

Research on Economic and Political Instability in Midwestern Factory Towns

Findings from a series of four focus groups among white swing voters in industrial counties across five Midwestern states



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May 2022

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Focus Group Methodology

- Lake Research Partners conducted and moderated four focus groups among white swing voters in select small to mid-size Midwestern industrial counties.

Date	Location	Group
April 12, 2022	Woodbury, Dubuque, & Wapello, IA	White Swing Men
April 14, 2022	Genesee, MI Marion & Trumbull, OH Luzerne & Lackawanna, PA	White Swing Women
April 18, 2022	Mahoning, OH	White Swing Voters
April 19, 2020	Manitowoc & Marathon, WI	Mixed Gender

- As qualitative research, this study is not intended to draw measurable conclusions, but rather to yield insights from in-depth exploration of the concerns, values, and attitudes of the defined constituencies.
- Numerical ratings are qualitative in nature and should not be interpreted as representative of any population.

Qualitative Research Statement of Limitations

- In opinion research, qualitative research seeks to develop insight and direction rather than quantitatively precise or absolute measures. Because of the limited number of respondents and the restrictions of recruiting, this research must be considered in a qualitative frame of reference.
- The reader may find that some of the information seems inconsistent in character upon first reading this report. These inconsistencies should be considered as valid data from the participant's point of view. That is, the participant may be misinformed or simply wrong in his or her knowledge or judgment, and we should interpret this as useful information about their level of understanding.
- This study cannot be considered reliable or valid in the statistical sense. This type of research is intended to provide knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and opinions about issues and concerns.
- The following limitations are inherent in qualitative research and are stated here to remind the reader that the qualitative data presented here cannot be projected to any universe of individuals.
 - Statement 1. Participants who respond to the invitation of a stranger to participate in this research show themselves to be risk takers and may be somewhat more assertive than non-participants.
 - Statement 2. Some participants speak more often and more forcefully in focus group sessions than other participants, so their opinions tend to carry more weight in the findings.
 - Statement 3. Participants "self-select" themselves.
 - Statement 4. Participants were not selected randomly; as a result, each person in the pool of possible participants did not have an equal chance to be selected.

Executive Summary

- **Factory towns voters are very concerned and uneasy** about the way things are going in the country, largely driven by concerns about **rising costs** and other **economic issues**, but also **divisions in the country**, war, and crime.
 - **Inflation** is far and away the **number one issue** on these voters' minds right away and they do not see the administration addressing it.
- **Populism is powerful with this audience.** Democrats have an opening to talk to these voters about wealthy corporations moving jobs overseas, price gouging, wealthy corporations and CEOs not paying taxes they owe, and stagnating wages.
 - This messaging does **require some delicate balancing** – some men see corporations as important job creators and part of America's success.
 - These voters are responsive to messages that speak directly to their **pocketbook concerns on trade and good jobs, health care, retirement security, and economic stability.**
- The focus groups were more **mixed on unions** than the survey data, especially men.
 - These voters are **pro-union**, but are feeling discouraged that in their eyes unions have lost power and **union jobs are no longer as good as they want them to be.** They feel that unions are less effective today and less likely to advocate for workers.
 - They also had some mixed personal experiences with unions and some **issues with national & bigger union leadership.**
 - Despite these challenges, **unions can still be an important validator** and source for **economic information and perspective.** The quote from a union leader also tested strongly as a validator.
- Factory towns voters are **distrustful of the mainstream media.**
 - Many are **getting information from informal networks** of friends and family, online, exclusively local news, or consulting many different sources with different political leanings.
 - There is a **very strong negative sentiment towards “corporate media.”** Democrats need to be pushing this term to define Fox News, because Republicans are already using it for mainstream news sources such as CNN, the New York Times, and MSNBC.

Messaging Summary: Positives

- The focus groups suggest that the most promising path for advertising to these audiences is **local, positive, forward-looking, issue-focused, and candidate-centric**.
 - Advertisements touting the accomplishments of the Biden administration and national Democrats are a difficult sell with this audience. However, there is a promising path here for **individual, local** Democratic candidates to **speak to these voters on the issues they care about**.
- Voters like messaging that cites **specific policies**.
 - The strongest topics and actions tested were **bringing jobs back home from overseas, higher wages, bringing down health care costs, and taxing wealthy corporations**.
 - These voters are very sensitive to what they perceive to be **empty rhetoric**.
- For these voters, the **economic debate is also a values debate**, where they want to see **hard work rewarded**.
- The **solutions** part of advertising is much more important than the problems part.
 - These voters know what is going wrong and they are tired of what they perceive to be **finger pointing with no solutions or change**.
- These voters respond best to **verifiable facts, validators** who they see as on their side, and **concrete steps** that candidates will take to **make their lives better**.
 - These voters are very **distrustful of media** and sensitive to advertising that comes across as **political and/or pandering**.
- Candidates should also be leaning heavily on alternative methods of communicating with these voters, including **earned media on local news** and holding **local events such as job fairs**.
 - These kinds of communication **build credibility** with voters and **establish a local presence** for the candidate in a way that ads cannot.

Messaging Summary: Contrasts

- Times are tough. There is little room for victory laps and **people want to hear how Democrats will do better.**
 - These voters don't want to see Democrats deflecting blame for economic issues while they currently hold power, or being overly self-congratulatory about economic successes that voters do not see. Democrats need to be **self-aware about these voters' lived experiences of the current economic situation and speak to the candidates' plans to make progress on the issues that voters care about.**
 - Many of these voters do view Democrats as historically the party of working people, but are struggling to believe it is still true when they are struggling under Democratic leadership. **There is an opening here for candidates to talk about getting back to the party's roots and how they plan to do so.**
- **Contrasts** are received much better at the **individual candidate level** and need to be **verifiable, fact-based, and to the point.**
 - While contrasts are necessary, they need to be done carefully so as not to lose these voters, who are **tired of division and negativity.** They do not want to hear what they perceive to be Democrats bickering or bashing Republicans gratuitously.
 - Presenting an **individual-level choice**, for instance saying **"I am the only candidate in the race who [did x] or [supports y]"** is much better received than blanket statements such as "Democrats build things, Republicans break things."
- There is a Republican economic critique that will beat Democrats if we don't **engage and set up the alternative.**
 - These voters had **little sense of an alternative economic narrative offered by the Democrats.**
 - Men especially felt that Biden and the Democrats had gotten some things wrong on **energy policy, economic impact payments and unemployment, not being aggressive enough on trade and foreign policy, and not being in touch with inflation.**
- Republican victories in these factory towns won't come because they beat Democrats on cultural issues. They will come because **they filled a void and beat us on economic issues.**
 - **Culture-war attacks on Democrats largely fall flat**, but can have an impact if Democrats are not filling the vacuum on economic issues.

Context & Mood



In their own communities, voters are seeing economic hardship and a rise in crime that alarms them. Some say there are more jobs available right now than in recent years, but they are not being filled. Some blame this on poor wages and job quality, others blame government handouts and lower work ethic after the pandemic. It would help to focus the jobs discussion on the need for better wages and benefits, but voters are not hearing much about that.

Voters are Seeing in Their Communities...

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

- “I see **shelves becoming bare** at times. **People are talking about how expensive their food bill is.** But I think in our area, people have a lot of pride, and they wouldn't come out and say, ‘Well, **I don't have money for this or that or whatever on the table.**’” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “**More people are struggling.** There's people that have been out of work and things like that, so they've needed donations. But we've rallied together, we've helped people find other jobs.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA

VIOLENCE

- “There also seems to be **a lot of violence**, not where I live, because I kind of live out in the country. I live more in a suburban area. But in the inner-city area, **every week shooting.**” — White Swing Man, Trumbull OH
- “I just think the Youngstown itself, I think, is just one big mess. There's **so much killing and shooting** and random stuff. It's ridiculous. And it's just like Detroit, it seems like. **Everybody's getting shot.** And hardly a day goes by. The suburbs are different, but there's still crap going on there. But **Youngstown is actually scary.**” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

JOB- RELATED ISSUES

- “As far as the jobs, **there's jobs all over. You may not be getting exactly what you were paid before.** I do believe that as far as I'm concerned, I worked my whole life and retired, and I'm sure all of you ladies have also where you're not retired. **I don't mind a family being subsidized, or even a single person, if they get off their rear end and go to work, but are not earning enough maybe to sustain themselves,** so they get a little bit of help. But get off your rear end and go out and do something.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “**Part of [people not returning to work] is because of the fear that they're going to go out and get COVID.** There was such a ramped-up mess that if you go out, you're going to get sick. I don't think people are as afraid as they are anymore, so hopefully that will change. **Hopefully, that will change.**” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “**I don't think that's a better economic situation.** In my own area where I live, **there are a lot more jobs** than there had been, and **they are paying more,** but it's because so many **people refuse to go back to work.** Those jobs are open. They have been filled pretty much consistently since I was as a kid, and now those jobs are open because people are getting money just for being at home.” — White Swing Man, Wapello IA
- “We have great trade schools in this area...I'm in human resources, trying to hire somebody nowadays, due to the pandemic as well, is quite frustrating. **There are jobs that nobody wants to work because the government handed out such great money,** that everybody's sitting around and struggling, trying to find... There is great paying jobs in this area. People would prefer to sit down.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Men in particular identify corporations moving jobs overseas and stagnated wages as a root cause of economic and job-related issues in their communities. They are more structural in their analysis.

