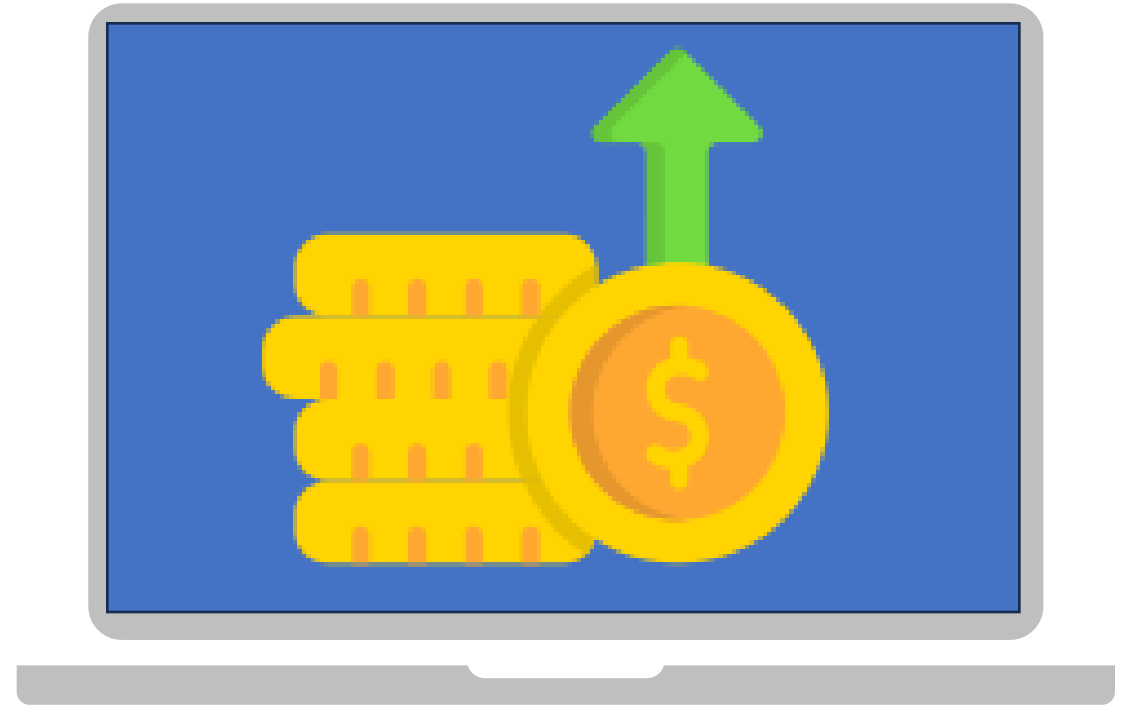


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## FOCUS GROUP REPORT

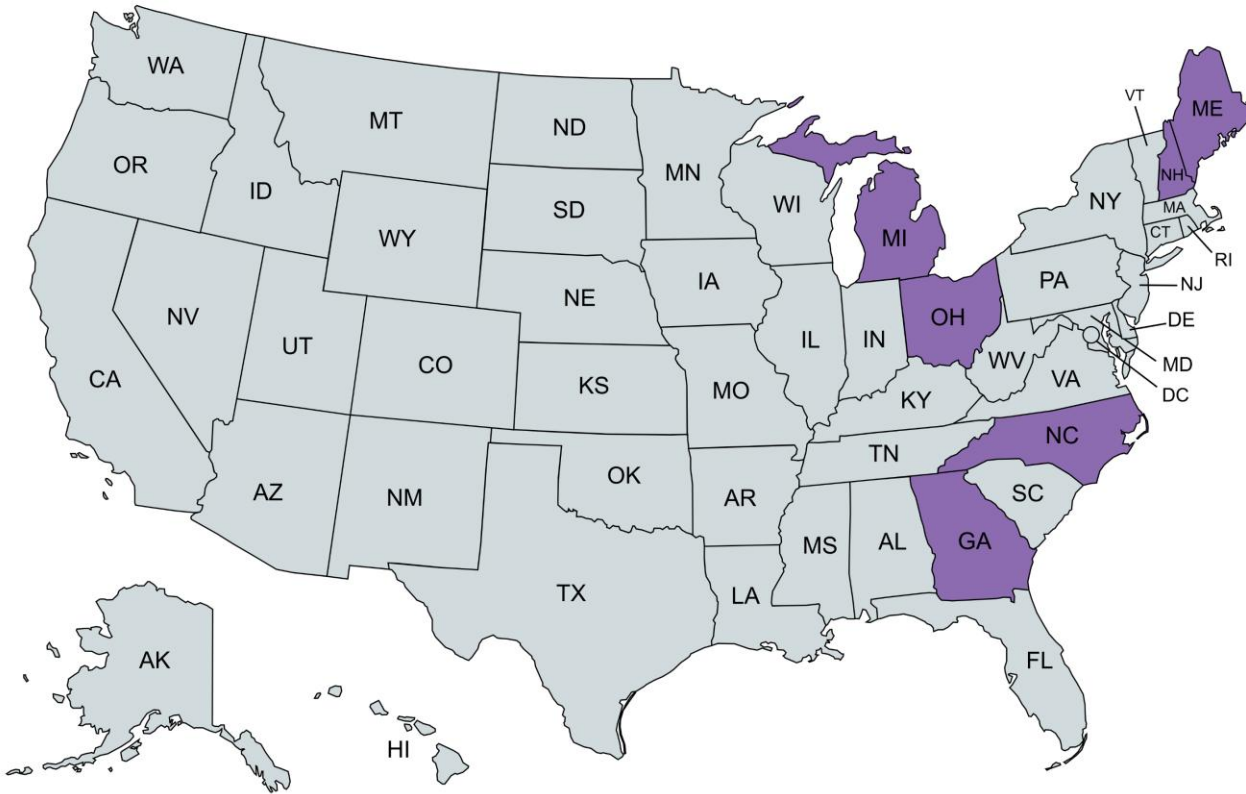
Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Working Class Voters on  
Affordability



# Methodology

On November, 20 2025, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with working class swing voters from battleground Senate states\*.



- ❖ Group 1: Working class women with dependents from NH/ME
- ❖ Group 2: Working class young men of color from GA/NC
- ❖ Group 3: Working class middle aged white men and women from MI/OH

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\*GA, ME, MI, NC, NH, OH

# Key Takeaways

- People feel severe economic pain that's only getting worse
- Some have developed strategies to afford the basics
- Voters think Democrats may have good intentions on the economy, while Republicans uniformly seen as out for the rich
- Universal healthcare is widely seen as a policy that would help

# The Economic Pain People Feel Can Be Deep, With Feelings Of Helplessness

"I'm scared. I'm scared of us losing our healthcare, of him not getting the care that he needs, and me not being able to provide for my family, even though I went to school and got a career to do so." – NH woman, independent

"People are trying to decide, **do I pay my rent or do I eat?** Do I pay my electric bill or do I feed my children?" – OH woman, independent

