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## FOCUS GROUP REPORT

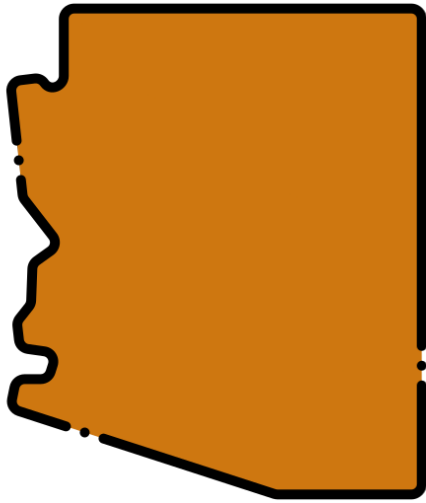
Thursday, June 22, 2023

AZ-1, NY-19, & WI-1  
Constituents On The Economy  
& Their Representatives

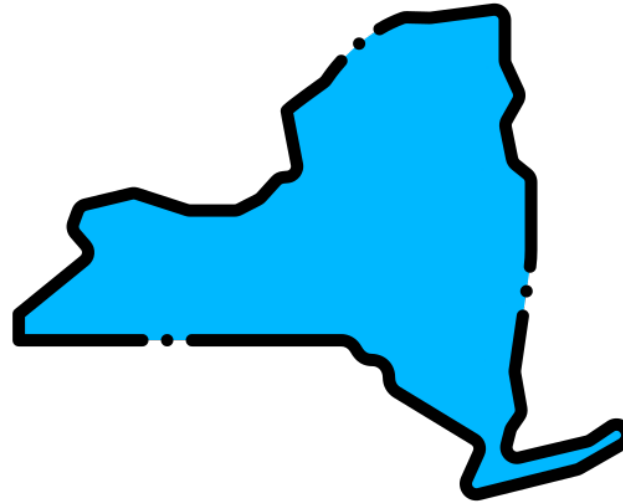


# Methodology

On June 13, 2023, GBAO conducted three focus groups online with independents and soft partisans in AZ-1, NY-19, and WI-1.



Independents and soft  
partisans in AZ-1



Independents and soft  
partisans in NY-19

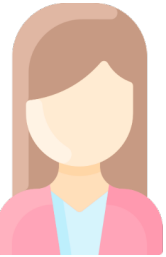


Independents and soft  
partisans in WI-1

# Key Takeaways

- Despite broad pessimism, views on the economy are now mixed.
- Knowledge of Congress' record on the economy is thin. And Democrats' vision on the economy is not particularly clear.
- Our three example members are not well-known, although a handful know of Schweikert's ethics problems.
- "Specifics" tend to shift constituents negatively—whether they're specific allegations against members or insulin prices.
- Member-specific criticisms are more effective than describing representatives as part of the "MAGA" movement.
- Few seem to be following the Supreme Court closely, but trust in the Court is split, with participants citing *Dobbs*.

# Views on the Economy Are Now Mixed



"It's good to see a little bit of the prices are coming down, but it still hurts our bottom line." – WI woman

"Jobs are readily available for everyone and pay is high, higher than it's ever been. And yeah, it's great to hear that I think it was, it's been like 40 years, or maybe more, since unemployment's been this low. It's great that everyone has the opportunity to work and make good wages too." – WI woman

"It's still kind of frustrating that when you go to restaurants and you try to do things, there's still not enough like workers and so unemployment's low but getting people actually back into the workforce and filling those jobs is another frustration." – WI man

"I feel like maybe inflation might be starting to get under control with the passing of that bill. It's not nowhere where it needs to be, but I feel like it's starting to maybe turn a corner, maybe." – AZ man

"I think my financial guy has always said, and I've always loved this, the economy is like a giant S, or sideways S, or a snake or whatever, and it goes up and it goes down... Hang on, if you don't like it now, you'll like it in a few years. And I think that will continue to be true." – AZ woman

"The stock market is trending upward lately, which... Yeah, it can fluctuate, but trending upward consistently as it has been lately." – AZ man

"I took economics back in my freshman year of college, and we were shown various examples and theories and things like that where there is no straight path, you're going to veer left, you're going to veer right. Positive economy, negative economy. But generally, this country is very good as far as wealth and our daily lives.." – NY man



