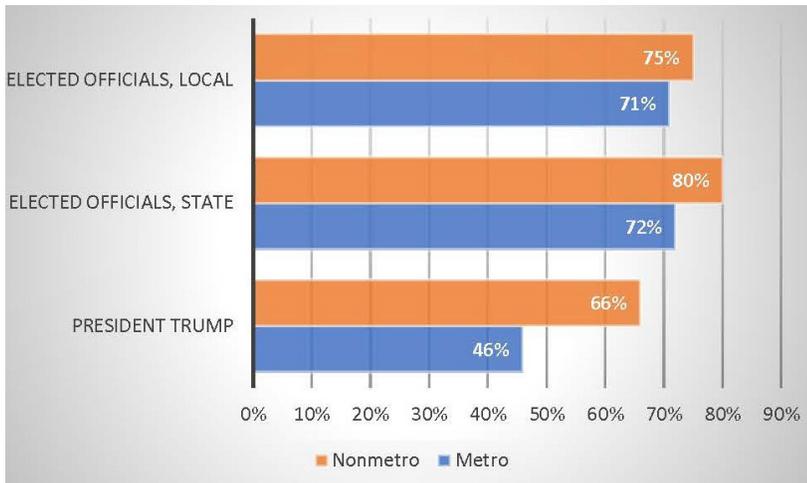
residents differ from nonmetro residents in approving President Trump’s handling of the Covid-19 outbreak; 66% of rural residents rate the President’s response to the outbreak as excellent or good whereas 53% of metro residents rate the President’s response as poor or “only fair”. Also, metro, nonmetro differences exist in rating performances of elected state officials; one-in-four metro residents rate the job state elected officials are doing responding to Covid-19 as poor or fair, whereas 60% of nonmetro residents rate state elected officials’ responses to the virus as “good”. In general, a larger percent of nonmetro residents approve of elected officials’ responses to the virus than their urban counterparts (Figure 3).

Table 3: Beliefs about Accepted Behavior during the Virus Outbreak

Comfortable ...	Metro	Nonmetro
Going out to the grocery store	62%	61%
Visiting with a close friend	64%	71%
Eating out in a restaurant	77%	72%
Necessary to ...		
Requiring most businesses other than grocery stores and pharmacies to close	71%	70%
Asking people to avoid gathering in groups of 10 or more	88%	82%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	90%	92%

Note: Chi-square tests did not reject the hypothesis of independence; that is, there is no difference between metro and nonmetro responses.

Figure 3: Responses to Covid-19: Illinoisans' Ratings of the Job Performance of Elected Officials



Note: Statistically, differences in responses exist between metro and nonmetro residents for the ratings of the President, and elected state representatives.

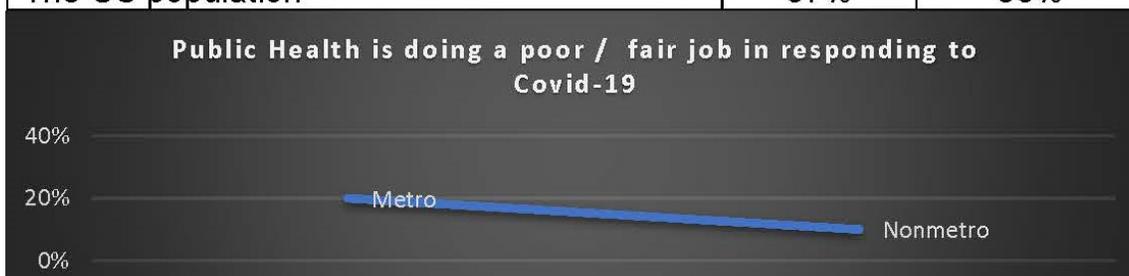
Healthcare Performance

More metro residents rate the performance of public health institutions such as the CDC in responding to the Coronavirus outbreak as fair or poor (21% metro versus 10% rural residents). This could be because of the rapid spread of the virus in the metros, see Table 2. When asked about their confidence in area hospitals to handle the seriously ill

Covid-19 patients, metro residents are not too confident (46%), and this correlates with their belief that the virus is a major threat for their personal health (Table 4).

Table 4: Beliefs about Healthcare

Covid-19 is a major threat to ...	Metro	Nonmetro
Personal health	32%	23%
The US population	67%	56%



C. Economy

Tabulated responses to the results of questions about the US economy, and personal finances are shown in Table 5. In line with the established procedures for reporting the results of statistical tests, responses that differ significantly are marked by asterisks, two ** for $p. \leq 0.01$ and * for $p. \leq 0.05$.

Table 5. Impacts of Covid-19 on the US Economy and Respondents' Personal Finances

Threat of Covid-19 ...	Metro	Nonmetro
A major threat to the US economy*	88%	84%
It will cause a recession*	52%	47%
It will cause a depression	14%	15%
	Metro	Nonmetro
Covid-19 ...		
Is a major threat to personal finance*	46%	42%
Has resulted in me or someone in my household to lose a job	20%	22%
Has resulted in me taking a pay cut because of reduced hours or demand for my work*	24%	19%

D. Summary and Conclusion

Illinoisans differ in perceptions about the impacts of Covid-19, the differences in beliefs are context specific, whether the respondent lives in the metro region of the state or the nonmetro. In general, metro residents are more fearful about the virus, they have too many infected cases, and the majority don't believe that President Trump is responding effectively to arrest the spread of the virus. There is one thing that both the populace agrees

about: the economy will contract; recession will make more and more businesses get into difficulty.