



## FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

# National Working-Class Voters

March 28, 2022

### TOP TAKEAWAYS

- Inflation is impacting the lives of working-class voters. They largely blame government policies for causing inflation and are leery of government intervention and promises to reduce inflation.
- Working-class voters view fuel prices as a major indicator of inflation. They believe that American energy independence can help lower fuel prices and say that government policies disadvantage domestic oil and gas production, leading the U.S. to rely on foreign countries for petroleum products, which increases the cost of fuel.
- Working-class voters are comfortable in their current economic status and want to be made to feel secure in the middle class.

### THE BIGGEST ISSUES

**Inflation:** Inflation is a leading issue for voters in this group. A focus on inflation is unsurprising given voters' general tendency to be most concerned about pocketbook issues, and the soaring inflation level currently is hitting respondents square in the pocketbook. This is an especially critical issue for this group of voters because they have less disposable income that can be allocated to rising costs.

**Energy Independence:** Gas prices are one of the major indicators of inflation to this group of respondents because it is also one of the most visible. While voters in other economic classes have jobs that permit work-from-home scenarios, this group specifically mentions having to travel to work and the increased financial burden they face as a result of rising prices. They believe energy independence can reduce costs at the pump and can be accomplished if government would prioritize domestic energy production.

**Security in the Middle Class:** Participants are worried about slipping out of the middle class because of inflation. They want to see government policies that give them security in the middle class and help others achieve that status as well.

## WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS THINK?

### **Government is a major contributor to inflation, and participants expressed skepticism that government can fix inflation.**

- Participants place a great deal of blame at the feet of government when it comes to the problem of inflation, especially in the areas of spending and interventionism.
- Voters say that government spending is a leading contributor of inflation. They think government should rein in spending in order to bring inflation under control. Most express support for rolling back spending to pre-COVID-19 levels, while one says government should roll back spending to “the Clinton era.”
- Members of this group say unnecessary government intervention is another cause of inflation. COVID-19 stimulus checks, also related to government spending, are specifically mentioned as an unnecessary intervention (“giving stimulus checks to people that don’t need them”) that led to current levels of inflation. Older participants harken back to the late 1970s and are concerned about other government-based interventions, such as price fixing and skyrocketing interest rates. Participants want government out of the way and want to let the market correct inflation.
- Participants are concerned that inflation and a struggling economy are not going away. Again, older respondents see parallels to the Carter administration and say that “history repeats itself.”
- While all of these voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who talks about fixing inflation, they had one overwhelmingly popular question rooted in deep skepticism: “How?” To compel voters to support inflation-busting candidates and policies, the messages must be about specific solutions and how they will work, not simply hollow or empty promises.

### **Inflation is causing participants to make sacrifices in their spending habits.**

- Gas prices are the most mentioned and most visible indicator of inflation, and participants are altering, or considering altering, their behavior as a result. Because this group of voters cannot work from home, gas prices are eating into any extra money they may have previously had. Participants say they have stopped eating in restaurants to save the gas that would be used to travel to a restaurant (in addition to the cost savings of the meal itself), are considering purchasing different vehicles to save on gas, or have even had to cut their grocery budget to pay for gas.

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- Participants also note that grocery costs have increased dramatically. They indicate that the rising costs of groceries—doubling in some cases—have caused them to make changes in their spending.
- A few respondents note that they are caretakers for their aging parents who are presumably on a fixed income. These voters are having to make cuts in their own family budgets to supplement the income of their aging parents, which isn't going as far given the levels of inflation.

### **Unanimous support for the Keystone XL Pipeline is driven by a desire for energy independence.**

- Voters strongly believe the United States should be self-sufficient in our production and use of energy. They say that relying on other countries (Russia was specifically mentioned) for oil and gas drives up costs of only petroleum products and hits these participants hard at the pump. They view energy independence as a way to “dramatically” reduce inflation.
- In addition to reopening the Keystone XL Pipeline, these voters want to see other domestic production, such as more drilling and modernizing American refineries to accommodate the refining of the type of oil that is produced domestically. However, they view these as long-term solutions toward energy independence and want to see more immediate measures, like reducing or eliminating the gas tax, put in place for short-term relief.
- Participants say that tapping into the strategic oil reserves is not a solution.

### **Working-class voters see programmatic inconsistencies and political ambition as standing in the way of welfare reform.**

- Voters indicate that they believe strongly in work requirements for able-bodied adults on welfare, but they say that inconsistencies in government programs and the ambition of elected officials get in the way of implementing the work requirement.
- Respondents say that state policies require individuals to demonstrate they are looking for work in order to receive unemployment benefits. They say that the same types of systems can and should be used to verify that other welfare recipients are working to remain eligible.
- They also say that the issue of work requirements is “polarizing” and that the reason politicians don't implement the policy is because doing so would “cost them votes.”

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- Participants take pride in their communities and recognize the failure of policies and politicians in other areas of the country. One respondent (from Georgia) says, “Worst case scenario...we end up with a lot more of what you see over in California—in San Francisco and L.A., in the Bay Area. We don’t want that in our neighborhoods...there has to be some kind of leadership.”

### **Respondents say are worried about falling out of the middle class because of inflation. They want policies that help others rise to the middle class.**

- Working-class voters express some worry that because of inflation, they are not secure in the middle class. They want government policies that get out of the way of the economy and let the markets fix inflation and secure their status.
- They also want policies that move other people into the middle class *without denigrating the lower class*. They overwhelmingly support policies that get the government out of the way and let individuals chart their own paths. They support policies that provide public information about the cost of college and earning potentials (although some expressed skepticism that this should be done by government) and that let individuals choose whether college or a trade school is better for them, such as making education funding available for non-college education. They say especially that funding needs to be available for trade schools because there aren’t enough tradesmen coming through the ranks to replace the aging and retiring population in the trades.
- Participants do not like “fast track” language. They prefer language like “pathway to success” and “expanding the middle class.” Words like “success” and “security” were also very popular.