“The wages have stagnated, the companies have decided to outsource overseas and the workers, some of them at least are staying home or they're evaluating, do we need both myself and my spouse working, or can we live on one salary and either the other spouse stay home and take care of the kids or various other arrangements.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA

“Well, I think that shift, **companies, those jobs have been shipped overseas** for labor costs and cost savings that companies have seen...and they haven't returned.” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA

“I work in manufacturing, I'm actually an engineer, and so a lot of what is causing that stuff overseas, it's not just wages. That is a big part of it. But everything is cheaper for China. If China buys steel from Spain, it is half the cost of what we pay for it. And it's because of an agreement between the two of them. Whereas the tariff laws have actually made it difficult for the United States to get materials at a reasonable cost. So **going to China makes sense because it's half the cost of materials and about a 10th of the cost of wages.**” — White Swing Man, Wapello IA

“I would say **our manufacturing jobs over the past 20 years have shifted to overseas.** So a lot of those folks here that have spent their entire life, the companies they worked for are no longer here. Those manufacturing facilities are no longer here. They've been outsourced overseas to really, to China. A lot of them.” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA

“We could give you a list of companies that have left the Lackawanna Luzerne County area. There's been some new ones, but **they haven't replaced the employers that had a thousand, 1,500 employees. They're different kind of jobs. They're smaller.** And it's hard to say better or less because of the inflation of wages in today's world, but **we've seen several large companies, manufacturing companies, distributing companies in this area and they're gone.** People were there for 30, 40 years.” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA

Women are more likely to identify price gouging, corporate profiteering, and tax breaks as root causes of economic hardship and jobs issues. They are more focused on money and how economics are affecting families, though they are very populist about profiteering.

"We have shortages, like global. It's just not us suffering. It's everybody globally that is suffering. Because of COVID, **because of the pandemic** that we've been dealing with two years, and everything's behind. It's demand for the products that's not out there yet and everything. It's definitely **the oil and the gas companies are totally gouging all of us.**" – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

"Iowa already cut its unemployment for people. I know this because that's my office that I work at, months ago. We still have a worker shortage. **Cut unemployment all you want, you're still going to have a worker shortage. We don't have enough people here.**" – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

"As far as the gas companies, yeah, I believe that they're gouging us. However, it isn't just the gas company and their profits, because they did take a 20 some billion-dollar loss at one time. And **every sector that you can think of is subsidized immensely by the government...**" – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

"I don't think it's fair to judge the economy based on what you're paying for gas. I mean, **if you look at corporate profits, those oil companies are raking it in.**" – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

"Well, for my own personal family, my husband and I both have had careers, decent salaries, but raising two kids through college, it's not easy. My boys both have enormous college debt, **enormous college debt...**But yes, **the economy is tough here.** There are jobs out there. I think a lot of the people don't want to take them now because they're holding out for that bigger pay. My college son works at a local beer distributor, who's now paying him \$20 an hour to go sit there and sell beer because they can't get workers. But then other people trying to get a full-time job are getting offered or 14 or \$15 an hour. So, **there's such inequities. There's things available, but they'll pay a college kid \$20 an hour to sit and sell beer, but other people who are looking for a job that they need to sustain themselves may not be getting that wage.**" – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Wisconsin voters reflected the impact of the constant language of Republican media during the 2020 campaign. All the states showed the impact of right-wing social media and news about pipelines, energy policy, and weak leadership.

“I think that **our leadership can only handle one disaster at a time**. We went from Afghanistan, leaving our equipment, the loss of 13 soldiers, and that got swept under the rug because now we had people coming to our border. That got swept under the rug because something else happened. **Our president can't handle more than one thing at a time. There's a lot of finger pointing, and nobody's taking ownership and there's nothing being resolved.**” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“Well, I would suggest **that it seems like there's a lack of leadership at the executive branch**. I think that trickles down in a lot of different ways, and it also trickles outside the boundaries of our country as well. **Ukraine** comes to mind right off the bat. I think that we would also talk about just **energy policies** and flip flopping on those types of things that the administration has done quite a bit...**it doesn't support or garner a lot of trust in the administration** that we don't have somebody that's **asleep at the wheel.**” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI

“**No thanks to the President**, though. He's the one, the minute he came into office, and I hate to talk politics, but **the first thing he did was shut down all the operations and put an immediate stop to all the oil and gas companies** that are here that we could benefit from.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“I think **a lot of finger pointing went back to President Trump** that he was responsible for COVID, he was responsible for talks with China, he was responsible for talks with Russia. They were more worried about his tax returns and they spent his entire time in office trying to impeach him. And **the president now cannot stand up and answer questions in conferences from the press. He only takes certain questions.**” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“Well, yeah, because **the Keystone Pipeline was shut down** the next day.” — White Swing Woman, Trumbull OH

These factory towns voters are generally pro-union, but many have issues with union leadership and feel that unions have lost power and are not effectively advocating for members in the way that they should. Men were more negative than women. Unions seem to serve better as sources of information and validators than as saviors.

“The union as an ideal is a great idea. It worked, it did a lot of good for workers, but it's become this dinosaur. It's massive. It's bloated. And **it's not really helping workers the way it used to the way it was intended to.**” — White Swing Man, Wapello IA

“Yes. I would say for the most part, yes. You can look at a decline in our wages and it is directly linked to the decline in unions. **You lose your unions, you lose your good wages.**” — White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

“Me personally, no. **I don't have anything against them, but I'm not in one. They say they bring up wages, I don't know.** I know for a while, they were trying to get delivery workers like myself unionized, but I don't think anything became of it. **I like it not being in a union, I like the independence** of doing what I do. I can do deliveries anytime I want, I can quit anytime I want. I like the freedom of it.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

“I don't know much about labor unions. I know about teacher union because my sister's a teacher. I'm jaded when it comes to that. **It's kind of political with the teacher unions** and it's really disgusting because they're supposed to be there to make sure that they're protecting our educators, and it seems like they're out to just keep their jobs. **The people in charge of the unions, they really are not advocating for the teachers the way that they should...**” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

“It **depends on how well the union works...**my ex-husband was a president in the union, but it depends because **some are kissing the butts of the people in charge and not worrying as much about the people they represent** in the union. And then there's others that fight gung ho.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“It **depends what labor unions** you're speaking of.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Both men and women, however, are very negative towards wealthy corporations, although some Wisconsin voters are more positive about corporations creating jobs and being involved in their communities.

"We're a smaller community. We don't have many large corporations in our area and I think they are suffering the ones that... They themselves are suffering. People have not returned back to work. They were given such an incentive with unemployment and the federal subsidize that they didn't need to work. And they just are continuing that and it's having an impact."
— White Swing Voter, Marathon WI



"No, they want my money. That's all the wealthy corporations want. They just want your money."
— White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH



