

# DAILY NEWS

OPINION

## Our real national divide: Local America vs. National America



By RICHARD FLORIDA and MICK CORNETT NOV 04, 2018 | 4:00 AM



People dine outdoors at Market Square in downtown Pittsburgh in an undated photo. (Getty Images)

It goes without saying: Ours is a divided nation. But the real boundary doesn't run between Blue or Red states, liberal and conservative ideologies, or urban versus rural regions. No, the real divide in America is one of scale.

On one end is National America, backed by billionaire donors, given voice by corporate media, and anchored in Washington, D.C., where the discourse has never been more polarized and toxic. At the other end is Local America — the reviving cities, sprawling suburbs and far-flung rural communities where politics are pragmatic, discourse is civil and, most of all, things get done.

The two of us belong to different political parties, and differ sharply on a number of policy views. But we share a core belief that our country's future lies in Local America.

Two cities we know particularly well — Oklahoma City, where one of us was mayor, and Pittsburgh, where the other lived and taught for two decades — exemplify the power of Local America. A couple of decades ago, both cities were ravaged by the forces of deindustrialization and globalization. Their industries died and their downtowns were abandoned as their best and brightest moved away. Economically exhausted after a century of booms and busts, and broken-hearted by the senseless bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City's civic and business leaders and community groups came together to turn their city around. More than \$2 billion in public funds and many times more than that in private investments were invested.

Pittsburgh lost thousands of high-paying manufacturing jobs when its steel mills and factories closed down in the 1970s and 80s. Local government leaders and philanthropists worked together to stabilize its neighborhoods and rebuild its economy around knowledge and ideas. The city is now seen as a beacon of economic renewal. And its current mayor, Bill Peduto, is working hard to ensure that the benefits of its new tech economy extend not just to highly educated knowledge workers but to all Pittsburghers.

These are just two stories of broader remaking of Middle America's cities. In New Orleans, former Mayor Mitch Landrieu worked with both Democratic and Republican leaders to rebuild the city after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Former Mayor Richard Berry of Albuquerque, a Republican, launched his "Better Way" partnership with non-profits and faith groups to dramatically reduce homelessness in his city. The locally-driven revival of dozens more cities from Des Moines to Indianapolis, Charleston to Chattanooga, Boise to Provo, are beacons of hope.

All of these places have found ways to build a better future — with or without help from Washington. Local America's Republicans have figured out that citizens of all stripes are perfectly willing to pay taxes for projects and programs that they believe in, while many of Local America's Democratic leaders advocate for lower taxes, reasonable regulations and business-friendly policies that conservatives in their cities can gladly get behind.

The division between National and Local America shows up starkly in opinion polling, too. According to Gallup polls, trust and confidence in National America is far below that of Local America. Only 40% of Americans trust the Congress to do the right thing — while more than 70% express high levels of trust in their local governments.

Years from now, historians may well view 2018 as one of America's critical tipping points, when Local Americans finally gave up on Washington, D.C. and took matters into their own hands.

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