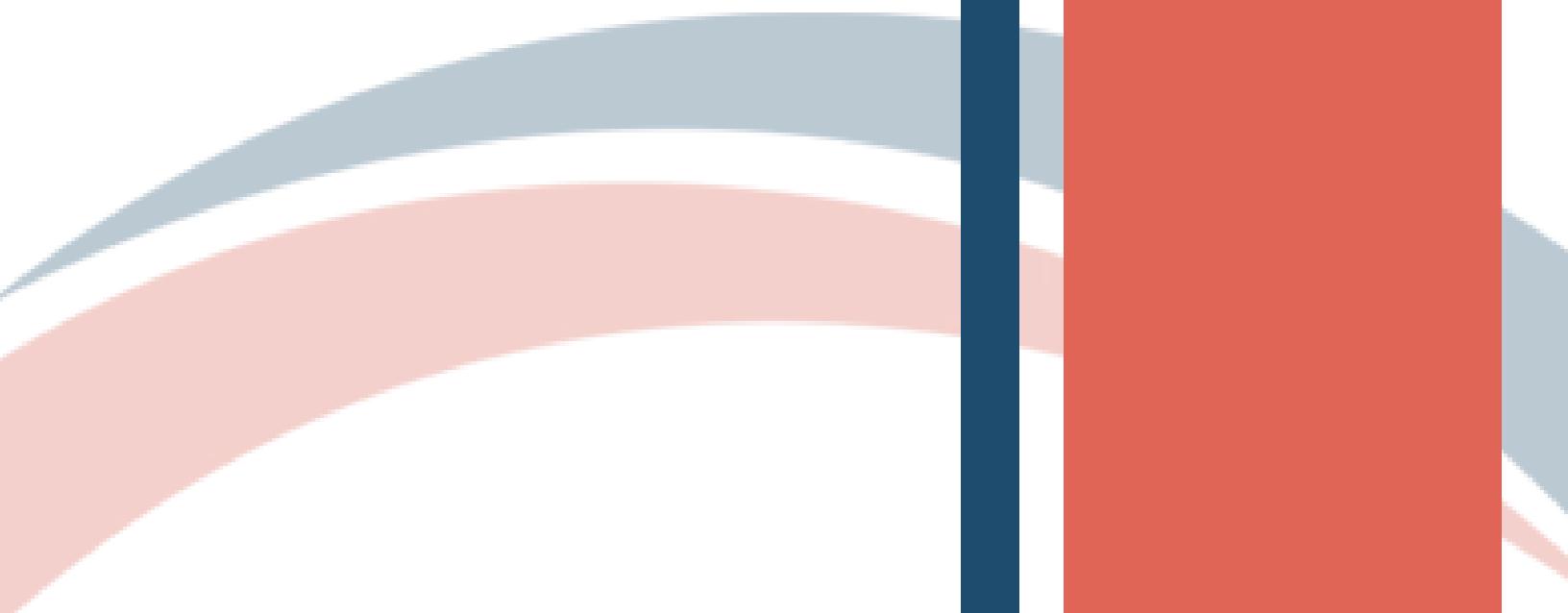


THE WORKING CLASS PROJECT

2025 REPORT





For too many working folks in this country, the American Dream – if you work hard and play by the rules, you can have a comfortable life and a brighter future for your kids – feels more like a fairy tale from long ago. They’re understandably angry about it. And when they went to vote in the 2024 presidential election, a lot of working-class people – of all races – didn’t think Democrats cared about them, respected them, reflected them, or had a plan to help them. So they voted for Donald Trump and the Republican Party, some for the first time ever.

Democrats have to win back the support of the working class, including men and working folks in places we haven’t been competitive, such as the South and the Heartland. If we don’t, our governing coalition may well cease to exist. And we can’t earn working-class votes without listening to and learning from them.

That’s why we launched the Working Class Project – the biggest and most extensive working-class research investment in the Democratic Party. The following report discusses what we learned over the last nine months, as we conducted dozens of focus groups and roundtables, surveys, an in-depth study of media consumption habits, and other qualitative and quantitative research across 21 states.

What we found wasn’t always pretty: I’m a proud Democrat who was twice elected statewide in Louisiana, but the way I heard working-class voters describe my party was often unrecognizable. But we also found plenty of reasons for optimism: The people we talked to don’t think Trump is delivering on his promises to lower costs; in fact, his tariffs are killing working folks. They don’t like how he’s cut their health care. They really don’t like all the ways he’s helped his rich friends scam the system. And they’re hungry for authentically normal candidates; candidates fighting to ensure hardworking, decent people – the people who make our country great – are respected and rewarded.

That ethos defined Democrats for generations – ever since FDR pulled our nation back from the brink of economic and social disaster in the midst of the Great Depression. We can, and must, again be the party of the American Dream, and of American dreamers. Our initial research offers us a practical, informed, and necessary path forward.

Mitch Landrieu

Co-chair, Democracy Matters and American Bridge 21st Century

ABOUT THE WORKING CLASS PROJECT

In the wake of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, the Democratic Party needs a plan to win more working-class voters. So Democracy Matters and American Bridge 21st Century co-chair Mitch Landrieu launched the largest working-class research effort in the Democratic Party, The Working Class Project. We started The Working Class Project to better understand working-class voters in 20+ battleground states through qualitative and quantitative research; to develop proven message frames that work not only for Democratic candidates, but for leadership and the Party overall; and to disseminate our work across the larger ecosystem, so it can be put to good use ahead of critical elections. This report summarizes the research we've conducted throughout 2025 along with our key findings and recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Working-class voters perceive Democrats to be woke, weak, and out-of-touch, too focused on social issues and not nearly focused enough on the economic issues that impact everyone, every day. But Democrats can win back these working-class voters, in 2026 and beyond.

Nearly one year since Trump was reelected, a solid majority of working-class voters remain frustrated, anxious, or struggling with their financial realities – and they aren't optimistic any of that will change. They are worried about inflation, and about their paychecks keeping pace; about the price and attainability of both housing and health care; about the job market, Trump's chaotic tariff policies, and their sense of stability. These Americans define themselves by their hard work and self-sufficiency, but feel like neither trait is rewarded in our economy. They're angry – not necessarily at the wealthy, but at an unfair and rigged system where politicians give the rich and powerful all the breaks. And they're disappointed Trump and Republicans aren't helping them, viewing them as more focused on picking fights and looking out for themselves than on reducing how much everything costs.

This provides Democrats with an opening. To earn back the votes of working-class Americans, our Party needs to make clear it values people who work hard. Instead of denigrating or contrasting ourselves with Republicans, Democrats need to advocate for our own policy agenda, one that first-and-foremost rewards hard-working, fair-playing people – an agenda that helps them get ahead, not just get by; an agenda that ensures health care is affordable, homeownership is obtainable, and retirement is possible. And because the status quo feels broken, Democrats shouldn't be afraid to acknowledge that we need big, bold, aggressive changes, across the board.

There's no one perfect model for Democrats to follow as we try to earn back working-class votes and work our way out of the political wilderness. But Democrats who are authentically relatable, clear, and respectful in how they communicate connect most with the working class.

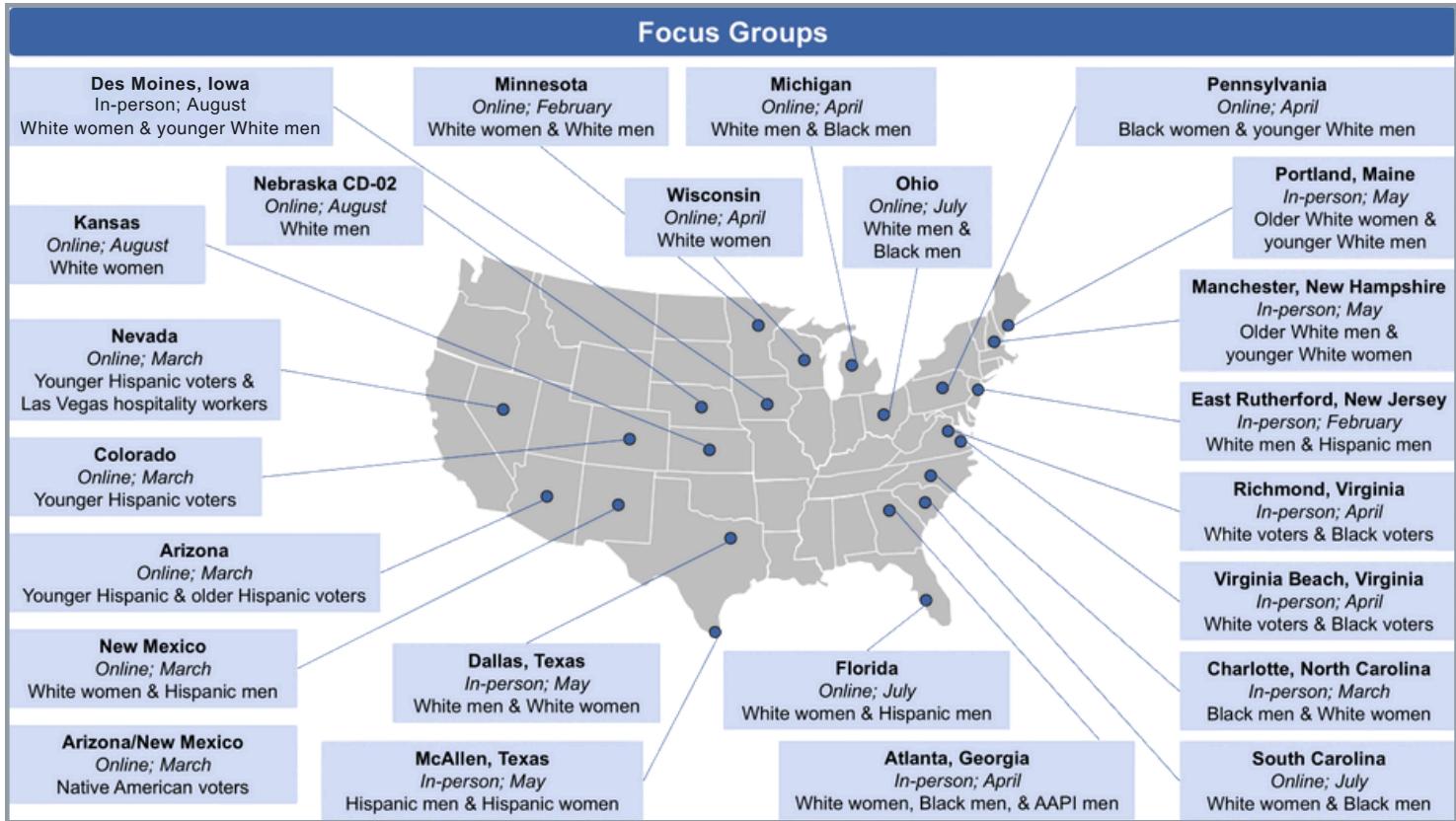
Finally, when and where we reach these voters also matters. They increasingly get their information from, and form their opinions on, non-traditional platforms – particularly YouTube and TikTok – and Democrats need to build up their presence on these channels.

