

navigator*

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

Arizonans, North Carolinians, and
Pennsylvanians on the State of the
Economy



Methodology

On August 28, 2024, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with Democrats, independents, and Republicans across various demographics—including a mix across education, gender, race.



Democrats under 40 in Pennsylvania



White soft partisans without a college degree in North Carolina*



Soft partisan men of color voters in Arizona*

*Participants self report to be independent or not strongly identifying with the Democratic or Republican Party

Key Takeaways

- Most feel pessimistic about the economy, both personally and broadly.
- Inflation remains a pervasive worry, as many blame corporate greed and stagnant wages.
- Raising taxes on the wealthy is seen as a way to help everyone.
- From a list of economic proposals, many want to see the government addressing high food prices and medical debt.

Tolerance and Sense of Community Considered Things That Are Going Well

Moderator: Fill in the blank: I feel [BLANK] is going well in the country today.

"I'll say **gender diversity**... I think [the] media has been doing a lot of work to present queer identities or different ways for people to show up in gender and sexuality. I feel like it's just gotten better, although the legislation around it has been up and down." – PA man, independent lean Democrat

"So looking more at local communities and how things are going. I'd say my answer would be similar for two years ago. **I think that COVID brought out a lot of sense of community** in some senses. People wanting to really work locally to make change." – PA woman, weak Democrat

"I'd say class consciousness like **how much we all kind of relate with each other is really good right now**." – NC man, Independent lean Democrat

"**Diversity, making sure everybody's spoken for or included**." – AZ man, weak Democrat

"**I think we're doing a better job on inclusion in general, getting all kinds of people involved and getting people's opinions**." – AZ man, weak Democrat



navigator*

Most Feel the Economy Is Not Going Well, Although Some Offer a Counterpoint

Moderator: What isn't going well in the country today?

"I think just based on just a basic livelihood; it's just been hard for a lot of people. Most people are just getting by. Inflation has obviously been an issue for some. Obviously, things cost more as time moves, but that'll move but where pay doesn't move. So, it seems to be a battle." – PA woman, weak Democrat



"The fact that your dollar doesn't stretch as far because it costs you more to travel, it costs you more just to go to a show, to go to the ball game or to go such different things. Just this adoption of just adding fees that become normal, it's just greed. The fact that people just don't feel like they have enough, or they don't think that penny pitching is hurting anybody. But it all adds up, when it just costs you more and more and doesn't stretch farther and farther, it makes you feel down and out." – AZ man, weak Democrat

"I think we hear a lot of negative messages about the economy, and obviously inflation is always a really scary thing, but there are a lot of positives about the economy when it comes to the job market that we're in, and the job wage growth that we've had over the last several years has been the highest it's been in decades, but that's not the messaging we hear so I think a lot of people get a different message and feel like the economy's in dire straits and it's about to collapse." – NC woman, independent

navigator*

Inflation—Especially Food—Is How People Say They Judge the Economy



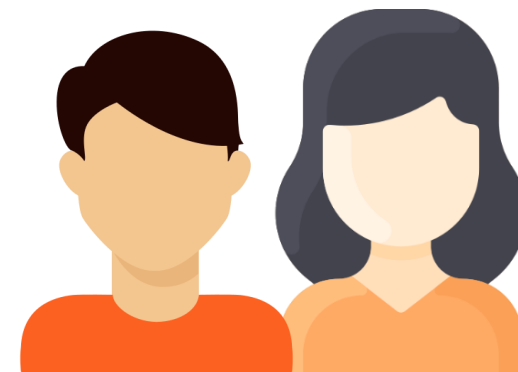
Moderator: What indicators do you use to determine how the economy is doing?

"Food, gas, everything's up. It's hard to get by and I don't think wages are keeping up. Somebody said something about the wages being raised... It's just not keeping up with how fast everything is going up [in price]." – NC man, independent lean Republican

"The biggest issue for me right now is the cost of living, in general. I want to cry every time I go to the grocery store. It's pretty bad." – NC woman, independent lean Republican

"I think I would agree with what a lot of people are saying in regards to inflation and just the rising costs of living, whether that's necessarily like food costs or health care costs or things like that. Yeah, I'm not super in touch with the economy, but just from personal experience I would say that yeah, it's not going great, but I don't really know what the solution is for that." – PA woman, weak Democrat

"Definitely food prices, groceries [are not going well]." – AZ man, independent lean Democrat

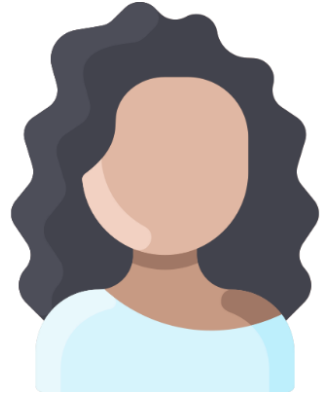


navigator*

Quite a Few Participants Are Experiencing Economic Hardships

Moderator: How are things going for you personally in terms of the economy?

