

Biden's Breakaway Voters— BIPOC, Young, and Economically Struggling

Presidential rematches are [extremely rare](#) in American history. Most of this November's voters will be facing a choice they've made before when they pull the lever for either President Biden or former President Trump, and so we might expect that voters would make the same choice in 2024 that they made in 2020.

And yet a potentially decisive number of them are not—at least so far. While Biden won 51.3 percent of the popular vote in 2020 to Trump's 46.9 percent, current polling averages show Trump leading 44.5 to 44.1. Pundits are struggling to explain Biden's slipping popularity and his failure to rally his 2020 coalition.

So who are these voters that are changing their mind? And what are the life experiences driving their political reality?

What Working America has learned—through thousands of conversations with working class voters at their doorsteps in swing states across the country and through our surveys of thousands more both on election night 2020 and again this year—is that:

- **The working class voters leaving Biden were not switching to Trump, they were instead politically adrift**, expressing either uncertainty or a desire to support a third party.
- **Almost half listed a pocketbook issue** as their top concern and, [despite a world-leading macro-economic recovery](#) under Biden, they are not the winners in the Biden economy—**most have no economic resources to call on in a moment of need.**
- They were the same voters that we know are **least likely to have experienced the gains from the Biden economy — young voters and BIPOC voters**, both crucial to his coalition.

Three unique datasets

We were able to draw these conclusions from three Working America datasets.

First is a unique longitudinal tracking survey of persuadable and working class swing-state voters. We asked these 8,203 voters in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin in November 2020 to tell us who they had just supported, and then we asked these same voters in January 2024 about their current plan to vote. Because this survey tracked the preferences of the same voters across time instead of pulling from a random sample each time like standard polls, it gives us deep insight into how the minds of individual voters are changing since the last election.

We then pulled out from this group all of those voters who had chosen Biden in 2020 but were not

supporting him now, either because they planned to vote for Trump, vote for a third party, were unsure of their vote, or didn't plan to vote at all. We had 479 face-to-face, in-depth conversations with those voters in Arizona, Georgia, and Pennsylvania to produce our second dataset and this Front Porch Focus Group report. We first asked what issue was most important to them, and then asked a question rarely posed in mainstream polls: "If faced with an unexpectedly large bill, such as for a medical issue or a home repair like a burst pipe, what would you have to sacrifice or adjust in your life to cover this expense?"