Research Partners Include:



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SUMMARY OF RESEARCH



The Working Class Project conducted:

- **39 focus group discussions** with nearly 400 collective working-class voters across 21 states, from February to August.
- A two-phase **media consumption study** among working-class voters across 21 states in the spring. This included an online survey of 7,555 voters, of whom 2,179 self-identified as working class, and media-usage diary research, in which survey respondents were asked to complete a detailed diary of their media usage over 24 hours. A total of 474 working-class voters participated in this diary research.
- **Weekly longitudinal qualitative research** over 13 weeks from March to June, among a fixed group of 28 self-identified working-class swing voters across battleground states who voted for Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential election. Participants responded to and discussed new questions each week, focused on Trump's actions in office, party brands, and current events.
- **Monthly longitudinal quantitative research** in April, May, and June. Each wave included 1,000 interviews via an online panel among self-identified working-class voters, who were asked a series of tracking questions to measure movement, and new questions to capture reactions to unfolding national events.
- A **benchmark messaging survey** of more than 3,000 working-class voters across 21 states. This survey consolidated the most resonant message frames borne from focus group discussions and longitudinal qualitative boards to assess how they moved voters on a generic ballot and congressional vote. Messages covered issue areas focused on the economy and rising costs, tariffs, health care, corruption, immigration and LGBTQ+ issues, specifically focused on trans issues that continued to arise in each focus group.
- **Ad testing** in September and October that assessed messages that performed well in the benchmark survey, integrated into various ad treatments, and tested in Virginia as well as the remaining 20 states in which we conducted research.

DEFINING THE WORKING CLASS

To listen and learn from the working class, we first had to determine whom to talk to – to figure out who constitutes “the working class.” Other research projects and campaigns have used predetermined, rigid definitions, based on education and/or income, to delineate this group of people. The Working Class Project instead elected to cast a wide net and let potential participants define themselves as members of the working class, or not.

Our approach found, through both the qualitative conversations and quantitative surveys, that individuals who define themselves as “working class” vary widely in terms of income, education, and industry; these characteristics can also vary widely based on geography. For example, an elementary school teacher with a Master’s degree, living in southern Texas and making around \$50,000 annually, might consider themselves part of the working class; so, too, might a supervisor of a construction company in suburban New Jersey who doesn’t have a college degree and brings in \$185,000 annually.

Amidst such variety, however, common trends emerged. **“Working-class” voters define themselves by their hard work, self-sufficiency, and economic anxiety.** They have and make “just enough” to get by, but not enough to get ahead. They don’t depend on government assistance, but things like home ownership, vacations, and extra-curricular activities for their kids feel out of reach. Many feel as though their work ethic would enable them to elevate their economic position, if only the system weren’t broken.

Their occupations included mechanics, construction workers, teachers, nurses, medical technicians, paraprofessionals in schools, law enforcement, administrative staff, delivery drivers, retail workers, bank tellers, financial analysts, construction workers, and non-profit staff.



“Anyone living paycheck to paycheck... if you receive your check and have to do calculations to make it last...if you get to the point where you don’t have to worry about any financial stress, I don’t consider you working class.” – Black man, OH

“Hard working, people that go in everyday and punch in and punch out... not the investor class...they put in the hours” – Latino man, FL

“People that are working and have multiple jobs, people that don’t have generational wealth.” – White woman, FL

“We don’t make enough to be rich but we’re not poor. We’re all pawns to help someone else make money.” – Latino man, NJ

KEY FINDINGS



Based on qualitative and quantitative research completed in 2025, The Working Class Project found that:

SENTIMENT:

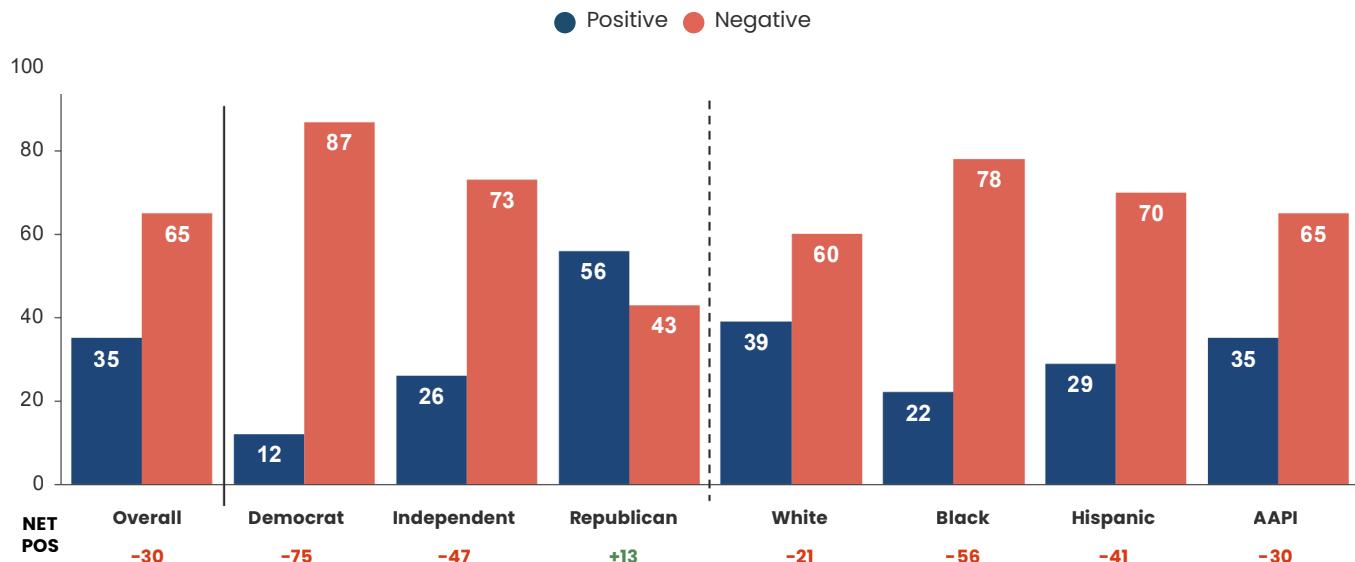
The economic mood amongst the working class is grim, with many feeling stuck and scared.

A solid majority of working-class voters rate the economy negatively, and a plurality say President Trump is bringing chaos that hurts the country; many cite the constantly changing tariff rules as a particular source of chaos and confusion. Few have seen recent improvements in their own financial situations, even among those who are optimistic about the direction of the economy under Trump. Many are acutely financially struggling: worries center around inflation, housing, groceries, health care, student loans, and their wages not keeping pace. They feel like the economy does not reward hard work, making stability feel out of reach.

A solid majority rate the economy negatively, including nearly three-quarters of Independents and across racial groups.

Only Republicans are net-positive on the economy, with a solid share still rating it negatively.

How would you describe the U.S. economy these days?



