

What's on the Minds of Persuadable Voters in Michigan and Minnesota?

Both Michigan and Minnesota are must-win states for the Democratic nominee in the upcoming 2020 presidential election. Michigan played a pivotal role in Donald Trump's 2016 victory – the state voted for a Republican president for the first time since 1988, shattering the so-called “Blue Wall.” While Minnesota has been a more consistently blue state (at least in presidential races), Trump lost by a razor-thin margin of just 1.52 percent in a contest where Hillary Clinton did not win a majority of votes.

To better understand how voters are processing the current political moment in these key states, Working America deployed its professional canvassers to working-class communities to better understand their views on hot button issues and how they judge the president's first term in office. The findings in our latest Front Porch Focus Group report revealed that while there are divisions between urban and rural areas, voters in these states are more often than not aligned in their support for a strong progressive agenda, creating an opening for Democrats.

Working America canvassers spoke with 280 persuadable and Democratic-leaning infrequent voters in Michigan (Macomb, Monroe, and Wayne counties) and 150 persuadable voters in the suburban Twin Cities area in Minnesota from December 17, 2019 through January 17, 2020. We augmented these interviews with an additional 566 online responses from the Minnesota suburbs and exurbs. To identify persuadable voters, Working America's unique targeting model combines analysis of dozens of our randomized clinical canvass trials conducted during elections over the last decade. The persuasion model ranks voters on the likelihood they will change their candidate preference because of conversations with our canvassers. We used past vote history to identify the Democratic-leaning voters.

These crucial segments of voters in Michigan and Minnesota who are likely to be persuaded are just the sort of voters that Democrats need to engage and win over this fall.

MICHIGAN

Michigan’s support for Donald Trump in 2016 was both historic – it was the first time the state had backed a Republican in more than 30 years – and crucial to Trump’s 2016 victory.

Democrats lost this “Blue Wall” state by just 0.23 percentage points – the narrowest margin of victory for Trump across all 50 states.

Our recent conversations in Michigan centered in suburban Macomb, rural Monroe and urban Wayne county communities. Southeastern Michigan is significant in statewide elections because it makes up 49 percent of the state’s electorate, but progressives will still need to make gains in other more rural parts of the state to secure a win in 2020. We sought to understand voter opinion across geographies.

Recent Findings

Working America canvassers began each front-porch conversation by asking the voter to identify the issue that matters most. Across the three counties, we found similarities among voters on their top issues. Regardless of whether someone was a Democratic base voter in Wayne County or a Republican in Monroe County, they were likely to name health care as their chief concern. After health care, our segment of Michigan voters ranked jobs and the economy and concerns about government corruption as most important.

Top Issue	Monroe n=67	Macomb n=140	Wayne n=73
Health Care	21%	24%	22%
Jobs/Economy	13%	18%	18%
Gov. Corruption	10%	14%	6%
Retirement	8%	2%	6%
Education	6%	7%	14%
Transportation/ Infrastructure	3%	6%	11%
Trump's Policies	3%	3%	10%

Source: Working America Front Porch Focus Group Report, 2020

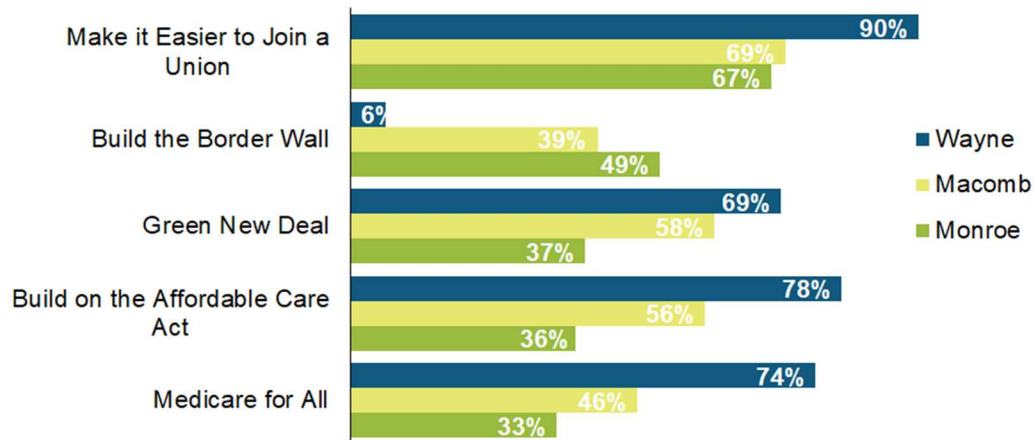
Despite similarities on voters’ top issues, we found contrasts between urban Wayne County and rural Monroe County on support for policy proposals that address immigration, the environment and health care.

