

# Build Back Belief

Why voters around the world lost faith  
in government and how to win it back

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## INTRODUCTION: A BREAKDOWN IN TRUST

“That’s who’s been forgotten today – ordinary people who work hard, aren’t rich, but aren’t at the bottom of the pile either.”

Swing voter, woman, Arizona, November 2024

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“People have been forgotten, even purposely pushed to the side. When it comes to energy bills, food prices, it feels like people are almost disposable. Pushed to the side in favour of others.”

Former Labour voter, woman, Lancashire, June 2025

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“It boils down to a lot of distrust. Now, realistically, even though we could have voted Democrat and they would still have time to make these changes, I don’t trust in them to make the changes. Anybody can say things, but why hasn’t there been immediate action already?”

Democrat-to-Trump voter, man, Mountain States, February 2025

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“There’s a gap between politics and us, the people. They are elected, but they aren’t acting as representatives of the people... And the gap is widening...”

Former SPD voter, man, Brandenburg, March 2025

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“I’ve just seen Australia change slowly, like the frog in the water that gets boiled slowly and, by the time he notices, it’s too late. The politicians certainly don’t realise it, and we’re just slowly going down the toilet.”

Former Labor voter, man, Queensland, May 2024

# Listening to swing voters in Pittsburgh, Brandenburg, and Accrington, we heard the same story over and over. Frustration, even anger, with the politicians they had elected to serve them.

A powerful sense of injustice fueled by the belief that government is no longer on the side of the people it has been elected to serve. Dismay that working people like them must work harder and harder just to get by, drained of hope and aspiration. Fearful for their children and grandchildren in an increasingly insecure world.

The change imperative could not have been more powerfully felt: change to break through the malaise with a different kind of politics led by politicians they can truly believe in. Perpetuating the status quo is no longer an option for many voters who feel ignored and disregarded as their futures ebb away.

When we looked at what has worked electorally for the center left – in the U.K. a year ago, in Australia, in pockets of the U.S. where some Democrats had outperformed the norm – we found common themes.

Successful candidates persuaded voters – against the odds – to believe in them: to believe that they would deliver for them, because they believed they could deliver for them (they were competent to do so) – and, even more importantly, to believe they wanted to deliver for them. Their conviction, sense of purpose and leadership shone through.

Conviction seems to be the deal breaker. Only by feeling the strength of political leaders' own conviction was it possible to truly believe in them.

And only when voters believed in their political leaders was it possible to believe things could get better in their country, for their future, for their communities, for their families.

This pamphlet sets out to unpack the insight gained from hours of conversation with strategists and the crucial voters they set out to woo in the U.S., U.K., Australia and Germany – and to turn that insight into practical ways for progressives to remake the broken contract between government and the people, and start to win again.





# Contents

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01. WHAT HAPPENED: U.K., U.S., GERMANY AND AUSTRALIA	7
------------------------------------------------------	---

---

02. THE ABANDONED “MISSING MIDDLE” VOTERS	12
-------------------------------------------	----

---

03. REPUTATIONAL DAMAGE TO CENTER-LEFT PARTY BRANDS	22
-----------------------------------------------------	----

---

04. THE CHANGE IMPERATIVE	32
---------------------------	----

---

05. A QUESTION OF BELIEF	36
--------------------------	----

---

06. BUILDING BACK BELIEF	40
--------------------------	----

---

6.1. POLITICIANS THAT STAND UP FOR ME	41
---------------------------------------	----

---

6.2. AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR ME	43
-----------------------------------	----

---

6.3. FUTURE WITH AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ME	46
----------------------------------------	----

---

6.4. A MESSAGE THAT CONNECTS WITH ME	49
--------------------------------------	----

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07. LOCAL OVER NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL: THE BELIEF BIAS	54
------------------------------------------------------------	----

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08. 10 STEPS TO BUILD BACK BELIEF	58
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# 01. What happened:

## U.K., U.S., GERMANY AND AUSTRALIA

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### THE INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES SHOW MIXED SUCCESS FOR PROGRESSIVES, BUT TELL A CONSISTENT STORY.

**Of course, every center-left political party needs a cross-class coalition to win. But every center-left political party is facing the same electoral challenge: retaining its “working-class” base, which has reduced in size in its traditional form as our developed economies have changed over the past few decades.**

**O**ur case studies show that the centre left wins when it focuses on that working-class base. This group is changing. The jobs workers are doing, the places they live and the lives they lead, are changing. New divides have opened up, particularly between university and college-educated people, and school leavers.

Our profiles of the center-left’s target voters in the nations we surveyed show them more likely to be female, middle-aged, working in a service sector job, in contrast to the traditional stereotype of an older man working in manufacturing. Today’s “working class” is low-to-middle income, and more likely to be ethnically diverse, than its traditional predecessor.

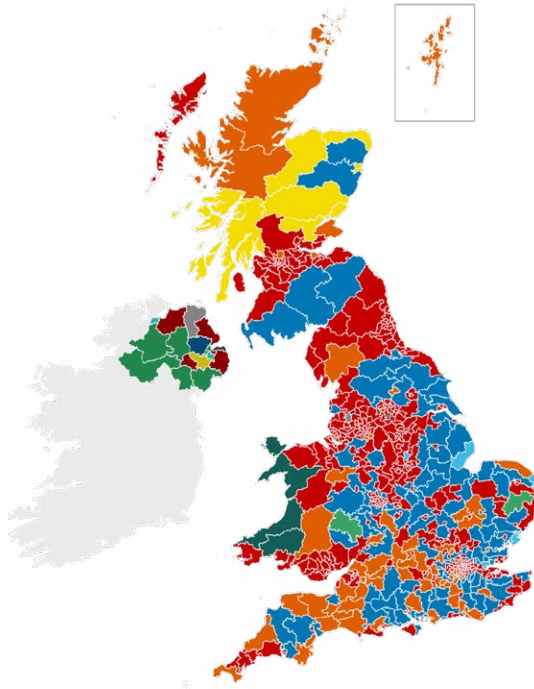
## INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES



## U.K.



→ Labour won a historic landslide but is now trailing Reform UK in the polls.

**LABOUR SECURED A HIGHLY EFFICIENT VICTORY**

Winning 63% of seats on 34% of the vote by increasing its vote share outside of the major cities and winning 12% of Conservative 2019 voters.

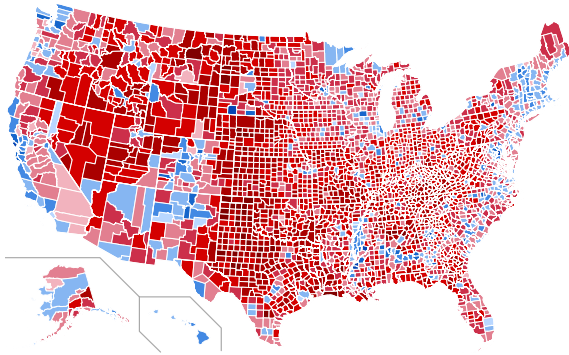
**BUT LABOUR NOW TRAILS THE INSURGENT RIGHT-WING CHALLENGER PARTY REFORM UK IN THE POLLS.**

Recent analysis predicts that, if an election were held today, Reform would win 271 seats, just short of an overall majority, with Labour in second place on 178. This represents the fastest decline in vote share for a governing party in the U.K.

# U.S.



→ Democrats lost ground with almost everyone, everywhere.



## **TRUMP WON THE POPULAR VOTE 50% TO 48%.**

At the November 2024 U.S. Presidential election, Democrats lost ground with almost everyone, everywhere across the country.

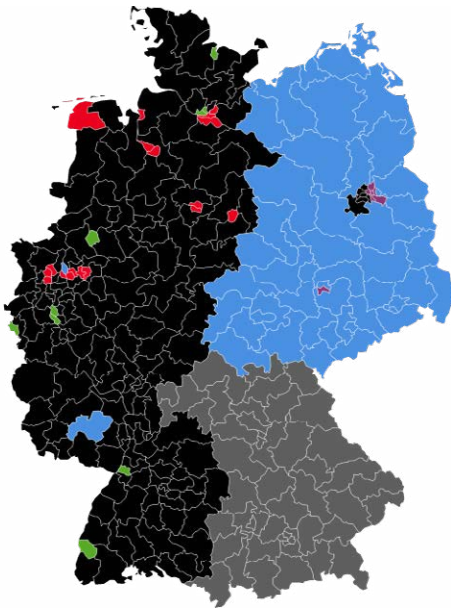
## **MOST DRAMATIC WERE THE DEMOCRATS' CONTINUED LOSSES AMONG NON-COLLEGE-EDUCATED WORKING-CLASS VOTERS.**

They continued their long-term decline among white working-class voters, and also saw unprecedented losses among ethnic minority working classes.

# Germany



→ In February 2025, the governing Social Democrats (SPD) fell to third place.



**IN FEBRUARY 2025, LESS THAN THREE YEARS AFTER WINNING THE MOST SEATS IN THE PREVIOUS FEDERAL ELECTION, THE GOVERNING SOCIAL DEMOCRATS (SPD) FELL TO THIRD PLACE** behind the Christian Democrat Union (CDU) and the far-right populist Alternative for Germany (AfD).

**THE SPD LOST TO THE CDU IN THE WEST, WHILE THE AfD DOMINATED IN THE EAST.**

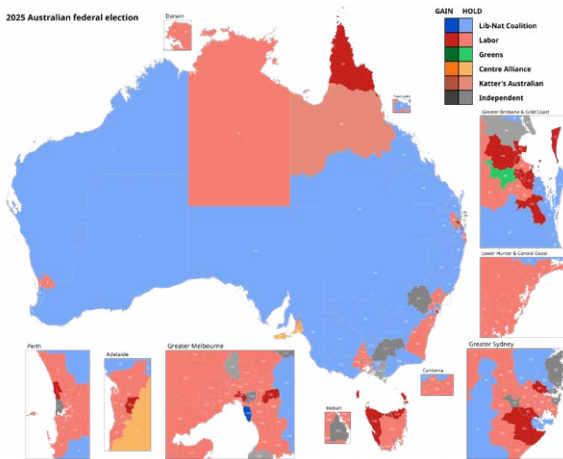
The AfD turned out two million voters who had not voted previously and won among working-class voters and young men.