"The economy is in the trash. I worked with DHL Express about nine years now, and there's no other way to say it - feels like we're driving off a cliff, we can see it, but the brakes aren't working." - White man, OH

"Everything is going up, child care, groceries. My wife stays home with my kids because we couldn't afford childcare. The question is, when does this become unsustainable." - White man, VA

“Everything is super expensive: food, fuel, rent, bills, etc. Jobs are still paying the same amount as before, and people can't compensate for the price increases.” – Latina woman, NV

“To not care about people losing their jobs is crazy to me, because you can apply for 100 jobs and not hear back. The economy is so bad that employers are posting jobs that aren't there. You should be caring about your people, you should be caring about Virginia and Virginia's economy.” – Black woman, VA

“Back in '96, gas was 96 cents a gallon... now gas is \$4 a gallon. The price of eggs is ridiculous, it used to be \$1.59. These tariffs last night, I was up until 5:20am talking about that with my mama, explaining to her that stuff will double in price.” – Black man, GA

“Trump is racist” but “I don't care, I vote with my pocketbook.”
– Latino man, NJ

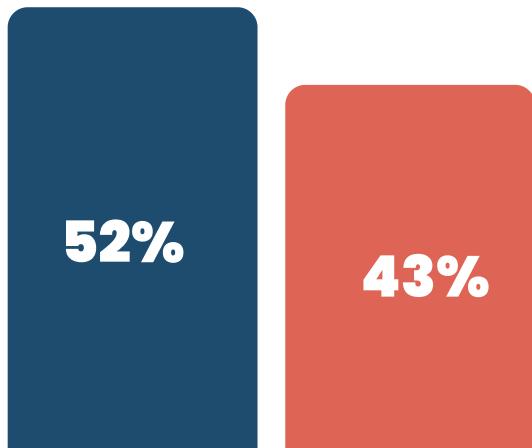


SENTIMENT:

Aside from maybe unions, few working-class voters can name a person, candidate, or group they see as fighting for working people. In fact, few could proactively recall a time when it felt like the government was helping the working class – even pointing out that Social Security and Medicare are programs Americans pay into, rather than unqualified government support.

"The Democrats only have a fighting spirit when they are not in office. Once in office, they cater to everyone but the American people. They had four years to boost the economy, but decided to have us fund two wars (that we know of) instead." – Black woman, GA

"I don't think there's...[anyone] standing up for the Democracy part, I don't think Democrats are fighting for the oath they swore too...either you're too scared to voice your mind or following the crowd." – White woman, FL



- A candidate focused on fixing the economy so those who work hard can get ahead
- A candidate focused on taking on big corporations and the wealthy

"Nobody's thinking about the citizens, all the higher ups are trying to get a dollar right now." – Black man, OH

"I've always hoped that they're just gonna help the everyday average guy."
– White woman, KS

53%

of working class voters prefer a candidate that believes if you work hard, you should be able to get ahead, and that we need to help Americans grow their incomes and keep more of what they earn over a candidate that believes we need to [overhaul the system and] take on dark money in politics.

"I'm a lifelong Democrat and they need to rebuild, they need to get back to their basics... the homeless, the poor, the Medicaid. The stuff that JFK, that FDR all worked on... Why cut someone's feet off if they're trying to walk" – White man, OH

"Unions lost their way. It's not about trying to make sure everyone gets a cut, the higher ups are lining their pockets." – Latino man, TX

"They just pulled a bunch of subsidies from farmers, which is gonna increase the cost of food, which is going to increase the cost of living, and that's directly from this state. I don't know what our Kansas representatives are doing right now, but they're dropping the ball. They're not fighting for us." – White woman, KS

SENTIMENT:

The Democratic brand is suffering – working-class voters see Democrats as woke, weak, ineffective, and out of touch. At best, many working-class voters think Democrats have “good intentions” or “mean well,” but they don’t see Democrats as strong or patriotic. They do not believe Democrats can get things done. These voters also can’t name what Democrats stand for, other than being against Trump. While Republicans are seen to be “out for the rich”, the working class also sees them as vividly focused on strength and safety. And perhaps in a nod to Trump’s actions in the first months of his presidency, they say Republicans are able to get the things they want done.



“[The Democratic Party] aligns with what’s popular, inclusion, but at my age I don’t care if I’m included. I want to make enough money.”
– Black man, NC

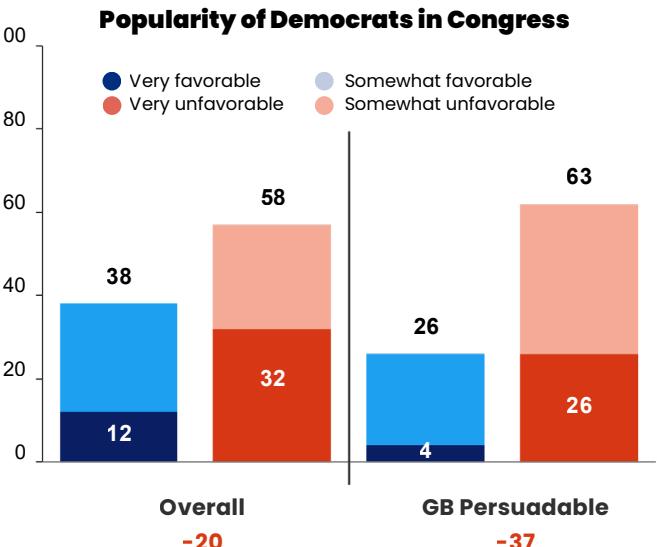
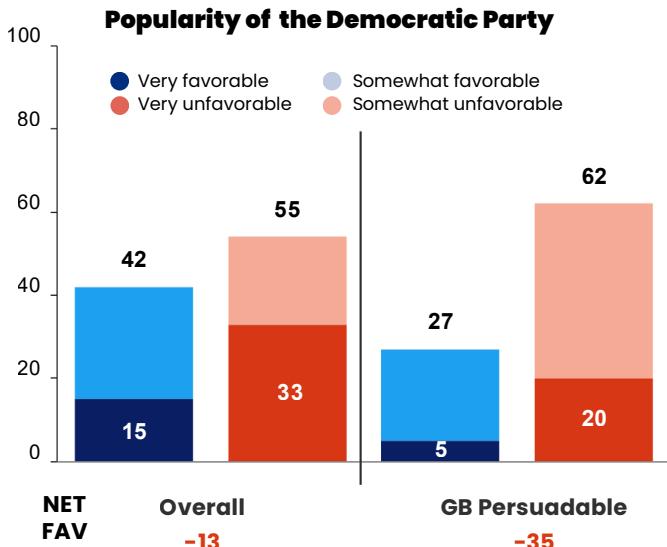


“I voted for Trump because I thought the Democrat party was weak at the time, and I thought Trump would be [the] party for national security. Normally I would vote Democrat, but I felt Biden was not as strong as he could’ve been. At the time, this was more important than unions for me.” – White man, MI

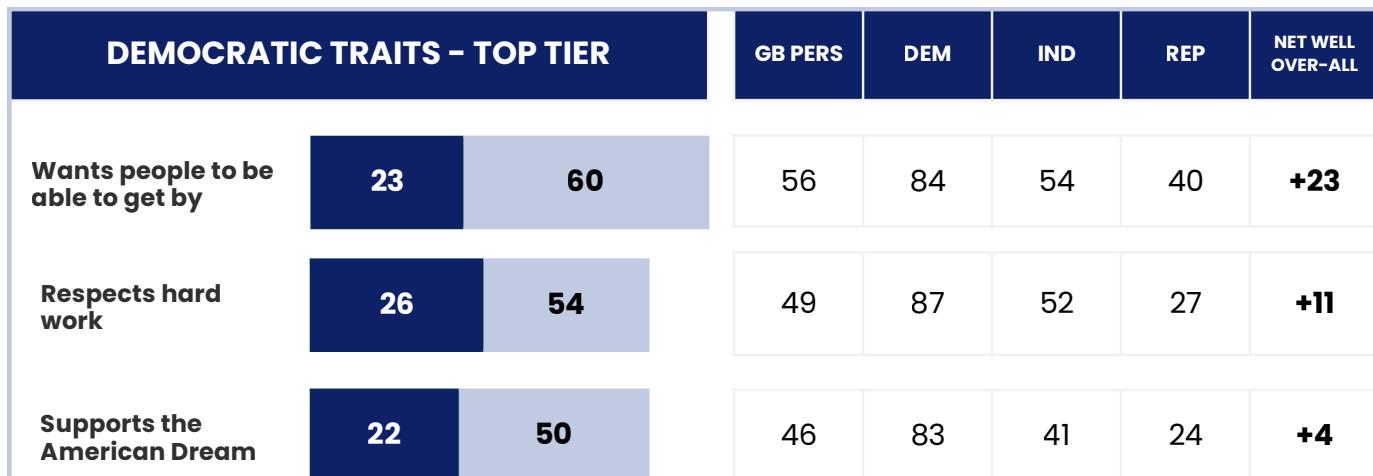


The Democratic Party and Democrats in Congress are net negative by double digits and worse off than Republicans

Over six-in-10 persuadable working-class voters are unfavorable to the party and Democrats in Congress.



Democrats' strongest traits are on wanting people to be able to get by, respecting hard work, and supporting the American Dream – but even their strongest ratings are soft.