"I've been out of work for about a year. I'm disabled and you know how long the disability hearings can drag on and stuff like that. My hearing is in November and after that it's probably going to be another three months before I hear anything." – PA woman, weak Democrat



"I think the things that I consider are my savings, which I had run through after being unemployed for a while and then recently employing myself and there was an opportunity to buy a home that I just did not have the means to do so because I wasn't there... While I'm able to pay for my bills now, there isn't a sense of generational wealth or just past something of a larger value. Even having my own car, I share it with other people to make it work... And I need it for work, the stuff that I do. So, I think while I'm able to pay for my bills right now and I'm not super worried about where my next meal is coming from, which is a blessing in and of itself, there are larger things that I think are more important to our societies, like our ability to be able to be a contributor to society that I don't quite feel confident in my ability to obtain at this time." – PA man, independent lean Democrat

"I became disabled as a child. I was born with a genetic condition, so I've never worked a traditional job in that sense. But I guess I do feel the effects of it, like with the cost of medical and being on disability. So, I don't know much, but I do know that obviously the cost of living has gone up, but we were in the process of moving and we can't get accepted anywhere. **Me and my fiancée both are disabled and on disability, and we just don't make enough to even make two times rent.** So, it's definitely a problem." – NC woman, independent

navigator*

Citing the Current Inflation Rate Evokes a Variety of Reactions: Disbelief, Surprise, and Frustrations About Corporate Greed

Moderator: Currently, the inflation rate is 2.89 %, down from 8-9% in 2022. How do you feel hearing the current inflation rate?

"How do I feel? Well, numbers don't lie, right? That's what they say. **So yeah, it sounds good. I would rather it low than high. I guess it's more so just on a personal level**, when your personal circle is working two jobs to get by, it's like, yeah, the numbers are low, but personally, the people I know, they're trying to get by whether the number is low or high it sounds like." – PA woman, weak Democrat

"**At least it's slowing a little bit, right?** It's not still up in the 8%, 9% range." – NC man, independent lean Republican

"I think that looking at that number, I guess I don't really have an opinion on whether or not I think it's correct because looking at that number I **don't think [it] is helpful for what I think all of us in this call would experience on a daily basis. Everything that we're just talking about is about cost of products, and that isn't necessarily due to inflation** because the company themselves have the ability to lower the prices, especially large companies. **And we've seen profit margins skyrocket really over the past few decades**, but especially during COVID. And luckily there's a little bit of the government kind of started doing their job a little bit and cracked down on some of it, but a lot of it is still happening." – NC man, independent

"So, it's good to hear that the number percentage wise has gone down for inflation, but I don't think what a lot of people would take into account is that wages haven't gone up at the same rate that inflation has... **So yeah, inflation might be down, but since wages are stagnant, since they've been stagnant since the mid 80s, that really isn't doing as much good as it should be doing...**" – AZ man, weak Democrat

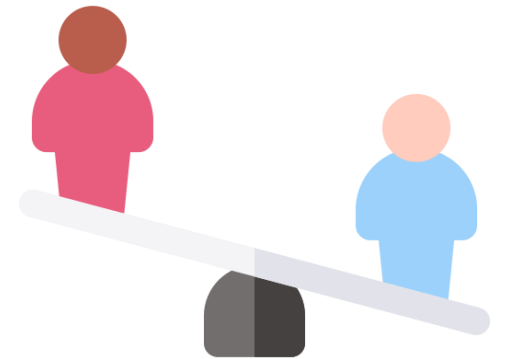
"For me, it just sounds like greed. If inflation is going down, the prices aren't going down." – AZ man, weak Democrat

navigator*

Some Point to Inequality to Explain the Current Economic Situation

“I think everybody should be aware of how much systematic racism affects virtually every facet of American life from educational opportunities to career opportunities. I remember they released a study a couple years ago, if you have an African American sounding last name, your chances of getting canceled by an Uber or Lyft driver are increased by 50%. So, there's so many parts of what should be the American experience that should be equal and that just aren't for those of us.” – AZ man, weak Democrat

“Systemic inequality in every single sector of life I think has an impact on everything we've mentioned [regarding the economy]. Health care, housing, I think it all has a great impact... [Moderator: And how do you know it's happening?] By looking at bigger numbers. Yeah, bigger numbers, bigger sets of outcomes for people. Looking at the patterns. I also think that people's individual choices aren't entirely and only theirs and in their control. It's also about exposure and connections and access and resources and things like that. So, you can point at someone's choices, but if that choice was between choice A and choice B and the correct or better choice was actually choice T and they had never gotten close, then I don't think it has to do with personal choices.” – PA woman, independent lean Democrat



navigator*

Many Are at a Loss to Identify Specific Policy Solutions

“I think our government's just very inefficient in how they respond to things in general... But you see that, lobbyists in D.C. and in the local state, houses are entrenched and they're a big part of the laws getting passed, they get passed. You don't see anybody looking out for the middle class or lower class. You don't see anybody looking out for the little guy. The Democrats certainly do it more than Republicans and they talk about it a lot more. But when it actually comes to it getting passed, at least in most things it doesn't seem to be done. And then partially that's because of Republican obstruction, but still our government doesn't respond as efficiently as it should and some honestly just don't care.” – AZ man, weak Democrat

