



January 16, 2026

Message for Working Class Voters

Survey Results

To: Interested Parties

From: GQR and The Century Foundation

Working class voters are both hurting and angry; leaders need to speak to both emotions to reach these constituencies where they are and need to do something about it. At a core level, these voters need more money in their pocket to get through the month. A 54 percent majority of non-college voters have had to dip into their savings to meet daily expenses and four in ten have skipped a meal to save money. These voters do not suffer quietly. They blame big corporations and a political class which enables them for their challenges, and embrace a whole range of populist policies to improve their lives.¹

Things are Bad and Will Not Get Much Better

A 68 percent majority of non-college voters describes the economy as doing “not very well” or “not well at all,” a number which balloons to 85 percent among Black working class voters. What is more, few voters—college or non-college—believe things will get better any time soon. A whopping 81 percent of non-college voters (84 percent among college educated voters) believe prices will continue to go up over the next two years.

This economy has produced real suffering among voters, particularly non-college voters, and among younger voters and women as well. A majority have put off major purchases — behavior which ripples through the entire economy. One in three have missed payments (half among younger people), one in four are working side-jobs and nearly a third (37 percent among younger people) have delayed medical treatment.

¹ This memorandum summarizes a mixed mode survey commissioned by the Century Foundation taken October 14-24, 2025 of 1,426 registered voters. The survey includes a base sample of 1,026 voters and oversamples of 200 Hispanic non-college voters and 200 Black non-college voters. For the purpose of this analysis, non-college voters are defined as working class voters.

Figure 1: Economic Life Changes

% Yes	Total	Non-College	Young (18-49)	Young Women	Black
Switched to less expensive or bought fewer groceries	64	69	72	77	74
(SPLIT) Tapped into your savings to meet daily expenses	48	54	55	60	55
Delayed a major purchase like a car or appliance	46	50	54	56	50
Was late paying a bill or skipped payment	35	42	49	54	56
(SPLIT) Reduced contributions to your retirement savings	35	39	40	43	36
Skipped a meal to save money	34	41	45	47	44
(SPLIT) Used a "buy now, pay later" product to spread out the cost of purchases	32	36	46	48	45
(SPLIT) Delayed or went without medical care or treatment	29	34	37	38	32
Took a second job, side hustle, or gig work	27	29	42	45	35
(SPLIT) Delayed or skipped buying medicine prescribed by your doctor	24	30	32	39	27
(SPLIT) Took a short-term loan against your paycheck to get through the month	16	19	24	24	25

There Are Villains in this Story

Working class voters do not suffer with equanimity. The people they blame the most are corporations who have grown richer in this period and the political class that empowers them.

- One of the biggest problems working class voters see in this country, outside of “earnings not keeping up with rising costs,”² is that “wealthy people and big corporations are rarely held accountable when they break laws meant to protect consumers and working people.” An 82 percent majority of non-college voters believe this is a problem and 62 percent rank it a major problem.
- Voters react negatively to “billionaires” (50 percent unfavorable, 27 percent favorable among non-college voters--52 percent negative among moderates--as well as prescription drug companies and health insurance companies.
- By nearly a 2:1 margin, non-college voters believe, “most very wealthy people in this country get ahead by rigging the system and taking advantage of people,” rather than, “most very wealthy people in this country get ahead with ingenuity and hard work,” (62 to 38 percent). A 66 majority of self-ascribed moderates also contend the economy is rigged, as do 61 percent among college educated voters.
- Voters support getting corporate money out of politics. A massive, bi-partisan majority supports “banning corporate money in politics to reduce the influence of the wealthy and big corporations.” Just 14 percent oppose.

² The biggest problem in this country according to voters.

Figure 2: Problems in this Country

% A Problem	College	Non-College
Earnings are not keeping up with rising costs.	86	82
(SPLIT) Wealthy people and big corporations are rarely held accountable when they break the laws meant to protect consumers and working people.	82	82
(SPLIT) Health insurance companies using artificial intelligence to deny treatments prescribed by doctors.	72	74
(SPLIT) Corporations have too much power, stifling competition, raising prices and ripping off consumers.	76	75
(SPLIT) Health insurance companies deny treatments prescribed by doctors.	73	75
(SPLIT) Big corporations drive small neighborhood businesses out of business, hollowing out local communities.	70	72
AI data centers use massive amounts of electricity, driving up energy bills	68	63
Government regulation and red tape make it too hard for businesses to create new jobs	59	58
Immigrants take American jobs and lower wages for American workers	35	48

Massive Support for Populist Public Policy

Not surprisingly in this context, a huge array of policies aimed at getting more money into the pockets of working Americans and holding corporations accountable generate broad, bi-partisan support among college and non-college voters alike. While all these proposals amass huge majorities, among the notable policies include banning insurance companies from denying treatment prescribed by doctors (88 percent support), breaking up corporate monopolies (86 percent), preventing big banks from buying single-family homes (84 percent) and breaking up big tech (79 percent among working people).

Figure 3: Populist Policy Support

% Total Support	Total	Non-College	Moderate
Ban tech companies from getting access to children's private data through their schools.	89	88	89
Ban health insurance companies from denying patients the treatments and medicine their doctors recommend.	88	88	87
Increase Social Security benefits to help seniors deal with rising costs, paid for by increasing Social Security taxes on incomes over \$180,000	86	86	87
Break up corporate monopolies that stifle competition and increase costs.	86	86	86
Invest in building housing to help lower housing costs.	86	86	87
Lower tax rates for small businesses and raise tax rates for big corporations.	86	87	88
Ban corporate money in politics to reduce the influence of the wealthy and big corporations.	86	85	88
Ban Wall Street banks and hedge funds from buying up single-family homes which raises housing costs for both owners and renters.	84	84	83
Limit the federal government's ability to dictate school curriculum, so that parents and teachers can have a say.	82	84	86
Require corporations poised to make billions of dollars from AI to contribute to a fund that could be used to retrain workers who will lose their jobs to AI.	82	83	81
Make it easier for all workers to join a union so they can bargain for better wages and benefits.	78	79	80
Break up Big Tech companies so a handful of billionaires can't control the Internet.	78	79	79
(SPLIT) Adopt a Medicare for All system which would provide all Americans with health care coverage, paid for by the federal government.	74	71	76
Provide all <u>working and middle class</u> families access to free <u>child care</u> , paid for by a tax on big corporations.	74	74	78
(SPLIT) Raise the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 to a living wage of \$17 an hour.	74	74	78
(SPLIT) Raise the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 to a living wage of \$25 an hour.	69	70	75
(SPLIT) Lower the age of Medicare gradually over five years so that eventually all Americans would be covered by Medicare.	67	71	72

Conclusion

Working class voters have had enough. Many barely scrape by, watch the wealthy grow richer at their expense and watch with growing anger a political class that cannot get it together to do anything about it. A winning message addresses both frustration with things like breaking up monopolies and stopping big banks from raising housing costs, but also their immediate needs with things like raising wages, cutting costs and expanding Social Security.