

Winning Jobs Narrative September 2024 Qualitative Research Online Journals Analysis

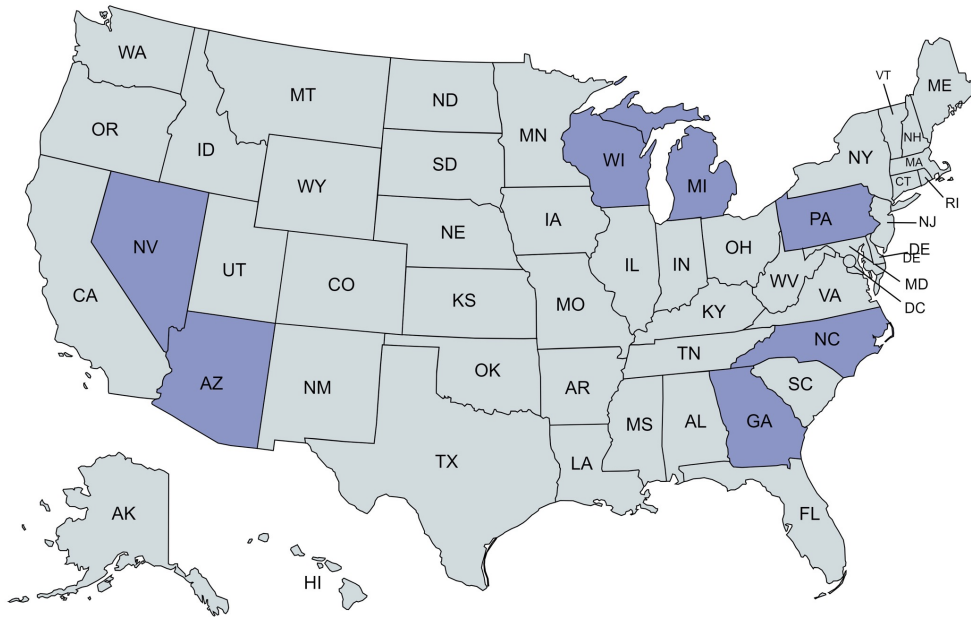


Methodology

In-Depth Online Journaling:

Global Strategy Group conducted an **online journal** among battleground voters between September 18th and September 20th, 2024.

Care was taken to ensure the journal contained a mix of voters across gender, age, region, and level of education.



Defining Audiences:

Swing voters:

- Have a history of voting for both Democrats and Republicans and are not definitely voting for one party over the other in 2024.
- Are either (1) undecided, (2) voting third party, (3) voting for Trump but did not vote for him in 2020, or (4) voting for Harris but are somewhat/very unfavorable towards her or somewhat/strongly disapprove of Biden.
- No strong partisan identification or ideological tendencies.





Economic Landscape

The cost of living remains the dominant concern heading into the fall, though other issues – namely abortion and immigration – are also on top of people’s minds

Participants often tie these issues together, particularly the economy and immigration. But underneath it all, there’s a pervasive sense of frustration and anxiety with the status quo. Voters are fed up that their needs aren’t being addressed and feel they have suffered for too long. They are worried that the increasingly toxic political environment will prevent anything from getting done.

“Inflation is easily my biggest issue because it has crippled my family financially. We make more money than ever, yet we are struggling with bills. I’m also concerned about the border because **immigrants are taking away our resources.**”

– Hispanic woman, WI

“The economy is another issue. Prices for food are skyrocketing and price gouging is a real thing that the government keeps saying it will address, but they never do. When is it ever going to get better?”

– White man, MI

“I don’t like the way we talk to each other. More than anything it’s how nasty everyone is to each other. And it’s not just politics, it’s everybody now it seems. I don’t know what to do about it but it makes me very worried.”

– White man, WI

“The economy is, by FAR, my biggest concern. Prices across the board are too high and job opportunities have become scarce. **The border crisis is concerning too with what I am hearing from Aurora CO and Springfield OH.**”

– Hispanic man, NC

“Women should have control of their own bodies, not the government.

Extreme division among citizens and government. **We have to be more willing to reach across the aisle.”** –

White man, MI

“Inflation & cost of living are major issues right now. Wages have stayed the same, while prices on everyday items just continue to rise. It’s almost impossible to survive day-to-day with the way things are. **The economy has been so bad over the past few years; something needs to change.**”

– White/Hispanic woman, WI

For voters, costs = the economy. The number one change that would help people like them is lower costs

As we've seen in other research, it's less about mobility and more about stability. Most are looking for prices to come down so they can afford the basics, not for their income to rise.

“I'm most concerned with keeping the cost of living fair and reasonable, like the cost of goods, property taxes, insurance, etc. If the cost of living suddenly skyrocketed more than it already has it could cause me considerable hardship.”

– White woman, NC

“I would like prices to come down so that people are able to afford things like real estate. **When I think of the economy, money comes to mind.**”

– Biracial woman, GA

“The change in the economy that would have the biggest impact on my life would be reducing the cost of food. I don't eat out because I can't afford it, and I rarely eat beef because I can't afford that either.”