# Views on the Future Economy Are More Positive

*Moderator: How do you think the economy is going to be the same or different 10 years from now?*

"I like to think I'm normally optimistic. So, there's **long-term history** into what the stock market has done for us and where our economy's been, so I **think there's plenty to hang on to**.... We could just kind of sit back, let it rock and invest in safe bets and listen to Warren Buffett." – NY man

"I like to be positive that things will be getting better. And I do have faith that things are going to go in the right direction." – AZ woman

"I think back, several years ago, when it was like the banking bailout and people were really panicked and flipped out. And John McCain said something I've never forgotten, he said, 'The fundamentals of our economy are still sound.' And people at the time laughed, but he was right.... I mean, **we have some crises, but then we recover, and it's going to keep on keeping on.**" – AZ woman

"My own personal opinion, I think we'll kind of stay like this, and then I think here in a couple more months, I **think we'll rebound.** I think the market's already rebounding." – WI man

"It'll probably get worse, and then it'll get better. And then maybe we will be heading towards worse again. This is what the economy does. It's not always a level everything's perfect. It's never going to be that way." – WI woman



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# Although Pessimism Is Still Widespread

*Moderator: Fill in the blank for me. I feel blank is going well in the country today.*

"The only thing that comes to mind is **nothing.**" – WI woman

"**Nothing.**" – NY woman

"I don't know, I guess, yeah, **I got nothing.** The economy's not doing well. Foreign matters are a little bit of a mess. Yeah, I'll stick with nothing." – NY man

"Honestly, **I would say nothing.** I can't think of anything." – NY man

*Moderator: What's not going well?*

"I think **mainstream media is really good at pushing all the negative narration...** And all of those tactics are really good, because they get in our head. They make us anxious, they make us think, they make us overanalyze. And I think a mental battle with ourselves is really what we're going to have to do day in and day out. Because everyone is so caught up in their own daily lives and shit they have to take care of." – NY man



"**People are not as kind to one another as they were 10 years ago.** I feel like everyone is suspicious of pretty much everyone else except their very small circle. We don't tend to see the best in other people." – AZ woman

"The country is so divided. A lot of negativity came into this country, oh, let's see, how many years ago now? Eight, almost seven years ago. **The election of 2016, there just seemed to be more negative energy just being put out there,** and a lot of people jumped on that bandwagon like, 'Oh, now it's okay, I could be a jerk.'" – AZ woman

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# Little Awareness of Congress' Actions on the Economy or Health Care

*Moderator: What have you seen your elected officials say or do about the economy? What have you been seeing Democrats in Congress or Republicans in Congress doing or saying on healthcare?*

"I try not to pay attention to it because I don't trust any politicians. They're going to say what's good for them." – AZ man

"I got to be honest, in the past year, I haven't followed the news on any changes in healthcare. I know a few years back there were quite a few things happening, like trying to repeal Obamacare and whatnot, and I really don't know." – AZ woman

"I actually haven't been listening to them at all because I feel like it's boring and depressing and I might get mad, and why put myself through that?" – AZ woman

"It seems like it's a little radio silence right now on healthcare, just because the whole focus seems to be economy." – WI man

"I haven't paid a whole lot of attention because it hasn't really affected me." – WI woman

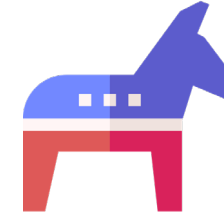
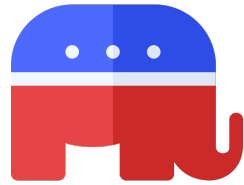
"What I'm hearing is blame on both sides... it's just that blame game back and forth as to what's good, what's bad, who's responsible, who's not." – WI man



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# The Republican Vision for the Economy Is Clearer Than the Democratic Vision

*Moderator: What's the Republican/Democratic vision for the economy?*



"I think the Republican vision is more free market. It's more of the idea of less regulation, giving more opportunity for corporations to make big money." – NY woman

"Republicans, I know they want to get a handle on the handouts and reduce taxes." – WI woman