- Very well
- Somewhat well

"Politicians, lots of them are out of touch. They just know what happens up there, they don't know the minor changes for everyday people."
– Black man, OH

"I think the Democrat party as a whole has disintegrated to complete socialism, and that's why there was a swing...the D party isn't the party of my youth. Their issues aren't the issues we care about. Fighting for the guy sent to the wrong prison and the men in girls' sports. It's too radical." – White woman, TX

"Most Democrats have been working people." – Black man, GA

"It's trying to cater to a new type of audience. Back in the day, people didn't care... now you have to be so careful, what you say so you don't get canceled... they are trying to cater to a new audience."
– Black man, OH

"They are all over the map, they don't have a plan to execute. They don't know where to start... they don't have any strong points to grow. All they do is criticize Republicans." – Latino man, FL

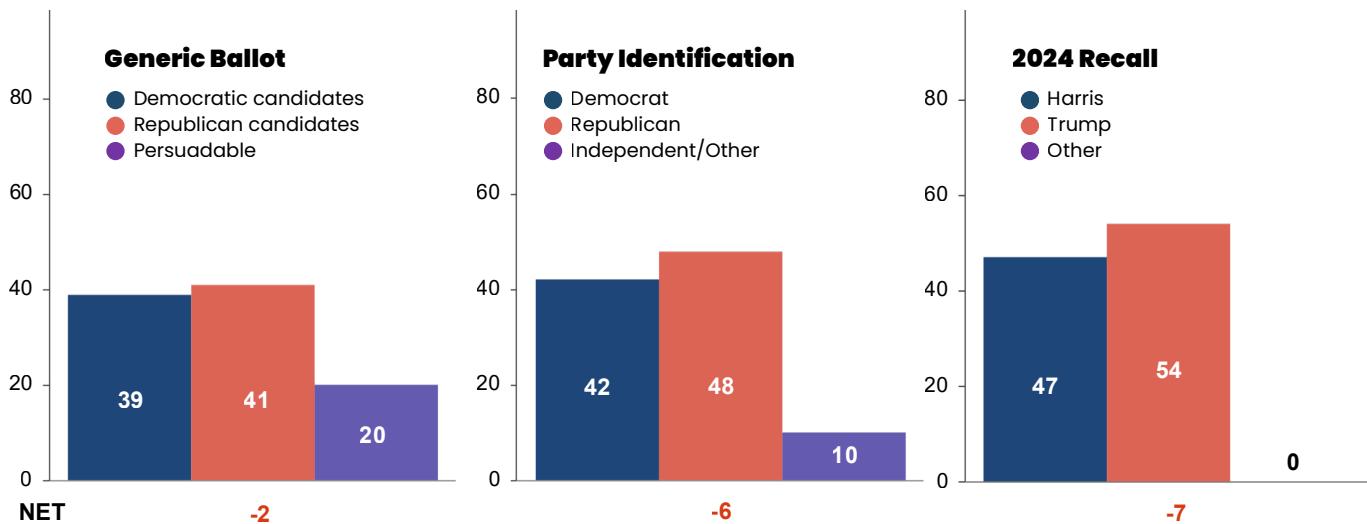
"Democrats will fall for anything, even if it's detrimental. They want to include everyone, but at some point, you have to put your foot down."
– Black man, GA

"Working class to lower – used to be Democrats. They would take care of [the] working class. Middle class and upper – was Republican. My view is still the same, even though I switched to Republican. I consider myself working class still, but I'm trying to get over the hump to middle class." – White woman, NC

SENTIMENT:

Democrats are behind with working-class voters in key states, but a solid share are not favorable to Trump's policies and are open to our messaging. While these voters supported Trump by 7 points in 2024, they only favor Republicans by 2 on the 2026 generic ballot – and after hearing key messaging, the generic ballot is tied. The national trend of Trump's sagging numbers has shown up here, too, in both qualitative and quantitative research; working-class folks report feeling disappointed and surprised Trump has not done more to help people like them, and that he is picking political fights rather than working on reducing costs. Still, Trump's favorability is about net even, and a substantial share at least like his ideas, if not his approach.

Trump won these voters by 7 points, and they identify as Republicans by a six-point margin, but Democrats trail by just 2 on the generic congressional ballot with 20% persuadable.



"I'm about to lose my job... I'm on Medicaid and food stamps... The BBB, it's not beautiful, it's ugly... the orange man in the White House needs to go. I was a Trump supporter, but he lied to everybody." – White man, OH

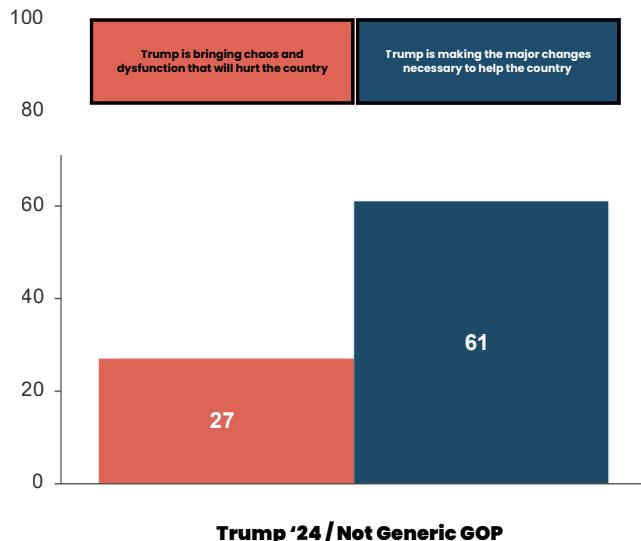
"I think sometimes there can be a lot of focus, especially on the really wealthy ones, about just money, money, money for the ones with a lot of, you know, power." – White woman, KS

"They played the game good... they played the people. They played to me. But for some reason that guy in the White House lied to me because of my Medicaid, because of my health issues" – White man, OH

"Cluster fuck, I just feel like we have a Constitution and rule of law and it's not being applied – it should be applied to anyone here." – White man, NH

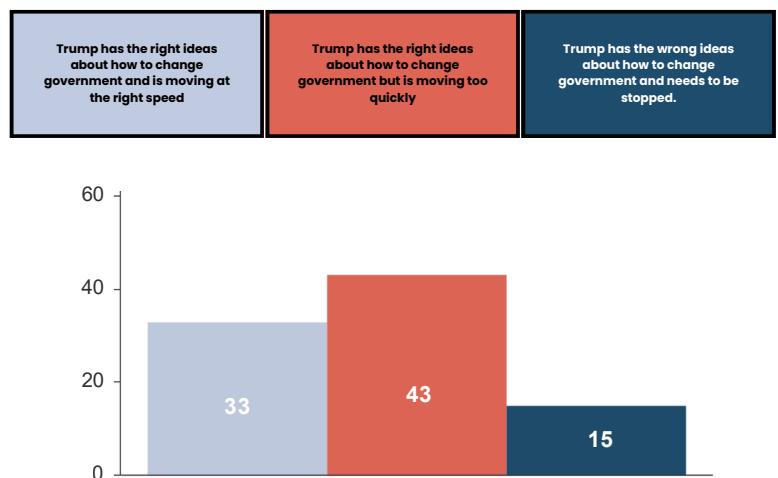
Among Trump voters who do not vote for a Republican on the generic ballot (13% of working-class voters), about a quarter think he is bringing chaos, and just under half think he is moving too quickly.

Which of the following comes closer to your view about Donald Trump's presidency so far?

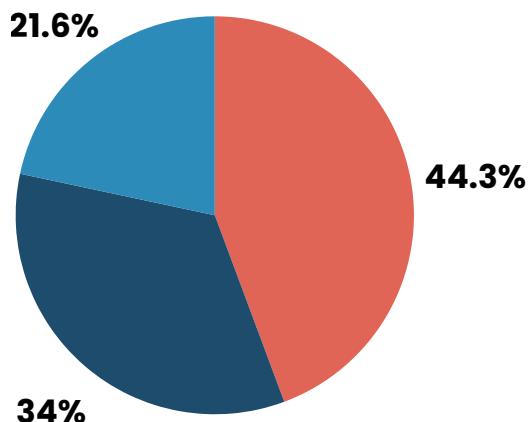


Trump '24 / Not Generic GOP

Which of the following comes closer to your view about the changes Donald Trump has made since taking office?



Trump '24 / Not Generic GOP



"[He's] loud and a jackass... decisive, he is getting things done, I gave him a C on his term." - White man, NE

"Trump's a dictator, not a president."
- White man, OH

- Say Trump has the right ideas and is moving at the right speed
- Say Trump has the wrong ideas and needs to be stopped
- Say Trump has the right ideas but is moving too quickly

"It's confusing, and you can research it all day long, and you still don't get a clear answer on who's benefiting. Where's the money going?" - White man, IA



POLICY:

Working-class voters across demographics feel Democrats have lost their way on the economy, and are too focused on “woke” social issues that don’t pertain to the lives of regular people like them. Though not always aligned with voters’ opinions, the issue of transgender kids in sports, specifically, and the perceived prioritization by Democrats of transgender rights over other issues more generally, has stuck with working-class voters since the 2024 election. Working-class voters also see Democrats as standing in reflexive opposition to Trump and advocating for handouts to people who don’t want to work – a particular offense to those who define themselves by their hard work and self-sufficiency.




“I just feel like they’re focusing so much on, you know, the social issue... and kind of pitting people against each other based on that, rather than on other things.” – White man, NE


“It feels like the majority of Democrat politicians are so far left leaning, they’re out of touch... I feel like everyone should be treated with respect no matter where you come from, but it feels too much....”
– White man, ME


“We need to focus on how people live before transgender issues.”
– White woman, IA


“I think they’ve been so bad economically that they’ve never been focused on it... they’ve always been focused on social issues.”
– White man, NH

POLICY:

Immigration remains a deeply challenging topic for Democrats – working-class voters perceive Democrats as being for open borders and handouts to the undocumented, positions they dislike. Many working-class voters do not believe undocumented people are entitled to constitutional protections or have a right to due process. We conducted focus groups in Texas before we were witnessing the multi-city ICE raids we're seeing today. In those groups, we heard from Latinos who feel their own immigration challenges were ignored by Democrats, while others have been given more leeway – or even rewarded – for not following the rules. We also heard from voters in Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska in August who were already experiencing fatigue around Trump's enforcement actions having gone too far, but overall agreed with the goals of tightening the border and deporting criminals.