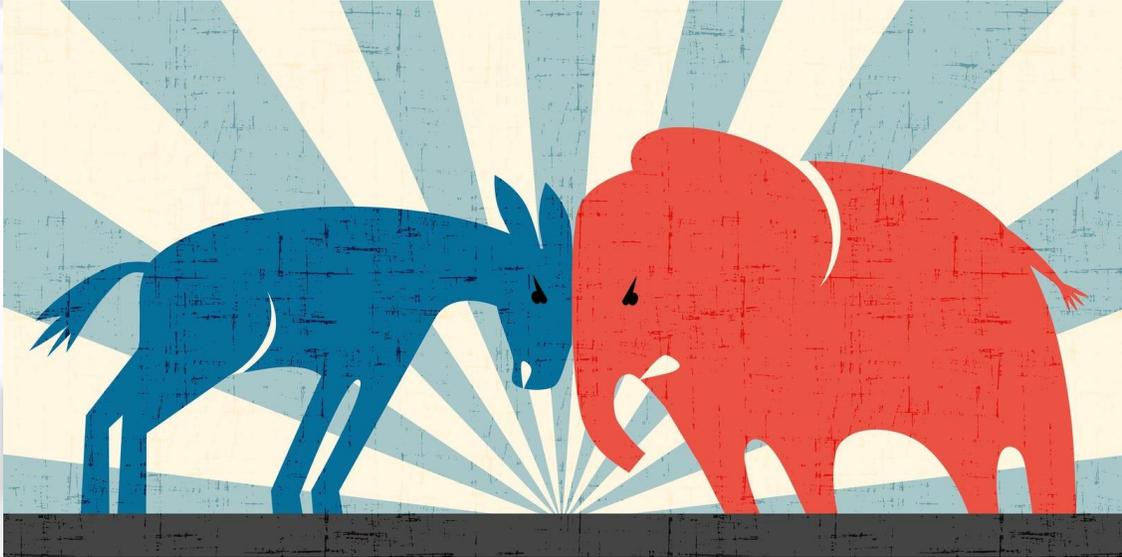
"They have figured out how not to pay taxes, so the taxes get trickled down to everybody else. And so the middle class, which is what, I don't know if the rest of you are, but that's what I am. We're the ones that end up paying the taxes. Not the high, not the low, but the middle."
— White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA



"So in Manitowoc, we have... I'm just thinking of one here in town. We have Ammo incorporated. They make ammo and they did donate a lot to like Ukraine's effort for their war. So, that was good."
— White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI



Comparing the Parties



Voters see Republicans as better on the economy and for business. They are also associated with toughness, particularly Trump himself, and preserving traditional American values.

“As a person, our previous president, starts with a T, not a real nice person, as far as a leader I'd rather have him on my side than against me. I think **his approach with China that he just stood tough** against him instead of just rolling over was a positive thing.” — White Swing Man, Dubuque IA

“I guess, I always felt that as a middle-class worker, that my salary, my home taxes, my investments were maybe **more secure with a Republican president.**” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“I think they stand for more of the **American people keeping their rights** along with the **constitution**, making sure that we are upholding those and leaving those for everyone.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“Everything has gotten more expensive. The deals that we were talking about with **China**, it was more of a, **we were finally standing up and saying, you're not going to take advantage of us anymore...**not counting all the BS about who was talking to the Russians and if there was collusion and... That was all fake, that's all come out. I've just been lied to repeatedly for years now. And **it's hard for me to have any faith in the Democratic Party right now.**” — White Swing Man, Wapello IA

“Well, traditionally, I thought they stood for **business and growing business, especially larger business**, but I kind of get stuck with the... It's more just the finger pointing, what the Democrats are failing at and they're really kind of getting away from the bipartisanship that gets things done.” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI

“I think that the Republicans maybe were doing a little better. Pre-pandemic, **the economy was going a lot better** and we almost did have a deal with China on some things. And then unfortunately the pandemic occurred and everything went downhill from there.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA

“I wouldn't say they represent a certain race, but maybe **someone who owns a business.** I don't know. But I wouldn't associate a party with a race at all.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

On the negative side, Republicans are perceived as standing for the rich and big business, not the average person. They are also viewed as a white-ethnic party by some.

"I think, **traditionally, they had a... they would argue over tax plans and saying that government was too big.** But damn it, I'm in Iowa and they are regulating the hell out of us. So **I don't think that they're small anymore.** They seem to be getting bigger and bigger... Iowa's unemployment system is and **what they're doing to our public education,** we're headed for a... I think the most hilarious meme I saw was a trash can on fire and this state falling into it. They have, we have a governor that is promoting vouchers right now...you can already look at the other states that had it. And it basically blew up their public education system so much to the point that the federal government had to step in and say, 'Hey, you don't get to cut public education that much,' you end up in violation of the federal government." – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

"I agree with [voter] that our voter base is **behind large corporations** and the righty mighty, because it's a large voting forum for the Republican party." – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

"Economic issues, **they stand for the wealthy.** They don't stand for the common people." – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

"I think **they stand for helping out for the rich.** If you're poor or middle class, I think you're put last on the totem pole, on the back burner." – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

"**Rich people.** Business owners." – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

"**Crackers.**" – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

"**Honkies.** Without saying, you know what I mean." – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

The Democratic party is viewed as standing up for regular working people, social equality, and civil rights. However, they are also seen as weak, ineffective, and giving too many handouts.

“I think I've seen from the Democratic Party one thing that they're doing is they're **pushing more job fairs and that type of thing, student loans, forgiveness, and paybacks**. So they're speeding up the process, with also the build of back America better. They made the **infrastructure bill**, which is billions of dollars or whatever, in terms of wastewater and to help with the wastewater- That's a democratic thing that they passed the bill back America thing. And it's very helpful in terms of what they've done in terms of the IRS, legislative proposal, making sure that **tracking people's payments and things who might otherwise get out of paying taxes** and everything with things like that.”
— White Swing Man, Luzerne PA

“What, traditionally, a Democrat stood for, which was **the family, union, helping other people**, those type of programs, and Republicans tended to be more for the wealthier, more conservative and whatever...I don't know what the heck they are.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“A quick association I make is the **Democrats are the 99% and the Republicans are the 1%**. I know that's not really true, but that comes to mind, I guess.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

“I agree with them on most of the **social type, non-discriminatory, empathetic** towards other people. But no, **I can't honestly say I've seen a lot of tangible results** that they've produced.” – White Swing Man, Trumbull OH

“I think **they stand for handouts**. I think they just want to hand everything out and not necessarily in a... I mean **sometimes in a good way**, but sometimes I think they're handing out **to the wrong people**.” – White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“You keep asking other people, but they're the party that passed the **Civil Rights Act** in 1964. So we're talking the party is **social equality**, the party that's going to stand up for **minority rights**.” – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

Many voters think that both parties are too extreme, both get some things right and some things wrong, or are both corrupt and self-serving.

“It's **middle ground that's lacking**. Again saying, like [voter], I've always been a Democrat. However, **I don't like the extremism on either end** where you may not like President Biden's policies or whatever, but the extreme Democrats don't agree with him, the extreme Republicans don't agree with him. The same thing with Trump, where I think he to tend to lean into, and this only my personal opinion, he, Trump, tended to lean into some of the extremism in the Republican Party, such as the QAnon and all of that craziness. I actually worked with a teacher who lost her job because she became a member of QAnon. I'm thinking, how could this happen to people? How could they become so extreme in their political views that you actually lose your job?” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“Government has its rule for all of us. It always depends on where you are in the spectrum of what you need from the government. I think I agree that there are enormous amounts of people who take advantage of government programs. But then there's the cases when there's those people who have true need, and then they actually need those services. See, and then it's a problem for them if they've cut programs. So that's where balance balancing, **I think is we lack that balance in our country, no matter which party is.**” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“They all **stink.**” – White Swing Woman, Genesee MI

“I would say, this has become a very team-oriented thing. Unfortunately, the blue, the red...Reality is **they both have it right on some points and they both have it way wrong on some points**. But I would say that I, myself, I've never been on either side of the fence. **I always try and stay in the middle of it**, but I have to admit in the last year I have been literally thrown over the fence to the Republican side and I have no choice, but because everything I see is really affecting us.” – White Swing Man, Wapello IA

News & Information Sources



These swing voters are very distrustful of the media. They think traditional news reporting has become politically polarized and is no longer trustworthy. As a result, they are turning to alternative and often multiple sources instead; however, these alternative sources often provide misinformation.

“Bias.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“Money. The news never used to have to make money, and **now it's entertainment...**And these obnoxious really **polar opposite entities have gone bonkers** trying to sensationalize nothing, and we haven't had that problem.” – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

“It used to be that we could depend upon the news organizations to just report the news. Now **the right has got their news stations and the left has got their stations, and each one of them are telling a different story. I don't know who to believe anymore.** When I was a kid, we had news that we could rely on because all they were doing is reporting facts. They weren't slanting the news one way or the other. Now they seem to be slanting it any way that they want, and it's more fiction that you hear on the news than anything else. But I think the Republicans and Democrats have always been pointing fingers at one another. That hasn't changed.” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI

“When you say the media, **what it used to be and what it is now is completely different.** David Brinkley and Walter Cronk aren't around anymore. When you say the media now, I think more, they're advocating a position I mean, **they have a predetermined agenda** that they're going to support or attack, and that's my general opinion of the media.” — White Swing Man, Trumbull OH

“Manipulation. I believe just as it was already pointed out, **they're very polarized. I also go to other than normal sources to try and glean actual facts and truth.** COVID is a perfect example. We have been misdirected repeatedly for two years, only to come down to finding out... And you have to really like... And sadly enough, Spotify, **Joe Rogan's podcast is probably one of the better sources I found** of actual experts who just completely disagree with what the CDCs been doing, the WHO I mean, there's so much.” — White Swing Man, Wapello IA

Voters are using different strategies to manage their lack of trust in traditional information sources, including checking many different sources from across the political spectrum, only watching local news, and/or doing their own research online.