– White man, MI

As a result, when pushed to choose, lower costs are prioritized above all other goals for the economy, but other priorities – like improving the tax code (either through tax cuts for the middle class or raising taxes on the wealthy) have some salience. Virtually no one prioritizes reducing the deficit or “growing the economy.”



“Raising wages means we pay more in taxes. **We need real action now to reduce the costs of everyday items because that negatively impacts EVERYONE, not one class of Americans.**”

– Hispanic woman, WI

“This is tough to answer, because all these things need to happen. But I do think **if we start holding the wealthy accountable, it would fix a lot of other problems.**”

– White woman, AZ

Concerns about costs make voters pessimistic about the economy. Some can point to bright spots, but optimism is muted

What Voters Are Pessimistic About...

Outside of anger about rising costs, voters point to what they see as government inaction to fix the problem as a driving source of pessimism.

*“I am more pessimistic every day that goes by. **I used to be hopeful, but these politicians don't do what they say, or they do just enough to make you think they are.**”*

– Mixed woman, NV

*“**Prices are consistently rising for goods and services.** My insurance rates are much higher, food costs are high, and average income in my area has not changed to reflect that.”*

– White woman, NC

*“I am usually a very hopeful person, but **with the division in our country and the hostility from party to party I sometimes lose hope.**”*

– White woman, NV

What Voters Are Hopeful About...

Those that are somewhat hopeful point to some progress on reducing costs like falling interest rates and note other areas of the economy (like manufacturing and jobs) that are on the rise.

*“**Inflation is coming down and with the fed more likely than not to lower interest rates, that should help further lower the rate of inflation.**” – White man, AZ*

*“**Gas and food prices are decreasing, unemployment is going down (more jobs created) and interest rates are decreasing (though slowly).**” – White man, NC*

*“**I am pleased to see real investments in building back American manufacturing.** Tariffs have also been kept in place to protect American businesses.” – White man, PA*

Participants don't think either party is adequately focused on bringing down costs

Battleground voters believe politicians are only focused on advancing their political career, picking partisan fights, and using their office to enrich themselves. They don't volunteer one party as more guilty than the other – it's a problem with the political institution writ large.

*"Inflation I suppose is the reason for everything costing so much now. Focus on that. I don't know what steps they need to take, though. If I knew the answer I guess I could run for office myself? **They're the experts, that's why we vote for them, right? Just figure it out. Do I think they're focused on it? I honestly don't know what they're doing. I guess my answer is no.**"*

– White man, WI

*"Keeping America affordable. **I feel like neither party is really concerned with this.**"*

– Black woman, GA

"I think the majority of leaders in Washington are very out of touch with what most folks are dealing with. I don't think many are focused on us, I think they are focused on connections there and securing re-election."

– White woman, WI

"I don't think anybody in Washington cares about the middle class at all, frankly. If they cared about us, they'd be actively working together to fix our economy and offer help to people in need; instead, they're too busy getting rich while in office and convincing their constituents that anyone who doesn't share their political views are an 'enemy.'"

– White/Hispanic woman, WI



Values, Identity, and the Economy

Most are unfamiliar with the term “economic patriotism” and tend to interpret it as economic nationalism/protectionism

Participants’ initial definition of “economic patriotism” is a focus on how we position the U.S. economy relative to our competitors, not necessarily one about values and investments.

“Not familiar with the term, but I would hope it would mean keeping the country’s wealth within the country, as opposed to foreign aid, etc.”
– White man, NC

“I have no idea but I would imagine it involves shopping local, buying locally made goods and avoiding imports when making purchases.”
– White woman, NC

“Putting forth economic policies that put the interest of the average American worker over people who live in other countries.”
– Asian man, PA

“It means buying American made products and items, buying from small businesses, bringing back the factories.”
– Black woman, AZ

But we have a more fruitful discussion with voters when we ask them to think about what specific policies support economic patriotism. While some point to tariffs and “buy American” laws, others talk about supporting businesses, protecting workers, and boosting skills training.

Tariffs + Buy American

“Minimum tariffs to protect American companies, investment in energy independence policies, continued investment in manufacturing and infrastructure.” – White man, NC

“Buy American, hire American, manufacture American and the government should provide benefits to companies who bring these stateside.”
– Hispanic man, NC

Protecting Workers and Everyday People

“Creating stronger labor laws to protect the workers, making corporations pay a fair share of taxes, and making sure that the deals that are made with other countries, that your country is profitable to help your country meet the needs of your people. Making sure the public has health care and tools to decrease the cost, increasing wages according to living cost for everyone.” – Mixed woman, NV

Supporting Businesses

“Provide resources (money, training, low interest loans) for companies to advance their technologies and become more competitive in the world.”
– White man, NC

“Creating new markets for American made products. That would allow us to create the need for more jobs and put people to work.”
– White man, MI