**THE CDU ASSEMBLED AN OLDER, MORE AFFLUENT ELECTORAL COALITION,** and are now the senior partner in a coalition government deal with the SPD.

# Australia



→ The incumbent Australian Labor Party won a second term with an increased majority in May 2025.



## LABOR REPOSITIONED THE PARTY AS “ON YOUR SIDE”

After a loss in support after the 2023 “Voice” referendum and cost of living crisis, Labor successfully repositioned the Party as “on your side” in contrast to the “out of touch” center-right Liberal-National Coalition (L-NP), personified by Prime Minister “Albo” Albanese drawing on his working-class roots.

**LABOR WENT ON TO WIN A SECOND TERM** with 94 seats, up from 77, with a 2% swing from the 2022 election.

## 02.

# The abandoned “missing middle” voters

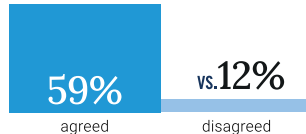
### A POWERFUL SENSE OF ABANDONMENT WAS PLAYED OUT IN EACH LOCATION

We heard the same heartfelt complaints from neglected voters, who, whether they came from Brandenburg, Pittsburgh, or Accrington, all felt government was no longer working for them.

**V**oters we heard from in Australia were a little more hopeful after the election, but still had doubts about the ability of government to deliver and the jury is out. Again and again, voters in every location described finding it much harder to get by on what had previously been secure middle incomes, while their sense that the gap between the richest and everyone else is bigger than ever and it's getting worse.

#### U.K. WORKING-CLASS VOTER POLL

YOU GET LESS IN RETURN FOR WORKING  
HARD THAN A DECADE AGO



YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY WILL BE WORSE OFF  
THAN THE NEXT GENERATION



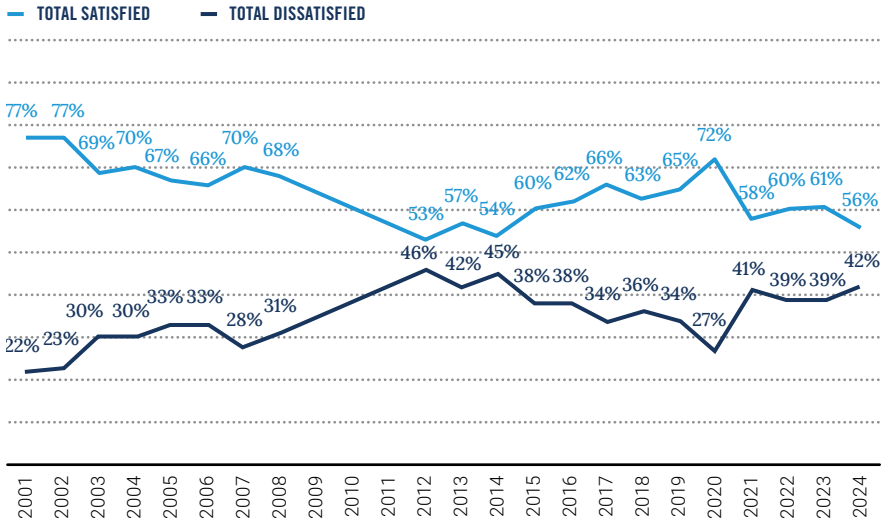
WORKING PEOPLE AS A WHOLE ARE WORSE  
OFF THAN THEIR PARENTS' GENERATION



Source: YouGov for PPI, GB working class adults  
October 2023



## SATISFACTION WITH “THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A PERSON IN THIS NATION TO GET AHEAD BY WORKING HARD”



Source: Gallup Poll Social Series (GPSS) US. Gallup. 2001-2024.

Some talked of old class boundaries breaking down – a merging of working and lower middle classes – with opportunity even further out of reach for them and their children, leaving their parents’ ambition of “bettering yourself” out of reach, too. This group of voters described themselves as the “missing middle.” They feel ignored by government and believe most politicians to be completely out of touch with their day-to-day difficulties. They feel marginalised to the point that their entire cohort feels dramatically under threat. Some struggled to define themselves as the touchstones of their lives (secure work, affordable housing) once relied on crumbled away.

**“You used to have working class, lower-middle class, middle class. I don’t think there is any middle class anymore. It’s gone. There used to be classes. But now there’s just a massive gap between the rich and the poor.”**

Labour-to-Reform, woman, Lancashire,  
June 2025

United around their powerful sense of unfairness: doing the right thing, playing by the rules, but not being fairly rewarded, these voters all strongly believe that others benefit by not playing by the rules – whether illegal migrants or rich bosses.

Yet much of their ire is directed to politicians of all parties, who are seen to be further and further removed from their everyday struggles.

“There’s less of a legit middle class. For my parents, if you had a reasonable job and you worked, you were able to, at the very least, afford housing and groceries. Whereas I feel like now, a lot of people have to have more than one stream of income to meet the basics. That’s not a way for the citizens of a country to live... Now people are just working, working, working, and I think that’s really unfair.”

U.S. swing voter, woman, Midwest, August 2024



## A STEP LADDER REPRESENTS BRITAIN TODAY WITH THE WORKING CLASS AT THE BOTTOM.

The backbone of the country was the working class. But it’s not anymore. They’re discouraged, you don’t get rewarded for a day of hard work.”

Labour-to-Reform voter, man, Lancashire, June 2025



“The middle class is being eroded. Where you used to be able to work one job and buy a house, those things are out of reach for people like us now.”

U.S. swing voter, woman, Michigan, August 2024

“There’s hardly no middle classes. Basically, the middle class has gone. There’s only wealthy people and people who don’t earn big salaries... The middle class is either drifting away to the right or to the left.”

SPD-to-AfD voter, east Germany, March 2025

“The middle class has to struggle more and more to make ends meet.

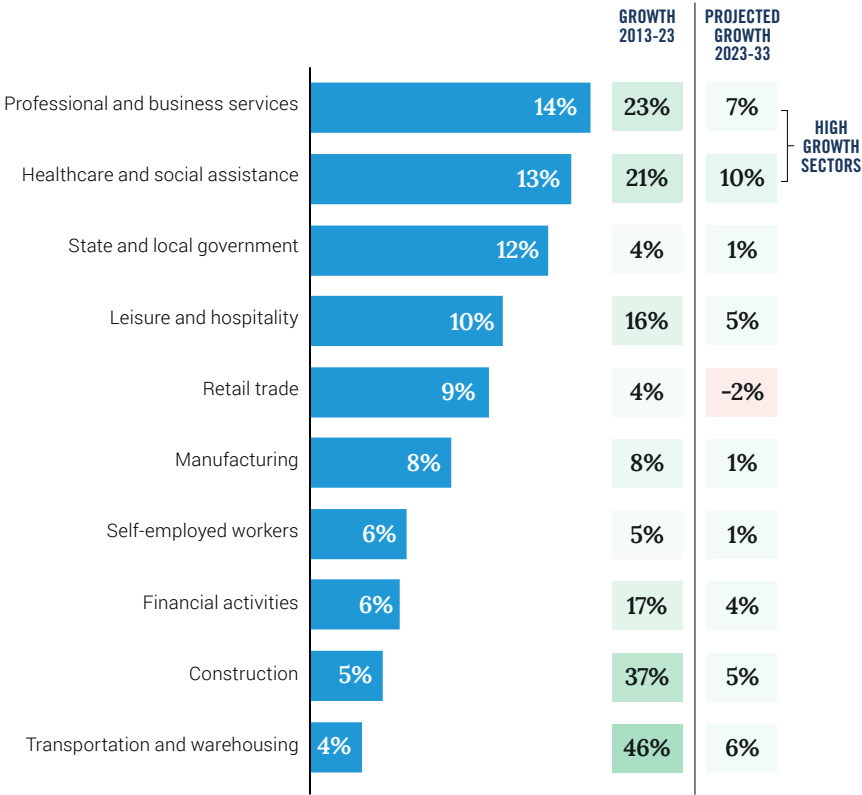
Former Labour voter, woman, Northamptonshire, June 2025

AND IT'S SET TO GET WORSE IN THE COMING YEARS...

These profound feelings of loss are likely to accelerate in the future. Over the next five years, 12 million Americans are predicted to change jobs, and more will face disruption to the skills they need and the wages they earn as the labour market restructures.

PPI analysis shows that employment in the tech, info and e-commerce sector is well outpacing job growth in the rest of the private sector. Manufacturing jobs in the U.S. are likely to stagnate, retail jobs decline, and jobs in health and professional services grow. While much attention has been paid to the opportunities from AI, blue-collar workers in our focus groups expressed great trepidation about the changing world of work.

TOP TEN SECTORS AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Industry Projections 2023-2033

**“Technology is booming with AI now so if somebody follows that path then they are lucky. Because everything else like tradesmen, the automotive industry, many medium sized companies, they are on the decline.”**

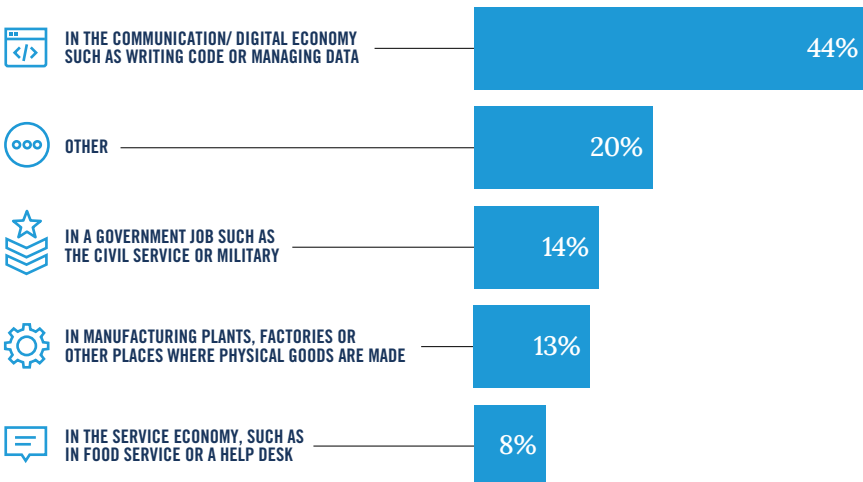
SPD-to-CDU voter, woman, west Germany, March 2025

Looking to the future, very few years for a resurrection of manufacturing as career destinations for the next generation. Many more working-class voters want to believe in their children's futures and that they will find the best jobs and career opportunities in the trades and the digital economy. Yet those U.S. and British voters in our focus groups were not optimistic about the possibility of the opportunities of the future being open to their children.