"You're in the headlights, you're afraid to move, you're afraid to make a move because if you make the wrong move, everything that you have, you could lose....Like Battleship, **you ever play that game Battleship, and it's like you don't know when they're going to take you out.** You don't know what they're going to take away next. You don't know where they're going to hit next." – ME woman, independent lean Democrat

"I was a stay-at-home mom. Now I have to go to work. **I have two health issues that kind of limit what I can do, and I have no choice but to go to work,** to help make ends meet, to help put the food on the table and pay the bills." – OH woman, weak Democrat

"I feel like I **never have enough in savings.** I never feel comfortable enough to stop side hustles or anything like that. It's always a feeling of just got to get it however you can." – GA man, weak Democrat



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# Most See Things As Worsening, Not Improving

"I think the economy's going to tank because when we all lose healthcare starting in January, or most of us like me, I'm going to lose it in January, what is that going to do to the economy? People can't afford to buy anything now. It's going to just kill it." – NH woman, weak Democrat

"I feel like especially in the tech industry, **everything feels really inflated right now** and I'm not sure it's going to end well for any of us." – GA man, independent lean Democrat

[Moderator: What comes to mind when I say the economy?] "Wages being stagnant. The minimum wage that has been the same for so long. **Everything keeps getting more expensive except our paychecks.**" – NH woman, independent lean Democrat