- “You should be able to take a story and usually it's published **multiple different websites or by different sources**. You should be able to match it up and see **what facts, if they're the same, if it's different.**” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “I used to watch ABC. Mostly I get it from national news, and **I try to look at several different stations**. And one of the things that I do is I see who they're bashing, and then I try to figure out why they're bashing. And if it's just totally off the wall or an incomplete statement that they've taken out of context, then **I try to research that a little bit and see exactly, or as close as I possibly can, to what the true meaning might be.**” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “I like to go like to the New York Times or CNN, Fox news, **I split it even between Fox News and CNN. That way I get the mix of both** because CNN is ultra-liberal where Fox news is ultra conservative, Republican versus Democrat. So, if I **look across those two**, that's pretty much my good dose of both.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “I get more of my news by reading quite a bit from **lots of sources on the internet**. I read **dozens of articles** daily. I flip back and forth to **local TV channels**, I don't have cable. That's **not stuck on any one source**. Sunday morning, **I watch all the different news shows** that are on back and forth.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I watch the **local news** every day. And then generally just **online magazines**, political magazines or news magazines, Daily Mail, Guardian, that kind of thing...I don't see the same type of coverage as compared to the American magazines or Wall Street Journal or the Post or anything. **They seem to be firmly in one camp or the other but the ones overseas are not as much**. They seem to be, they don't have a dog in the fight as much so there seem to be much more **reporting neutrally.**” — White Swing Man, Trumbull OH
- “**Local papers**. Well, I still get the paper, but **I also look online** for not only my paper, but ones in the area or just in general.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “Well, I read the paper and I watch news things, but **I don't really know who I believe, fake news** and all this stuff. I don't know. **The Vindicator [local paper]** comes to my house. Paper, yes. I love it. I watch **local news** and then I'll watch ABC particularly. That's usually my go to at night, I watch the local news and then I watch ABC.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “We have a **local paper** that I read online daily. And when I see stories, well, the political stuff would come across Associated Press because that's who they're in contact with. And if I see something that I want a little more information on, **I'll do some online searches** about that topic and specific to see some other publications that have been wrote up about it.” — White Swing Man, Dubuque IA
- “**Local news**. And people in the neighborhood and the area itself, too.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Wisconsin voters in particular report getting their news and information from informal networks of friends, family, and social media. Many of these are also being influenced by far-right platforms, directly or indirectly.

“I get, I watch **Newsmax** every now and then. Also, **the Trumpet brief**, that's a newspaper and it comes on the web. And then there's a group in this area called...where **people that go to different conventions and stuff and share information**. And as far as watching ABC, CBS, any of that stuff. No, **I don't watch the news.**” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“I get a lot from my **grandparents**. I'll be honest. **They are big fans of OAN, whatever that stands for**, the OAN network. And, so **I've watched a few things that they've sent me**. Like, they'll send me the actual link to what they watched and they're like, “Hey, we watched this.” So yeah.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“I honestly, I do not. **I get it from my husband**. I try to avoid.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

“Mostly **online**. I think a lot of us get it online, whether or not it's a website that you looked up yourself or **a page that you follow on Facebook or Instagram or stuff that people share**. I kind of follow just, like a mixture of everything. I like to... you can't just be... Like think one way. I try to think both ways. I try to understand why. I mean, I have a lot of family that is like very religious and they're very anti-abortion and then I have younger friends that they're pro-choice and so it's like, you kind of get it from both sides and you see it from a lot of different views. Like links to whatever site. I think it is important though, to know the difference between a verified news site and a blog that someone wrote. **You can tell that it's like opinionated, a lot of blogs that people share, that it's one sided...**” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI

The phrase “corporate media” is received very negatively and, for many of these voters, is synonymous with the big news organizations, including Fox, but also CNN, MSNBC, the New York Times, and others. It is critical for Democrats to push this phrase to define Fox News, as conservatives are already doing so aggressively for other legitimate news sources.

“With corporate media, because when you're dealing with the corporate media, they're sending out that slanted message...And **with those sources and when you have that corporate media, they've got a message that they want to get out.** And I know television's all about the ratings and the scare tactics that you see, but what has gone is the art of doing the research or the art of investigating the story. It's like, **here's the message we're going to push out to you, and now you must follow it, or you must listen to it.**” — White Swing Man, Genesee MI

“It's true of both parties. Once they're no longer in power, **you have people who work for a particular party who now become a contributor on whether it's CNN or Fox or MSNBC.** They were in the administration and now they're giving you their opinion and slamming it to their side.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA

“I happen to like Fox news and I'm a Democrat. But I also watch NBC, MSNBC, CNN. If something's going on, I'll go to each one and see what they're all saying...But what really gets me is when I watch something happening real, and then **you go to the stations and I can't believe that the different spin that each station puts on something** you know just saw with your own eyes.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“I'm trying not to watch the news too much because it mentally is draining to me. **Fox news is bottom of the barrel.**” — White Swing Woman, MI

“That's a nightmare. **Fox is a nightmare.** A corporation that has a Republican spend.” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“**Special interest.**” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Messages



The strongest economic messages for Democrats we tested focused on lowering the cost of health care, including prescription drug prices, and on addressing the movement of manufacturing jobs overseas. The *Republican Culture War* message was not very strong among these swing voters overall, driven by its low ratings among women and voters in Ohio. Among men and voters in Wisconsin, it does have some resonance, but not more than our best economic messages.

Message Ratings	Average Rating	White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	White Swing Voters OH	White Swing Voters WI
Health Care	2.44	-	-	2.44	-
Jobs Overseas - American	2.43	-	-	-	2.43
Rx Drugs	2.31	-	2.67	-	1.86
Jobs Overseas - Fair Share	2.12	-	2.0	2.25	-
Create Security	1.92	1.63	1.89	2.22	-
Create Opportunities	1.71	-	-	-	1.71
Generic Econ Contrast	1.71	1.88	-	1.89	1.29
Cost of Living	1.65	1.50	1.78	-	-
Republican Culture War	1.06	1.88	0.44	0.44	1.71

Messages rated on 0-3 scale, with 0 meaning not at all convincing, and 3 meaning very convincing

* Denotes message not read in group.

The *Health Care* message opens with an acknowledgement of the personal struggles that many voters are facing with expensive, ongoing health conditions, which these Ohio voters readily related to and connected with. Many shared personal stories of their reliance on publicly funded health care for their own health or the health of friends, family, and community members. As our survey showed, people in these factory towns have faced many personal hardships that messaging can and should speak to.

Too many of us, our families, and our friends know what it's like to suffer from a disability, chronic health condition, or addiction, and not be able to afford the care we need. Nobody should have to choose between essential health care and food, rent, or bills for their family. I'm fighting for quality, affordable health care for all.

- “I wound up in a situation where I needed spinal surgery without the expansion of Medicaid, I would be crippled. Because I had access to getting the surgery that I needed, I'm healthy and can survive. I feel that in my circumstance, **there were politicians who were trying to block my ability to be able to get back to live** and a lot of people faced that. I was one. **Getting rid of the Affordable Care Act or not having had the Affordable Care Act, would've been devastating to me now and for all of my life.** It's important to me, helped me survive and I think that's a good thing for our country.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “Just last year I've been in and out of the hospital. I've been on dialysis four days a week. **If it wasn't for Medicare, Medicaid, these programs I'd most likely be dead right now.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “My daughter, she doesn't have insurance. She's a waitress, she makes too much money for Medicaid, which I think is utterly ridiculous, so she has no insurance because she can't afford it but she needs it. **People that need it are the ones that can't afford it or can't get it for whatever the reason.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “**I'd like to hear more information,** but like you said, it's just one statement. I guess I can come from a different angle where I accept health insurance for people who want to see me as a dietician. Someone with Medicare, for example, I can only see them two hours a year, only if they have diabetes or kidney complications. Someone who's just obese or someone who has heart disease and wants to see me, that would not be covered at all and I think if that was covered, we could save so much money in the hospitals on procedures and just them being in there for any kind of complications they have, if we took a more preventative approach. I just think it'd be cool if something like that was in place, so **I gave it a two just because I'd like to hear more of what they could offer, but I know that's limited.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

Average Rating “Health Care”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Voters OH	2.44
White Swing Voters WI	N/A
TOTAL	2.44

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

Wisconsin voters have seen firsthand corporations move *Jobs Overseas* in their communities and agree that it is a problem. While some are softly pro-corporation, viewing these corporations as important job creators, many do also blame corporate greed for those decisions and want to bring back *American* manufacturing jobs.