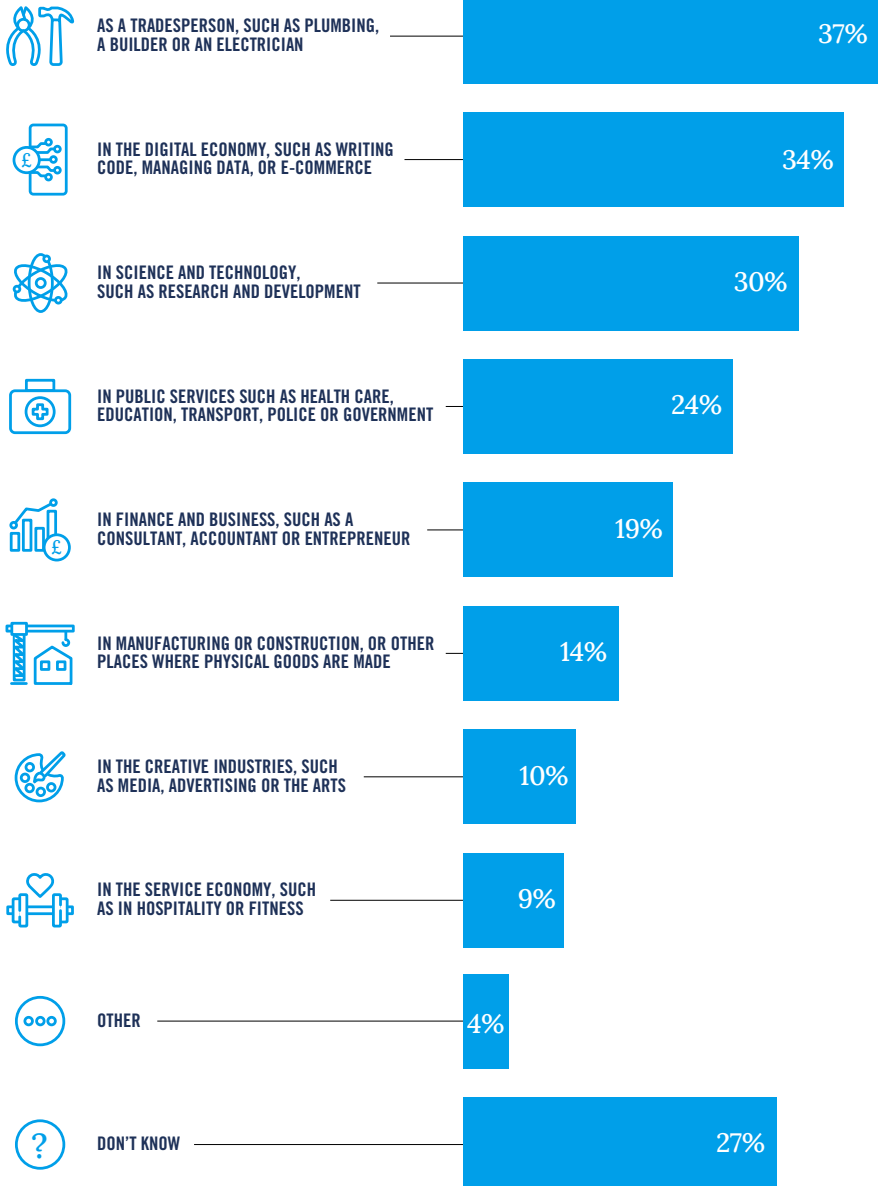
**“The biggest worry for me at the moment is trying to work out my kids are going to do with all the AI that's coming in, because that's a big fear for me. What kind of job are they going to get? Because I can see it in my job. We're using AI now a lot at work, and I'm thinking, what are my kids gonna do?”**

Former Labour voter, man, Northamptonshire, June 2025

## GENERALLY SPEAKING, WHERE DO YOU THINK YOUR CHILDREN WILL FIND THE BEST CAREER OPPORTUNITIES?



## GENERALLY SPEAKING, WHERE DO YOU THINK YOUR CHILDREN, OR CHILDREN GENERALLY, WILL FIND THE BEST JOBS AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES WHEN THEY GROW UP?



Source: YouGov for PPI, survey of working-class Brits, published in Winning Working Britain PPI, September 2024

“The typical worker used to be industry, coal mining... But in the Ruhr district de-industrialization has progressed to such a point that we’re not producing anything anymore. Most of the stuff comes from China.

SPD-to-AfD voter, man, east Germany,  
March 2025

Nowhere felt as pessimistic in this regard as Germany. Working-class voters in both the east and west of the country linked the decline of German working-class identity to the nation's loss of purpose and optimism. With Germany now lagging far behind China on the high-tech manufacturing they used to be known for, these voters struggled to imagine any good, working-class job options for future generations.

All this imminent change makes it critical that center-left parties keep their focus on this core group and their changing needs. It is vital that the progressive parties look to the future, resisting looking back to a nostalgic past that all voters know no longer exists. They need to identify future threats and clearly communicate solutions and opportunities, taking voters with them as they go.

## → CASE STUDY

# Hero voters

## HOW IDENTIFYING “HERO VOTERS” CAN HELP THE CENTER-LEFT WIN

**In 2020, when Keir Starmer became leader of the Labour Party, the party had lost its fourth successive general election and had sunk 26 points behind the governing Conservatives in the polls. Labour knew it needed to win over the middle ground of working-class voters on low-to-middle incomes, but its overall desired electoral “coalition” was too wide, removing its focus and muffling its message.**

We identified “hero voters” (so-called to compensate for their strong belief that Labour had abandoned them) – and agreed these should be the most critical group to focus on for 2024. These “hero voters” had voted Tory in 2019 but were open to Labour. They were middle-aged and older, 63% non-graduates, 60% had voted Leave in the Brexit referendum, and half were worried about their economic security. Hero voters were patriotic, family-oriented, and felt strongly that people like them get an unfair deal from the status quo.

Hero voters became Labour’s reference point rather than the more affluent, progressive part of the party’s coalition, and the party was re-wired – with all the challenges that came with it – to put them at the centre.

Labour’s approach of single-mindedly focusing on this group and placing them at the heart of communications and policy was key to turning around Labour’s fortunes and, ultimately, to electoral success.

This approach can be replicated across countries. Winning campaigns should have an image in their minds of the individual hero voter they need to speak to, as if engaged in a one-on-one conversation.

**DETAILS OF EACH  
TARGET HERO VOTER**



# Hero voters

## Pen portraits

### UK LABOUR'S TARGET "HERO VOTER"



**BECCA**

📍 North West of England

She and her husband both work full-time and have three kids. Becca is increasingly worried about crime. Knife crime is increasing locally and she worries about her eldest playing out on the streets. The town center no longer feels safe or pleasant, with many shops boarded up or replaced by barbershops and vape shops.



She chooses an air fryer to sum up life in Britain today:

**"It went viral when energy bills went up because it's supposed to cut your energy bill. You don't need the oven. But I don't think that's really worked."**



### SPD'S TARGET "HERO VOTER"



**THOMAS**

📍 Brandenburg

The SPD lost younger voters and blue-collar workers to the AfD, particularly in the east, and older voters and white-collar workers to the CDU in the west.

Thomas is in his 40s and lives with his wife in Brandenburg, a state in the east. He works in a warehouse.

He voted SPD in 2021 but quickly grew frustrated with the government not seeming to listen to concerns about uncontrolled immigration. He has his doubts about the AfD but doesn't feel he has any other option given the last four years.

He says Germany is symbolised by a burnt-out candle:

**"We're all burnt out. The situation in Germany right now is going further downhill because of politics. Nothing is being done for the citizens the way I see it. It's very difficult for a normal person of my age to find a good job."**



## DEMOCRATS' TARGET "HERO VOTER"



Like U.K. Labour, the Democrats need a cross-class coalition to win. But it is working-class voters, of all ethnicities, that the Democrats really need to focus on. Analysis of polling, Census and GSS data shows that the swing voters who backed Trump in 2024 but are winnable by Democrats are non-college-educated (71% with no college degree), working age (54% aged 35-64), middle earners (52% earn less than \$100,000).



ERIN

📍 Reno, Nevada

Erin lives on the outskirts of Reno, Nevada, with her husband and son, who is in his 20s and still lives at home. Despite both working full time, Erin and her husband are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

She chooses the receipt from her last visit to the store to sum up life in America:

**"The amount of times I go to the store just to pick up just one or two items and it's \$10, \$12 and it's like, wait a minute, I remember when you could fill a paper bag of groceries for \$10 or \$12."**

Erin tries to avoid the news nowadays as it's too depressing and mostly follows local news via Instagram.



## AUSTRALIAN LABOR'S TARGET "HERO VOTER"



Labor won by retaining their working-class base while also winning university graduates and white-collar workers. 39% of degree holders voted Labor, alongside 32% of blue-collar workers.



HARRY

📍 Brisbane

Harry is a landscaper who runs his own business in the outskirts of Brisbane. He's a divorced dad of two boys and is currently looking for a new house. Despite searching for months, he's finding it impossible to find somewhere in his price range that is big enough for when his sons come to stay.

He wasn't overly impressed by any of the political parties during the election campaign, saying that politics is "less and less about workers and Australia, and more about PR stunts and showing face," but opted for Labor in the end.

He chose a screwdriver to sum up life in Australia today:

**"My water bill has gone up so much that I use this screwdriver to prise open the tank and check the gauge every day."**



# 03. Reputational damage to center-left party brands

## WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Center-left parties have suffered damage to their brands – their core identity and the sense of what they stand for – as their association with their traditional electoral base has weakened, leaving voters questioning their central purpose.

**O**ur research conducted in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. Presidential election highlighted this, laying bare the stark position of the current Democratic Party. We found that many U.S. swing voters' reaction to the election outcome was outright relief.