Voters have an easier time relating to “economic opportunity” – which they see as a level playing field for people like them to get ahead

“Economic opportunity seems like if you are in a dead-end job and you get offered a job that pays twice what you are used to for maybe the same or easier work. Like your life would dramatically improve and you would have lots more opportunities economically. **You would be able to buy the foods you want, get the housing you want, pay all your bills etc. It sounds like more than just survival mode that most people are in right now.**” – White woman, MI

“**Economic opportunity means giving people resources, and jobs to make a living wage to buy and use everyday goods and services that also stimulate the economy. It also means giving people the tools like free education, training, etc. to be competitive or build their own businesses to contribute to their everyday lives and communities.**”

– Mixed woman, NV

“It means **the options and opportunities that people have to become financially independent.**” – Hispanic man, AZ

“It means **giving everyone a chance to put food on their table, a roof over their head, and power to cool/warm up the place** while not making them work 60+ hours a week or do a job that destroys their back or knees.” – White man, WI

“The idea that **we all have an opportunity to create wealth.**” – Native American man, PA

They point to wage growth, support for small businesses, and skills training/education as ways to support economic opportunity.

Increasing Wages

“**Increasing the minimum wage** that jobs can pay an employee.”
– Black/Hispanic woman, GA

Supporting Small Businesses

“**Giving money to small business owners/tax breaks so the everyday person can open a business.**”
– Hispanic man, NV

Skills Training

“**More funding and promotion for trade schools where people can get jobs that actually help our world run** while making a solid income to support themselves.”
– Hispanic man, NV

Investing in Education

“**Increased funding for public education, expanded access to higher education,** minimum wage increases, small business support, and tax incentives for investment.”
– Native American man, MI

Reducing costs is far and away the preferred way to grow the economy, followed by investing in workers, families, and businesses and building up the middle class

While many are attracted to this idea primarily because it addresses their challenges with rising costs, many can make the connection to it as an economic growth strategy: putting more money in people's pockets lets people *invest in themselves* and get ahead. In that way, there isn't a huge distinction between addressing costs and the other messages on investing in workers/helping the middle class.

"It's too expensive for families to even survive right now, which puts a huge strain on the entire country. **Reducing the cost of living would help encourage working families to take risks and actually purchase more unnecessary things.**" – White/Hispanic woman, WI

"Reducing costs would make things seem more accessible and therefore people would be able to afford to spend more and boost the economy."
- Black/Hispanic woman, GA

To grow the economy, we should invest in workers, families, and the small businesses that are the backbone of our economy. We should reduce costs and create opportunities for working families to thrive. That starts with rebuilding the middle class, because when the middle class is strong, America is strong.

"When the middle class is strong, they are spending money to the economy and everything is stronger."

- White man, AZ

"By reducing cost this allows families to keep more of what they already bring home. Less handouts are needed and they can save for the things they need and other opportunities such as colleges and business start ups."- Black woman, GA

In a closed-ended question, 17 participants picked "reduce costs and create opportunities for working families to thrive" as the best way to grow the middle-class. 7 picked invest in workers, families, and businesses; 6 picked build up the middle class; and 1 picked support small businesses.

But voters are hungry for more details and are suspicious of what they consider platitudes and empty rhetoric

People want to know how this approach will be implemented – what policies will be passed, how it will be funded, etc. Messaging on the “middle class” should avoid sounding exclusionary and offer a plan to lift everyone.

*“I don’t think there’s any OTHER way to grow the country than what’s listed. **But how are we going to do it? Can anything get passed through Congress?**”*

— White man, WI

*“**What about people who are not middle class but lower into poverty?** The homelessness in the US is horrible. People are barely surviving and working just to pay bills. That’s not middle class, help them.”*

— Black woman, GA

*“I think that this is the right way to go because the middle class is the largest part of America. **I think what is missing is helping the poor people get up to the middle class. Helping the homeless get back on their feet makes America stronger.**”*

— Black woman, AZ

*“There is no perfect approach. **This is just a vague statement with no real solution, it’s a sound bite.**”*

— White man, WI

*“**How so? What exactly will be invested in? How will it be funded?** You can’t very well spend your way out of inflation. Overspending is exactly what ruined our economy.”*

— White man, NC

*“**This answer is vague and specifies no actual actions that could be taken to grow the middle class.** There are no actual plans to invest in workers and families and no specifics as to how this can be accomplished. It does not specify which opportunities will be created if that is related to employment, tax credits, reduced taxes, etc.”*

— White woman, NC

While being in the “middle class” is still an aspiration for many, the goal posts are moving. Now “middle class” is more about survival than comfort

Many note that the comfort and stability that middle-class families used to enjoy is disappearing. Today, rising costs means economic precarity is either present or just around the corner, forcing many in the “middle class” to be just barely hanging on or falling behind.