Contrasting Support for Policy Proposals

Respondents saying “support” for each policy issue

By Geography

n=280



Source: Working America Front Porch Focus Group Report, 2020

Support for building on the Affordable Care Act or the Green New Deal was considerably lower in exurban/rural Monroe county than in urban Wayne and suburban Macomb counties, where these proposals garner solid support from voters.

Where we found strong unified support among voters in all three counties was their support for making it easier to join a union.

Spotlight on Macomb County

Perhaps more than any other county in America, Macomb County, Michigan, has proven to be a bellwether in recent presidential elections. Macomb County is known as the home of the “Reagan Democrat.” After voting for Barack Obama in both 2008 and 2012, the county voted for Donald Trump in 2016. Between 2016 and 2018, Macomb swung again, voting to put Democrat Gretchen Whitmer in the governor’s office. Macomb County’s shift from Republican to Democrat between 2016 and 2018 was the largest of any county in the state.

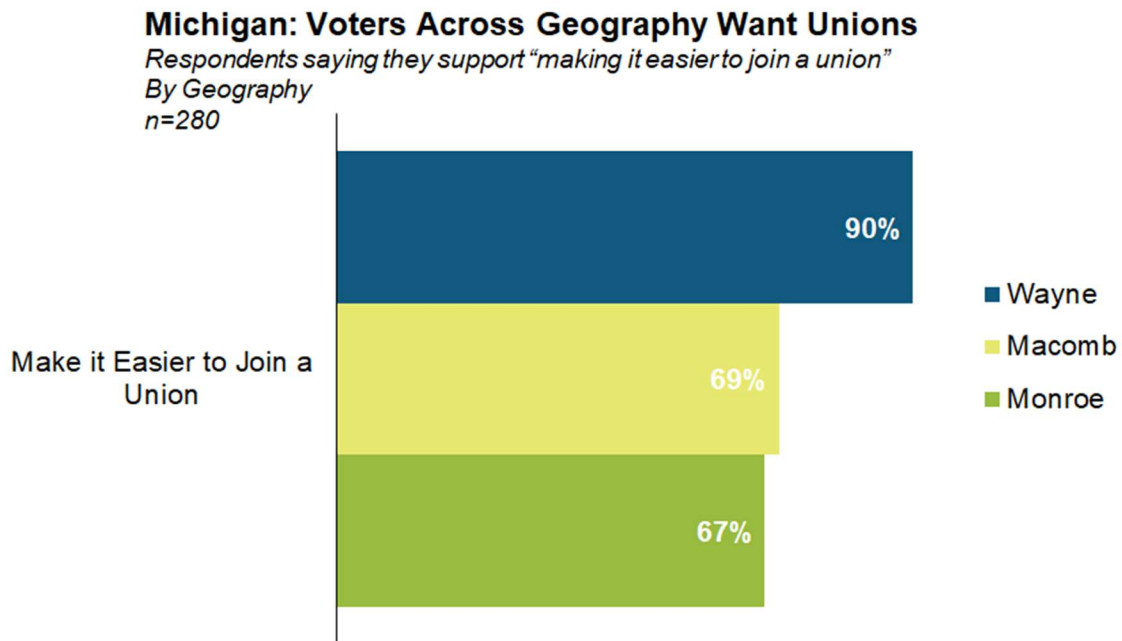
So, which way are Macomb voters leaning on policy issues in 2020? Whomever the nominee ends up being, our findings show that persuadable Macomb County voters are receptive to progressive policies regardless of political ideology and are eager for change, underscoring that voters in this iconic county don’t fit neatly into partisan or ideological categories.

When asked about Donald Trump’s plan to repeal the ACA, Marlene, a 60-year-old Macomb County resident and Trump supporter, said, “I don’t want him to touch that; he better leave that alone!” Another Macomb County resident, Stacey, a 33-year-old, said she wasn’t sure about Medicare for All, but spoke passionately about the need for universal health care, saying, “People are dying due to no insurance, and even when they do [have insurance], the insurance companies often deny coverage or procedures.”