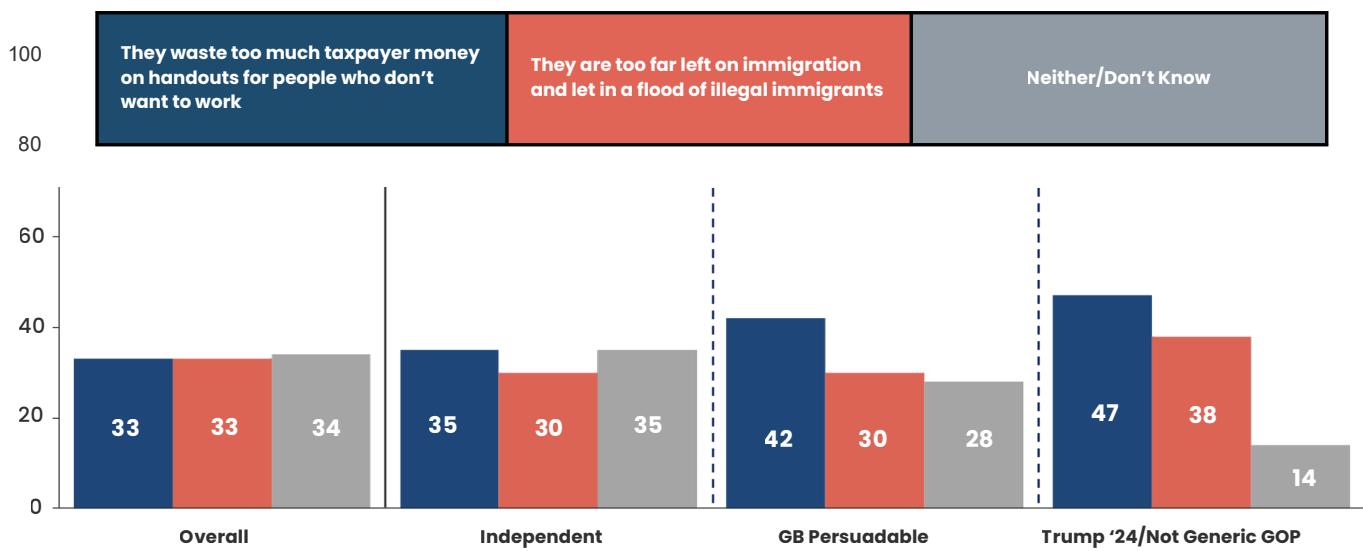
"Obama sent a bunch of people back to Mexico and he wasn't considered a bad person, but Trump is doing it and he's labeled a bad person." – Latino man, TX

"I don't trust Democrats because they want to bring illegals in and deport us." – Latina woman, TX

Voters are divided between being more concerned that Democrats waste money on handouts versus being too far left on immigration.

Independents, persuadable voters, and voters who voted for Trump but not a Republican on the generic ballot are more concerned by handouts.

Which is a bigger concern for you about Democrats?



“Before everybody judges, I’m not a Republican, I’m a Democrat, but I voted for Trump this year. I couldn’t deal with the last four years of the border being wide open.” – Latino man, FL

“People not coming into the country, I believe I’ve heard some stats where it’s... leaps and bounds better than the previous administration.”
– White man, IA

“Well, I might be one of the more heartless out of the group, just because I’m of the opinion that if it’s illegal, it’s illegal. Period. End of story.” – White woman, KS

“No, let’s cut on all the spending we make sending money to other countries, let’s cut on all the illegals benefits, and there will be enough for American families.” – Hispanic woman, FL

“It’s just interesting watching the last four years versus now where, you know, we were told the border was closed for four years and then at the last second, no. It’s not. We need to close it. We need the, you know, Congress to do it for us. Then all of a sudden, boom. It’s like you’re just a whiplash, back and forth. Like, is it a problem? Is it not a problem? And now you see what kind of problem it really was. And now they’re saying, you know, don’t deport them and keep them. And... they’ve been here for so long, and it’s kinda like, well, why wasn’t that handled eight years ago.” – White man, NE



POLICY:

Working-class voters don't fully recognize the extent of the harm Trump's budget bill is causing. Months after the Big Beautiful Bill was signed, working-class voters are surprised to learn details of what's included in the law, besides for some of the things they like, like no tax on tips, and quickly grow concerned once they do – many find Republicans' budget cuts so extreme and politically foolish that they are hard to believe. On Medicaid cuts specifically, voters had strong reactions, and were incredulous as to why Republicans would seemingly make a bad system worse. Republicans start off on stronger ground on these issues, but Democrats can reclaim them when they vividly illustrate how their plans differ from Republicans', particularly on health care.



"We probably don't know all the cuts that are being made... it disgusts me that there are congressmen or senators who don't agree but didn't stand up... because Trump manipulated them." – White man, OH

“I am totally against that [cutting Medicaid]. I think they snuck it in. It's for the rich people, not the working class. If I was a Democrat, this is something I would latch onto, something I would be screaming about.”
– Latino man, FL

“That's (BBB) a freebie that the Democrats are gonna get to hammer from now to the election.” – Latino man, FL

“I haven't read this huge bill pushed through in the middle of the night but well, I haven't heard anything about the bill that's positive. Just the many people that will be damaged by it.” – White woman, SC

“So it sounds like there was a lot of Medicaid cuts across the board, in the Big Beautiful Bill. Sounds like it benefits a lot of higher earners, and it sounds like it was right out of the Project 2025 playbook.”
– White man, NE

POLICY:

Working-class voters expect tariffs to increase their prices, and are either resigned to, or angry about, them. While some of Trump's supporters continue to pin their hopes on "trusting the process," despite not seeing a clear plan, many others worry that his tariffs were not done "the right way," and that the rollout has been "chaotic."


"I'm a mechanic from a major airline - my job is to keep people safe - we're out of stock of a bunch of products because of the tariffs. I have to sign things daily that say the planes are safe even though I worry they aren't" - White man, NH


"At first I thought he was trying to save us money... but then he put the tariffs on and we can't afford groceries no more... why are we paying more when we just made all those cuts to save money."
- White woman, IA




"Tariffs haven't kicked in yet and the prices haven't hit yet. Things that are expensive now - wait until down the road." - White woman, NC


"I think the goal is to help rich people. Especially [because] the way he's doing it is messing up the economy. We are untrustworthy as a country." - Black man, VA


"I'm not going to be happy if a can of beans goes up because Trump has a tariff on steel." - Latino man, NJ


"I think the tariffs are gonna affect the economy, and I think it's not gonna go the way it's intended to go." - White man, NE

MESSAGING:

Messages and messengers that challenge “billionaires” alone reinforce the view that Democrats don’t value hard work, and risk falling flat. Broad attacks on the wealthy as people are viewed as conflicting with the spirit of the American Dream and the ideal of success generally, which can trigger defensiveness among working people. However, most of these voters oppose budget and tax policies that favor the wealthy at the expense of everyone else, such as Medicaid cuts.


“I feel like distributing wealth would be from Democrats, they always talk about locking up the billionaires but they pay a lot of our taxes. I was raised to work, nothing is free. I think there are some people who have generational wealth, but my daughter has her own company so why would she be punished for working so hard to get successful.”

- White woman, TX


“The thing that jumps out to me is, billionaires are crooks, but the richest people in America right now earned it themselves, how are they crooks?” - White man, TX


“Everyone should have the opportunity to be that billionaire. The American dream is the chance to be successful in our country.”

- White man, TX


“It lost me at distributing wealth fairly, but are we really? We kind of do that already, everyone has an opportunity to go make money.”

- White man, TX



MESSAGING:

Video clips of a variety of Democrats show there are many ways to be likeable and connect with working-class voters. In several focus groups, we showed clips of Democrats – both sitting and not – speaking publicly and gathered feedback on their styles from participants. Some of the most well-liked included Senator Elissa Slotkin of Michigan, Senator Ruben Gallego of Arizona, and Congresswoman Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington with many groups of voters, and Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett was particularly popular with Black voters. However, there was no single profile or type of candidate who appealed to everyone. Instead, Democrats who spoke with authenticity, plain-spoken vocabulary, clear and intentional statements, and a lack of condescension consistently appealed to working-class voters. Voters also liked candidates who used an important illustration, story, or facts, demonstrating their connection to the people they represent. For, example, voters liked that Gluesenkamp Perez cited a statistic about opioid addiction in her district, which might be more compelling and believable to voters than a story about one person. While physical presentation often mattered less than what leaders said, if a Democrat presented as inauthentic or gimmicky, it was immediately obvious and not well received.