- “In my mind, **if I were middle class I could easily afford my basic necessities (food, shelter, utilities, fuel, etc.) with money to spare for leisure activities and upward mobility.** I cannot. No matter how hard I work, each month, like millions of other Americans, I operate in the red, falling more and more hopelessly in debt.” – White man, NC
- “I think middle class used to mean that you were doing pretty well. Most people did pretty well. **Now I'm not even sure what middle class is. It's almost like it's gotten wiped out. You're either really wealthy, or you're super poor.**” – White woman, AZ
- “**Middle class is owning a house and a decent car, but you are paycheck to paycheck.** Middle class can't afford to miss work and doesn't get much time to do anything besides work.” – White/Hispanic woman, WI

Participants make a distinction between the goals of “growing,” “building,” and “strengthening” the middle class. Those that find the middle class aspirational value “grow” and “build” (and largely equate these two) because they want more people to achieve the middle class lifestyle. Those that see it as slipping away opt for “strengthen” because they want to protect those currently in the middle class from sliding backwards.

- “Strengthen is more important than the others. **Too many middle class families are falling behind. We need to stop the bleeding first before we can grow.**” – White man, WI
- “I think growing the middle class is most important, because **I believe that as many Americans as possible should be able to achieve the American dream.**” – White woman, NC
- “**Strengthen the middle class sounds more important than the others. It means more stability.**” – White woman, NV
- “I think that **the most important one is grow the middle class, we need more people in the middle class.**” – Black woman, AZ



Policy Discussion

Most know how tariffs work, though participants have varying opinions about whether they are good economic policy or not

The cost sensitivities of this group make many averse to anything that could raise costs – and some start out with a baseline knowledge that the cost of tariffs would trickle down to the consumers. But others like the relative advantage it gives to domestic producers.

*“I believe they are **harmful since they increase the cost of goods.**” – Native American man, PA*

*“Tariffs are harmful to the American economy, because **they are inflationary and will eventually raise prices for Americans.**” – White woman, NC*

*“I think **they might encourage companies to manufacture items within the US. This seems helpful to the economy.**” – White man, WI*

*“Helpful. **Foreign countries and companies have been taking advantage of us for years.**” – Hispanic man, NC*

But when asked to think of who they benefit, many say “government” would be the primary benefactor of tariffs. The impact on workers, consumers, and businesses is secondary (and where people are unsure).

“The government would benefit, the people would likely be harmed. The prices may be higher once it gets to the consumers.”
– Black woman, GA

“Does our government collect the taxes? That would be good I suppose. But are we the ones paying them? I’ve never been clear on that.” – White man, WI

“The government would benefit from the increased incomes. The people who buy those goods would have increased costs.”
– Hispanic man, NV

“I think the US government would benefit financially from tariffs and, if the right people are in office, the American people could also benefit.” – Hispanic woman, WI

Voters generally favor a higher corporate tax rate to offset increasing costs for everyday people

Opinion on the Corporate Tax Rate

Voters are inclined to believe taxes on corporations are too low, but it's not a universal sentiment because many aren't sure. However, almost no one thinks taxes are *too high*.

“Way too low. They hardly paid taxes. Big business finds all kinds of loopholes to get out of paying taxes, and there's plenty of tax incentives from our own government.”

– White woman, AZ

“We take too much taxes from poor workers and not enough from the corporations that they work for.”

– White woman, MI

“I really couldn't say for sure, but I feel like taxes on big companies are probably about right? I'm not super familiar with what those rates are, but I think they are okay. I know there are a lot of loopholes for these companies too, so maybe that should be the focus for eliminating.”

– Native American man, MI

Reduce vs. Raise Corporate Tax Rate

When forced to choose, voters would rather raise the corporate tax rate to fund investments in our economy than cut corporate taxes to spur growth and make our economy more competitive. For voters, this is as much about an economic strategy (to raise revenue/fund investments) as it is about frustration at big businesses skirting taxes and price gouging while everyday Americans suffer.

“This would mean having an economy focused around people, not corporations.” – White man, WI

“Corporations are raking consumers over the coals - CEOs take massive bonuses and raises annually, often not even paying for health care or retirement for their employees. If they have so much money it makes perfect sense to encourage or require them to pay some of these profits towards taxes.”

– White woman, NC

“I think corporations can pay more taxes to help fund investments into our economy.”

– White woman, NV

Higher Corporate Tax Rate vs. New Tariff

And because they support raising taxes on corporations and already have reservations about the impact of tariffs, participants opt for higher taxes on corporations over tariffs on imported goods.

“Tariffs would affect every single American and business, while increasing taxes for the rich would only impact a small percentage of the population.”

– Hispanic man, NV

“Tariffs only make prices go up. Raising taxes on corporations and a more fair tax code would actually bring in a reasonable amount of money to fund programs.”

– White man, WI

Messaging focused on addressing high costs and helping everyday Americans succeed resonates – but voters are skeptical of messaging that they feel lacks concrete details.