*For decades **wealthy corporations and CEOs have been profiting at our expense by moving jobs overseas with no consequences while our communities suffer.** We need policies that **bring our manufacturing jobs back home**, toughen our trade laws, and encourage buying American, so our communities here at home have good jobs that pay good wages.*

- “I chose three because **I used to work for a big corporation and lots of jobs were moved overseas** and it was just a constant complaint that, “Oh, now we need to fill other spots.” On shore, is what we called it. So in the US, we had to fill all these up other spots and customers didn't like talking to people overseas. And so for me, **it just seemed very silly to move jobs overseas if we weren't meeting the needs anywhere.**” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “**I agree it is their fault.** Again, **I feel it's all the bottom line**, how much money they make for their shareholders or whatever instead of the betterment of the community and getting some community loyalty by a business that's been here and stays here and supports the community.” — Swing White Voter, Marathon WI
- “It is the domino effect that **as they pull businesses out of the communities, it affects everyone.** And there's complaints from having the items shipped back into the United States, the cost of shipping, the length of time, the quality of workmanship. And **some of those things were very well taken care of right here in the United States.**” — Swing White Voter, Marathon WI
- “Well, I agree that **we should get more jobs back here.** The problem that I had, I don't think all corporations are looking to switch jobs overseas. I mean, that could have been seven, eight years ago, that's that was a trend. When the last administration was in, **he was concerned about getting jobs back to America and he was pretty successful in doing that.** I haven't seen what the economy is doing right now in the last year. It has me worried because **I don't think we're concentrating on American workers.**” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI
- “So it said something about **not have consequences for jobs going away, and that, to me, sounds like a democratic thing. Bringing jobs back, but at what wage?** Because going back to that free market, **are you going to buy a box of cereal for 30 bucks** if it's your neighbor making it?” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI
- “I know **there was two businesses in our area, not since the pandemic, but prior to that, were relocating to Mexico and left,** not their whole companies, but divisions of their companies. And **it was always about the bottom line.** They could make more money, they could get cheaper help and all that other stuff.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “So **there's a lot of things that were shipped overseas and they could be and should be made here** and we wouldn't be having all this problem with not getting the stuff.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

Average Rating “Jobs Overseas-American”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Voters OH	N/A
White Swing Voters WI	2.43
TOTAL	2.43

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

These factory towns voters are very concerned about health care costs, especially the price of Rx Drugs. Again, many connected with the personal focus of this message and shared their own stories. For women in particular, this is a top-tier issue. Voters in Wisconsin agreed with the message, but did not find it as compelling as the message about jobs moving overseas.

*Too many of us, our families, and our friends know what it's like to get a difficult diagnosis and not be able to afford the care we need. Nobody should have to choose between essential prescriptions and food, rent, or bills for their family. I'm fighting for Medicare to be able to negotiate to **lower prescription drug prices.***

- “No matter how much you spend monthly on your prescription, your insurance premiums, when time comes to use it, **you still have to pay out of pocket. It's ridiculous.** It really is.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “I'm in that category where **I've been hit with some pretty catastrophic things, and some of the drug prices.** \$40,000 for an injection is just absolutely ridiculous.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “I think it's also **touching on something that probably every single one of us has encountered or known somebody in the middle...** And I'm saying in **the middle class.** Because either you have a Medicaid card and you can do whatever you need to...or else there's the wealthy that can afford to take the hit.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “It's hard for a lot of people. We are just talking about social security or your source of income and something happens to you and **you have to pay a lot of money out of your pocket. How are you supposed to do that when you can barely afford month-to-month bills?**” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI
- “I was a two. **The whole statement was pretty good,** but at the end it said that Medicare needs to lower prices. **It's more than just Medicare. It's also big pharma because they're not in it for helping customers.** I used to work in the pharmacy so I know that when we're charging 300 times what a pill is, **it's no longer about helping the person,** the client, whatever you want to call them, **it's about putting money into their pockets.**” – White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “People in these situations where **they can't pay their bills** and it's because maybe **their medical bills are in the collection** and they're being garnished from checks and then **they have no money to pay their bills.**” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI
- “I have a difficulty with this entire statement because it doesn't apply to me...But if I were on Medicare, I'd probably in trouble because I'm taking 11 different medications and I'm trying to fight diseases from Agent Orange and I would be hurting. That would be an effect. And I see a lot of people who are taking a pill that costs \$2,000. I'm sorry, **there isn't a pill in the world that should cost \$2,000.**” – White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI
- “The whole statement was pretty good, but at the end it said that Medicare needs to lower prices. **It's not just Medicare. It's overall healthcare.**” – Swing White Voter, Wisconsin

Average Rating “Rx Drugs”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	2.67
White Swing Voters OH	N/A
White Swing Voters WI	1.86
TOTAL	2.31

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

Like voters in Wisconsin, voters in Ohio and women across these factory towns have seen firsthand corporations move *Jobs Overseas* in their communities. Even more so than in Wisconsin, they are strongly anti-corporate and angry. Wages, fair pay, and jobs overseas are the most resonant parts of this message, but tying these to tax fairness has potential as well.

*For decades **wealthy corporations and CEOs have been profiting at our expense by moving jobs overseas with no consequences while our communities suffer.** We need a fair tax system that requires wealthy corporations and CEOs to pay what they owe, and to provide our communities with more support for our small businesses, **good jobs, and good wages.***

- “Well, I believe that **the jobs need to stay here** and that **everything is being sent overseas**. If we put **more tariffs on everything** leaving and then coming back, it would stop. I do not believe our politicians are going to stop it.” – White Swing Woman, Trumbull OH
- “Because they come over here, they start their companies, **they get all of the knowledge that they need using our technology and our smarts. And then they take it somewhere else where the labor is cheaper**, they don't have to pay as much, and there's a bigger profit.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “This area that we are in, a lot of businesses, they come for manufacturing and industrial areas and it's a great... But they eventually... **I've been through three companies that I've staffed for that actually got up one day and left and left the people high and dry**, and didn't give them an opportunity to help them place them anywhere.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “I believe every word it said. **I agreed with everything.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I wanted to pop off a three right away. But I stuck down to the two because I think it's just a little bit... **There's a little bit more than that.** And I think **it's overall not just corporate taxes.** I think it's private taxes too, which are a huge deal who pays how much and whatnot.” – Swing White Voter, Mahoning OH
- “**Pay everybody a better wage so that they can afford it to buy stuff that's bought in America.** And instead of all the corporations making all that money, **make this stuff here, pay people a fair wage**, and they'll be able to afford to pay twice as much because it was **made in America.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I think if we start somewhere and we do follow through and we do just what we say we're going to do and **buy American made goods, make it here**, slowly but surely, we could be self-sufficient, self sustained.” – Swing White Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I like the fact that it's stating about **the wages and fair pay** and stuff like that. That's what I got from that.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “Too many of our **jobs going overseas.** Too many **people are struggling.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

Average Rating “Jobs Overseas-Fair Share”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	2.0
White Swing Voters OH	2.25
White Swing Voters WI	N/A
TOTAL	2.12

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

There is some division on the broader *Create Security* message. Many voters agree that the 1% has been taking wealth from the rest of us and like to hear it called out, but a few take issue with what they consider to be blame being placed on the wealthy for their success or with the language of “rigging the rules.” Voters want to hear more about what policies specifically would *Create Security*.

*For years now, the top one percent has been rigging the rules to **take more and more wealth from the rest of us**, driving up the cost of living while holding wages down. **We need policies that create security and stability – good jobs, with good wages** – so we all have the freedom to succeed and provide for our families.*

- “That’s an undeniable fact that the top 1% has been increasing their share of the wealth, and by necessity taking it from somewhere else. That’s really what stood out to me. What’s the point of organizing ourself as a society if we can’t have empathy and help take care of everyone?” – White Swing Man, Trumbull OH
- “Something that was very effective for me was the fact that it’s acknowledging that we need new policies. That we can’t sit on our laurels and live off the past. That we got to look towards the future and do new and powerful things.” – White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “They need to focus on jobs.” – White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “There’s a lot of truth in that statement. If you just look at the pandemic, the top 1% gained so much more wealth during the pandemic when the bottom 99% couldn’t work...the top 1% just took advantage of it. Jeff Bezos gained hundreds of billions of dollars during the pandemic. It’s like the top 1%, when there’s a war, they get rich.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I’d say the part of this where the top 1% has been rigging the rules.” – White Swing Man, Dubuque IA
- “I think it pits one group of people against another saying that they’re rigging the rules. If a person is successful and earning a good wage and a good living, why are we begrudging them earning that wage?” – White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “I think that you don’t have to make the 1% the enemy and you can just focus on bringing up the 99%. It has nothing to do with the 1% supposedly rigging rules, I don’t really find that true.” – Swing White Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I feel that the 1% are really taken care of very well and we are the ones who really suffer.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “I agree with that statement in principle, but I would want to see what the specific policies are because Democrats do tend to go through, let’s try to create government and Trump deregulated a lot of stuff to try to create wealth.” – Swing White Voter, Mahoning OH
- “They say this is wrong... Yeah, no kidding. We all know. What do you intend to do about it? Let us know. Don’t just tell us something we already know.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Average Rating “Create Security”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	1.63
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	1.89
White Swing Voters OH	2.22
White Swing Voters WI	N/A
TOTAL	1.92

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

Wisconsin voters agree that the cost of living has gone up while wages have stayed down, and some believe that the 1% is to blame for that, but some again are hesitant to blame the wealthy or to pit people against one another; they are very sensitive to divisive language. They do want policies that *Create Opportunities* – with good jobs and good wages – but would probably respond to the message better with more concrete language on better policies.