**"I was relieved when Trump won. Because of immigration issues, transgender issues. We were going down a weird path."**

Former Democrat voter, woman, Midwest,  
November 2024

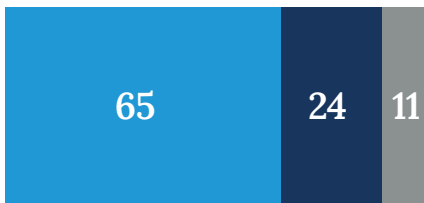
They had deemed Harris a bigger risk to them than Trump, and trusted Trump more to stand up to the extreme elements in his party than she would be able to do to hers.

The Democrats were perceived to have moved out of line with mainstream

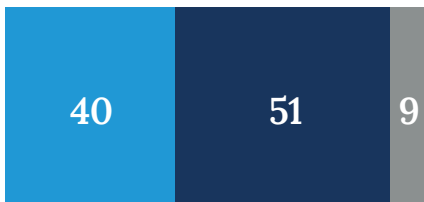
### % AGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING:

■ AGREE ■ DISAGREE ■ NOT SURE

Donald Trump is able to stand up to the more extreme members of his party



Kamala Harris is able to stand up to the more extreme members of her party



Source: YouGov for PPI survey of working-class voters,  
November 2024

**“Democrats try to play too much to various groups instead of just do what’s best for everyone. Because everyone participates in the economy. People got tired of Democrats trying to group everyone up instead of trying to address the nation as a whole.”**

Former Democrat voter, man, Nevada, November 2024

American values, illustrated by the fact that only a quarter of the population identify as “liberal” or “very liberal” compared to more than half of Democrats. Crucially, while Democrats have become much more liberal over time, the rest of the country has barely changed. Twenty years ago, only a third of Democrats identified as liberal compared to one in five Americans overall, a much smaller divide than exists today (Gallup Poll Social Series (GPSS), Gallup, 1994-2024). 53% of US non-college voters said the Democrats had gone too far in pushing a “woke” ideology (New York Times/Siena Poll, 2022). They also told us they felt judged for expressing views that differ from activists.

**“They make you out to be a bad person”**

Former Democrat voter, woman, Midwest, November 2024

This is essentially a question of highlighting misplaced priorities – why are you worried about them when you could be worrying about me?

To the voters we spoke to, the Democrats only represented “the elite” (college graduates) or “niche groups”

(single issue campaigners), a complaint which came up time and time again from swing voters who had previously voted for them.

**“Who are they for? The elite. I don’t feel they’re the party of the working man or underprivileged anymore. They seem to be off.”**

U.S. swing voter, man, Michigan, August 2024

When we showed voters a mood board of images representing different groups of people in America and asked who would be better off if the Democrats or Republicans won the Presidential election, voters struggled to identify anyone who would be better off voting for Harris, but eventually settled on the protest group and the line of migrants at the border. However, they were clear that the rich businessman, more worryingly, the small business owner and, most worrying of all, the family would be better off under the Republicans.

**“When I think of family, I think more of the Republicans. Sitting down at the dinner table every night of the week, those values.”**

Former Democrat voter, woman, Midwest, November 2024

Our research explored the identity of each of the center-left parties in depth, and found that the Democrats were not alone in experiencing severe brand damage.

The SPD in Germany had risen to victory in the federal election of 2021 after an inauspicious start, with a campaign focused on the steady leadership of Olaf Scholz and an emphasis on bread-and-butter issues for working Germans. By the February 2025 election, where they came in third place to the center-right CDU and far-right Alternative for Germany, voters no longer associated the SPD with the present-day working class, and out of touch with the priorities of ordinary Germans.

**“The SPD today says ‘we’re for the workers and the working people’ but there’s no real workers’ party anymore... You have to stand up for yourself and fight for yourself. There’s nobody who represents you. There’s nobody there.”**

Former SPD voter, man, Brandenburg,  
March 2025

Contrasting with losing center-left parties, under Keir Starmer’s leadership, the U.K. British Labour Party actively set about addressing its electoral weaknesses, including the tight focus on winning over the hard-pressed working-class voters in British towns and suburbs. Labour called these our “hero voters,” to put them at the centre of Labour’s strategy and ensure the party paid them the respect they deserved.

This enabled Starmer to lead the party on a long and calculated road to victory, making a decisive break with the party’s recent past under Jeremy Corbyn, with a policy emphasis on core concerns about the cost of living and public services.

This was combined with a very strong narrative about Starmer’s own working-class background. Many voters did not realise that he was a self-made man. Correcting this was game-changing.

Labour also set out to reassure voters about the party’s patriotic credentials, a theme which also came up with the Democrats, who were perceived as much less patriotic than the Republicans. Patriotism does not simply mean nostalgia for the past, however. In fact, changing the country was seen as the patriotic choice by many voters, against a background of loss.

“A few weeks ago, we celebrated VE Day and everything was red, white and blue. And when you look back at Britain in those days compared to how we are now, I do not see a time where we could ever get back to that society, that mentality, having that pride that we used to have... We’re a lost cause.”

Labour-to-Reform voter, woman,  
Northamptonshire, June 2025

Similarly, the Australian Labor Party was seen by swing voters we spoke to as more down-to-earth, the party of “people like me,” underscored by PM Anthony Albanese’s emphasis on his working-class roots. The ALP made patriotism authentically Labor, illustrated by Albanese holding up a Medicare card on election night and declaring, “This card is not Labor red, or Liberal blue, it is green and gold. It is a declaration of our national values, in our national colours. Medicare belongs to all Australians, and together, we will make it stronger for all Australians.”



ALP ad from the 2025 federal election campaign

It was not a given that Australian voters would see Labor as the party ‘on their side’ by the 2025 election. Labor strategists knew they had to regain this identity following the 2023 “Voice” referendum and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. They reset government policy to this strategic goal, including reforming a tax break to make it apply to all citizens, not just the well-off. An assured election campaign with specific pledges aimed at the ordinary Australian helped highlight the distinction between PM “Albo” and the out-of-touch LNP leader Peter Dutton.

It is striking that the two center-left parties in our study that have been successful in the last set of national elections – the Australian Labor Party and the U.K. Labour Party – both re-orientated their message and policy offer to “working people.” Their leaders both worked hard to emphasize their personal backstories in how they connected to voters, and made their pitch of offering solid social democratic policies that met the priorities of working people on the cost of living and public services. Both outperformed their opponents on who would be best at managing the economy in the interests of working people.

“Labor is for the working person, like all of us. I’m working class. I have to work to survive. No intergenerational wealth, no early retirement on the horizon. Just working, paying the bills, and getting ahead where I can.”

Swing voter, woman, New South Wales,  
May 2025

“Patriotism means recognizing some things are going wrong and that we have to change. If you’re not asking for change, you’re not patriotic.”

U.S. swing voter, woman, Georgia,  
August 2024



“

**IF LABOR  
WAS A  
DRINK THEY WOULD  
BE XXXX BEER.**

Going back to Labor’s working-class roots, the common man.”

Swing voter, man, Queensland, May 2025



“Dutton didn’t seem like a normal Aussie. Albo goes along, has a beer with people, whereas Dutton appeared to be higher class. I don’t know if he is actually, but that’s his approach and how he came across.”

Swing voter, woman, Queensland,  
May 2025



*A Labour campaign ad introduced voters to Keir Starmer's childhood home whilst he was opposition leader*

“He came from a background like ours, not born with a silver spoon in his mouth like the current lot.”

Man, Labour hero voter, West Bromwich, speaking  
about Keir Starmer during the 2024 election

## FOCUS ON THE ISSUES THAT MATTER MOST

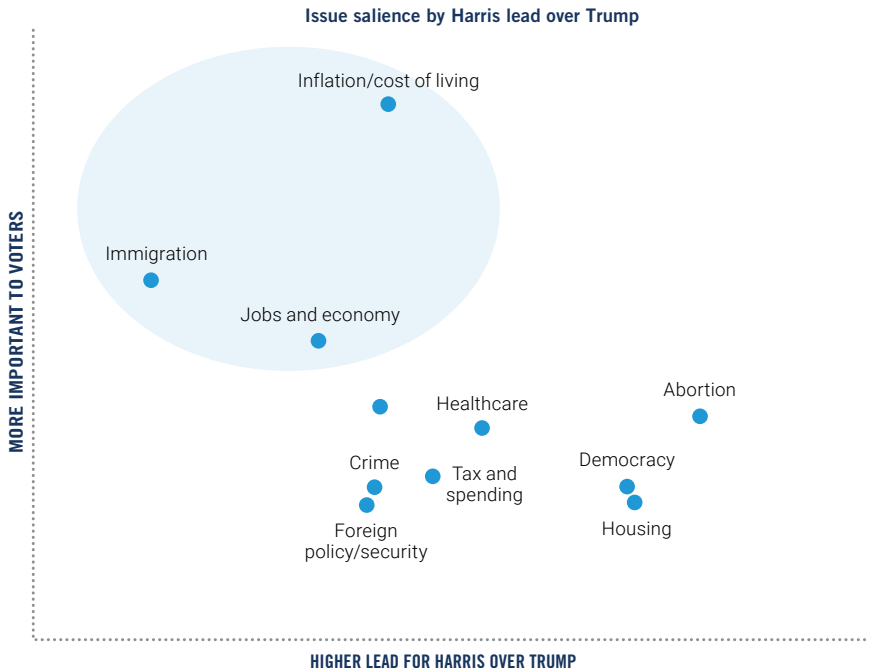
By contrast, the Democrats underperformed Trump on voters' most important issues. Voters perceived them as fixated on fringe issues, even though the Democratic campaign was focused on the economy, in large part thanks to a devastating and highly successful attack on Harris by the Trump campaign on her previous views on gender identity. This was mentioned spontaneously in every focus group that we ran.

This left voters with the view that Harris was focused on marginal issues, while Trump was focused on the issues that mattered most.