“What stands out is building up the middle class. That’s a massive step forward in the right direction. It’s a very vague plan, but yes I think it’s the right approach.”
– Hispanic man, AZ

“The fact that the speaker is acknowledging that the economy is bad stands out because politicians seem to be gaslighting people into believing that everything is fine.” – White/Hispanic woman, WI

While we’ve made progress on the economy, costs are still too high. For many Americans, no matter how much they work, they aren’t able to get ahead. It’s time to create a better economy that will build up the middle class and help more people find economic security, stability, and dignity. We will build an economy that lowers costs so that everyone can compete and have a real chance to succeed, build wealth for themselves and their children, and anyone who wants to start a business or advance their career can access the tools and resources to do so.



“The positivity to the statement is what stands out most but also the lack of details of how any of this would be accomplished. **If this is a possibility then why hasn’t it been done before?**” – White man, NC

“Sounds like a lot of promises with no plan! HOW will all of these things happen? What resources and tools are being offered?” – White woman, WI

“Everyone can compete and the part about advancing their career really resonate with me.”
– Asian man, PA

Because of their concerns about inflation, voters gravitate toward policies that will directly lower costs or help everyday people make ends meet

Other policies, like getting rid of taxes on tips, paid family leave, or increasing tax deductions for small businesses are less important, because voters can't immediately relate those back to their lives.

Federal Ban on Price Gouging

*"Seems like there should already be a law in the books about price gouging. I go to the store and everything is like twice or three times the price that it should be. Wages are going down and costs are going up. **It's insanity and no one can survive like this.**"*

– White woman, MI

Expanding Child Tax Credit

"Extending the child tax credit would really help with the expenses of children...It would help our family so much. We'd be able to get ahead and save for our children's future and to be better off and able to be more successful."

– White woman, NV

Building New Housing + Going After Corporate Speculators

"Building up housing units, going after corporate speculators who jack up rent, and banning anyone who isn't an individual from buying houses would be massive. These could lower housing and rent costs which would free up money to be used for other things by families."

– Hispanic man, AZ

Protecting Social Security + Medicare

"Those people who worked and paid into programs like SS and Medicare absolutely should benefit from their contributions. These programs should be expanded and solidified so that they remain untouchable."

– White woman, AZ

Raising Taxes on Corporations

*"I first and foremost picked taxation of corporations and billionaires. **This would supply funding to put back into our own country, and would also give funding for all these other things.**"*

– White woman, AZ

Cutting Red Tape on Small Businesses

"Cutting the red tape to make things easier for small businesses will encourage more people to open up smaller businesses in their communities."

– Mixed woman, NV

Voters overwhelmingly see these as Democratic policies. The focus on raising taxes on big corporations and the wealthy is a giveaway, as is the takeaway that these policies together prioritize everyday people, not big businesses and the rich. Unprompted, several contrast these policies with the economic components of Project 2025, which leads them to conclude it's coming from Democrats.





Project 2025

Most have heard something about Project 2025, but impressions remain relatively thin

Abortion is breaking through – because these are all battleground states, some are reporting hearing Democratic messaging on abortion, partly due to paid and earned communication.

“900 pages of ultra conservative recommendations about policies to radically reshape virtually every aspect of our lives.” – Hispanic man, AZ

“I have heard that information from the political ads, which is to be taken with a grain of salt since it is mostly attacking the other candidate.” – Hispanic man, NV

“What I hear is primarily very frightening ideas about controlling women's bodies.”
– White woman, WI

“All I heard on the radio while I was driving home from work is that.. Trump is going to make prison time for people who get an abortion and that it's going to get rid of affordable healthcare. But I really don't know the real detail and or information at all.” – Black woman, GA

The attacks on checks and balances is deeply concerning to voters and antithetical to core American ideals. The plan to give government and corporations more “control” also raises alarm bells with these persuadable voters.

Project 2025 is a plan being pushed by powerful allies of Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress. The plan would result in an unprecedented takeover of the federal government that would benefit Donald Trump, his loyalists, and their billionaire donors. The plan would give Trump more powers than any president before him by eliminating the checks and balances in our system. The plan would fundamentally alter the government by firing thousands of nonpartisan civil servants and replace them with MAGA loyalists and give politicians, judges, and corporations more control over Americans' lives.

“What stands out to me is 'eliminating checks and balances.' **It is the end of democracy.**” - White woman, AZ

“Control over Americans' lives stands out to me...no one should have that much power over our lives.” - Black woman, PA

“The replacement of civil servants who don't agree with him being replaced with his loyalists is some scary stuff. Giving politicians, judges, and corporations more control over American lives sounds like a dictatorship mentally.”
- Mixed woman, NV

“The phrase of eliminating the checks and balances set up by the founding fathers should never come across our lips or be any part of any agenda in this country.” - White man, AZ

Higher taxes for everyday Americans (coupled with tax cuts for the wealthy) and raising the Social Security retirement age are credible and concerning

Here is some more information about some of the plans included in Project 2025:

o Change the tax code so the typical family of four would pay \$3,000 more per year in taxes and the typical single person would pay \$950 more per year in taxes