*For years now, the top one percent has been rigging the rules to take more and more wealth from the rest of us, **driving up the cost of living while holding wages down**. We need policies that create opportunities – **good jobs, with good wages** – so we all have the freedom to succeed and provide for our families.*

- **“It sounds really good.** It sounds effective, but I think **that anybody that's voted more than once has probably heard this every election cycle.**” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI
- “I was a two also. I guess I focused more on what I didn't think. And I thought just **the word rigging, I thought it was just very immature** and I thought that definitely could use a better term. **I just don't think rigging would be the right word.** I think that they twist it to their own agenda. I would say that they're figuring out ways around to make it benefit them, whatever it may be.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- **“I think the 1% is controlling it. I feel there is opportunity for good jobs out there,** but it's like social security. If you get this much of an increase in social security, but the cost of living is pushed up that much by that percent, you are still not gaining anything.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “I'm not too sure what could be done about putting more money in to social security or into paychecks, but definitely, **the cost of living, our taxes, our utilities, our food, vehicles, real estate, it's all gone up and I don't know, our salaries haven't gone up.** And I imagine that most people have experienced some frozen income, that there won't be raises, there will be reduced bonuses. So the households are being affected by it. I think that 1%, I think that's low, I think that number is higher and I believe that it is being manipulated.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “At the end, it was saying...**freedom for everyone to provide for their families.** I think **anybody can have that freedom the way that it is right now** anyway. I just think **people aren't going out there and taking advantage of the different opportunities** that there are.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI

Average Rating “Create Opportunities”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Voters OH	N/A
White Swing Voters WI	1.71
TOTAL	1.71

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

Voters like that there are specific policies listed in the *Generic Econ Contrast*. They want to be able to provide for their families. Some have concerns about higher wages leading to higher prices and some do not like what they see as taxing the wealthy to pay for more government programs.

*We all do better when working people have **higher wages, better benefits, safe workplaces, and secure retirement**. I am fighting for strong unions, **good health care, equal pay, affordable higher education, secure pensions, and a fair tax system** that requires **wealthy corporations** and CEOs to pay what they owe so we can **provide for our families**.*

- “It’s just not talking and fluff and emptiness, but it’s giving me **very colorful, concrete examples** of what it’s talking about.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “The **affordable higher education** is absolutely, in my opinion, **the best path for us all to have a better life**. I think we do struggle in that arena to provide education at a reasonable cost. **It is literally 10 times what it was** when I went to college.” — White Swing Man, Wapello IA
- “I like everything about it except for I am fighting for strong unions...**they’ll take the unions payers money and they line the pockets of some of the union executives’ corruption.**” — White Swing Man, Dubuque IA
- “If they have to pay more taxes, that means that they raise the cost of everything that they sell. I hate the term fair share...I think **we need less taxes, not more taxes. The government has plenty of taxes.** It’s just, where is the money going?” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “So many **corporations are incentivized...But many of the people that they’re grossly underpaying are collecting government benefits** because they can’t survive on the wages they’re being paid.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I liked that they commented that **they were going to care for our families**. I mean, that was kind of where it hit home for me...Having things being provided for medical, making **medical available for everyone, education for everyone.**” — Swing White Voter, Wisconsin
- “Don’t know that that’s the answer because **the higher wages go, the more you have to pay for the goods** in the end, I mean, it’s a vicious circle.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “For me, **higher wages, better benefits, retirement**, those all connected with me. **A fair tax system.** How do we get the largest companies in the world like Amazon, for example, who doesn’t pay any tax to pay something? I didn’t give it a perfect three. **I’m more focused on the wealthy corporations rather than the actual individuals themselves.**” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA
- “I do agree with it. I would like to see these things happen but...**the second we raise the wages**, oh, guess what? Now, **whoever we’re working for is raise the cost of what they’re producing.**” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “And then **bashing corporations** again, I thought that was **unnecessary** with the tax reasons.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

Average Rating “Generic Econ Contrast”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	1.88
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Voters OH	1.89
White Swing Voters WI	1.29
TOTAL	1.71

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

Voters agree that the *Cost of Living* is too high and that wages should be higher. However, they feel that this is a message that they have heard over and over already from Democrats with no action. Many of these voters are also concerningly unenthusiastic about joining unions today. The power of unions lies not as much in calling for unionization, as in using unions as sources and validators.

*We all deserve the freedom to support ourselves and our families. But for decades wealthy corporations and CEOs have driven up prices and the cost of living more and more while holding wages down so they can profit. I'm fighting for **good jobs, higher wages**, and for all working people to have the freedom to join together in a union.*

- “I like the fact that it talks about **higher wages. We all need higher wages with inflation**, with higher gas prices and that. So I think that really resonated with me and rang a bell.” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “That's nice say, but **they're not going to be able to do anything about it**. That's why it's not a three.” – Swing White Man
- “**Without a consensus** of the people working together, **none of this is ever going to change.**” – Swing White Man
- “I put the one down because you could have all of this happening if you join a union, and as I mentioned before, **I am a little bit hesitant about joining unions** or being provided because the experiences I've had were not the greatest.” — White Swing Man, Genesee MI
- “This is an **overused message. I've heard this from every Democrat**. And unfortunately, at the end of the day, these **wealthy corporations have the ability to create more jobs**, accruing higher wages a lot faster than any government” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA
- “I just liked the whole **wages** and the **fair pay** and stuff like that. It just gave me a good feeling about reading that.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “Well, to start with, I said I'm retired, but my job was a speech writer, so that was my profession. The statements are too loose. **There's not enough impact in anything...**Nothing really sticks out. **Except I did like that first line about the freedom to support yourself...** But then it gets lost. It gets watered down after that.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “**It's just like pissing in the wind**. That's all they're doing. They're saying it, but they're not living it.” – White Swing Woman, Trumbull OH
- “That's a **cop-out**. The companies would point the finger at Biden and say, "Hey you, take responsibility for the inflation." And so, I do think **that is on the government more so than the Amazons of the world.**” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA
- “I'm fighting for **good jobs, higher wages**, and for all working people to have... But the part of having the freedom to join a union came across to me that **you would also have the freedom to not be in the union.**” — White Swing Man, Dubuque IA
- “**I like the whole statement** in a whole. But when I hear it all the time, year after year after year, it's like, **how about let's do something about it?**” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Average Rating “Cost of Living”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	1.5
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	1.78
White Swing Voters OH	N/A
White Swing Voters WI	N/A
TOTAL	1.65

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

Shane Larson CWA Quote:

"Joe Biden is the most pro-union president since FDR. He has appointed people to the National Labor Relations Board who come from the labor movement and who are committed to supporting workers' legal rights to organize and bargain for better wages and working conditions, rather than corporate lawyers focused on ensuring profits trump workers' rights. He has prioritized American union workers in his Buy America executive orders, he has used trade agreements to lift up workers' rights in Mexico and the US under the new NAFTA, he has raised wages for government contractors so no one working for the federal government makes less than \$15 per hour, and he has stood in support of workers trying to organize at companies like Amazon and supported those on strike. He picked as Secretary of Labor an actual labor union leader who has prioritized workers. He has already done more for workers and unions than any president in a very long time." – Shane Larson, Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Despite somewhat low levels of enthusiasm for joining unions themselves, women in particular respond very positively on the whole to a quote from “a union leader” CWA’s Shane Larson praising Biden’s pro-union policies. There was some disagreement over whether \$15 an hour is actually not enough, or is too much for small businesses to pay.