“I don't know if [the government] should determine prices, but it's hard to say for that because [that is] a slippery slope. **But when you get to a point where you're getting choked, who should you yell out for help? And that's the only thing, our equalizer is the government.**” – AZ man, weak Democrat

“I think it would be a lot more helpful if the government included more people as far as getting approved for programs, whether it's food stamps or health care. When I see programs or see things that people can apply for, it's like low income and yet, those incomes are very low. But nowadays, it just doesn't fit to what low income actually is for a lot of people. To me, when I see those low-income numbers, it's almost like, what is it below poverty line? Low income is almost middle-class for some people or whatever middle-class used to be. So maybe if they actually included more people, raise those guidelines and yearly incomes, it could help a lot more people.” – PA woman, weak Democrat

“For me, the biggest thing that I think [the] government could and should do is decrease defense spending, military spending. I think that would do tremendous things for the average person because then the money could be actually designated towards some of these other programs that we've been told they can't pay for.” – PA woman, independent lean Democrat

navigator*

The Two Parties Lack Distinction Among Participants, Though Democrats More Likely to Help Those in Need

Moderator: Which party is helping you more on the economy? What are Democrats doing? What are Republicans doing?

“Right now, probably I would say, maybe the Democratic side would be better [on the economy], and that's not even saying a great thing. But then the next term, it could be the Republican would be much better.” – NC woman, weak Democrat

“I don't really think there's much that it speaks to me. I know with the Republicans, I've been seeing stuff about their Project 2025 stuff about cutting funds to education and cutting Medicare and those kinds of things... There's nothing that really anybody's doing specifically for me. There's things they're doing that could hurt me, but nothing that I think is going to help me really.” – NC woman, independent

“I'm more familiar with how the Democratic Party is seeking to meet the needs of the everyday American and to meet the needs of where people are. I'm not super attuned to the local Republican Party, so that might also be the case that they are actively trying to work towards change. But I see it, I'm more familiar with it within the Democratic Party.” – PA woman, weak Democrat

“I think the first two things that come to my mind is the course that the transportation bill on the Democratic side to go ahead and ensure that logistically we can be able to go ahead and move around in a country where it safe to do so. And on the Republican side, you look at the tax reform, right? And I was able to go ahead and put more money in people's pockets in the last Republican president in office.” – AZ man, weak Republican

navigator*

Economic Proposal List

- A. Lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%.
- B. Ban price gouging that increases the cost of food and groceries.
- C. Cancel medical debt for millions of Americans.
- D. Extend the Trump Tax cuts which would maintain tax cuts for billionaires.
- E. Allow Medicare to negotiate lower costs of expensive, common prescription drugs more quickly.
- F. Eliminate the federal tax on tips.
- G. Close tax loopholes for corporations and the ultra wealthy not paying their fair share.
- H. Make permanent the Child Tax Credit—a tax cut for most families with children—and create a new \$6,000 tax credit for newborns.
- I. End taxes on Social Security benefits for people earning over \$25,000 a year.
- J. Do not raise taxes on anyone making less than \$400,000 a year.

From the List of Economic Proposals Many Want to Address Food Prices or Health Care Costs

Moderator: Why did you select that proposal as one that would help you the most personally?

"I have a friend that plays basketball overseas and he told me that prices in Europe are literally the price that they are on the shelf and they're cheap. They're way cheaper than American prices... You shouldn't have to pay 300 plus dollars to feed a family of four. It shouldn't cost you an arm and a leg to feed your family or for you to eat. And then they just keep increasing prices and it's crazy." – AZ man, weak Democrat

"Because my mom just recently passed away of dementia. One of the drugs that could have helped her with her Medicare was still going to be \$578 out of pocket. And that was as cheap as we could get it, it was a proven drug that helped, and Big Pharma did not care. And I think that's a huge problem in this system that medicines that actually work, they're charging way too much money for because they know it works. That's like chemo. You've got to have chemo to continue to live if you've got cancer and it's ridiculous. I think we ought to be able to negotiate to where you don't have to choose between heating oil, food, rent, or medicine." – NC woman, independent lean Democrat

"Well, just the price of things is just so crazy and it's literally everything. So, these are things that you need to survive, assuming that you need to eat to survive or just have basic necessities. And having it lower would help a lot of people because people will go online and it's like a trend to show your Walmart grocery order from 2020 and then reordering it now and see the difference of the total and it being over 100% increased cost for the same groceries. Obviously, we all wish it was lower, so I don't know a single person who doesn't wish groceries cost less." – NC woman, independent

"I definitely think we need better health care. It's been a nightmare to navigate anything and not get any help. And then also some sort of universal basic income would be amazing, but I know that's probably never going to happen." – PA woman, weak Democrat

navigator*

Raising Taxes on the Wealthy and Big Corporations Is Seen as a Way to Help Everyone

Moderator: How would raising taxes and closing loopholes for the wealthy or big corporations help you personally?