“Project 2025 is bad for people like me, I do not want to wait longer to retire and I do not want to pay more in taxes.” - Black woman, AZ

o Provide households making more than \$10 million annually with an average \$1.5-\$2.5 million tax cut

“This would eradicate the middle class completely because all the tax cuts and benefits being handed to those who have plenty of money to pay more taxes would have them paying less and having the middle class and lower class earners make up the difference makes absolutely no sense.” - White woman, NC

o Cut the corporate tax rate to 18%, providing a combined \$24 billion tax cut for the largest corporations in the country

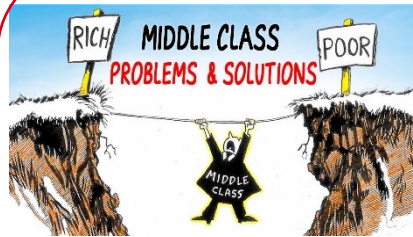
“The general sales tax would make everything, especially groceries, more expensive.” - Black woman, AZ

o Replace all taxes with a national sales tax that would result in a \$5,900 tax increase on the median American family and a \$2 million tax cut for those in the top 0.1 percent

o Raise the Social Security retirement age for the majority of Americans and cut Social Security benefits, costing the typical retiree between \$46,000-\$100,000 over ten years

“My mom is disabled and to know [Trump] wants to cut funding to her is angering. My dad is about to retire and if Trump wants him to work basically till he dies it’s sad.” - Black woman, GA

Images that voters associate with Project 2025 largely reflect their concerns about its implications for middle class Americans, women, and democracy as a whole



“Project 2025 would ruin the economy, eliminate the middle class, and make it hard to afford anything or to even live in America. It would kill the American dream.” – Black/Hispanic woman, GA

“I feel like Project 2025 would make the middle class struggle a lot more than they already are. Taxes are already high and it's hard to save for retirement, then they plan to take benefits away.” – White woman, NV

“Project 2025 reminds me of ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ because Trump and his Vice President don’t believe in women’s rights..They want to move things backward.” – Mixed woman, NV

The power of Project 2025 is in both the scale of change it calls for (just how far its proponents are willing to go and how much they will destroy to achieve its goals) and in the specificity it provides.

“How widespread and detailed it is. The fact that it seeks to undermine and downright eliminate foundational aspects of freedom that our country is founded on.”
– Hispanic man, AZ

“Most other proposals are singular and there might be one or two concepts they would like to take on. This feels kind of like a handbook for further harming the country, which is very different.”
– Native American man, MI

“It basically makes Trump the focus of all of the policies. It does nothing more than spread racism, sexism, and every kind of ‘ism’ that further divides people.” – Asian/Native American woman, GA

“The extensive range feels different. The desire to literally change the way our country was set up is very concerning.”
– White woman, WI

ONE POINT OF CAUTION: Despite voters' concerns about Project 2025, voters are still not certain Trump/Republicans will pursue it or be able to enact it over objections from moderate Republicans, consistent with our last round of qualitative research.





The Debate

Most voters say they watched some or all of the debate, though voters don't recall hearing much about the economy

Trump's racist comments about immigrants broke through the most with voters. Many say Harris came off as better prepared.

- ***"The eating pets thing was really weird. Harris seemed fine."*** – White man, WI
- ***"What stood out to me was some of the untrue things Trump said about immigrants."*** – Black/Hispanic woman, GA
- ***"I did not watch the debate, I just saw some posts on social media about how Trump was talking about illegal immigrants eating cats and dogs."*** – Native American man, MI
- ***"I thought that Kamala looked much more composed than Trump and that he looked to be panicking when she would press him on issues."*** – White woman, NC

When directly asked, some can recall a back and forth on the economy, but most can't provide specific details. Among those that do, the most frequent thing they remember is an exchange on the "Trump tax" and Trump blaming Harris for the bad economy.

- ***"I didn't see and didn't hear any specifics about the economy at the debate."*** – White woman, WI
- ***"Harris mentioned giving tax breaks to new small businesses. Trump just repeatedly stated how we had the best economy in history during his presidency and how bad things were with Biden/Harris."*** – White man, NC
- ***"I remember Trump talking about his plan to raise tariffs on goods, and Harris referring to his plan as 'Trump sales tax.'"*** – White man, MI
- ***"Trump talked about banning abortion, Kamala Harris talked about more affordable housing."*** – Black woman, PA

Voters like the policies Harris highlighted in her opening remarks; the *Opportunity Economy* communicates a chance for voters like them to succeed

HOUSING & LOWERING COSTS

Swing voters like the emphasis on cutting taxes and reducing housing costs. Here, as we've seen elsewhere, tone and context is important. Voters appreciated that she named the fact that people are struggling.