"I saw her [Spanberger] kids go to public school, and that means something to me, because even though you have more resources, you put your kids in public school." – Black woman, VA



Loved what she (Slotkin) was saying about the middle class, bringing prices down. – White man, MI



"She (Slotkin) seemed open to the good and the bad. She's willing to hear all sides and then form an opinion, instead of just being one sided." – White woman, WI



"He (Gallego) just was saying what a lot of people were thinking and have been going through. We need someone to think about what the average person is going through. We don't need someone who doesn't see actual hardships from the economy." – Black man, MI

"She (Slotkin) was spot on, we need to focus on giving things to people who are less fortunate. We need to pay attention to taxes and bring back overseas biz who should be here in the first place."
– Black woman, PA



MEDIA CONSUMPTION TRENDS

Based on results from over 7,500 surveys and over 2,000 media diaries analyzed by The Working Class Project:

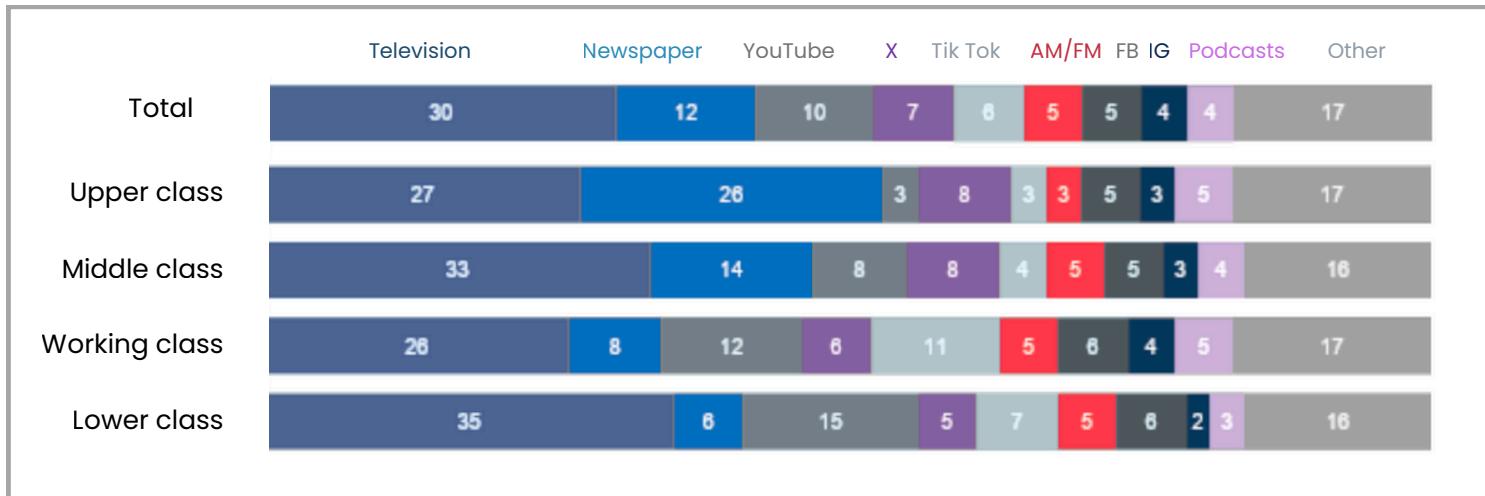
(1) Working-class voters typically engage with most types of media first thing in the morning, between 6 AM and 8 AM, particularly social media. However while one-third are watching TV or video streaming at 6 AM, its peak is between 6 PM and 11 PM, when it eclipses all other media.

(2) Like the overall electorate, TV/video, social media, and audio are the most popular media sources used daily by working-class voters. When looking at media use daily, working-class voters have similar habits to the overall electorate. Where working-class voters differ most is in consuming less news and using YouTube and playing video games more than the overall electorate. When watching TV, working-class voters most consistently watch broadcast TV news, with 56% watching at least weekly, followed by sports (39% weekly) and cable TV channels (37% weekly). Working-class voters are less likely to watch each on a weekly basis than the overall electorate.

	Total	Upper class	Middle class	Working class	Lower class
Television	79%	80%	83%	74%	74%
Newspapers (printed/online)	67%	79%	70%	63%	63%
"Over-the-air" AM/FM radio	60%	49%	60%	61%	61%
YouTube	59%	50%	56%	63%	73%
Facebook	57%	49%	56%	60%	62%
Podcasts	46%	56%	46%	47%	32%
Instagram	40%	43%	37%	43%	41%
Streamed AM/FM radio	38%	32%	39%	36%	42%

(6) Working-class voters have a hard time trusting news sources. Only local newscasts and local newspapers received positive net trust scores among working-class voters. And even for these local news sources, trust is lower among working-class voters than among the overall electorate.

(4) YouTube is a vital media and news destination for the working class. YouTube has a higher percentage of working-class Americans using the platform daily compared to the total electorate. When using YouTube, working-class voters are generally most interested in lifestyle and practical content (food, cooking, fashion, and beauty). Usage of YouTube peaks among working-class voters between 6 AM and 7 AM, when 23% are on the platform.



(5) Audio provides a consistent working-class audience from early morning until early evening. Online audio services and over-the-air AM/FM radio are the most used daily audio platforms for working-class voters. The best online ad-supported audio services to reach working-class voters include Pandora, iHeart, and Spotify. The growth in podcasting also captures the working class, with 44% listening to a podcast at least weekly.

(3) While TV is the most-used news source, YouTube and social media are key providers of information among the working class. A sizable percentage of working-class voters rely on YouTube (12%), TikTok (11%), and Facebook (6%) to get most of their news. Social media is used “daily” for reading news more than any other source, and the working class is more likely to get their news from TikTok than the overall electorate.

	Total	Upper class	Middle class	Working class	Lower class
Facebook	52%	41%	52%	52%	61%
YouTube	43%	34%	40%	48%	61%
Instagram	32%	41%	29%	34%	37%
TikTok	21%	16%	16%	26%	32%
X	17%	21%	18%	16%	17%
Snapchat	13%	8%	10%	16%	20%

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though Democrats are unpopular with the working class, the GOP has failed to deliver on their promises, so Democrats have an opportunity to win back these voters and reclaim the economic mantle from Republicans by articulating a positive economic vision of their own.

As they do so, Democrats don't need to reinvent the wheel; indeed, many of the following message recommendations may read like, or are adjacent to, long-time, standard Democratic messaging. The bottom line is that working-class voters no longer associate tried-and-true Democratic messaging with the Democratic Party and its candidates. To earn working-class votes, Democrats need to relentlessly keep bread-and-butter economic messaging at the very center of their campaigns and communications, and they need to ensure their messaging is reaching voters via the media platforms the working class utilizes most.

Below are specific messaging recommendations for Democrats based on The Working Class Project's research to date:

Messaging A Democratic Agenda:

Democrats must make a positive case for themselves, rather than only be seen as attacking Republicans. Working-class voters associate Democrats with reflexive criticism of Republicans and Trump, and cannot articulate ways in which Democrats are working to make the lives of working-class folks better. Attacks on Republicans don't convey values or vision; being respectful, warm, fact-based, and positive in articulating Democratic priorities weakens support for Republican priorities.

"I don't hear any vision... I don't hear anything that's positive."
- Latino man, FL

"The majority of Democrat messaging is going against what Trump is saying... there's no real answer." - White woman, FL

"The Democrats must abandon this, you have to vote for me because I hate Trump, and tell me the policy." - White man, OH

"Now all it is, is smash the other guy in the head, call the other guy a prick." - White man, OH



Democrats should lean into the issues they already have credibility on – supporting the working class through health care, Social Security, Medicare, and housing. Health care, in particular, has proven to be the leading policy area among working-class voters when describing their perception of each party. Democrats' most popular-testing messages were about lowering health care costs, including by cracking down on big drug and insurance companies; this was also the most effective message for raising doubts about Republicans in Congress.

Sample Message: "We need to make sure no one in America goes broke just because they get sick. Health care should be a right, not a privilege. We need to fight to lower the cost of health care and crack down on the big drug and insurance companies that keep jacking up prices."

I think it's good to bring Des back to the basics. I am disappointed in the party right now. – Latino man, TX

Democrats used to be for helping people, and now they've gotten too into the trans and the LGBTQ and jamming small issues down your throat. – White man, NH

The working class wants to see their hard work rewarded. Working-class voters are frustrated that, no matter how hard or much they work, they no longer feel able to pay for things like a home, their kids' college, or a vacation. They blame "others" – everyone from undocumented people to CEOs of the biggest corporations, who they think skirt by and are rewarded without doing any hard work of their own. Working-class voters of all races and ages believe Republicans too often look out for the interests of the ultra-wealthy and big corporations, rather than regular people, but they also believe Democrats are too quick to give handouts to those who don't play by the rules, while punishing those who work hard to achieve financial success. The message below was much more effective than a message focused on criticizing the wealthy and corporations.

Sample Message: "Too many politicians have lost sight of the value of hard work, and that people need to work hard to get ahead. We need to start standing with people who work hard for a living. We need to help Americans keep more of what they earn, have a secure retirement, get quality, affordable health care, and good schools for their kids."