**"We all saw the Trump ad 'she's for they/ them'... And I don't think that a lot of this social stuff, the transgender stuff, [I don't think] that the overwhelming majority of people care about it and are overly concerned with it. If you're having a hard time paying your grocery bills like me, every bill is going up, water bills, food bills, I don't care about these other issues if I can't pay my bills. That's just me."**

Democrat-to-Trump voter, Nevada, February 2025

## THE DEMOCRATS ARE WEAKEST ON VOTERS' MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES





In the U.S., U.K. and Germany, we heard similar sentiments about the impact of inflation and high levels of immigration. Both issues speak to misplaced values and provoke strong feelings of unfairness. The voters we spoke to feel they are being taken for a ride by “greedy corporates” who are raising prices opportunistically. And stories about illegal immigrants receiving a better deal from the welfare state than they do provoked real anger in almost every location.

**“My son can’t find an apartment but everybody who comes pouring in from foreign countries, they suddenly get an apartment right away. Something is very wrong there.”**

Former SPD voter, woman, east Germany, March 2025

**“If you let thousands of people come to the country then it’s a problem when they don’t sustain themselves, when they take the resources of people that have paid into this country all their lives.”**

Labour-to-Reform voter, woman, Lancashire, June 2025

**“Immigration is a big problem. A lot of the immigrants are coming into the country, and they’re supposedly taking jobs. They’re taking resources. So there’s a lot of issues across the city with immigration. So I think that’s a big problem with what’s happening with the country... The border is broken. The situation is just a dumpster fire and has been for years now.”**

U.S. swing voter, man, Pennsylvania, August 2024

Only the Australian Labor Party appeared to have neutralised the issue of immigration prior to the federal election, where it was not seen as a pressing crisis in the way it is described in the U.S., U.K. or Germany, as immigration has started to reduce. As a result, immigration featured much less strongly at the Australian federal election in May 2025. Australian PM Anthony Albanese has emphasised ‘balance’, control and pragmatism, tightening some rules and pointing to recent reductions in immigration levels.

**“The main parties only speak about immigration during the election campaign. They think little things like that are enough, like giving little biscuits to doggies. But the AfD have spoken out for a long time.”**

Former SPD voter, man, east Germany, March 2025

## STRONG LEADERSHIP

The perceived strength (or weakness) of the party leader has also proved a decisive factor in each of the U.K., U.S., German and Australian elections. Our U.S. research showed clearly that Trump was admired for being strong and on

their side, while Harris was seen as weak and diluted. When asked to compare the two candidates to cars, voters described Trump as “a dump truck: strong, big, fierce.” Meanwhile, the Democrats were “a small car, a Kia, something weak.”

## IF [POLITICIAN OR PARTY] WERE A CAR, OR A DRINK, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

“A neat whiskey. He’s strong and gives it to you straight.”

Trump voter, man, Nevada



“A dump truck: strong, big, fierce.”

Trump voter, man, Nevada



**DONALD TRUMP**

**VS**

**KAMALA HARRIS**



“A small car, a Kia, something weak”

Trump voter, woman, Midwest



“A watered down cocktail. Weak.”

Trump voter, man, Nevada

**“Scholz was too reactive. He gave vague interviews like he was a commentator. But he was meant to be the leader!”**

Former SPD voter, man, east Germany, March 2025

With more volatile electorates, election campaigns can shape and change perceptions of leaders, as well as go to the heart of whether voters connect with the individual. Anthony Albanese was not overwhelmingly popular with Australian voters. But deft handling of external events – Trump and the east coast cyclone – and a campaign that single-mindedly aligned his personal story and Labor’s policy offer, allowed Albanese to reject the “strong vs weak” frame the LNP Coalition had tried to set him up for.

As it was, his opponent Dutton came across to voters as the weaker, shifting around on policy, and projecting a Trump-lite vibe that fell flat. For example, Dutton floated the idea of another referendum on deporting migrants, sacking 41,000 civil servants, and ending working from home, all of which failed to resonate with the voters the LNP needed and gave the impression of being uncertain with poorly thought-through policy.

The insecure state of the world makes it even more important for voters to feel their leaders are strong and sure-footed. They are conscious of an increasingly insecure global context. They feel their countries are at greater risk now than they were ten years ago. Global insecurity drives feelings of anxiety and powerlessness about politics back home.

**“As a kid we had no fear of war, everything was hunky dory. Now I tend to have a more dystopian view. Like, what’s happening between India and Pakistan, we should all have the hairs on the back of our neck standing up.”**

Labor voter, man, New South Wales, May 2025

International relations are seen as zero-sum. There is background anxiety about the possibility of international, unpredictable shocks changing things at home.

This increases the appeal of strong leaders who put their countries’ national interests above all else. And makes reactive leaders seem even more powerless and naïve.

# 04. The change imperative

## A GOVERNMENT I BELIEVE WILL WORK FOR ME

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### THE STATUS QUO IS NOT AN OPTION

**Dissatisfaction with the status quo that started in the Rust Belt of the U.S., with the Brexit vote, the collapse of the “Red Wall” of the U.K., and the demise of the industrial heartlands of Germany, is now all-pervading. Quite simply, working-class voters, the missing middle, no longer believe most governments and most politicians act in their interests and urgently demand change.**

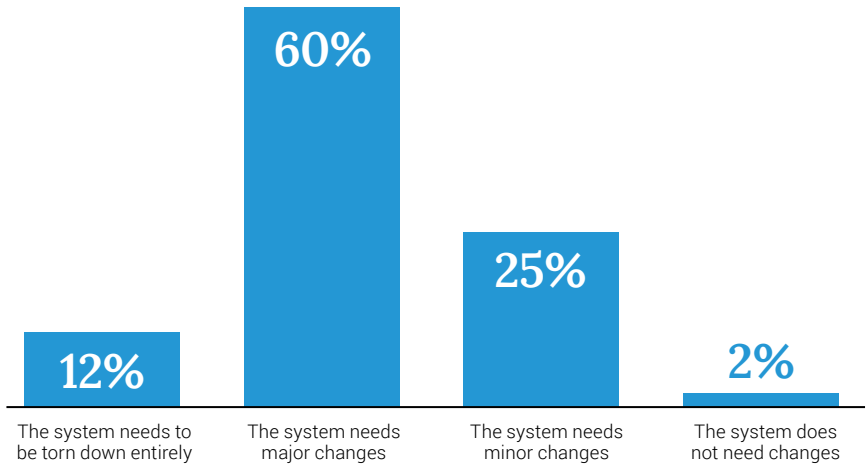
**A**cross Europe, large majorities of voters say their countries are heading in the wrong direction. A poll by Datapraxis in summer 2024, just after the European Parliament elections produced a decisive shift to the political right, showed that every country they polled, except Poland, said their country was heading in the wrong direction.

This desire for change has often been attributed to an anti-incumbency effect, where leaders who have been in charge throughout the combined global crises of COVID-19 and the Ukraine war – sparking global inflation of energy and other costs – have paid the electoral price. However, our research identified much deeper causes that pre-date the recent crises, which have only added fuel to the fire.

In the U.S., just 2% of voters felt the political and economic system did not need change. This theme resonated in all the groups we held in the U.S., U.K. and in Germany; all of which were “change elections” and to a lesser extent in Australia, whose relatively satisfied voters described a more moderate appetite for change.

Working-class voters in each country feel the world is an unpredictable and confusing place in 2025. They have a strong sense that things are no longer working as they used to, and that the old rules no longer apply. Radical change has powerful appeal in this context.

## WHICH COMES CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEW ABOUT THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM IN AMERICA?



Source: Times/Siena. Battleground survey, October 2024

“

### YOU’VE JUST GOT TO ROLL THE DICE.

My object to sum up life in America in 2025 is dice. Everything seems ruled by chance. It’s hard to know the rules.”

Former Democrat voter, woman, Nevada, February 2025



The center-left can and should be advocates for change. Right now, however, working-class voters associate that sense of momentum and freshness with the populist right.

Trump appeals as necessary “shock therapy” in the context of an uncertain, unpredictable world. Similarly, in Germany, voters compared the AfD to an energy drink, something that “wakes people up,” while the SPD was “old red wine” and the CDU “cold coffee that’s been around a long time.”



## THE AfD WOULD BE AN ENERGY DRINK.

Something that wakes people up and energizes them. They're trying to be different. They have wings, they're going up and up."

SPD-to-AfD voter, woman, east Germany, March 2025



"Change" was the U.K. Labour Party's simple yet powerful one-word slogan in the 2024 election. It is still early days in the U.K., but people are impatient to see the change promised by Starmer's government materialise.

Many working-class voters, in each country, concede that the parties and candidates on the populist right may not have all the answers. But voters do believe they will shake things up.

For these voters, who feel that both country and community are broken, this seems a risk worth taking. They believe that mainstream parties have run out of steam and either can't or won't fix things. Hence the welcome for Trump with his rapid change agenda.

**"Our only choice was Trump.  
The bull in the china shop."**

Former Democrat voter, woman, Nevada,  
February 2025

**"The AfD represents everyone  
in the country who wants change."**

Former SPD voter, woman, east Germany,  
March 2025

**"Everybody's had enough of the  
mainstream parties. Whether you like  
him or loathe him, Trump has made  
some changes, good and bad, and they  
believe what he's saying. People are  
looking for a change."**

Former Labour voter, man, Northamptonshire,  
June 2025

Even in Australia, which has been somewhat more insulated from economic shocks over the past two decades than the comparator countries, we heard anxiety about the cost of living, and uncertainty about the future.

### THE BROKEN CONTRACT

All of this speaks to a sense that the long-standing contract between state and citizen no longer works.

Soaring inflation and high levels of immigration have exacerbated feelings of unfairness and instability amongst this group of voters in the U.S., U.K. and Germany. Whilst cost of living has been uppermost in people's minds at recent elections, in Germany, immigration was the most important issue to all groups of voters at the February 2025 federal election (except those who voted for the smaller Greens and Left parties).

**"I don't really like opening my bills or even the mailbox anymore since everything became more expensive."**

Former SPD voter, woman, west Germany, March 2025

“

**THE COUNTRY HAS LOST ITS PURPOSE, IT'S DISINTEGRATING.**

Times are changing. We've got to adapt. Like this old tea towel I now use as a cleaning rag."

Labour voter, woman, New South Wales, May 2025



**"Something just stopped working, the way prices went up."**

U.S. swing voter, woman, Georgia, August 2024

And life feels increasingly unfair with the balance tilted in favour of others, often perceived as less "deserving." Whilst they tend to agree with statements about the rich paying their fair share, more often they will spontaneously mention immigration in relation to this sense of unfairness. The lack of belief is not just about one issue, such as immigration, but connected to a wider problem that people feel the basic contract between them and government has broken down.