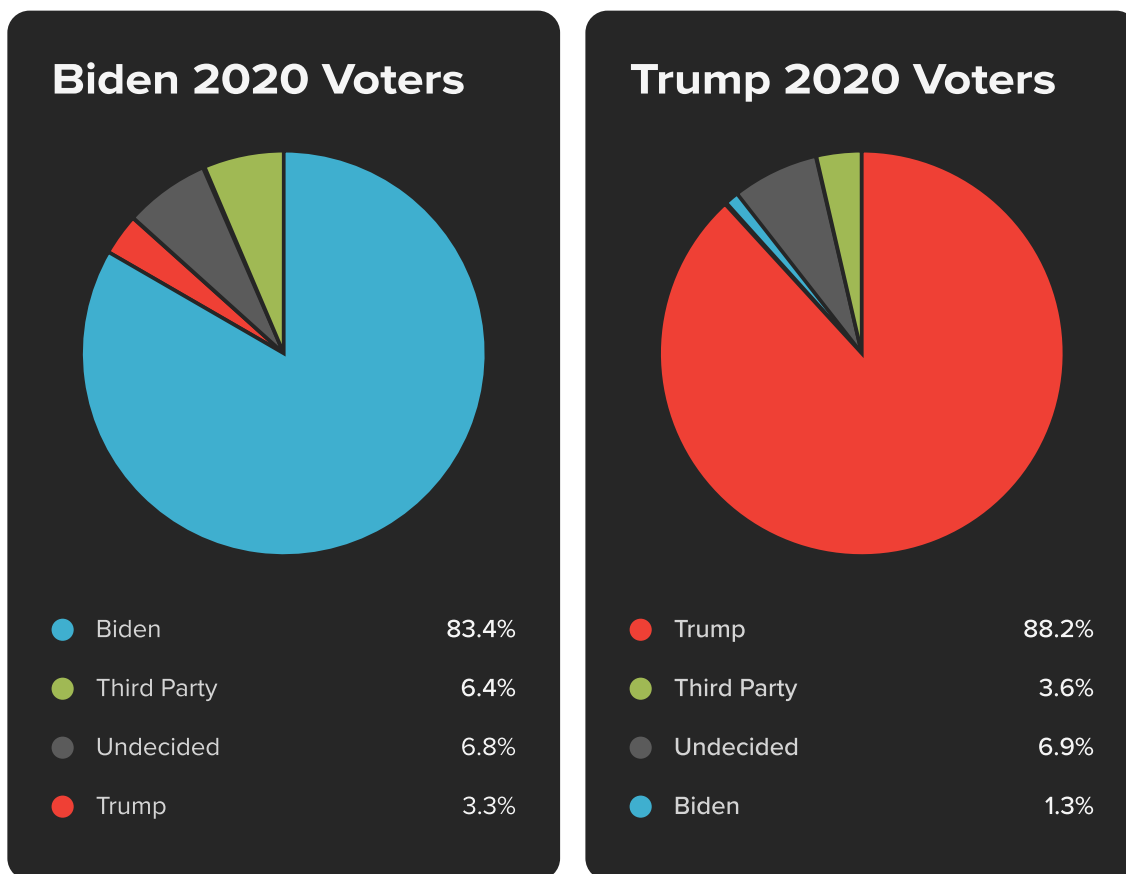
Lastly, we compared these datasets to the information we collected from an additional 2,714 recent face-to-face field interviews about the economy with working class voters in Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, which we discussed in our previous Front Porch Focus Group ([It's Not Just the Vibes](#)). We asked those voters about their occupation, recent salary increases, and their views on the direction of the economy.

Who Is Shifting and Why

Who

Our research focused on a specific slice of the electorate—working class and persuadable voters in six key swing states—rather than a broad sample of likely or registered voters more commonly seen in public horse race polls. But among the types of voters we examined, trends over time are both representative and revealing of the electorate as a whole. Overall, about 1/7th of Biden's 2020 voters told us they no longer supported him in 2024. Trump also lost voters overall, but at a much slower rate; only about 1/17th of them dropped their support.