“**About time. Very powerful...** But Joe Biden actually did do all those things, so **he's really more for the working class than any president in the past.**” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“I don’t think \$15 an hour is a fair wage. \$15 an hour is \$600 a week....So that's 26 or \$27,000 a year. That's not a fair wage...**You cannot afford a family on \$27,000 a year...\$15 ain't enough.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

“I knew he was a **man of the people.**” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“How **he advocates for the people**, and he's done those things. But **someone in a position that actually has been working in that sector** and know what it is to be on the inside and then to come to the leadership, knows what they didn't get or something like... You know what I mean?” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

“But they say they can't make it any higher because **small businesses can't afford to pay their people.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

“Those types of issues are very, very important to me. I actually thought that I was a little caught off guard **realizing just how much Joe Biden had been advocating for issues that I felt strongly for...**I do know that he is doing as much as he possibly can with those issues. Which again, for me, I agree with.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

“**About time.**” – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

“It’s a **powerful statement.**” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

“But **higher wages mean less hiring.** So if we go higher, they're going to lay off.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA

Some voters see right through the *Republican Culture War* message as fearmongering and distraction. However, for others, this message triggers visceral fears about their children learning about sexual topics at a young age and being exposed to transgender women in school. In the absence of a clear, sharp economic message from Democrats, this fear can fill the vacuum for some Republican-leaning voters – but the bigger threat is having no economic message.

Right now, our kids are being groomed by sexual predators pushing a radical trans-gender agenda at school, who want to force girls to use bathrooms, changing rooms, and play sports with boys, and are teaching anti-American ideas like Critical Race Theory. The government is trying to keep parents out of decisions about how to raise our kids, but doing nothing about the immigration chaos at the border and rising prices.

- “**You got kindergarten kids, first, second, third graders being exposed to this at this point in time...**I firmly believe everybody has a right to do what they want to do. But **to force it on the people is what's got me going.** Yeah, I've known that there were transvestites. I was in the service. Okay, they exist. As I've always said, do whatever you want to do, **just don't infringe upon me and mine.** Keep it separate. **Having raised girls, I can't see them being involved with a transgender person in their bathrooms, in their changing rooms, at Phys ed or whatever.**” – White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA
- “It just seems to me **these are scare tactic dog whistle issues** that they bring up to distract people from other situations going on.” – White Swing Man, Trumbull OH
- “What percentage of people are transgender? I don't know, less than 1%. **It's just a big smoke screen,** just like raw meat to the base for Republicans.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “My husband was a phys-ed teacher. .. And he's had some issues with **people that wanted to be considered males in female bathrooms,** and the girls are just terrified. And as a swimming coach, I can't imagine having to go up against someone who has certain, perhaps, still male characteristics. And especially after Title IX, we fought so hard to get where we are to have to go back there and start over again.” – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “**Between kindergarten and third grade, our kids don't need to know about any of that.** They're little, we'll play, have fun. [But] I am not concerned about someone of a born opposite sex being in a bathroom.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I think if you are born a female, you are a female. **If you are born a male, you are a male.** Flat out.” – White Swing Woman, Genesee MI
- “I think a lot of **teachers are there to support students, that's part of their job,** is to support students. And I think that comes off sometimes as they're pushing them to be a certain way when they're probably already that way. And **the teacher is just supporting their decision of being transgender** or something like that.” – White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “There was nothing there. There's no policy there. **There's just a bunch of blanket statements about what they don't like.**” – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA

Average Rating “Republican Culture War”	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	1.88
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	0.44
White Swing Voters OH	0.44
White Swing Voters WI	1.71
TOTAL	1.06

*Bold text denotes the strongest language in the message

We learned a lot from the ad testing about how to communicate more effectively with these voters. Overall, the tone of all of the initial ads was too positive towards Democrats and their accomplishments, which these factory towns voters are not seeing in their own lives and did not find convincing. Promisingly, the *New Ad Script* written for the Wisconsin group using this feedback performed better, even in this more difficult group. Women responded slightly better to all the ads on the whole.

Ad Ratings	Average Rating	White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	White Swing Voters OH	White Swing Voters WI
New Ad Script	1.71	-	-	-	1.71
Freedom (Audio)	1.41	1.25	1.89	-	1.00
Miles to Go (Video)	1.39	1.50	2.00	1.33	0.57
Sneak Attack (Audio)	1.39	-	1.44	1.33	-
Rising Prices (Audio)	1.06	1.25	-	0.89	-

Messages rated on 0-3 scale, with 0 meaning not at all convincing, and 3 meaning very convincing

* Denotes message not read in group.

Wisconsin voters, who are not as anti-corporate as many of these swing voters, do not totally buy the taking on big business message of this script. However, it works well that the message is focused on improving the Democratic Party and returning it to its roots, rather than how good it already is, which they would not find convincing. They also like that it does not attack Republicans outright.

Big business CEOs and lobbyists already have people representing them in Congress. I'm running to fight for working people. I'm the only candidate in this race who wants to make sure that the billionaires and big corporations pay what they owe in taxes so that the rest of us can get good schools and roads and health care.

I'm the only candidate in this race who will take on big oil and the big food companies and the big drug companies and force them to stop price gouging, and will vote to enforce the antitrust laws so that small businesses can compete against the big monopolies.

I will work with anyone in either party who wants to help working people, but I will stand up to anybody in either party that looks down on us and tries to divide and distract us so that they can line the pockets of their big contributors.

When I was growing up my parents told me that Democrats were the party that fights for working people. One of the reasons I'm running for Congress is to make sure my party lives up to its roots.

New Ad Script – White Swing Voters WI: 1.71

What Works	What Doesn't Work	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will work with anyone in either party who wants to help working people. Working to make the Democratic Party better – not talking about how great it already is. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wisconsin voters don't buy into the anti-corporate sentiment as much, even as far as big and wealthy corporations are concerned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For Wisconsin specifically less of a focus on taking on big business and corporations, more about what voters will get in their own communities.

- “I was a two. The fact that they mentioned the **schools and roads**, I feel like that's something that we definitely think about as the middle class or the working class, that they were talking about a lot, they have some good points there.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “**They would be willing to work with them.** And they encourage that. And I think that's probably something we need.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “I like how they were **taking ownership** and **admitting as to what they needed to work on** as a party versus the finger-pointing and blaming.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “He mentioned **bipartisanship** and **accountability** for his party. It got away from the finger pointing.” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI

Men had issues with the tone and delivery of the *Freedom* ad, which they felt was pandering. It also sounded generic to many. The key points about economic *Freedom* resonated with voters, however, we have already lost them by the time they get there because the beginning sounds too political and the accent and music are distracting. Scaling back the tone and some reordering would likely help.

What Works	What Doesn't Work	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many voters do agree with the core message about economic freedom. Some women didn't mind the tone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men in particular felt the tone – the country music, the voice, the accent – was pandering. Many found it generic and boring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dial down the music and country accent, which distracted voters from the message. Move the economic message up to the front.

- “I had mixed feelings about that because some of the **regulations that keep big corporations from polluting our environment**, if some, **they also affect an individual or a company that's just starting out.**” — White Swing Man, Dubuque IA
- “I thought **some of it was actually true information**. I feel that way about a lot of it. I **didn't care for the tone** in general, **it was very pandering**...The whole slow delivery, little bit of a Southern drawl. "You know me? I know you". No, I'm sorry.” — White Swing Man, Wapello IA
- “It was **kind of that bland**, there wasn't really anything that stood out from that. And maybe if they picked up like a celebrity voice or something. **Ted Nugent or Kid Rock or somebody.**” — White Swing Man, Genesee MI
- “You hear freedom in a lot of ads lately. Freedom is in everything like, ridiculous soap ads. **They'll throw out freedom. It's just silly.** But, when you really think about it, what does that mean? I guess what resonated with me is, **better paying jobs, concrete things that all people can benefit from**, that's what keeps us free is having those opportunities to those things. **And the music was catchy.**” – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA
- “Just seemed to be **politics as usual** to me, honestly. I mean **very cookie-cutter.**” — White Swing Man, Trumbull OH
- “Pretty good. It **didn't seem too negative** like the last one was, or as negative. **Had some good positive goals in there.** And what I mostly didn't like was that I don't know, for me, **damn is a swear word in our household.**” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “**If you don't have a good paying job** and I guess you're all to a certain extent, living in the US, free to do whatever you want, **there's still limits on what you can do.** But **if you are not stable economically**, there are a slew of problems that you will have trying to survive in this country. **Poverty is vicious.** ” – White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA
- “They were **concerned about the little people. That's what I liked about it**...that ad was pretty decent. **I didn't like about the 1%** again because it seems like we're always picking on the 1%. And **the 1% aren't responsible for all of our problems.**” — White Swing Voter, Manitowoc WI

Average Rating “Freedom” (Audio)	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	1.25
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	1.89
White Swing Voters OH	N/A
White Swing Voters WI	1.00
TOTAL	1.41

Showing the vote counts on the screen along with popular bills that Republicans voted against was by far the most successful part of *Miles to Go*, which women in particular responded to. However, the ad as a whole was too nationalized, too self-congratulatory, and not forward-looking enough.