"Republicans are attempting from a theatrics standpoint to reign in spending and to control spending." – AZ man

"I feel like the Democratic Party is not ... I feel like their vision isn't as focused on the financial landscape. I feel like they're more focused on the social issues, the gender issues, abortion, and they're not as focused on the real issues I think that people are faced with now." – NY man

"Democrats, they just want to keep spending." – WI woman

"I guess plenty of jobs, low unemployment, low inflation. I think both want that, though." – AZ man



# The Members Examined Are Mostly Not Well-Known



*Moderator: How many people, raise your hand, tell me, "I know the name of my member of Congress."*

In WI, 3/9 people

"Are we talking about **our governor?** My member of Congress. No, I don't know." – WI woman

"Well, the first name that came to my mind was for the area that I live in, **Robin Vos.**" – WI man

"I know that **he's a Republican.** That's all I really know." – WI woman



In AZ, 3/7 people

"**Not a clue.** I didn't know who he was." – AZ woman

"He has some **really creepy campaign signs,** I'll tell you that. He just has that weird little smile. I'll say that. He needs to get a better person to help him out with that." – AZ man

"I know he's been serving in the House of Representatives since 2013, and he **typically leans more moderate Republican** from what I noticed. Sometimes he does stray into the more far-right side, but that's pretty much what I know." – AZ man

In NY, 2/5 people

"I know who he is, but I **don't really follow him too much.**" – NY man

"I do remember from back then that Marc Molinaro was the youngest mayor in the country at one point, and I **get postcards from all the different politicians,** and all the same promises." – NY woman

"I **really don't know much** about him because he doesn't have enough exposure. I do receive these postcards in the mail. I appreciated having him reach out like that, his office. But I **don't see him or hear of him,** so I'm really blind on that." – NY man

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# Top Concerns About Members Largely Focus on Specifics, Whether it Be Policy or Questionable Ethics

## Top Testing Messages

AZ	NY	WI
Schweikert said it could be "a terrific thing" if people worked longer and voted 12 times to cut Social Security or Medicare.	Molinaro has been a politician on the public payroll for almost 30 years—since he was 18 years old. He personally made millions of dollars, and even used taxpayer dollars to lease a \$80,000 luxury SUV, which he crashed multiple times, and then repaired using taxpayer dollars.	Steil voted against capping the price of insulin and against giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices. And he voted repeatedly against lowering insurance premiums for working families.
Schweikert voted to make a massive cut to programs Arizonans need, like law enforcement, K-12 public schools, and veterans' benefits.	Molinaro voted with the oil industry, making it harder to lower gas prices for working families and he got over tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry.	Steil voted for a massive cut to programs Wisconsin needs—like law enforcement, public school, veterans' benefits, and food for families who can't afford it.
Schweikert was fined almost \$200,000 after being convicted of almost a dozen ethics and campaign violations, like requiring his publicly-funded employees to run his errands and arrange babysitting for his children.	Molinaro voted for a massive cut to programs New Yorkers need—like law enforcement, K-12 public school, and veterans' benefits.	

# Enumerated GOP Cuts Are Shocking

"We need our law enforcement. We need them to be paid well. They protect us. Our veterans sacrificed, and our kids are our future. **To cut those three programs in any way to me is just sabotage for our nation.**" – NY woman

"Teachers are already underpaid as it is, so **to continue to cut the funding is a slap in the face...**And then with law enforcement too...that'd be something I'd be okay paying into so long as they're actually there for what they're needed for and not used egregiously...And then of course, veteran benefits. That's huge. And the people that fought for our country to make it what it was, what are you going to do? Put them on the street?" – NY man

"**I don't know who benefits from cutting more funding** from our education and more funding from our law enforcement and for families that can't afford food and for our veterans. **That just doesn't sit right with me.**" – WI woman

"I just think those are some **pillars of what the government's supposed to provide** and voting against that wouldn't do well, especially in a state where there's a lot of veterans and we need help with the schools." – AZ man

"I know that Arizona's in the bottom 10 in overall education and **cutting it ain't going to do us any favors.** And then cutting spending Social Security and Medicaid...**He is not making any friends doing that,** and he ain't a friend of mine." – AZ man