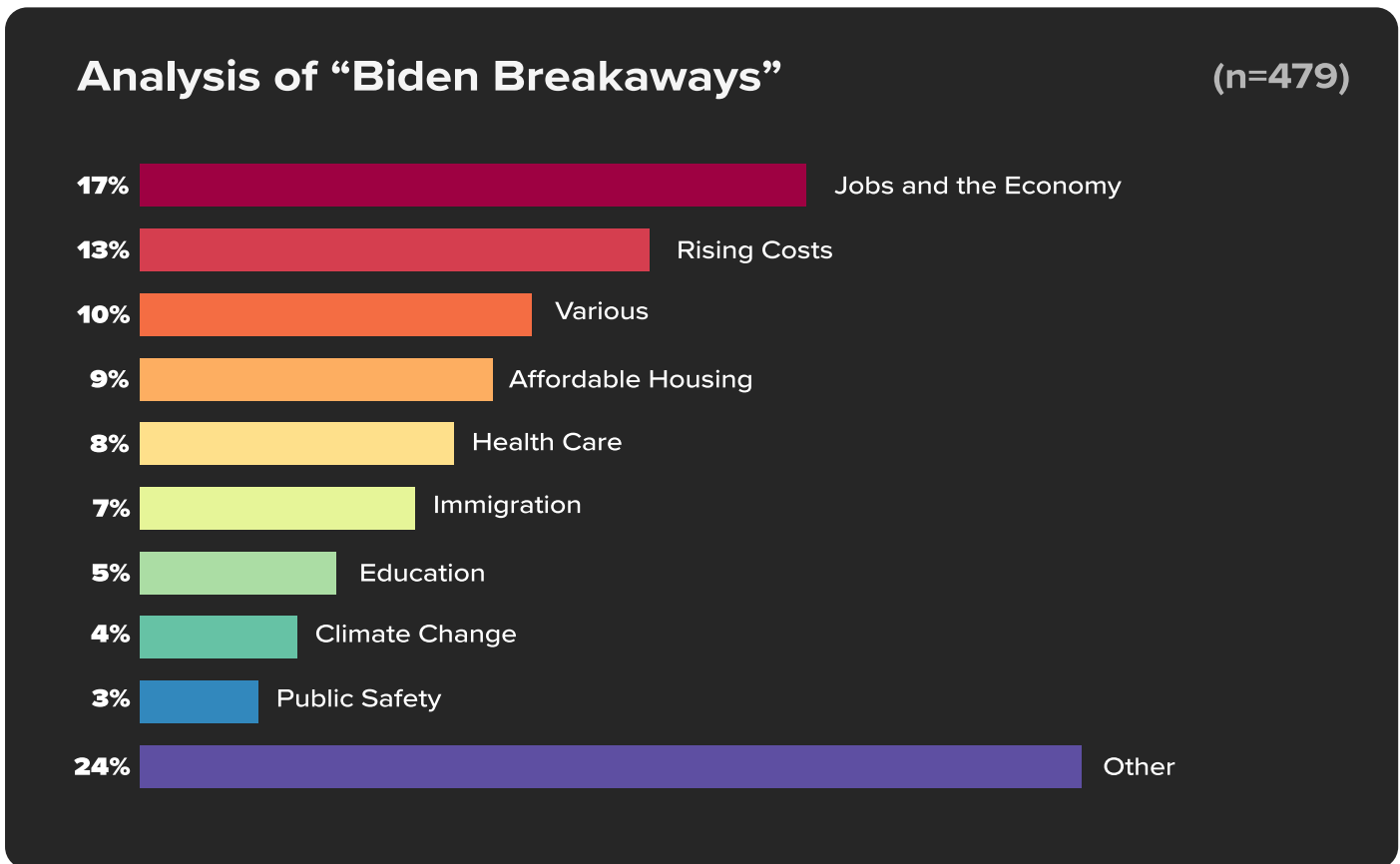
How 2020 Biden and Trump Voters are Voting in 2024



2020 Exit poll data vs 2024 January Survey Results. n = 8,203

Why

When we canvassed these “Biden breakways”, they cited “jobs and the economy” as their top issue most often, with “rising costs” coming in second. Health care and housing were the next two, and collectively these four “kitchen table” issues totaled almost half of all responses. But that still left many voters with a diversity of concerns, including immigration (7%), climate change (4%), and public safety (3%). Beyond these perennial election issues, many voters we talked to volunteered “saving democracy” as their top priority – an indication that these voters are not thinking of this as a typical election and are aware of the stakes for our country.



What voters mean by “Other” Top Issue



Most of the Biden Breakaway Voters are Living on the Edge

Asking these voters about their resources in a crisis also provided a stark reminder of the struggles many Americans are facing four years after the onset of the COVID pandemic.

When Biden breakaway voters were asked by a canvasser how they would deal with an unexpected large expense—like a sudden hospital stay or a burst pipe in the basement—the most common answer we heard (40 percent) was “nothing.” These Biden-breakaway voters said they have no options to be able to cover such an expense.

Overall, 73% of them said they either had no option or would need to make a serious sacrifice to handle an unexpected expense. Among those who said they’d have to make a sacrifice, most said they would go into more debt, pick up another job, or work more hours. Only a quarter of these voters said they had easier options to fall back on, like using savings.

This suggests that if Biden wants to recapture these breakaway voters in 2024, addressing these very real economic pressures will be a necessary step.