*"What stood out to me was the fact that **it's the largest tax credit in modern history.**"*
– Native American man, PA

*"**I like what she said about an opportunity economy that there is a shortage of housing...**I think that it will help someone like me because I will be looking to buy a new home soon." – Black woman, AZ*

*"**What stood out was the emphasis on how difficult families have things right now, how much they are struggling, and what solutions she is proposing to combat those issues.**"*
– Native American man, MI



OPPORTUNITY ECONOMY

Overall, voters respond well to "the opportunity economy." Most connect with it and describe it as a mechanism to help people like them get ahead.

*"**I think the Opportunity Economy she is speaking about would help out a lot of different people and contribute to the success of America's economy.**"*
– Black/Hispanic woman, GA

*"**I think the Opportunity Economy is just what America needs. We need more affordable housing and for the economy to have better opportunities and not make it so hard to get ahead. I think it would help so many people tremendously. More people will be able to afford rent or a mortgage and to afford things for their children.**"*
– White woman, NV

The “Trump sales tax” attack and prospect of \$4,000 in higher costs per year stand out, but narrowly defining his tariffs as tax increases may inadvertently create believability issues

Voters find it hard to believe that Trump would raise taxes, primarily because they remember lower taxes and costs when he was president.

- **“While I'm sure there will be tariffs imposed, I don't recall Trump saying it would be 20%, so I don't really believe that is a true statement without further research.”** – White man, MI
- **“Middle class people will pay more. I'm unsure how true this is because we've been paying more for things now than we were when Trump was in office.”** – Black woman, GA
- **“I don't believe that Trump's plan said that. Even his supporters would balk at that. I think it must be an exaggeration or something. That would be brutal for families, including mine.”** – White woman, WI
- **“Naturally I don't like the idea of creating a 20% tax on everyday goods and I'm not even sure that is true. I do not believe most of her statements, mainly because when Trump was in office, our economy was thriving.”** – Native American man, MI

As a result, many are primed to believe Trump's rebuttal. Even if they don't find him to be credible, they agree that the economy was better when he was President. Others take a more nuanced view, and give Biden/Harris credit for rebuilding the economy post-COVID.

- **“I agree with Trump with everything he said. *The economy was dramatically worse for me the last 3.5 years compared to 2017-2021.*”** – Asian man, PA
- **“*The economy was so much better under [Trump].* I'm not sure if it's because of things he did or if it's things the last administration before him set up.”** – White woman, MI
- **“[Trump] inherited a great economy and tax policies that set him up for a good economy and then Covid happened and it tanked. *Biden/Harris have spent this time trying to dig us out of inflation.*”** – White man, AZ
- **“*[Trump's] economy was a crisis economy and Biden's was a recovery economy.*”** – White man, WI

But it appears the “Trump sales tax” labeling may be shortchanging the impact of the hit. When voters are informed that the back-and-forth is specifically on tariffs, not a “sales tax” per se, many conclude Trump's policies will harm people like them by raising costs.

“Oh, those are the tariffs! That makes more sense. I mean that seems pretty bad to me. Overall I think Trump's plan would harm me.” – White man, WI

Reducing drug costs is a strong proof point for Harris' record, while helping small businesses and "turning the page" on Trump are appealing goals that stick with voters

DRUG COSTS

Voters respond strongly to Harris' assertion that health care is a right. Her accomplishment on drug costs is important for two reasons: 1) it is a tangible way to prove she got something done to lower the cost of living (as we've seen in other research, health care costs are deeply personal to most voters), and 2) it positions her on the side of voters, not big drug companies.

"What stood out to me is when she said access to health care should be a right and not just a privilege to those who can afford it. It made me feel like I really hope she wins this election because I have special needs children, as well as my own health issues and being able to afford healthcare is sometimes hard." – Black/Hispanic woman, GA

"I liked that she mentions things that have actually happened, steps that the Biden administration has actually done to help people...It made me feel good about Kamala, like she wants to get stuff done." – White man, WI

"I see negotiating and capping drug prices for all as a great thing. **Harris is not out to support big pharm getting richer.**" – White man, NC

"My mom uses insulin and insulin used to cost over 300 bucks, people were going to different countries to buy it because it was so high in America." – Black woman, GA

SMALL BUSINESSES + TURN THE PAGE

Voters appreciate Harris' focus on helping small businesses succeed, which they link directly to success for middle class people. Her call to "turn the page" sticks with voters who are frustrated with Trump's negativity, and her note to "compare plans" is also powerful. Voters like her emphasis on substance here, not just style.