"Everybody doesn't deserve a completely equal slice of the pie, but **everyone does deserve at least a small share of the pie.**" – AZ woman



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# Some Find It Hard To Believe Members Would Hold These Positions, But Move With “Standalone Bill” Proof

“It makes it sound like he voted with the oil industry, but what if there were other sub-bills that were included in the voting process where he disagreed with the points that they were going to address?” – NY man



“All of these items are within a greater bill. So, I think it's just misleading. That's all. So, if I were to characterize what's wrong with culture right now, or just news media, it's generally this stuff, which is you're trying to evoke a reaction. Because I don't care who you are, all of this stuff is pretty bad. It's tough to be like, ‘Oh, I'm okay with not capping prices.’ Like, no, but obviously it's never this black and white...” – WI man

*Moderator: “So before we wrap... Steil voted against a bill, an individual bill, so not part of the Inflation Reduction Act. It was called the Affordable Insulin Now Act, and he voted against that. And that was a cap to insulin. It was called the Affordable Insulin Now Act. It was just insulin only.”*

“...Yeah, that's a douche move. I'll give you that one.”  
– WI man

# Others Explain Some Messages Don't Affect Them Personally

"I was just reading back through them, and I couldn't see any one specifically that came back to affect me personally. I guess maybe eventually paying taxes." – NY man

"I think the more specific the charge, the more we're going to be angry about it. It's easy to see the picture of somebody crashing their car seven times, but this one's broad and we understand that. I'm not debating it. But it's harder to get mad about it if it's so broad." – NY woman

"I would just say they don't really impact me as much because personally, I don't really have to deal with these, so it's just hard for me to relate to them. Yeah, I think it is important, but it's just hard for me to personally think about it as much." – NY man



"I could rationalize the tax breaks could possibly be passed on to us and make things cheaper or a more competitive environment for free market." – AZ man

"I don't trust any politician. But for me personally, no effect that I could really think of off the top of my head." – AZ man

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# Messages Make Members Seem “Crooked” or Lacking Empathy, Prioritizing Corporations Over People

“He's not going to take care of my interests. He's not going to take care of our schools if he's in the pocket of an oil corporation.” – NY woman

“Typical politician.” – NY woman

“He sounds corrupt. How do you do all of this? How do you sit in the pocket of the oil industry and not want to take care of the people who are electing you and not be corrupt?” – NY woman

“Sounds like he's taking care of himself instead of people. He's fixing his BMW using my taxpayer money.” – NY woman

“With the Medicare option, I leaned more towards that because it just showed he doesn't have any empathy for the people who can't afford those types of things, and I'm pretty sure that he could afford them. So he's just disconnected from reality it seems.” – WI man

“I really don't feel like this representative has empathy for humanity versus for dollars.” – WI man

“Mean and crooked, not for the people... Just reading that stuff, I don't like him, and I don't think I trust him” – WI woman

“Someone not to be trusted with the overall thought of the country as a whole in mind.” – AZ man

“He doesn't sound like he shares my outlook on what works.” – AZ woman

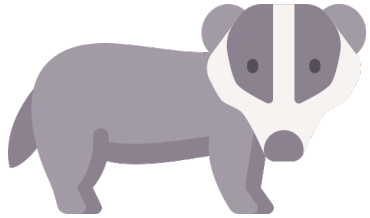


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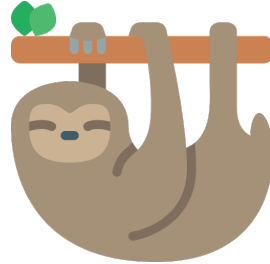
# Animals Further Suggest Members Are Vulnerable

*Moderator: If [Bryan Steil/David Schweikert/Marc Molinaro] were an animal, what animal would he be?*

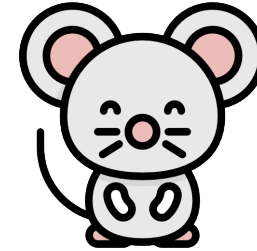
"Like a **badger**. Isn't that the little critter that's so mean and ornery?" – AZ woman