What Works	What Doesn't Work	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing the actual vote counts on the bills that are referenced in the ad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too focused on and positive towards Biden. Many felt it was too negative to Republicans. Not enough focus on future goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These voters are unlikely to respond to ads like this that are not individualized to the candidate.

- “The **showing of the actual vote count**...they talked about a particular issue and then showed who voted where, and the fact that the Republicans have said no en-masse so many times.” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA
- “The ad was completely well done. I thought it was a home run, I don't think that anything was factually inaccurate. **I really hate political ads and I just have a lot of trouble getting excited about Joe Biden.** I don't dislike him, he was just my second choice.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I get what it was trying to do. I get what it was trying to tout Biden's accomplishments...It should have come from a standpoint of "here's the difficult situation the country was in, he was dealt with and here are some of the things that he, he did", and **not so much let's pit Democrats versus Republicans.**” — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA
- “I just want a more balanced ad. **It's all Democrat talking points.**” — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA
- “What I liked about it is that **it was concrete facts. They showed the facts.** This is what the Democrats voted. This is what the Republicans voted on the record. **It wasn't rhetoric. It was on the record votes...**” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “For me, I would just say **all the negativity.** I'm tired of politicians blaming the other politicians or the other side. **Tell me what you are going to do...** If you're a Democrat, I don't want to hear anything about the Republicans.” — White Swing Voter, Marathon WI
- “If you looked at the votes, it was all strictly across party lines. There wasn't anyone that was giving one way or the other giving in at all. **So, they're calling one pot black, but they're doing the same thing.**” — White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- “You can look up and see how people vote. You can also go and see when they try to take credit for all the good things that have come of it and they voted against it. **You can find this information. You can see how they vote on things.**” — White Swing Woman, Woodbury IA
- “**I agree with a lot of it, but there was no answers there.** They weren't going to say what they were going to do, and that's why I did not give it a three.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

Average Rating “Miles to Go” (Video)	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	1.50
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	2.00
White Swing Voters OH	1.33
White Swing Voters WI	0.57
TOTAL	1.39

***Sneak Attack* has many of the same strengths and weaknesses as *Miles to Go*, but the section on the vote counts is much less effective without the visual. Voters strongly feel that this ad was too negative towards Republicans, too positive on the Biden administration’s accomplishments, and not solutions-oriented enough.**

What Works	What Doesn't Work	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking about Republican vote counts, which are concrete facts that can be verified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too focused on and positive towards Biden. Too negative to Republicans. Not enough focus on future goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voters are not in a place to hear about how great the Biden administration has been – ads need to be more self aware.

- **“I disagree with most of it.** Everything is in so much turmoil and everybody agrees we're in turmoil. But, **there's been no solution**, no nothing and **it's all the bickering** and all the arguing and just stop.” – White Swing Woman, Genesee MI
- **“What I liked about it is, everything that the ad mentions about, parties voting and not voting for the agenda is true. Because, that information is right out there black and white. It's not like a fake news or whatever.”** – White Swing Woman, Lackawanna PA
- **“I disagree with most of it.** Everything is in so much turmoil and everybody agrees we're in turmoil. But, there's been no solution, no nothing and it's all the bickering and all the arguing and just stop.” – White Swing Woman, Genesee MI
- **“The infrastructure was a good thing and the two parties not getting along,** not voting together. That's very important to me as I've stated before.” – Swing White Voter, Mahoning OH
- **“The first half was really good and then it just goes into attacking the opposing party rather than just trying to build up the good things about their party.** I just get tired of hearing all these things.” – Swing White Voter, Mahoning OH
- **“I just felt like it was more tearing down the opposition.** And instead of what you've done and all these problems were there under Trump too, most of them. Then **we're supposed to act like Biden fixed everything** or whatever, but **people are still hurting.**” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- **“They're constantly tearing the opposition down. I think we're all sick to death of people taking the low road,** we're tired of it. Take the high road, **talk about what you're actually doing** and just shut up...we already know, we see it every day.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- **“I think you can just say "I am different because X, Y, Z," and leave it at that. Just say I'm different, you don't have to say "I'm better" or "They're worse"** because it just makes you look bad if you say that you don't have to tear down anyone.” – White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

Average Rating “Sneak Attack” (Audio)	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	1.44
White Swing Voters OH	1.33
White Swing Voters WI	N/A
TOTAL	1.39

Rising Prices are a major concern for voters – but they are a recent concern that has occurred during the Biden administration. An ad about how well the Biden administration is handling rising prices and blaming Republicans comes across as tone deaf, partisan, and unconvincing.

What Works	What Doesn't Work	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voters generally agree with the anti-wealthy corporation and CEO message, just not the way it was packaged in this ad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too positive towards Biden and self-congratulatory. Too negative on Republicans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voters don't see the results from the Biden administration the ad is claiming. Ads need to be more self-aware.

- “The comment, **the bullshit**, or like, whoa, like, oh, **that got my attention**. Is it effective? Maybe to like a younger demographic or something like, "oh yeah, he swore on the radio" or "he swore on this video" ...**it kind of felt like the same message though.**” — White Swing Man, Genesee MI
- “They just say the government's going to come down hard on companies that are price gouging, but I really don't, I never get out of any of these politicians, **any concrete answers of what they're going to do to stop the price gouging** from happening.” — White Swing Man, Dubuque IA
- “This price gouging thing seems to be another kind of **red herring, distracting argument**. **Prices are going up because of inflation** because of economic policies and the money supply and the pandemic.” — White Swing Man, Trumbull OH
- “**The damn ad was too long**. You can't have something that long and have people's interest in it, and that's what sucks.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I think it's so sad that these ads have to play on people's emotions and make it feel like they're talking to you and **they can't really provide anything substantial to say other than we're calling the other party out on their BS, I think that's crazy to me**. It's a joke.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “None of the stuff is happening right now. **All things in the ad, none if it has actually happened yet.**” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH
- “I think **the average American is sick of the humble bragging with politics**. You toss a term out there like that, you don't necessarily define it with the time that you're given for an ad. So **I didn't like it at all**, I didn't like it. And that's what he said toward the end. He actually said that a couple times about calling them out.” — White Swing Voter, Mahoning OH

Average Rating “Rising Prices” Audio	
White Swing Men IA/MI/OH/PA	1.25
White Swing Women IA/MI/OH/PA	N/A
White Swing Voters OH	0.89
White Swing Voters WI	N/A
TOTAL	1.06

Voters' biggest takeaways from the groups focused on the dominance of inflation as a concern in their minds right now and their desire for more cooperation and civility in Washington. Democrats' economic narrative must address prices, wages, and benefits.

"You know, I think a real positive is I could tell just by some of the answers, I definitely disagree with people, some of the people here, but **we still had a civil discussion**. I could see their point of view. I feel like they could see mine. **That's what I felt was a real positive. Cause that's kind of a rare thing sometimes, now.**" — White Swing Man, Trumbull OH

"**Those last two ads were terrible...I hope I never hear those.** I was especially bothered by the **hokey pokey Southern drawl** routine. I thought that was demeaning as all get out and again, as [voter], said, it's nice to see there's a definite variance of position and thought, but **we're able to sit down and have a conversation for two and a half hours without blowing up at one another and getting nasty. Too bad our representatives in Washington can't do the same.**" — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA

"**The single biggest issues facing our country right now is inflation. And we're all going to have to work together.**

Republicans Democrats, the wealthy, successful companies are all going to have to work together to solve this. They're an important piece to our success. They're part of an innovation story." — White Swing Man, Lackawanna PA

"**We got to work together. I'm encouraged by seeing how we all had a civil discussion here.**

And it's everybody's responsibility. The poor, the rich, the corporations, the small businesses, cause we'll get, we'll all have a share in the success." — White Swing Man, Luzerne PA

"With the conversation and it is **possible to have differing opinions**, but then also, you have others listening, and because I'm more middle of the road and it was kind of nice hearing somebody thinks like me because **usually, it's one side or the other for it.** And so, I thought that was great." — White Swing Man, Genesee MI

"I see that **there's a lot of people concerned about the inflation** and all that. I just come to realize it's not only me. It's a lot of other people." — White Swing Man, Dubuque IA

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