According to Working America’s persuasion model, Macomb County has over 190,000 voters modeled as “persuadable.” Yet to win statewide, progressives must also increase their vote share in suburban and non-urban counties. Beyond Macomb County, there are 910,000 persuadable voters in the Detroit metro area and a total of two million across Michigan.

The Political Appeal of Unions

It should come as no surprise that in Michigan, the cradle of industrial unionism, voters across the political spectrum recognize the value of unions, as well as the role of government policy in making it more difficult to form and join a union. Since the passage of “right-to-work” laws in 2013, Michigan has lost roughly 44,000 union members. Our conversations revealed that Michiganders value unions and want to return to higher union density in the state. These voters, regardless of race, community or partisanship, want to see collective bargaining rights expanded by the next president.

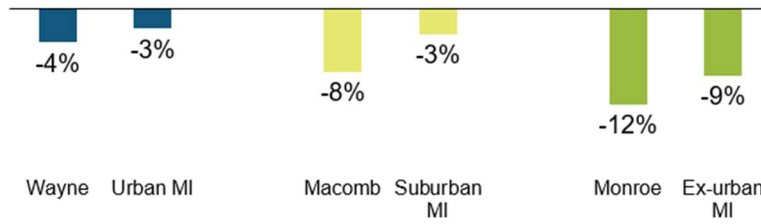


Source: Working America Front Porch Focus Group Report, 2020

The lessons from these counties can be applied statewide. Macomb, Monroe and Wayne counties have similar political attributes as other urban, suburban and exurban areas across the state.

Democratic Vote Share Shifting in these Counties is Similar to Statewide Geographies

Shift in Democratic Share 2012 to 2016



MINNESOTA

Although Minnesota – another Blue Wall state – has been reliably Democratic in presidential elections, Donald Trump’s loss there in 2016 was by a razor-thin margin of 1.52 percent, and Hillary Clinton secured victory with only a plurality of the vote. Progressives can’t afford to take Minnesota for granted in this year’s election. In fact, the Trump campaign has announced plans to deploy significant resources in Minnesota this year, increasing its investment from roughly \$40,000 in 2016 to \$30 million this year. And while voters from the Twin Cities metro area make up four of five voters statewide, the battle for hearts and minds where swing voters are concentrated is in suburbs and exurban communities. That’s exactly where we held our recent conversations and conducted online surveys.

Recent Findings – Surveying Suburban Voters

In Minnesota, we spoke with persuadable voters in the suburban communities of Burnsville and Minnetonka. As in Michigan, we found that there was broad support for making it easier to join a union, building on the Affordable Care Act, and the Green New Deal.

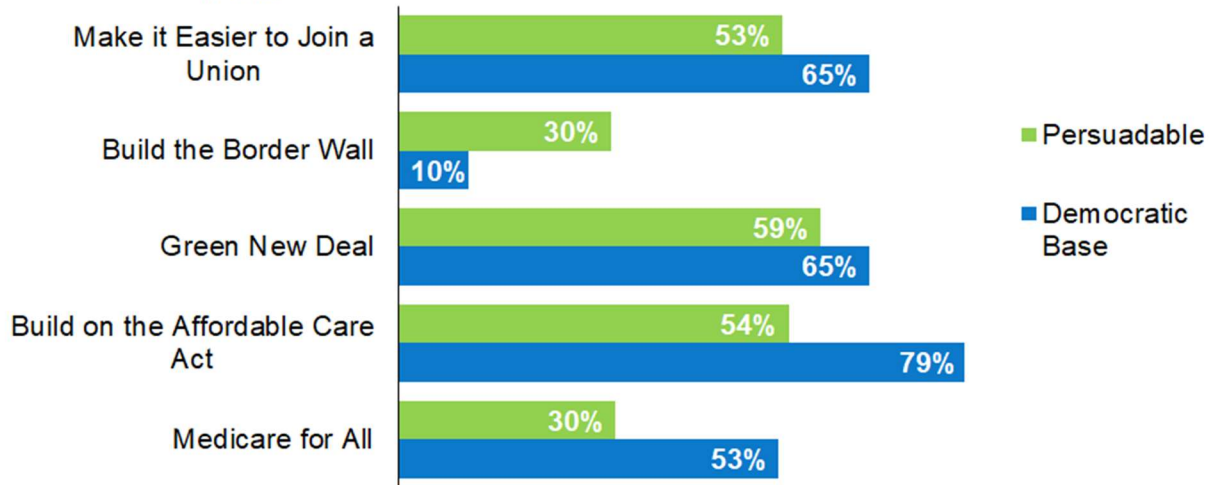
Broad Support for Many Progressive Solutions