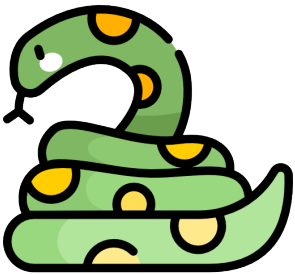
"I'm going to say a **sloth** because he doesn't really do much of anything until it's for his benefit." – AZ man



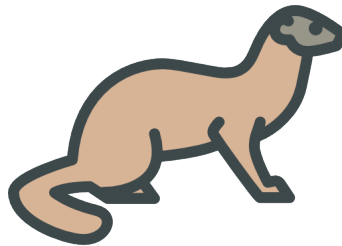
"He is so good at staying out of the limelight and just working his damage very understatedly. I would pick a **mouse**." – AZ woman



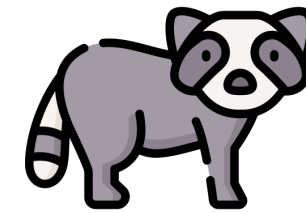
"Well, I mean, obviously a **snake**." – WI woman



"The man sounds like, from this, he sounds like a **weasel**." – NY woman



"Probably a **raccoon**. He just goes from house to house looking for people's votes, basically. Like a raccoon looking for food." – NY man



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# Member-Specific Criticisms Stronger Than MAGA Attacks

*After member-specific ad:*

"My daughter owns a small business and I see how she struggles and it **always seems like the small business owners are the ones to take the first hit.**" – NY woman

"I own a small business as well...If he's going to continue to give breaks to the 1%... and the corporations, then **why not just help us out too along the way?**" – NY man

"**I think he speaks for a lot of people.** He says what a lot of people think, so I think he got his point across in the commercial." – AZ man

"Oh, when the guy first started talking, I knew this was going to be a Schweikert commercial, and I thought, '**Wow, he's younger than I expected. Wow, he's a veteran. Wow, this guy's pretty cool.**' And then **discovered, no, that wasn't Schweikert talking.** And then when we cut to the white-haired corporate guy, I thought, 'Okay, yeah, that makes sense.'" – AZ woman



*After MAGA ad:*

"It's overkill... He's getting looped in with all of these other politicians that have their own far-right agenda." – NY woman

"I don't really know what I think about that. I don't know. I have to be honest. I'm not sure what the MAGA ... **What is that?**" – WI woman

"Just another piece of propaganda." – WI man

"I don't picture David Schweikert as a MAGA extremist." – AZ man

"I feel like if he were MAGA, I would've heard of him by now." – AZ woman

"I think he predates a lot of that movement. He's been around Arizona politics since I moved here, and I've been here for over 20 years." – AZ woman

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# SCOTUS Awareness Is Thin, but Most Are Doubtful the Court Will Make the Right Decisions in the Future

*Moderator: How much do you trust the Supreme Court to make the right decisions these days?*

"I just trust that if they're on the Supreme Court, they should know about the law and I'm just going to trust them. I'm just going to trust them for sure." – NY man

"I don't hear enough about it because I try to tune out of news. I don't feel they should be influenced by any outside sources or political agendas and things like that, so I try to keep myself numb to that as far as what they're voting on." – NY man

"I gave them two thumbs down. I'm thinking of, they've become more politically associated. I believe that their *Roe v. Wade* decision was such a slap in the face and threw women back a hundred years. It's not their right, it's not their place." – NY woman

"There's only been a couple issues like with *Roe versus Wade* and Clarence Thomas, that really puts a bad taste in my mouth. But in general, I have no other reason to not trust them." – AZ woman

"I don't trust them because I think they were... Well, most of them were chosen in order to overturn *Roe versus Wade*. And they've done their job, but they're still there. Well, they're the same people who were chosen for a decision I disagree with, so why do I think they would see things my way on any other issues?" – AZ woman

"After being reminded of that [*Dobbs* decision], I would say I don't agree with them to make the right decision moving forward." – WI man

"I thought that there were sacred parts of our government, and in light of recent things that happened with the leak coming out on their decision and things, that's at least put questions in my mind. Again, can you trust them?" – WI man



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## About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

## About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups on June 13, 2023 with independents and soft partisans in AZ-1, NY-19, and WI-1. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

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