# 05.

## A question of belief

### A GOVERNMENT THAT IS COMMITTED TO AND CAPABLE OF DELIVERING FOR ME

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#### GOVERNMENT ISN'T WORKING

U.S., U.K. and German voters talked with disappointment, even disdain, about politicians and mainstream political parties, often questioning the ability of government itself to deliver basic improvements in their everyday lives.

**T**hese voters perceive a mismatch between modern life, which feels increasingly fast-paced, and sclerotic, unresponsive governments – overly reactive, too slow, incapable of making big changes.

Many see politicians as, at best, weak and incompetent, trapped in failing systems, at worst, willfully propping up the status quo.

**“They don’t seem to deliver anything apart from long-ass speeches with big numbers thrown in there to give the impression something has happened. But nothing has changed.”**

Former Labour voter, woman, Northamptonshire, June 2025

**“The working class is dying. Instead it’s the politicians who become rich, do the wheeling and dealing and we’re the losers.”**

Former SPD voter, woman, west Germany, March 2025

**“It boils down to a lot of distrust. Now, realistically, even though we could have voted Democrat and they would still have time to make these changes, I don’t trust in them to make the changes. Anybody can say things, but why hasn’t there been immediate action already?”**

Former Democrat voter, man, Nevada, November 2024

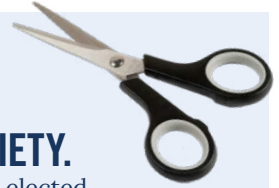


“

**I CHOSE SCISSORS TO REPRESENT SOCIETY.**

The gap between politics and us, the people. They are elected, but they aren't acting as representatives of the people.”

SPD switcher, man, east Germany, March 2025



“Trump is an entrepreneur. He's taken gambles in life, and he's been quite successful in most things he's done. He could walk away without needing the money.”

Former Democrat voter, woman, Midwest, September 2024

### CONVICTION MATTERS AS MUCH AS COMPETENCE

However, this is not just about competence – though this matters hugely, with an inability to control borders being the most obvious symbol of ineffective politicians – but crucially it is also about motivation. To believe that politicians can bring about the change people want to see, they also must believe that they really want to – that the politicians themselves have the motivation. Only then will they believe that change can happen.

This belief is hard to achieve. Critically, they need to be authentic – where their motivation to represent their people and get into politics is transparent. Without this belief, many voters are simply switching off, making it harder to make

the necessary case about the positive motivation of any politician. Trump achieved it because he was seen as someone who had already succeeded as a business person and didn't need to be in politics, Albanese achieved it because he was seen as “one of us” and on our side.

**“What was Labor's message? ‘Albo is a working-class bloke. Dutton is a “two bob snob.” That was it. And it worked.”**

Former Labor voter, Queensland, May 2025

Starmer achieved it once preconceptions of him as a “posh” North London lawyer were replaced with stories from his own childhood, so people could see he was a self-made man and no stranger to struggle.

## BUT THEY ARE CLEAR ABOUT THE CHANGE THEY WANT TO SEE

Voters describe the change they are looking for in pretty simple terms, even if delivering it in practice is harder.

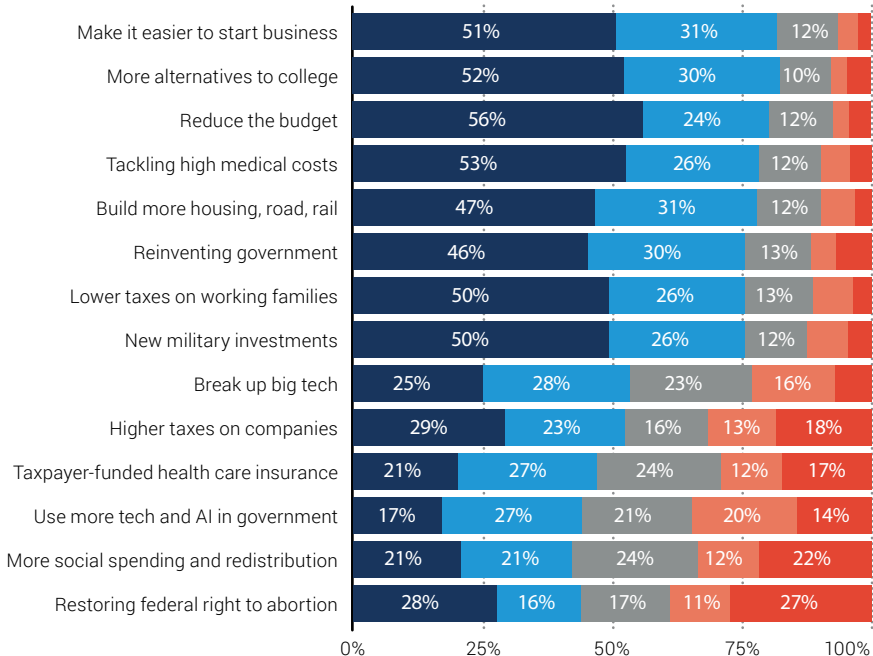
They want help with living costs to make life more affordable, particularly energy and housing. They want help to get on, and favour policies who open up economic opportunity for them and their kids – like better alternatives to college for gaining career skills – over higher tax and spend.

“Help people like us. I’m not having it that the government can do nothing about gas and electric prices. Same with rail prices. And food prices. And rent prices. How can it be that there’s no help on anything like that?”

Former Labour voter, man, Lancashire, June 2025

## WINNING POLICIES FOR THE WORKING CLASS

■ STRONGLY SUPPORT ■ SOMEWHAT SUPPORT ■ NOT SURE ■ SOMEWHAT OPPOSE ■ STRONGLY OPPOSE



## “Bureaucracy is taking over in Germany today. We’re world champions in that.”

Woman, SPD switcher, west Germany, March 2025

Working-class voters we polled in successive polls for PPI in the U.S. and the U.K. are concerned about the environment, but sceptical of hard targets that they believe will mean they will be the ones to pay for. The German experience of the SPD-Green coalition showed that climate goals will meet resistance if they are perceived to push up household costs; reinforcing the U.K. Labour government’s pitch to make cheaper energy the goal in a pragmatic “all of the above” approach.

The voters we have polled and listened to want moderation on social and cultural issues, such as more equality between men and women, and on questions of gender identity.

Overwhelmingly, they want control over their national borders and lower levels of immigration than their countries have experienced over the past few years. In the U.K., continuing small boats is a persistent reminder of government’s impotence.

Finally, given that they don’t believe that government works, voters assume that their money is being wasted and are very sceptical of big government and bureaucracy, fearing they will be the ones to bear the cost of more government spending. The change imperative is as much about how government works as what it does, which has been the appeal of DOGE for Trump voters, even if there are elements that are less appealing.

**“For me, whether it’s Elon Musk or somebody else, having somebody look at all the different ways that money is coming in, going out, seems sensible. Why does all that money have to come from our taxes?”**

Former Democrat voter, woman, Nevada, February 2025

# 06.

## Building back belief

**Through this research, we have aimed to bring the voices of these overlooked voters back into the political debate about the way ahead for the center-left. When we listen to them, we win; when we don't, we lose. We need a political vision and programme for a better and fairer society, but we can only have the chance to make that case and deliver change if we stay close to the voters that matter.**

Overwhelmingly, those voters are now telling us they have lost belief that government can and truly wants to deliver for them. They don't believe that politicians will stand up for them. They don't believe the economy works for them. They don't believe their children can look forward to a successful future. And they certainly don't believe the few political messages that actually reach them.

Our proposition for the center-left doesn't start with policy. It starts with a question of belief – to believe government CAN deliver, voters must also believe government WANTS to deliver. Voters must know what their government and its leaders believe in, before they can believe in that government.

Only if we can demonstrate those two vital ingredients – competence and commitment – will these missing middle voters be able to believe in government again. Building belief has four components:

→ **POLITICIANS WHO STAND UP FOR ME**

→ **AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR ME**

→ **A FUTURE WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ME**

→ **A MESSAGE THAT CONNECTS WITH ME**



# POLITICIANS WHO STAND UP FOR ME

“What do they actually know about the real world? What jobs have they done that aren’t high profile, well paid? How much does a weekly shop in the local supermarket cost? How much does it cost to fill up a car? Have they taken their kids to school on time? Because I don’t think they have any idea of what the general public has to do on a daily basis.”

Former Labour voter, woman, Lancashire, June 2025

Universally, voters want strong political leadership to guide them through an unpredictable new world. Many of them talked with real anxiety, describing their fears for themselves and their loved ones, particularly their children. Patriotism is fused with strength, in the eyes of voters.

**“I think the world is a far, far more dangerous place now. I worry about my 11-year-old leaving the house. But even on his phone there are things to worry about. So we’re having to restrict our children’s freedoms just to keep them safe.”**

Former Labour voter, woman, Northamptonshire, June 2025

Voters are crying out for politicians who show they have heard this anxiety, and will put their country’s – and these voters’ – interests first. Many voters are becoming increasingly wary of perceived generosity to other countries, when they feel their own countries are under so much pressure today.

A reversion to national self-sufficiency is a challenge to progressives who are internationalist in outlook, and see a retreat from the world as a means to make our interdependent countries worse off in the short and long term. So without lurching to a protectionist or isolationist mentality, center-left parties have to articulate a new national politics that helps our people prosper in a country that protects them and enables them to thrive, with politicians who stand up for them.

**“Albo took the middle path. Obviously not supporting Trump, but not completely opposing him either. It showed quite a bit of wisdom.”**

Labor voter, man, New South Wales,  
May 2025

Australian PM Anthony Albanese got credit from Australian voters for asserting Australia’s national interest as Donald Trump imposed tariffs, but also for taking a pragmatic stance. Whilst the Trump effect was somewhat overblown in the international commentary around the Australian election, Albanese’s middle-ground approach reinforced a perception voters already had that he would stand up for them.

**“Keir Starmer is doing well on defence. He’s been decisive on that.”**

Former Labour voter, woman, Northamptonshire,  
June 2025

Much of assuring people that we are on their side is about visibly standing up for them in the face of threats outside of their control. Keir Starmer has prioritised showing the British people he is standing up for them by switching funding from overseas aid to defence, and in establishing stronger relationships with the U.S. and Europe in Britain’s interests.