This is supported by the alignment between our tracking survey, our conversations with Biden breakaway voters, and the 2,714 field interviews we conducted in February. We learned in those February interviews that the types of voters who were struggling in this economy overlapped considerably with the groups identified in the longitudinal tracking survey as most likely to break away from Biden: younger voters and people of color.

Biden Breakaway Voters are Part of Demographic Groups Least Likely to Have Seen a Raise

Have you received a raise in the last few years?		
RACE	Yes	No
BIPOC	46%	54%
White	54%	46%
AGE	Yes	No
Under 25	39%	61%
Under 40	51%	49%
40 to 49	56%	44%
50 to 64	50%	50%

Source: Working America Front Porch Focus Group February 2024

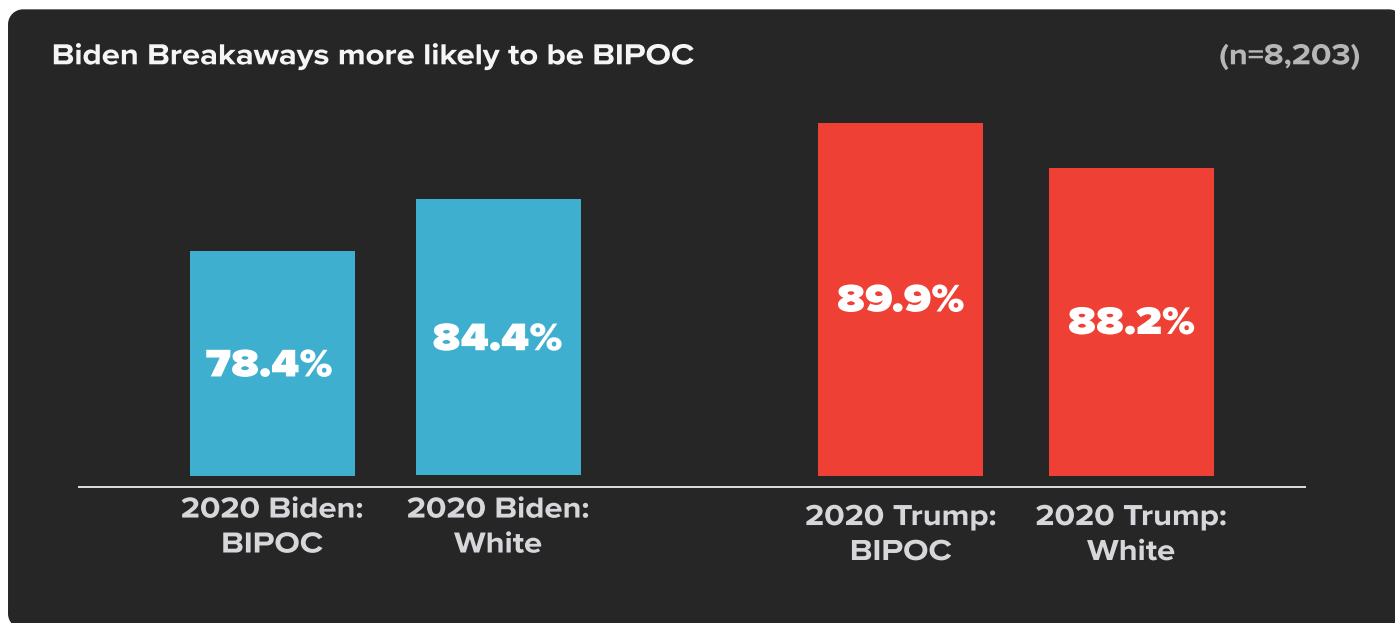
BIPOC Voters Leaving Biden, but Not Joining Trump

No Democratic presidential candidate can win in modern times without strong support from BIPOC voters. [In 2020, Biden won 90 percent of Black voters](#), 63 percent of Latino voters, and 67 percent of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander (AAPI) voters—these voters made up 2 out of every 5 Biden voters.