“I remember watching videos or reading articles about really wealthy executives or companies like Amazon getting away with not paying any taxes. I know there are a couple examples and I'm just thinking, and their accountants are probably paid a lot for helping them save so much money. **I think if we close those loopholes, that'll be a lot of extra money for the middle class or working people, for social services. That's what I was thinking about.**” – PA man, independent lean Democrat

“I mean everything from infrastructure to maintaining roads, all of that stuff. I would want money to be invested that way like it is in many other wealthy countries. It's invested that way. And so wear and tear, my cars decreased, grocery prices are able to be kept in a range, but I think that there's a lot of money that huge corporations are not contributing. And even on an individual level as well, I don't remember the exact figures, but proportionally the amount that the wealthy pay in taxes is very different than it was say 50 years ago.” – PA woman, weak Democrat

“I feel like if they paid their fair share, we'll have a lot more money within our country to be able to fund certain programs or be able to have more outreach and notify people of different programs that are in place because there are a lot of programs that are out there... So, at the end of the year that money just goes away and that money could be put into place and help a lot of people or the money is in place, but it's like it could help a lot more people if our community knew about it.” – AZ man, weak Democrat

“I think it's just the idea that corporations and the ultra wealthy... that's who is making the money. All of this extra money that's in the economy that none of us are touching, those are whose pockets it's in. **So, if we want to try to make life better for as many people as possible, I just feel like everybody needs more fair access to that money.**” – NC woman, independent lean Democrat

navigator*

Though Some of the Details Confuse Participants or Seem Too Hard to Implement

"I didn't exactly know who [corporate tax rate cuts] applies to. So, if that applies to large corporations or small business owners, in which case, I wouldn't want small business owners to be taxed more. But yeah, I just wasn't sure who that would apply to." – PA woman, independent lean Democrat



"I think that the corporations should have higher taxes, but if you [raise] them, and then you can't stipulate who gets the extra money...? Who's getting that money but the people higher up on the corporate ladder? So, I think that if we could force that money to trickle down to the people and the product it'd be different." – NC woman, weak Democrat

"To be fully honest, I think I struggle with words like tax rate and different things like that. I think I just saw that one and just went over it a little bit..." – NC woman, weak Democrat

"Let's be honest, they can raise the taxes for the corporation, but they'll still find a way to pay very little taxes. There's always a way, even with the billionaires. So, you could do what you can, but they'll find their way." – AZ man, weak Democrat



navigator*

Many See “Human Rights” or “Social Issues” Like Abortion to Be Important to Them Personally

“[Economic issues] are harder for people to grasp... I think the issues that I find myself the most connected with are the very human **issues**. So being able to see firsthand how policies and procedures and regulations are affecting the day-to-day people, whereas with tax breaks and stuff like that... Although it does affect us, it's not in the same way as maybe some other issues.” – PA woman, weak Democrat

“**None of this is particularly sexy, for lack of a better word...** [It's] just hard to grasp and requires a whole lot of conversation around any of this stuff to talk about how it affects people.” – PA man, weak Democrat

“I just kind of feel like human rights are the most important and what people would consider your constitutional rights. I would say that the human rights in the Constitution is more important to me than the economy no matter how much the economy may impact me.” – NC woman, independent

“I personally place social issues a little higher, specifically the abortion issue. Once [Roe v. Wade] was rolled back, it just set a very **dangerous precedent...** If Trump gets elected and Project 2025 gets enacted, they're not going to stop at going after women. They're going to start going after us too.” – AZ man, weak Democrat

“I think the only thing that's up in the air is my wife has talked to our daughters about a little bit what's been going on and not too detailed as about the whole abortion thing and things like that. So, for women there is that if Trump gets back in and gets those laws in, I **feel horrible for what the future could hold, not just for women but for people of color.**” – AZ man, independent lean Democrat

navigator*

navigator*

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 August 28, 2024 with younger Democrats in PA, and soft partisans in NC and AZ. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

For Press inquiries contact:

press@navigatorresearch.org

To learn more about Navigator:

<http://navigatorresearch.org>

@NavigatorSurvey on Twitter

navigator*