"I think consumer spending is going to be at a **very all time low** this year. I think there's a lot of people spending a lot more and maxing out their credit cards." – GA man, independent

"I think **grocery prices I feel are completely out of control**. Gas prices are out of control. I just think everything is a higher price than things were five years ago." – OH woman, independent

"I find everything is higher priced around here. I find I work, but I'm looking for higher paying job and that's been very discouraging. **Unemployment's up higher than it's been in four years and I don't see it getting better.**" – MI woman, weak Democrat



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# And Worse Than When Their Parents Were Younger

*Moderator: How does your financial situation compare to how your parents might have felt at the same age?*

"I'm in my thirties, so I would say around probably my age, **when I've talked to [my parents], they said things were pretty affordable.** They could rent an apartment, they could go buy a house on a one salary income. I guess it was a lot better compared to my age now. – OH man, weak Democrat

"My mom, she got a really great job working at State Farm, but she didn't need to have a degree....Now, **in this day and age, there's not really any 17-year-old who could leave home and go have an apartment** and finance themselves fully at that age, let alone have a job that's paying you a salary at 17 or 18 without having a degree." – GA man, weak Democrat

"I think in general that **it was a lot better, I would say, 30 years ago** – I'm 41 now, so if [my mom] was 40 – she had already bought a house by then. Like I said, I think it would be a lot different." – MI man, independent

"Back [when my parents were my age], the prices of things, they would complain about the price of things back then. And when they tell me about these things, I feel surprised because I'm like, **'Oh, please, I want to have those prices now.'**" – NC man, independent

"And back to my parents or even me, I'm 60, so when I was 30, I was married, we had a house, we had two incomes, and we were very comfortable. **My girls who are late twenties... They can't go buy a house, especially not by themselves.**" – MI woman, weak Democrat



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# Beyond Simply “Inflation,” Many Can Name Specific Challenges Like SNAP, The Job Market, Or Electricity

*Moderator: What are you most worried about financially? What keeps you up at night, if anything?*

**"I get \$64 a month in food stamps. At the beginning of this year, January 25, I had \$257 in food stamps every month and every month since consistently, they kept cutting it down, cutting it down, cutting it down to the point where I now get \$64 a month in food stamps, which does not buy very much at all."** – NH woman, independent lean Democrat

**"I've applied to over 50 jobs and I've heard back from five, if that, and they were all rejection things. And again, I've been a nurse now for 21 years."** – NH woman, independent

**"I had a big leak in my house and my water bill was extremely high and trying to get my landlord to work that out with the water company is the pits. But electric, Georgia Power's been high coming off this summer."** – GA man, weak Democrat

**"I currently work at a retail job where the wage isn't great and I guess hasn't been for a while. I do have a degree in technology and have been applying to jobs in the tech industry and it's been tough getting responses."** – GA man, independent lean Democrat

**"Right now my biggest stress is getting through this winter with heating and I have a wood fireplace, so I'm up three times a night. So I'm not sleeping. I'm not sleeping. I'm just trying to get through a night or day."** – ME woman, weak Republican

**"The electric bill... In Maine, it's horrific. And I'll be honest, I haven't been able to pay, with the cut in my pay right now, I haven't been able to put really anything on my electric bill."** – ME woman, weak Republican

**"The price of natural gas is outrageous... Every bill I got, it ate probably about maybe 40% of my paycheck and it was crazy. I had to switch [to electric]"** – NC man, independent lean Democrat



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# Many Have Developed Strategies To Make Or Save Extra Money



"I started investing in ways to make myself more versatile. I **became a notary public**, [I'm] thinking about going to school to get some other certificates." – NH woman, independent

"I've also taken on **an additional job** to cover the additional things that I want that don't take away from the items that my paycheck pays for" – OH woman, independent

"**Pokémon cards and comic books**, I've been going pretty heavy in those in the past couple of years, probably the past year or so, and I think over time, that's definitely going to continue to turn out profitable." – GA man, weak Democrat

"My approach this past year has been to look around my house and start getting rid of the things that...I'm ready to get rid of...I **have yard sales**. I'm stocking that money away." – MI woman, weak Republican