Our tracking survey showed BIPOC voters breaking away from Biden much more often than white voters this cycle. Biden lost more than 1/5th of his 2020 BIPOC voters according to our 2024 sur-

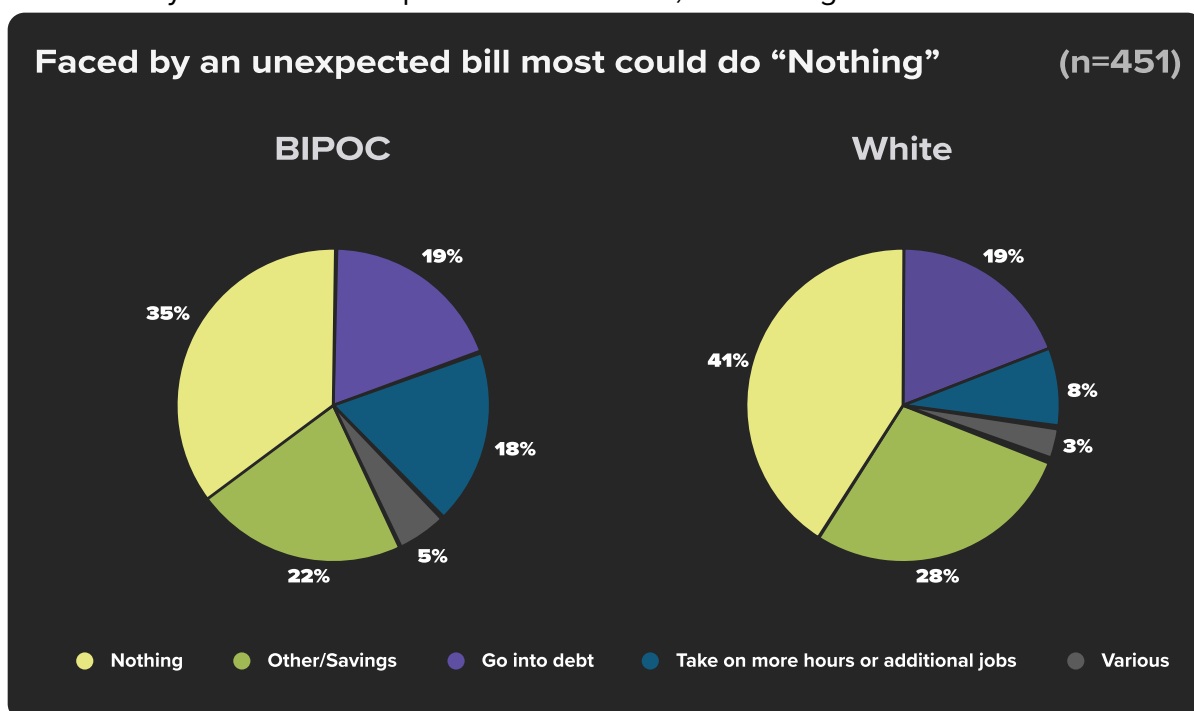
vey, compared to less than 1/7th of his white voters. But they are not leaving Biden for Trump. By comparison, Trump’s BIPOC support grew only a tiny fraction, showing both that his efforts at winning persuadable BIPOC voters have been ineffective but also that his 2020 BIPOC voters were among his most loyal. Instead, significant numbers of BIPOC voters instead told us in 2024 that they were still unsure of their vote, or planned to vote for a third party.

Among Biden 2020 voters, BIPOC voters were more likely than white voters to break away in 2024. Biden’s 2020 BIPOC voters were also substantially more likely to break away from him than Trump’s BIPOC voters were to break away.



Working class BIPOC voters’ lack of interest in supporting Trump gives Biden an important opportunity to win these voters back, if he can speak to their concerns.

When BIPOC Biden breakaway voters were asked how they would manage an unexpected bill, they were more likely than white breakaway voters to say they would need to make a major life adjustment and less likely to be able to tap “other” resources, like savings.



This matches the findings discussed in our last [Front Porch Focus Group](#). We canvassed thousands of swing state voters for that report and learned that a majority of white workers reported recently receiving a pay increase, but a majority of BIPOC Americans said they had not. This suggests that the benefits of Biden's economic management were not necessarily reaching some of his strongest supporters.