Labour opposition leader Keir Starmer visits British troops at the Nato base in Estonia (Steffan Rousseau/ PA)



# AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR ME

“Who benefited [from the Biden administration]? I don’t know really. I think that our lives, regular people, everyday lives, were the same. That’s how I felt. I didn’t see any difference particularly. My life was the same.”

Former Democrat voter, man, Midwest, November 2024

Today’s governments in most developed countries are governing amidst an unenviable backdrop. The recent crises of the global pandemic and Ukraine war, along with spiralling inflation, have been immediate contributors. But the underlying economic and demographic trends of lower growth, a needier population, and unwieldy government bureaucracies all pre-date the recent crises.

This fundamental dilemma of resource constraint underpins the choices governments are facing, and the psychological and practical squeeze that many voters experience. There’s less to go around, and voters see it and feel it.

The Biden administration’s response to this – in the form of \$6 trillion of public spending that helped to fuel a stronger pandemic recovery than other advanced economies – provides a salutary lesson. As we know, Bidenomics simply didn’t

land with the voters it was intended to, who were hurting from higher inflation. Plenty of voters even blamed the U.S. government’s actions for higher prices.

The high cost of living has been the dominant economic concern in all elections, except Germany, where it was second to immigration (which, of course, is not unrelated to economic pressure as discussed above). Each of the major center-left parties has promised or embarked upon major economic reform. One of the key lessons from recent elections is that whilst infrastructure investment may be desirable or even necessary, it is not the same as tangible “kitchen table economics” of their wages, bills, and affording the standard of living they’ve worked for. Modern center-left governments have to address both infrastructure investment and individual finances to succeed, economically and politically.

All center-left parties we reviewed attempted to stitch together their long-term agenda with a short-term offer, with varying degrees of success.

“Building Australia’s Future” was the slogan for ALP’s winning campaign. But the day-to-day election battleground was fought over specific forward offers for the second Labor term, with policies framed around how they would lower the cost of living and localised to individual places. The granularity of this was its power. Candidates even named the spot that the new Medicare urgent care centres would be built on, for example, pointing to the nearest urgent care centre that had been built in Labor’s first term.

In government, the Australian Labor Party delivered a series of retail policies that directly addressed cost-of-living concerns, including tax cuts and universal cash transfers such as tax cuts for low-to-middle earners and a \$300 initial energy rebate, with a further \$150 following in the March 2025 budget; and raising the tax rate on superannuation pension accounts holding more than \$3 million.

These tangible “proof points” of delivery are critical, not simply nice to have. And they need to be consistently communicated well ahead of an election, as voters need to see them to be able to attribute them to government activity.





“They gave us \$75 off electricity, talked about Medicare prices with bulk billing. There was some relief for people there.”

Labor voter, man, New South Wales, May 2025

When we spoke with American voters ahead of the Presidential election, we found they lacked this positive evidence about the Democrats’ record in office. It was a similar story in Germany, contrasting with the ALP’s successful

identification of tangible and future positives. This approach worked well ahead of the U.K. election, where the “first steps for change” attempted to bring to life the longer term offer, showing what could be achieved quickly.

“

**IT’S IMPORTANT THAT WE SEE SOMETHING QUICKLY AND I LIKE THAT THE SIX STEPS WORK TOWARDS SOMETHING.”**

Labour target voter, man, Rossendale, 2024



**My first steps** for change

1. Deliver economic stability
2. Cut NHS waiting times
3. Launch a new Border Security Command
4. Set up Great British Energy
5. Crack down on antisocial behaviour
6. Recruit 6,500 new teachers

**Labour**

Read our plan at [labour.org.uk/firststeps](https://labour.org.uk/firststeps)



# A FUTURE WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ME

**“Giving people the opportunity to improve themselves, achieve a better standard of living. At the moment we’re just making ends meet. We’re stagnant.”**

Former Labour voter, woman, Northamptonshire, June 2025

Economic opportunity is receding for many of this “missing middle.” Only half of young Americans today can expect to earn more than their parents did, down from 90% for Baby Boomers. Housing affordability and availability is a crisis across countries, particularly acute in Australia. The basis of financial and domestic security is getting further out of reach.

Voters are hungry to do better for themselves and their families. They are looking for new opportunities to get on in life through their own endeavour. For too long, these voters have felt that opportunity is slipping away from them and for the next generation. Restoring abundant opportunity is the core to a revived center-left politics.

Center-left parties need to make the aspiration to own your own home achievable again and expand alternatives to a university education for

working-class young people and adult learners who want to get ahead. Both U.K. Labour and the ALP made building more homes to increase housing supply an election pledge, and voters will expect there to be more opportunities to afford their own home come the next election.

**“My ambition for my children is for them to be happy and live a good life and I don’t think that’s easily achievable with the current state of the country, economy and government.”**

Former Labour voter, woman, Lancashire, June 2025



*Colorado Governor Jared Polis signs an Executive Order creating a postsecondary education talent system (Whiteboard Advisors)*

Innovative regional leaders are taking matters into their own hands by introducing local education schemes that match the needs of employers. Governor Jared Polis of Colorado has worked with education providers to create the right qualifications to earn a good living and rapidly scaling apprenticeships; Mayor Andy Burnham of Greater Manchester has led the development of the 'Greater Manchester Baccalaureate' to provide an employer-backed pathway from school to high-quality jobs in the region.

As we look forward, we can see that AI will transform the workplace as we know it, and further social and economic dislocation is ahead without significant adaptation of skills for those already in the workforce.

If we want voters to believe in their future, then as we remake the basic deal that if you work hard, you can get on in life, we need to show how government can be on the side of the people again. Here's what voters told us would work for them.



## BELIEVING IN A NEW CONTRACT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE

**Winning back these voters and restoring their belief in government means reshaping the contract between the government and the people.**

As part of rebuilding trust between the people and government, politicians have to acknowledge and correct the pervasive sense of unfairness felt by working-class voters that they have “done everything right” but are no longer getting a fair reward. It is also about looking to the future and giving back hope that the next generation will have a better life than the current one. Below is the winning narrative tested in focus groups:

*“In the past, there was a deal between the government and the people. That if you worked hard and played by the rules, then the simple things in life would be there for you – a warm home, a good job, safe streets, secure borders, and the opportunity for your kids to get ahead.*

*That deal has now been broken... People are continuing to work hard. But they're no longer getting the life and the country that they deserve.*

*We need a new contract between government and the people. We need a contract to hold politicians to account. They're elected on a manifesto, but aren't held responsible when things aren't delivered. The contract will require them to report back on their*

*progress. And if they don't deliver, they're out.*

*We need a contract with guarantees around things we can really experience like better jobs, cheaper bills, health care you can rely on and secure borders.*

*And we need a contract to restore opportunity for the next generation. A requirement to leave the country in a better state than it is now, with opportunities for the future like housebuilding to make owning your own home achievable, and affordable training available throughout your working life, whether you've been to university or not.*

*Everyone deserves the chance to earn a decent living. We need a new contract between government and the people to restore opportunity and make our politicians work for us.”*

**“We're hopeful they make good on what they've promised. We'll give them a chance.”**

Labor voter, man, New South Wales, May 2025



# A MESSAGE THAT CONNECTS WITH ME

“To be honest I’ve started tuning out from news and politics. It’s all depressing and none of it feels relevant to my life.”

U.S. swing voter, woman, Georgia, August 2024

The media environment is growing even more fragmented, with more distractions and multiple screens, personalised ads, an explosion of platforms, and more creator content. U.S. voters spend around 13 hours a day consuming some kind of media, according to an analysis of eMarketer data by Doug Shapiro. Many cynical voters now avoid politics altogether. An ever more fragmented media environment gives them limitless alternatives.

**“We don’t generally watch news programs. We just watch all kinds of stuff on YouTube and social media, mostly.”**

Former Democrat voter, woman, Mountain States, February 2025

Getting politicians onto non-traditional and non-news media like entertainment and lifestyle platforms is even more important. Trump’s use of Joe Rogan’s podcast and using McDonald’s as a platform showed he understood this.

In the U.K., Keir Starmer appeared on podcasts, sports, cooking and gardening shows, and told his personal story and motivations, including through an “unauthorized” biography in the run-up to the election.

In Australia, the Labor Party refocused its campaign on digital advertising and prioritising new media channels. Anthony Albanese took up podcasts and the party localised its short video content for candidates so they could give specific deliverables in their patch.

**“Albo was everywhere saying the same thing. I heard him on radio a lot, and Labor posts on Instagram. All saying the same sort of message really, that Albo’s a normal bloke you can have a beer with but Dutton isn’t.”**

Labor-Coalition swing voter, woman, Queensland, May 2025

We spoke to a number of winning U.S. Democrats – those who have been bucking the trend and winning in Trump-leaning districts. They won by running as outsiders to Washington D.C., insurgents demonstrating bipartisanship and collaboration with opponents to get things done, moderation on social and economic issues, and delivery on kitchen table priorities. They ran ads showing their candidates in direct conversation with voters or using real voices to help build trust in a media landscape in which traditional gatekeepers are distrusted.

This focus on the voter as an individual influenced the communications style that winning candidates adopted in their media. Their campaign ads typically employed direct appeals to the camera rather than slick, studio-produced voiceovers that voters find inauthentic.

South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas has been leading the way with direct-to-voter digital communications, which show to his electorate how the state government is taking positive action on the issues that matter to them. His Instagram feed is bursting with short reels for short attention spans, which demonstrate delivery on voter priorities such as new 24/7 pharmacies, new level crossings and showcase budget announcements like rent-to-buy your first home.

Amongst all the voters we spoke to, there was a strong desire for non-traditional candidates who transcend traditional left/right divides; and offer fresh thinking and new ways of governing.



*Jared Golden campaign*

“[Golden] looked like he had the whole community behind him. It felt authentic, truthful.”