Across Voter Type

Respondents saying “support”

By Voter Type

n=716



Source: Working America Front Porch Focus Group Report, 2020

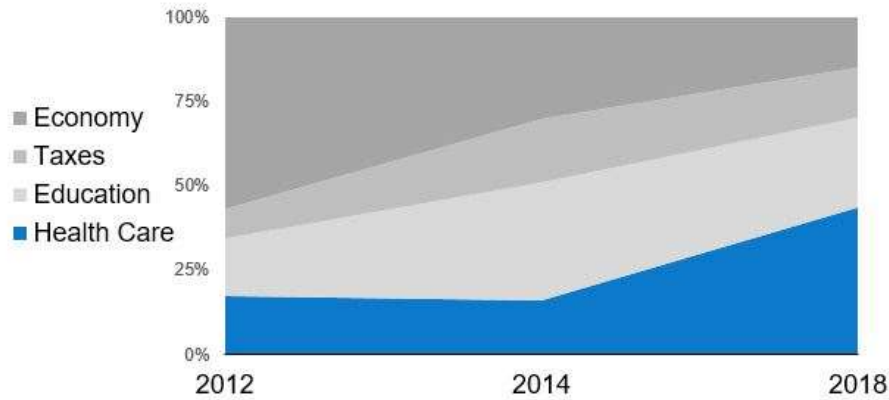
In conversations about health care, our canvassers spoke with some more affluent suburbanites who were reluctant to support a complete overhaul of our health care system. Steven, a 70-year-old white resident from **Minnetonka, Minnesota**, explained, “If I could click my ruby slippers together to make that happen I would, but we could barely get the ACA passed.”

Despite some hesitation about Medicare for All, the debate is settled for the majority of people we spoke with – everyone in America deserves access to health care. Voters frequently made comments like “everyone needs health care,” or “we have to do something” to secure universal health care coverage. Mary, a 72-year old **Minnetonka, Minnesota** resident, said, “We need to figure out our health care system so everyone can go to the doctor.”

We know that health care anxieties are not new to these voters. In these field interviews, the online surveys and in 228,700 conversations with voters in these same communities going back to 2008, we have seen a steady surge in voters naming health care as their top issue.

Health Care Concerns Rising Steadily

Total Share of Electorate by Top Issue
n=116,757

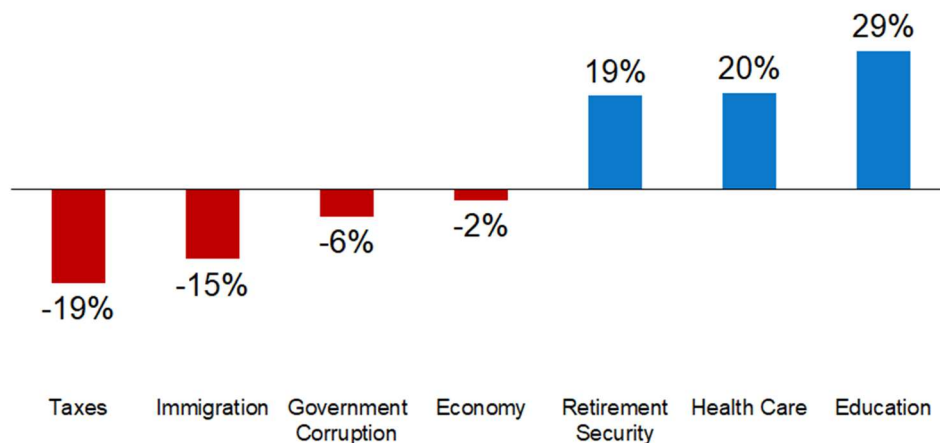


Source: Working America Canvass ID data

We have found that the issues voters are most concerned about influence both their partisan preferences and their likelihood to change their vote as a result of our contact, and this holds true in both online survey panels and in-person conversations.