"I'm **trying to invest in stocks**. I'm like a noob in the stock thing, crypto and everything. So, I've been on Reddit, I've been on YouTube trying to find the best stock to invest in." – NC man, independent

"[I've saved money by] **not eating out or eating out less** or for me, I've switched, just grocery-wise, I've switched from going to Walmart to I'm going to Aldi." – GA man, weak Democrat

"We essentially **eliminated all travel**. Where we traveled quite frequently before, it's nonexistent now." – OH man, independent lean Republican

"We have **cut our grocery bill in half**....You just don't buy as much and just make do with what you have. There's more chicken and rice and things that are lower costing than the things that you really want." – OH woman, weak Democrat

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# Some Describe Having To Use Buy Now, Pay Later Services Like Klarna

"I buy my groceries with my Cash App card so that I can use Afterpay and break the payments down to three or four payments so that I can actually afford the groceries." – NH woman, independent lean Democrat

"I really like the paying for stuff and the buy now, pay later for... It's helpful." – NC man, weak Republican

"I think in essence, [Afterpay is] pretty helpful, but I've been seeing people use it for stuff like groceries or eating out, which can be a slippery slope. I work in a retail store, people are buying clothes with Klarna, so I guess it's a bit dangerous." – GA man, independent lean Republican

"Sometimes when it comes to higher-priced stuff that my older daughter might ask for, I might use a Klarna or something." – GA man, weak Democrat

"In order to get dog food recently I had to do a split and four payment type plan and I've never had to do that before." – ME woman, weak Republican

"I've been having to use Klarna for car repairs, like a set of tires or new alternator, something like that, I'll do it. But usually I try to avoid it for everything else, just mostly use it for car repairs." – NC man, independent lean Democrat



"I've done those after-pay [programs] and then I got behind and now I can't do them anymore." – NH woman, weak Republican

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# There Is A Perception Of A Lack Of “Balance” Between The Wealthy And Everyone Else

“Why is all of it going up anyway? Just so someone else can make another dollar, so someone else can get more money? We're not seeing any more money, but they're seeing more, so I feel like **it's just unbalanced.**” – OH woman, weak Democrat

“Honestly, about the last couple of years, it just seems like **the rich are richer, the poor are poorer.** There's not a whole lot of middle class around me. Either you can afford things or you can't...I'm not saying that rich people need to give to less fortunate people, but there has to be some way to even it out. I don't know the answer, but I don't think it's fair.” – MI woman, weak Democrat

“**People like Bezos, Elon Musk, Zuckerberg,** these people who are billionaires who could solve problems like homelessness and hunger and stuff, **they should be taxed more, period.** They should pay their share. It's not fair.” – NH woman, independent

“I feel like **there's a boiling point that's happening.** If we get too far over, we're going to go over the edge. It's going to be not a good place for the US....If you're above a certain median income, then everything is going good. If you're below it, people are getting frustrated. It's been like that for a long time, but I don't know, it just seems like this last year's just getting worse.” – MI man, independent

“We have an interstate highway system because Eisenhower put a 75% wealth tax on the wealthiest people in the country so that we can afford to build the highways. That is reasonable. That makes sense. **Tax the people with the money, not the people without the money.**” – NH woman, independent lean Democrat



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# Trump Seen As Out Of Touch; Several Mention The Ballroom

"We have someone who was born with a silver spoon in their mouth who has no empathy and basically was fighting [against feeding] poor people with the whole shutting down of SNAP." – NH woman, independent

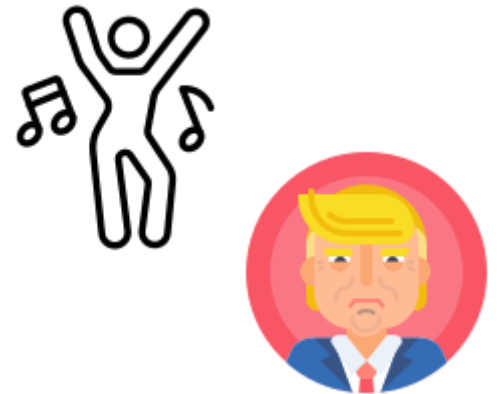
"[Trump has] built this big ballroom and you can see the whole laundry list of people that gave him money basically for his influence." – NC man, independent lean Democrat