"Raise the minimum wage and capping CEO pay, I know it's seen as a government overstep, but it needs to be addressed." – Latino man, FL

"I mean, if you look at that bill from a CEO perspective, that is, like, your best friend in the world. And with the taxes not being put on overtime, the corporations also don't pay taxes on that. So they're thrilled right now. They're gonna be able to work us to the bone without having to worry about the taxes on top." – White woman, KS

"They don't understand that people want to work – for the most part, they want to provide for themselves. They don't want the government to take everything they earn. They don't want to subsidize the lazy that don't feel like working. They don't want to subsidize other countries in perpetuity. They don't want DEI, people want the positions they earned through their hard work, not to be told they can't have it based on the shade of their skin, or that they got a position based on the shade of their skin. I guess some do want unearned positions, but isn't that proof that they are not going to be good workers anyway?" – White man, MI

"CEOs are giving themselves raises and I'm over here working my hinnry off and I don't get a raise. It would be nice to get a dollar raise every year." – White woman, TX

"It's hard out here, especially in Miami. The rent, the health care, the cars are high. They say to live comfortably, you have to make \$100K in Miami... I don't feel like the economy rewards you that much." – Latino man, FL

Our strongest messages focus on health care, whether or not it is framed around rights.

A populism message does well when laser-focused on costs.

DEMOCRATIC MESSAGES –TOP TIER % Much More Favorable	Overall	Dem GB Gain	Trump/Not GOP Gain	Ind	White	Black	Hispanic
[HEALTH CARE/RIGHTS] No one in America should go broke just because they get sick, and when someone gets sick or hurt, the last thing they should worry about is how they will pay for their treatment. Health care should be a right, not a privilege, and it's wrong that people have to turn to GoFundMe for care when they pay thousands for premiums while insurance CEOs make millions. We need to fight to lower the cost of healthcare and crack down on the big drug and insurance companies that keep jacking up prices.	48	60	41	48	42	66	54
[HEALTH CARE] No one in America should go broke just because they get sick, and when someone gets sick or hurt, the last thing they should worry about is how they will pay for their treatment. It's wrong that people have to turn to GoFundMe for care when they pay thousands for premiums while insurance CEOs make millions. We need to fight to lower the cost of healthcare and crack down on the big drug and insurance companies that keep jacking up prices.	47	51	43	46	42	57	54
[POPULISM] Working-class Americans are struggling while the billionaires just get richer. We're paying too much for gas, groceries, and even the medicine we need. It's time we stand up to big corporations and the politicians in Washington who serve them. We need to raise the minimum wage, cap prescription drug costs, crackdown on price gouging, make sure corporations pay their fair share, and end tax breaks for billionaire crooks. It's time to put working families first.	45	55	35	48	40	63	50
[STANDING WITH AMERICANS] Our political and economic systems are broken, with politicians focused on using their positions for their own gain, trading stocks with insider information and lining their pockets while working families struggle. We need to overhaul the system so that politicians work for the people who elected them again. That means term limits for all Senators and members of Congress, an audit of all federal government spending, and banning members of Congress from trading stocks.	42	43	39	41	43	41	38
[HOUSING] Everyone deserves to have a roof over their heads and to live comfortably in the communities that we work hard to create, but for us working class Americans, high housing costs have made it more difficult to find or afford a house. We need to increase the supply of affordable rental and for-sale housing and equip working class families with the tools they need to achieve the American dream of owning their own home.	41	51	32	43	35	62	48

Working-class voters want to see Democrats acknowledging the unfairness of the current system.

Working-class voters see "the system" as rigged against them, with others – the wealthy, corporations, cultural elites, undocumented immigrants, and people seeking handouts – getting unfair advantages; these voters don't feel like anyone in power is looking out for them. Nodding to this viewpoint helps working-class voters view Democrats as honest, humble, and prioritizing the working class. Working-class voters responded best to messages that start by explicitly identifying the challenges they face – particularly health care and the cost of living – before taking on those who rig the system in their favor.

Sample Message: "Working Americans are paying too much for gas, groceries, even the medicine we need. It's time we stand up to big corporations and the politicians in Washington who serve them. We need to cut middle class taxes, bring down health care and prescription drug costs, crack down on price gouging, and make sure corporations pay their fair share."

"It can be difficult to get ahead if you're a few paychecks away from being homeless, especially if there's an emergency."
- Black man, SC

"Make everything more affordable and come up with a long term strategy like the Clinton administration did, and don't have so many handouts, like student loan forgiveness."
- White man, TX

"[Trump's] making those tax cuts for the rich and anyone making under \$50K – what about the tax bracket in the middle? They're gonna be working their ass off." - Black man, VA

"Workers have to have a fair shake at the profit. I get really mad when I see the head honchos making more money than the workers." - White man, MI

A message on how Democrats lost their way, and one that goes negative on Republicans and Trump, fall to the bottom.

A negative against Republicans does a little better with Black voters but still falls behind our top positives.

DEMOCRATIC MESSAGES – MID TIER % Much More Favorable	Overall	Dem GB Gain	Trump/Not GOP Gain	Ind	White	Black	Hispanic
[LOST OUR WAY/ECON] For most of the last 100 years, Democrats were the party of the working class, that stood for an honest day's pay for an honest day's work. Democrats created Social Security and Medicare, established a minimum wage, passed the Civil Rights Act, and protected worker's rights to unionize. But recently, Democrats got away from these values – open borders, out of control spending, and failing to take on Wall Street. It's time to get back to basics and fight for the working class again.	29	38	30	29	27	33	35
[MORE OF THE SAME] Donald Trump and Republicans promised to change the broken political system. Instead they're doing more of the same -- passing tax breaks for their billionaire donors while cutting Medicaid, pocketing millions from energy companies while letting utility companies jack up rates, and putting insurance company CEOs in charge while letting insurance premiums skyrocket. We need leaders who fix the system to work for regular people rather than maintaining the status quo.	29	28	18	29	25	39	34

Democrats shouldn't be afraid to call for big, systemic change and action. Working-class voters who voted for Trump in 2024 consistently reported that the President represented change and was willing to take action at a moment when everything felt stagnant and stale. Many reported they regretted their vote, or worried that they had made the wrong choice, but freely admitted they chose to take a risk. Trump represents change and for working-class voters, the system has not worked for them, so change seemed like a step in the right direction, regardless of the chaos that was coupled with that change.

Sample Message: "Our political and economic systems are broken, with politicians focused on using their positions for their own gain, trading stocks with insider information and lining their pockets while working families struggle. We need to overhaul the system so that politicians work for the people who elected them again. That means term limits for all Senators and members of Congress, an audit of all federal government spending, and banning members of Congress from trading stocks."

Mid-tier messages focusing on rewarding hard work, the economy over social justice issues, and a pathway to success that does not require college.

DEMOCRATIC MESSAGES – MID TIER % Much More Favorable	Overall	Dem GB Gain	Trump/Not GOP Gain	Ind	White	Black	Hispanic
[HARD WORK] Too many politicians have lost sight of the value of hard work, and that people need to work hard to get ahead in this world. We need to stop focusing on handouts and start standing with people who work hard for a living and treat them with respect. We need to help Americans keep more of what they earn, have a secure retirement, and get quality, affordable health care, and good schools for their kids.	38	49	43	39	37	44	38
[A SHOT AT SUCCESS] Sometimes people act like it's wrong to want to be successful and make money when the truth is, most people get up every day hoping to be more successful than their parents, and be able to make enough to afford a nice life and even be able to splurge on things. We need to make sure people who are willing to do the work still have that opportunity to be successful, with access to a living wage, an education, and housing they can afford so everyone can have a real shot at success.	38	43	34	43	32	51	44
[BACK TO BASICS] We often spend too much time taking small groups of people and making everything about their issues and not enough about ordinary Americans who are struggling to make ends meet and dealing with high costs. Instead of being a social justice warrior, we need to make sure people can get a decent job, a middle-class tax cut, and go to the grocery store without emptying their bank account.	37	48	42	41	35	41	41
[TRADES] The elites and their college-for-all mentality have failed America, and it's time we got back to respecting the dignity of those who do all kinds of work, including those who work with their hands. We need to provide a pathway for jobs that doesn't require a four-year degree. That means fixing the education system so we're giving kids opportunities to learn a trade, making sure college is an option but not the only thing kids are pushed to do, and fighting for better pay for dangerous and physical jobs that society doesn't value like it should.	35	37	29	40	33	40	41

“
I didn't see anybody else who made changes their first day. I think he does have a role. It's hurt a lot of people, but he's got a plan.
- White woman, IA

“
There are all of these people in the Democratic party that don't want change but I do. - White woman, FL

“
Something different has to be done. Drastic change is required and it's too soon to say if something is actually wrong. - Black man, MI

“
They need somebody new with new ideas... get away from what happened in the past, and give us a reason to vote for them. Give us a new leader. - Latino man, FL

“
They [Democrats] think they're for the working class but their actions haven't proved that over the years. - White woman, TX

“
I like Trump. [He's] unorthodox and got his obvious down side, but he takes action and isn't afraid to ruffle some feathers. - White man, ME



Messaging Pitfalls to Avoid:

Don't attack Democrats and the Democratic Party. Emphasizing the Party's past mistakes is less resonant than making a positive case for the future – look forward, not backward.



"[Democrats] should be fighting for us, but they fight each other instead." – White man, VA



"Nothing is consensus driven, it's all in-fighting and all this crap." – White man, ME

Don't attack billionaires for existing. Working-class voters bristle when presented with messages that attack the rich – these messages are perceived as criticism of success, which voters still aspire towards, and punishment of hard work. Instead, voters responded well to calls to crack down on corruption and those who abuse the system to benefit themselves.