Democrats Win Minnesotans Who Prioritize Health Care

Vote margin controlling for the partisanship of the electorate (2012 to 2018)
n=116,757



Source: Working America Canvass ID data

In 2018, for example, we found that Minnesota Republicans concerned about health care were six times more likely than other Republicans to cast ballots for Democrats. With suburban Minnesota voters focused largely on health care, progressives should be looking to press their advantage with these voters and make their case they are looking out for their concerns about cost and access to affordable health care.

Voter's Top Issue <i>n=1,233</i>	Likelihood to Change Vote (per 100 conversations)
Immigration	↓ 14
Taxes	↓ 11
Education	↑ 5
Health Care	↑ 10
Retirement	↑ 12

Source: Working America random control trial data

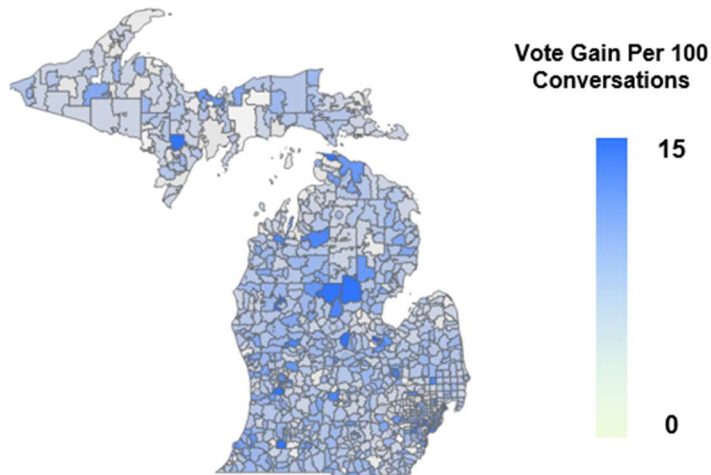
The Path Forward

Among the pivotal constituencies in these battleground states, one thing is clear – this election is up for grabs and it will take work to prevail. If you listen to inside-the-Beltway pundits, you would believe that voters are bitterly divided and rigorously committed to their political ideologies. Our view from the ground gives us a different perspective. By starting on people's doorsteps and engaging them in face-to-face conversation, we help voters connect the dots between their personal experience and their political choices. Our approach centers on listening first, then introducing new information, rather than telling people that what they believe is wrong. Many of these working-class voters are simply struggling to make ends meet for their families, and they don't always think in clear-cut ideological terms. Through authentic face-to-face engagement, however, Democrats can find common ground and win over these voters.

In these critical battleground states of Michigan and Minnesota, Working America has held front porch conversations with 250,000 working-class voters over the last 15 years, analyzing the feedback from voters and studying what motivates their political behavior. From this analysis, we can see clearly where voters in these states are open to changing their mind.

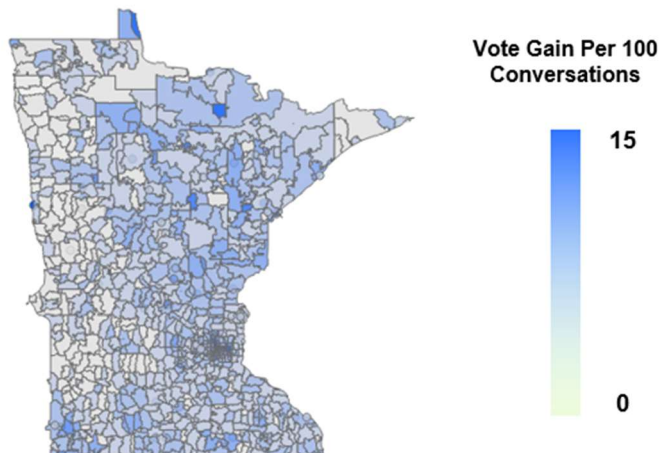
Michigan: Likelihood to Change Votes

(Per 100 Conversations)



Minnesota: Likelihood to Change Votes

(Per 100 Conversations)



Source: Working America Persuasion Model, 2020

In fact, Working America's new **vote gain calculator** demonstrates how progressives can gain votes from face-to-face conversations with Working America canvassers. Working America canvass contact could make the difference in both Michigan and Minnesota. In Michigan, with two million persuadable voters, Working America could win 400,000 votes for the Democratic nominee. In Minnesota, with 1.2 million persuadable voters, Working America canvass contact could win 270,000 votes for the Democratic nominee.

Be sure to check out the calculator to understand the scope of what we need to do to elect candidates that support working families in November 2020.