"I liked hearing specific plan details & would much rather hear the candidates discuss how to fix the country. She's right, name calling only gets us so far & further divides us." – White man, WI

"I thought it was good that she was saying she wants to compare plans and stop name calling and turn the page on all that and move forward. It was mature and what the debate should be." – White woman, NV

"Yes, **it's definitely time to turn the page on smear tactics and name calling.** Enough is enough already. The time for getting down to business is long overdue." – Asian/Native American woman, GA

"Small businesses **NEED** support and funding, and so I definitely think it's the right approach. **I'm a small business owner myself and I like her ideas to help them.**" – Native American man, MI



Setting up the Contrast with Trump

Voters respond well to both Harris campaign ads and like the focus on cutting costs for everyday Americans



FOCUSED

Participants appreciate that this is squarely focused on the middle class and **addresses price gouging.**

"I do think this is the right approach. I think those that are price gouging should be held accountable. And building up the middle class is critical to the country's success." – White man, AZ

"What stood out to me the most was that it talked about building the middle class, lowering food prices, going after price gougers. I think it's the right approach." – Asian/Native American woman, GA

"What stood out to me is she wants to build up the middle class. This means to me that she wants to make it more accessible to people to be considered middle class. I agree with the policies in the video. Lowering the price of groceries would help a lot of families." – Black/Hispanic woman, GA



A NEW WAY FORWARD

Voters like the uplifting tone. The emphasis on tax cuts for families stood out. **Overall, it seems voters could relate to this better and see what it meant to them** – lower costs (including on groceries, housing, and drugs) and lower taxes.

"Cutting taxes for 100 million Americans. I believe this is the right approach." – Hispanic man, NV

"I liked this one. I liked that it was optimistic about the future. I really liked that there were specific proposals." – White man, WI

"What stood out most in the video was the focus on the middle class. I think some of the policies are a good thing, like lower prescription costs and a ban on price gouging." – White man, MI

Both new Harris ads tested evoke positive emotions in voters and paint her on the side of everyday Americans – especially “Hands”



BUDGET PRIORITIES

While the policies featured in the ad are popular (support for homeowners in particular stands out), voters appreciate the facts-based approach of the message. Specificity is helpful here – whether it’s naming specific dollar amounts or, as we saw in our last round of qual, citing validators like the Wharton School. And as we saw previously, the term “opportunity economy” is popular with voters.

*“What stood out was how this video reframed the national debt/budget from the perspective of regular Americans as opposed to federal spending. **I liked the focus on helping the middle class with issues such as home ownership and small business startups.**”*

– White woman, NC

*“**I liked the specific numbers/points it brought up like the child tax credit and helping new homeowners.**”* – White man, WI

*“**I did like the fact that it quoted the Wharton school with statistics on the economic plan, which I think is helpful context.**”* – White woman, NC



HANDS

Voters appreciate that this ad visually centers everyday people. The values statement, “When small businesses and working families do well, America does well,” resonates with voters, again because it explicitly centers them as the economic priority. This ad also appears to set up a more favorable contrast with Trump by communicating that he has a pro-corporate agenda.

*“**The images of the hands stood out to me because it represented our moms, dads, and grandparents who have worked hard to take care of us, and who built the mom-and-pop shops of businesses to leave to their families to hopefully pass down to the next generation.**”*

– Mixed woman, NV

*“**I liked everything about the video, she's pounding the fact that she has plans and what she's trying to accomplish while Trump offers nothing.**”* – Hispanic man, AZ

*“**Harris is focusing on the working class and Trump is focusing on the top 5%.**”* – White man, NC

Voters find several aspects of the attack on Trump compelling – but the argument that Trump would “tank the economy” falls flat

Future messaging should instead make the argument that because Trump is focused on the rich and big businesses, he'll pursue a pro-corporate agenda that benefits large corporations at the expense of everyday people

“I don't find the statement believable because I have experienced a Trump economy and it was actually really refreshing.” - Hispanic woman, WI

Donald Trump is making a lot of promises about the spending and tax cuts he'll provide as president, but the truth is his policies would tank the economy, raise costs, and add trillions of dollars to our deficit. Nonpartisan experts say that Trump's plans to cut taxes for the wealthy and big corporations would cost \$5 trillion dollars. His only plan to make up the difference is trillions in new tariffs, which economists predict will raise costs on American families by thousands of dollars a year. Trump and his MAGA supporters will cut Social Security and Medicare, let big corporations off the hook for price gouging Americans, and raise taxes on middle class families. Leading independent economists and financial experts predict Trump's policies will increase inflation and cause a recession.

“What stands out to me the most is that Trump will cut Social Security and Medicare and raise taxes. I do find the statement believable because Trump seems to care more about himself and his rich friends than he does the American people.” – Black/Hispanic woman, GA

“The claims from independent economists and nonpartisan experts. It would be more believable if they named them.” - White woman, NC

At the end of the conversation, participants point to Trump's support for new tariffs as a primary concern about him, providing us a new way to talk about him that doesn't encourage voters to think about his handling of the economy as president, but instead as a new threat he poses for the future

“Trump putting more tariffs on products that will cost people more and that are not the best quality.”
– Black woman, AZ

“My biggest concern would be the percentage of new tariffs, and the costs of goods to me.”
– White man, MI

When forced to choose, voters say they are most concerned Trump will raise costs and make inflation worse, and make cuts to Social Security/Medicare. Relatively few say he'll add to the deficit and create a recession or help the wealthy and big corporations get richer.

Thank You

New York

Washington, DC

Hartford

Chicago

Denver

Seattle