Younger Voters Driven by Economic Concerns

Younger voters were another essential part of Biden's coalition — [his strong margins with voters under 44 in 2020](#) offset his narrow loss among older voters. In fact, the youngest cohort of voters were among Biden's strongest supporters; he won 62 percent of voters under 29.

But starting from this base of strong support, these younger working class voters were also among the most likely to break away from Biden in our tracking survey.

Slightly more than 1/6th of Biden's under-40 voters broke away from him in our tracking survey, including more than a 1/4th of those under age 25, compared to only 1/8th of his older voters. Similar to the BIPOC breakaways, these voters were not moving to Trump but remain politically adrift, telling us they are unsure or plan to vote for a third party. (Third party support more than doubled among under-40 voters in our sample.)

Working-age voters were more likely to be concerned about the economy than those in retirement age. Voters in the "sandwich generation" (ages 40-49 and likely to be caring for both children and older parents) stood out as far more worried about rising costs than any other age group.

In our canvass, we found young Biden breakaway voters under 25 were [understandably the cohort most likely to be worried about finding affordable housing](#), which was their #2 concern behind jobs and the economy. This suggests that the concerns of working class, persuadable young voters may be markedly different than the issues driving youth activists who are prominent in the media. While we found concern over climate change was stronger with this group (8 percent) than others, it still ranked behind economic issues. Younger voters were also far more likely to say that an unexpected expense would drive them to make a serious sacrifice or adjustment. Again, this matches with what we found in our previous focus group, which found young people the least likely to have received a raise.

The war in Gaza, which dominates media narratives about young voters, was mentioned as a priority by few of the young voters we spoke to. Similarly, while the Biden Administration's efforts on student loan forgiveness may appeal to those who attended college, college costs were rarely mentioned as a concern by the working class young voters in our canvass, many of whom did not attend college. This may point to a significant mistake in the conventional narrative around young voters, given that [the majority of young Americans do not attend college](#).

Older Biden breakaway voters stood out for naming immigration as their top concern much more often than others, and showing much less concern about inflation.