"How about a ballroom?...A billion dollars. How much was it? \$5 billion, \$3 billion or something? Do we really need a ballroom, ladies? Are we going to go to a fucking dance?...They're all out for themselves. 'Let's do the ballroom. Let's do stuff that don't need to be done and screw the American people.'" – ME woman, independent

"I don't think [Trump] has one clue what people who are struggling go through. I don't think he cares. I don't think he knows." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"I blame Trump. He's greedy, he wants to make money for him and his rich friends. They are throwing Americans aside, cutting SNAP...Everything's gone to the wayside so that the rich can get richer." – NH woman, weak Democrat

"I see the president building a ballroom when there's people that can't feed their families." – MI woman, weak Democrat



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# Democrats Seen As Having Good Intentions But Failing At Messaging Or Execution

*Moderator: How would you describe the Democratic Party's approach when it comes to the economy?*

"I don't think [Democrats] message well. So the Republicans like to promote themselves as being for the economy or they're going to be better for the economy. But the bottom line is, they're not." – NH woman, weak Democrat

"It feels like [Democrats are for] whatever the Republicans aren't saying or what they're against, because it's always the opposite....It's for themselves honestly, so they can get re-elected because, like I said, there's no particulars, there's no exact numbers, there's no, 'Oh, we're going to do this step, this step, this step to get these things done.'" – NC man, independent lean Democrat

"[Democrats are] no longer addressing the middle class. They're addressing groups of people and not [the] mass." – ME woman, independent lean Democrat

"Democrats are like puppies. They believe the affection you show them in the moment, and then as soon as you're gone they forget everything." – NH woman, independent lean Democrat

"I think [Democrats are] more about middle-class, more about socialized medicine, things like that. More for everybody having what everybody else has in terms of insurance, things like that." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"I think the Democratic Party is mostly there to help the poor or middle class people struggling, stuff like that." – OH man, weak Democrat



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# Republicans Seen As Far More Focused On The Wealthy

*Moderator: How would you describe the Republican Party's approach when it comes to the economy?*

"I don't even think [Republicans are] about getting wealthy or getting by. I think they would like to help people stay wealthy who are already wealthy, or people who are already wealthy get wealthier. Because just with the recent thing with food stamps or whatever, taking away food stamps is not going to help anybody get by or help anybody get wealthy." – GA man, weak Democrat

"[Republicans' approach is] 'if you have money, we like you. If you don't have money, fuck you.'" – NH woman, independent lean Democrat

"I just feel like [Republicans] just care about the wealthy. That's it." – NH woman, independent

"I think [Republicans] are helping a small group of people. It's an oligarchy and they're just helping the corporations more than the people." – GA man, independent

"I would say President Trump is the umbrella and people that own the big companies, like Palantir, the big companies are under the umbrella and Donald Trump is keeping them dry. I feel like they're the ones that are kind of running policy and Trump is just the one that's signing off on them." – NC man, independent lean Democrat

"[Republicans are] definitely not fighting for people like me at all. It's mostly [the] rich and ultra wealthy. That's all in their mind. Just look at the huge tax breaks they gave the wealthy, I mean, come on." – OH man, weak Democrat

"Trickle down.  
[Republicans have] stayed consistent with that theme since Reagan, enhancing the wealthy and everything will fall down and enhance the people on the bottom." – OH man, independent lean Republican

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# Many Still Feel That “No One Is Fighting For Them”

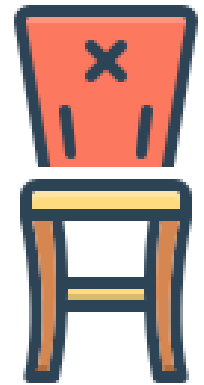
**“I think all politicians suck.** They say, ‘I’m going to do this and do that, and I’ll give you a candy cane.’ But yet they don’t do this and they don’t do that and they don’t give you the candy cane. They just want to have your vote and then they do what they want, just like Trump’s doing.” –ME woman, independent