"Everyone should have the opportunity to be that billionaire. The American dream is the chance to be successful in our country." – White man, TX



"I see Republicans as not just wealthy, but proud of the fact they can become wealthy by the opportunities afforded to them by living in the United States. Republicans are not afraid of success and not ashamed to flaunt it." – White man, NV



"I think politicians use billionaires as scapegoats for their own failures on not fixing the tax code." – White man, TX

Don't rely on pro-union support as the only way to show working-class values or connection.

Though unions are often viewed positively and were sometimes mentioned as one of the only groups fighting for working-class voters, being pro-union alone won't be enough to win support of working-class voters. Most working-class voters aren't in a union and therefore Democrats risk missing them altogether and/or risk sounding out of touch if they don't seek to connect with working-class voters through other shared values and policies mentioned above.

"I voted for Trump because I thought the democrat party was weak at the time and I thought Trump would be party for national security. Normally I would vote democrat but I felt Biden was not as strong as he could've been. At the time, this was more important than unions for me." - White man, MI

"The biggest issue is keeping wages competitive.. making sure a hard days work pays for a reasonable life... the one thing that needs to stay the same is you go to work do your time and are paid enough to have a life - White man, OH



"This country forgot how to fight for the common man... we don't have anyone who's gonna fight for us" - White man, OH

"Lack of education and skills. We need more programs. Better education results in better jobs and better pay." - Latino man, FL

"I don't trust the Republican party to help the working class. I don't think the Democrats can do what needs to be done but the intent is there." - White woman, SC

"Democrats in Nevada are big supporters of laborers. They understand how industries such as construction and mining are essential to the economy. I don't believe Democrats in Washington D.C. understand or respect laborers." - White man, NV

Messaging Transgender Issues:

Attacks on transgender people and those who support them by Republicans were some of the most devastating messages of the 2024 election. Almost one year later, these attacks still reverberate powerfully with working-class voters, to the continued detriment of Democrats – even a quarter of Democrats reported thinking that their own Party is “more focused on cultural issues” than on economic ones. The Working Class Project worked to identify messages and strategies that will help Democrats counteract the top-of-mind sense that, to paraphrase the Trump campaign ad, Democrats are for they/them, and Republicans are for you.

Democrats must address the issue of transgender kids in sports and bathrooms head on – otherwise, working-class voters are inclined to instinctively side with Republicans. In response to direct questions or attacks on transgender issues, answers that stated a shared value, took a clear position, emphasized that decisions related to transgender kids aren’t for the government to make, and pivoted to other key priorities that impact more people day-to-day landed best with working-class voters. Above all, messengers who were viewed to be responding authentically were received more favorably.

Democrats should avoid inadvertently making working-class voters feel left out of consideration when addressing transgender issues. Democrats are often caricatured as being focused too much, or only, on issues that impact a small number of people, rather than the overwhelming majority of Americans. Effective messengers counteract this by refusing to shift blame to Republicans; by not focusing on the experiences of transgender youth, which working-class voters found difficult to relate to; and by avoiding conflating attacks on transgender kids with attacks on girls writ large, a particularly-poor testing line.

Sample Message: “The government should not get to decide what kind of care medical professionals need to provide to patients. These decisions are best left to families and doctors. Of course there are limits. Kids shouldn’t be getting surgeries that are irreversible.”

Sample Message: “Our country is facing major challenges. Politicians should be doing everything they can to get costs down, but they would rather obsess over issues like transgender kids than propose real solutions to our biggest problems. We need to figure out how to bring down costs, not stir up more controversy and division.”

Sample Message: “No parent should be punished for getting their child the health care they need; no doctor should be jailed for following the medical standards of care. These sensitive decisions should not be left to the government. They are best left to families and doctors.”

“This goes back to abortion stuff with women – my body, my choice – the government shouldn't decide this.” – Black man, OH

“I think they've gone way, way, way, way, way too far. And I was part of the LGBTQ community since it wasn't cool.”
– White woman, KS

“I don't think that should be the main focus right now... they have so much to focus on that affects major ideas... [with] everything that's being cut right now, they have enough to focus on.” – Latino man, FL

“I believe that anybody can do what they want man... you can chop off whatever, you can add whatever... I'm not against it, I think it's another thing they throw in your face to be concerned about. People should be able to do what they want.” – Black man, OH

“It can't just be [trans people], it should be us, too.”
– Black man, OH



Ad Testing:

Based on the messages tested in the benchmark survey, which were previously developed from focus group and conversations and later assessed in longitudinal surveys, we developed approximately 30 ads featuring messages on health care, rising costs, populism, and more. Within each message bucket, we developed ads with different treatments, such as testimonials from a storyteller, like Laurie in Virginia. We made studio ads comprised entirely of b-roll, and we made ads based on AI-generated scripts or using AI footage or voice. We have since tested those ads in Virginia, with Virginia-specific calls to action for the 2025 gubernatorial election, and in the other 20 states in which The Working Class Project conducted research.

The results were promising, especially in Virginia, where our best-testing spot drove voters +4.7pp toward Democratic gubernatorial nominee Abigail Spanberger and increased her favorability by +3.7pp. Similarly high-performing spots moved voters by 4.4pp and 4.3pp, with favorability effects of 3.0pp. On a custom metric of "cares about working people," our top performing ads showed effects of approximately 8.5% overall.



Laurie
Shenandoah Valley



Laurie's ad moved voters in VA by **4.4%** toward Abigail Spanberger and moved working-class voters by **5.2%**.

This health care ad moved VA voters overall by **4.7%** toward Abigail Spanberger and moved working-class voters by **5.5%**.

Party	Treatment	Governor Vote Choice	Percentile	Gov Dem Favored	Percentile	Spanberger cares ab/working people
Dem	Health Care	4.7%	93%	3.7%	92%	8.7%
Dem	Laurie - Working Class V2	4.4%	87%	3.0%	80%	8.4%
Dem	Laurie Populism	4.3%	81%	3.0%	78%	7.3%
Dem	Laurie - Cancer Story V2	4.3%	79%	2.9%	76%	8.7%
Dem	Back To Basics	4.1%	67%	2.5%	68%	7.6%
Dem	Populism	3.8%	49%	2.2%	64%	7.7%
Dem	Hard Work - Time	3.6%	36%	3.0%	78%	7.8%
Dem	Laurie Paycheck Calendar	3.5%	30%	2.9%	74%	8.2%
Dem	" Raise Costs " [NHOz8aXU3	3.5%	28%	1.0%	34%	5.7%
		<i>Baseline = 54%</i>		<i>Baseline = 55%</i>		<i>Baseline = 61%</i>

Similarly, we tested ads across the remaining 20 states and while those results were still promising, they were not as demonstrative as the test in Virginia. We believe there are a few reasons for that:

- The ads tested in the remaining states were generic, without a specifically named candidate, instead only referring to “Democrats” or “Democrats in Congress” while the ads in Virginia were focused on a specific candidate and a specific and topical election.
- Virginia is hosting a hotly-contested election cycle, with pundits and voters across the country paying close attention to the results; voters in the remaining 20 states where we tested aren’t currently “primed” for political engagement, especially for an unnamed candidate and no election cycle.
- Our storyteller, while compelling and relatable, isn’t from those states, so while she may resonate on some level with working class voters, finding validators in specific states and districts will be important.”

Still, these results were positive, with our top testing ads increasing generic party approval by 3.2pp to 4.1pp. When it comes to House vote choice, our top testing ad drove voters toward Democratic candidates by 2.2pp. On a custom metric of “cares about working people,” our top performing ads showed effects of nearly 3% overall.

Party	Treatment	Democratic Party Approval	House Vote Choice	Democrats care ab/working people
Dem	Laurie Paycheck Calendar	4.1%	1.9%	2.5%
Dem	Hard Work - Dems	3.3%	1.6%	2.8%
Dem	Health Care - Dems	3.2%	1.3%	2.2%
Dem	Back To Basics - Dems	2.8%	1.3%	2.9%
Dem	Laurie - Go Fund Me V2 - D	2.7%	2.2%	2.3%
Dem	Public Service - Broken	2.3%	1.4%	1.9%
Dem	Populism - Dems	1.9%	0.9%	2.3%
		<i>Baseline = 43%</i>	<i>Baseline = 49%</i>	<i>Baseline = 50%</i>

Quick Reference “DOs and DON’Ts”

DO	DON’T
<p>DO acknowledge and celebrate hard work.</p> <p>DO focus on making the system more fair.</p> <p>DO focus on costs, including health care and housing.</p> <p>DO focus on shared values, especially when addressing attacks on “woke” issues.</p> <p>DO pivot to priorities that matter to the overwhelming majority of working people.</p> 	<p>DON’T attack billionaires as people.</p> <p>DON’T focus only on attacking Republicans.</p> <p>DON’T attack Democrats – look forward and make a case for the future.</p> <p>DON’T shift blame when it comes to “woke” issues.</p> 

Quick Reference Message Frames

<p>Right now, hard working Americans are feeling the pinch - trying to afford groceries, gas, bills, and medicine. One trip to the urgent care center or ER could be the difference in everything going wrong.</p>	<p>It's time we fix the economy so that people who work hard can afford to get ahead, not just get by. That means cutting taxes for the middle class, bringing down health care and prescription drug costs, cracking down on price gouging, and making sure corporations pay their fair share.</p>	<p>No one in America should go broke or need a Go Fund Me page just because they get sick. Health care should be a right, not a privilege. And lowering the cost of health care begins with cracking down on the big drug companies that keep jacking up our prices.</p>
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