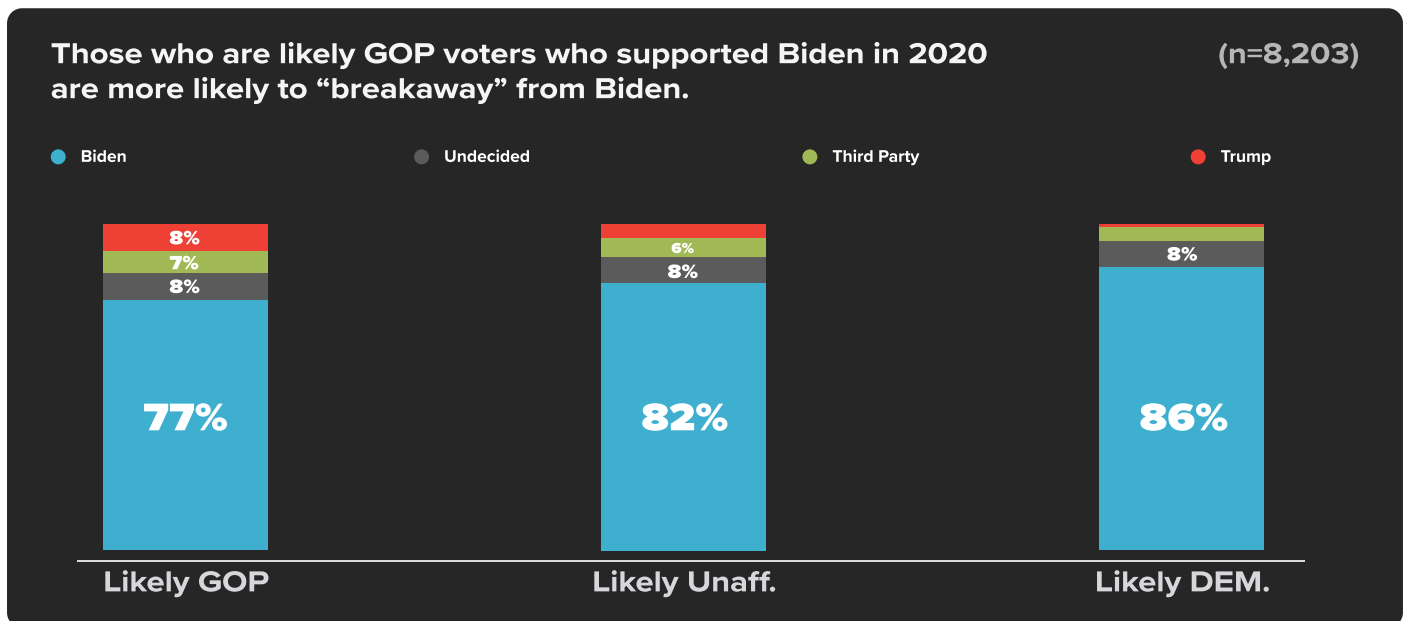
Top Issue by Priority Order

1= Top Priority; 5= Lowest Priority

	Under 40	40 to 49	50+
<i>Jobs and the Economy</i>	1	2	1
<i>Rising Costs</i>	2	1	4
<i>Affordable Housing</i>	3	3	5
<i>Health Care</i>	4	4	3
<i>Immigration</i>	5	5	2

Economic Pressures are Bipartisan Even If Economic Perceptions are Not

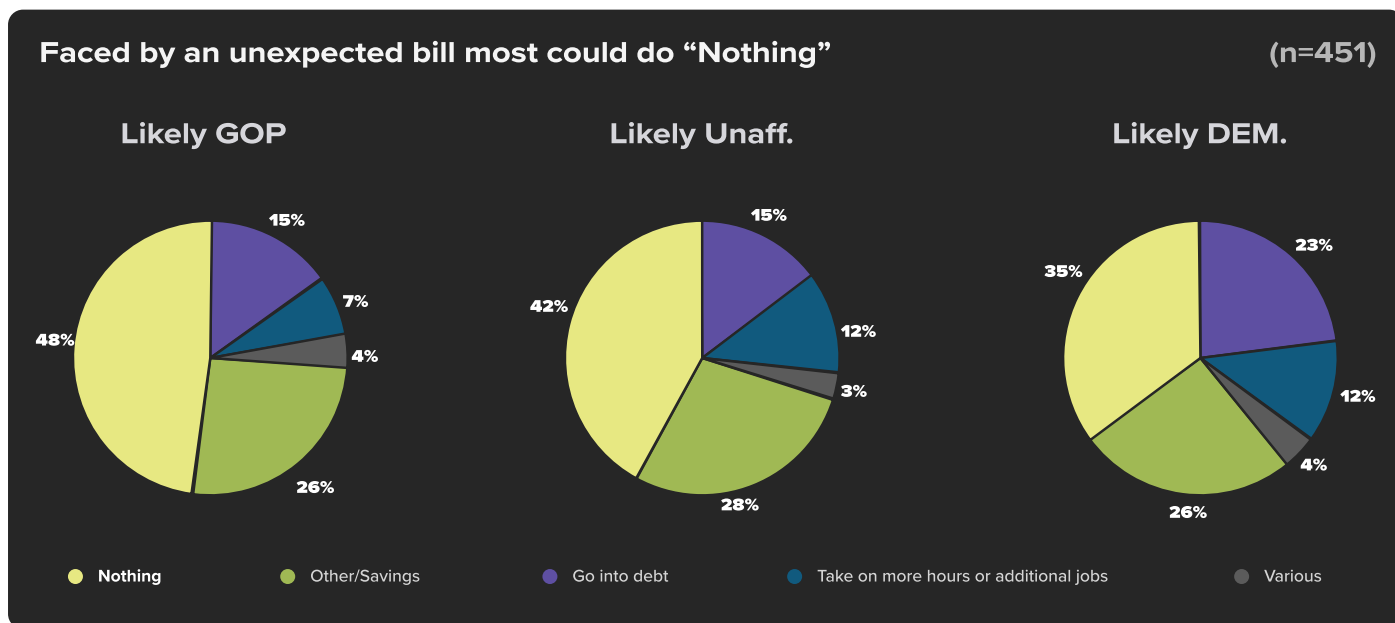
Biden’s potential vulnerability also spanned the ideological spectrum, as was evident when we look at how voters are behaving when split up by modeled partisanship (predictive statistical models of partisan preference based on a voter’s past behavior). While Biden’s likely Republican 2020 voters were somewhat more likely to defect from him in 2024 than likely Democrats, the differences were small in our tracking survey. That kind of consistent, bipartisan breakaway from Biden showed that Biden’s drop in support is more than just Republicans “going home.” Just as importantly, these Republicans were not selecting Trump.