**“I think both parties are fighting for the same interest** because after Citizens United, after that, it allowed companies to basically donate as much as they want. So, when you’re getting millions of dollars from a company, you’re not going to listen to the people you’re serving.” – GA man, independent lean Democrat

**“I don’t think your local politicians really care about the low, the peons, per se.** I think they’re going to do what they want to do when they want to do it.” – OH woman, independent

**“I don’t think unless you’ve walked in the shoes of people that are struggling, that are living paycheck to paycheck, that are struggling to pay their bills, that are struggling to feed their children, I just don’t think they understand and are willing to fight for that, because they’ve never been through it.”** – OH woman, independent

**“I think nothing’s going to change until our government decides that we’re a priority,** that lowering the cost of things is a priority of giving us affordable healthcare is a priority, and it doesn’t seem to be a priority right now.” – ME woman, weak Democrat



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# Universal Health care Is Seen As Solving Many Challenges

*Moderator: If you could wave a wand and make one economic policy or reform happen, what would it be?*

"Universal healthcare. It's not necessarily perfect healthcare, but healthcare for everyone." – ME woman, weak Democrat

"Free healthcare like Canada has." – NH woman, weak Republican

"Cut back on the military spending overnight and **everybody** could have universal healthcare." – ME woman, independent lean Democrat

"I've actually said this, I thought this since I was 18, I'm going to die on this hill. Universal healthcare...I already pay a tax to my insurance company, 20%. I'll pay 25% if **everyone** in the country gets to have universal healthcare, everyone else does it." – MI man, independent

"I would say universal healthcare. I think that would be fair. I think that's a fair thing to do." – MI woman, weak Democrat



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# Some Also Offer Ending Income Tax Or Bernie Sanders As North Stars

**"Get rid of income tax.** And that would be extremely radical, but it would give, because I'm not going to lie, I don't even know what income tax goes to... I guess, it goes to federal programs and stuff like that. But I just feel like it [costs] more money to the working people and the people that need it the most." – GA man, weak Democrat

**"I would rather [get rid of income tax] than a \$2,000 stimulus check** that won't do much in the long run." – GA man, independent

**"I think the only person who [understood what I was going through economically] would be Bernie Sanders,** I feel like just talking about stuff like how bad student loans are for the youth and how important universal healthcare is, I feel like those are two things he is always been consistent about." –GA man, independent lean Democrat

**"Bernie Sanders, I think he understands.** He's obviously wealthy, but he understands. He's trying to see things from other people's point of view." – MI man, independent

**"A bold thing...would be something like where an official forces cities to allow apartments in every neighborhood** or they promised free college training for anyone who wants a trade job." – NC man, independent



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# Some Say Only Working Class Politicians “Get It” And Struggle To Identify Candidates Or Policies That Could Help

“No [I can’t think of any politicians that get it], because I’m 28 and so now I am [in] my more economically aware state of life.” – GA man, weak Democrat

[Moderator: Can you think of a time you saw, ‘Oh, this elected official, they really get it?'] “Not anymore... I think it's pretty near impossible today because they couldn't get in that position with having experienced what normal people experienced. They'd have to have significant money to get to the position of being elected.” – OH man, independent lean Republican

“I can't think of anybody [that gets it]. I think if they're elected officials, they've run a campaign. They've gotten a lot of money. And like he said if they did experience hardship, it was a long time ago.” – MI woman, weak Democrat

“I'd like to hear [politicians are] working to find a way to make things less expensive, find out what's causing all this money. I don't know if it's the tariffs. I don't think it's just that because this has been happening for longer than the tariffs began.” – ME woman, weak Republican

“I think you [have to have struggled] to actually get it. You could say you get it, but I think to actually feel it, I think you have to experience it. You can't just say it.” – OH man, independent lean Republican

“I really feel that for an elected official, background is everything and someone who had to struggle, not upper middle class, but kind of like a lower middle class and below understands.” – NH woman, independent

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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; Mike Podhorzer; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

## About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups with working class swing voters from battleground Senate states (GA, ME, MI, NC, NH, OH)

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<http://navigatorresearch.org>

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