However, when examining issue priorities raised in the front porch conversations, we started to see a more expected sorting by party. Likely Republicans were more concerned about rising prices, jobs and the economy, and immigration. Likely Democrats were more concerned about health care, education, and climate change. Both were concerned about housing costs.

Regardless of party, voters were equally likely to have limited savings or other good options for dealing with an unexpected expense (although likely Democrats were more inclined to go into debt and take on more work, compared to likely Republicans who were more likely to report having no

options). As we saw in our last Front Porch Focus Group, partisanship also drove voters' view of the economy, with strong Republicans far more likely to report concerns about the economy than other voters, regardless of whether they experienced gains like a pay increase. While Biden-breakaway Republicans may be more likely to take a negative view of Biden's economic performance, they have already overcome their partisan tendencies to pull the lever for him once before — and the data in this report shows that the economic instability that working class people feel transcends party. Biden can win these voters back, if he gives them a good reason.



Trump Is Losing Women and College-Educated Voters

Finally, we saw areas of vulnerability for Trump when we examined his performance by gender and education.

Trump saw a much sharper drop in his support among women than men (nearly double) in our tracking survey. A lot of [political commentary](#) have focused on Trump's potential vulnerability among women voters since the Supreme Court justices he appointed overturned the right to abortion in the Dobbs decision. While women voters abandoning Trump does help Biden's margin in a 2-way contest, it does not necessarily mean they will automatically become Biden voters. In our conversations with Biden breakaway voters, we did find more concern about abortion rights among women than men; however only 4 percent of these persuadable working class women named it as their highest priority issue. Most of these voters instead prioritized the same economic concerns as their male counterparts. In our [last report](#), we found women were less likely to have recently gotten a raise than men, underscoring how a lack of economic security is an important variable in the lives of working class women.

Similarly, Trump lost almost 1/10th of his college-educated voters, twice the proportion of his non-college-educated base. This again reflects the findings of our [prior focus group](#), although in this case in Biden's favor. The voters who were most likely to tell us they had recently received a raise were those working in fields that typically require college degrees — tech, education, and health care. These are workers who are therefore more likely to view the current economy positively.

It's Not Just About the Message

Our previous [Front Porch Focus Group](#) found that the benefits of the Biden economy are not being felt on the ground by his strongest supporters. Now these findings above suggest that these same voters were the ones who are demonstrating the most skepticism among his 2020 coalition about a second Biden term. This suggests that Biden and allies have to do more in the coming months than [just communicate about his current high-profile economic or policy wins](#).

One answer is to connect these voters with active policies and programs that can help them today, such as the Biden administration efforts to help working class people build credit, access assistance for utility costs, and access low cost medications. But it also seems evident that candidates must communicate a plan to provide new solutions for these families in the future.

There's still time for that to happen — the campaign season has only begun. Working America organizers are reaching out at the doors, on the phone, and through email now, and at a growing scale in the months ahead, continuing to use our data-driven operation to support a working class agenda and connect these voters with solutions. We will continue to provide you updates on that work, and the state of the electorate, as we know more.