Former Democrat voter, man,  
Mountain States, February 2025



“

**WASHINGTON WASN'T LISTENING TO ME.  
SO WE BROUGHT MAINE TO WASHINGTON.”**

Jared Golden campaign ad, running to represent Maine  
in the House of Representatives, 2024



*Jared Golden campaign*





“

**SHE [MCDONALD RIVET] WASN'T PUTTING ON A FAÇADE. SEEMED LIKE A NORMAL CONVERSATION, LIKE SHE WAS TALKING TO A FRIEND.”**

Former Democrat voter, man, Mountain States, February 2025



Ads showing candidates in direct conversation with voters or using real voices help build trust in a media landscape in which traditional gatekeepers are distrusted. Democrat candidates Adam Gray and Kristen McDonald Rivet address the voter directly with no intermediary.





## LESSONS FROM WINNING DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES IN 2024

The center-left can learn from Democratic candidates who won further down the ticket in November 2024. Despite Trump winning the Presidency, many Democrats running for the Senate and the House bucked the national trend and won in areas that otherwise swung for Trump. These candidates and their staff shared the following lessons for how to win.

### ✓ **Run as outsiders to business-as-usual politics**

These candidates won despite their party's woeful national brand. They signalled their difference from other Democrats and that they would put their voters above their party.

### ✓ **Moderate on social and economic issues**

Moderates consistently perform better than progressives in these tough swing seats. The candidates we spoke to focused on "kitchen table issues" and moderated on or avoided highly partisan national issues, both social and economic.

### ✓ **Meet voters where they are**

These candidates identified their most important target voters and held them in mind when making any decision, often thinking about this group in terms of a single voter. "In my district I had 'Mrs.

Domico,' a single voter that my staff and I kept in mind at all times," one candidate told us.

### ✓ **Run as if you're mayor**

Winning candidates positioned themselves as pragmatic problem-solvers, there to solve whatever issues their constituents raise. Many described themselves as running like they were a "local mayor" rather than national legislators.

### ✓ **Go direct in your comms and digital**

Campaign videos from these candidates frequently addressed voters directly rather than using studio-produced voiceovers, and featured real voters and surprising endorsers more prominently than the candidates themselves.

# 07. Local over national and international

## THE BELIEF BIAS

“The request I'd make of the government is not to get involved in the conflict in the Middle East... It's not Britain's conflict to resolve... why are we involving ourselves in this and spending considerable sums of money doing so. We have so many problems here.”

Former Labour voter, woman, Northamptonshire, June 2025

**A**s we consider how to rebuild belief it is clear that a “belief bias” exists in favour of local over national or international. Understandably, voters trust their own experience better than abstract communications. Across the world, innovative local representatives are leading the way in engaging their voters directly in their communities online and offline.

Local representatives like Members of Parliament have an in-built advantage: a local platform with local responsibility. In many ways, online is a new way of traditional methods: good local politicians have always been rooted in their communities. In the 2000s,

the successful campaign to defeat the far-right British National Party, by Labour MP Margaret Hodge, was a four-year-long effort to rebuild relationships with the local community, with Hodge and campaigners hosting coffee mornings with voters to go where voters were, listen to their local issues, and act on them.

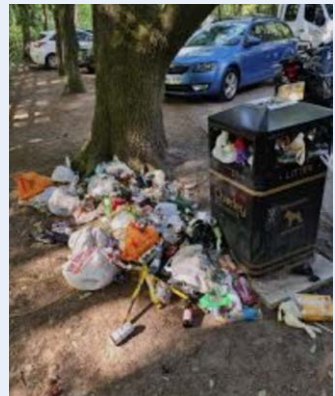
Our most recent research with U.K. swing voters shows clearly how voters often tend to fuse the national – and international – with the local. Voters who feel their local area is in decline and neglected by their government fear that every new global shock means more attention paid and resources diverted to other countries and less to them.

It is clear too that the success or failure of national initiatives will be judged by voters through the lens of their own community. Local focus therefore is a powerful way for politicians to demonstrate both motivation and competence.

In each country, we heard sadness at the decline of town centres and local areas. Physical signs of disrepair such as boarded up shops and pothole-riddled streets symbolise the neglect these voters feel and what they see as government's impotence and inability to fix problems.

→ **PICTURES TAKEN BY U.K. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS OF THEIR LOCAL AREA**

*Including tents occupied by homeless people, litter, disused buildings and potholes.*



**“A historic building that has been left to rot and decay by the local council. It’s an eyesore for the local community and also a hazard... I really feel the government should make councils accountable for properties like this. A beautiful building, part of the local history, is now an eyesore for the community.”**

Former Labour voter, woman, Lancashire, June 2025

“We were promised a new swimming pool here about twenty years ago but it never happened... We've stagnated since that point.

We used to have a bit of hope that things would improve in our local towns but they're falling to bits really and this is a prime example of that. I'd like to see the economy improving.

We're spending more on council tax without any evidence for how that money is being spent and instead it seems they're just keeping their heads above water.”

Former Labour voter, man, Northamptonshire, June 2025

In the U.K., voters are particularly dissatisfied with the decline of their high streets and worry that the cash-only barbershops and nail bars that now dominate many town centres are fronts for organised crime. In Germany and the U.S., complaints centre on rising crime. In both countries, voters link this back to uncontrolled migration.

Yet this also provides an opportunity for local politicians. By addressing local signs of decline, they can provide voters with tangible symbols of progress. This helps remedy doubts about politicians' motivation and competence, by demonstrating commitment to their local areas and showing that government can deliver.

If a politician is seen as a “national” politician, this enhances the view that they do not understand the struggles people face in their everyday lives. However, if problems are seen to be addressed at a local level, this is arguably the most powerful proof point we can offer.

The urgent care centers introduced by Albanese's government in Australia became a symbol of Labor's delivery – something new and tangible, that many of the voters we heard from had used, clearly attributable to the government.

“We actually had to use the urgent care clinic, and it was just such a relief not to have to wait it out in the emergency rooms.”

Woman, Labor, outer Sydney, May 2025

Similarly, Democrats who bucked the trend and won in Trump districts described running for election as if they were “local mayor,” rather than national legislators. This meant being pragmatic problem solvers and fixing problems on behalf of the community, putting their local community first.

One candidate we heard from had secured funding for a local community college while a State Senator and ran on that during his election to national office. “Voters knew him for that, not for being a politician,” his campaign manager told us. “I think some of them thought he was the president of the college or something, not a State Senator. We’d say we were running for mayor of all these towns. We avoided everything national – politicians, trends, messages.”



In Australia, State representatives have used visible signs of progress in localities to underline the local-national message. In Labor’s re-election campaign in 2025, the party deliberately

aimed for maximum recall by voters of Labor’s identifiable achievements.



As Labour is in power in so many local authorities and Mayoralities in the U.K., the examples from winning Democrats and Australian Labor show the possibilities of matching local delivery and experience to the national story. Voters want pragmatic problem solvers who move beyond party politics to work together to get things done in their patch for the people’s benefit.



# 08.

## Ten Steps to Build Back Belief

There is much at stake as progressives navigate the electoral challenges ahead, but our work suggests some clear learnings from recent successes and failures. The overarching message is that the basic contract between government and governed feels broken to many working-class voters who are hungry for a new approach to politics that they can really believe in.

### CHANGE IS AN IMPERATIVE...

In summary, this is our ten-point plan for success:

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#### 1. HAVE A CLEAR, SINGLE-MINDED FOCUS ON WORKING-CLASS VOTERS

→ Use the “hero voter” method to get to know and respect them and their priorities.

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#### 2. DEMONSTRATE EMPATHY

→ Listen and show you understand the fragility of their lives and have tangible solutions.

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#### 3. SHOW YOUR MOTIVATION TO HELP THOSE VOTERS

→ Use emotional connection to build trust.

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#### 4. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

→ Find voters where they are – shopping centres, workplaces, residents groups, social media communities.

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**5. FOCUS YOUR OFFER, DELIVERY, AND COMMUNICATION ON THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST TO THEM**

➔ Cost of living, immigration, health care.

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**6. TELL THEM WHAT YOU ARE NOT GOING TO FOCUS ON**

➔ It will always be a zero-sum game.

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**7. USE LOCAL ACTIVITY AS A LENS FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS**

➔ Showcase tangible examples of success at a very local level.

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**8. DEMONSTRATE CLEARLY HOW THOSE TANGIBLE EXAMPLES CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO GOVERNMENT ACTION AND YOUR MOTIVATION**

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**9. SAFEGUARD THE FUTURE**

➔ Show you understand and have a plan to manage and derisk future threats in a meaningful way for them and their families.

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**10. BE STRONG AND BE CONSISTENT**

➔ It's a scary world and voters want their representatives to be tough and relentlessly stand up for them.

**FOCUS GROUPS WERE CONDUCTED ON BEHALF OF PPI BY THE AUTHORS IN:**

Mountain states (Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico), U.S., February 2025

Swing states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, U.S., August and November 2024

North-Rhine-Westphalia (west Germany) and Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (east Germany), March 2025

Outer suburbs of Sydney, New South Wales and Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, May 2025

Lancashire and Northamptonshire, U.K., June 2025

In addition, interviews were conducted with strategists and advisors to winning Democrats, and with international strategists and politicians in each of the countries featured.

**YOUGOV HAS CONDUCTED FIVE POLLS OF WORKING-CLASS VOTERS IN THE U.S. AND U.K. FOR PPI, PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN:**

*PPI US Election Review and the Way Ahead for Democrats*, December 2024

*Winning Working Britain: Work and the Economy*, October 2024

*Campaign for Working America: A PPI/ YouGov survey of Working-Class Voters*, July 2024

*Winning Back Working America: A PPI/ YouGov survey of Working-Class Attitudes*, November 2023

*Roadmap to Hope: How to bring back hope to working-class voters in an age of insecurity*, October 2023

**PPI's project on Center-Left Renewal** was launched in January 2023 to catalyze and create a renewal of the center-left, sharing ideas, strategies, and research around the world. Since its inception, the project has facilitated a shared exchange between center-left parties, contributing new ideas and analysis designed to further the prospects of the center-left. The project's outputs are shared by PPI here:

[www.progressivepolicy.org/project/project-on-center-left-renewal/](http://www.progressivepolicy.org/project/project-on-center-left-renewal/).

Sign up to our project mailing list at: [info@ppionline.org](mailto:info@ppionline.org)



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Deborah Mattinson** is a leading British pollster and strategist, who was Director of Strategy to UK Labour leader Keir Starmer July 2021 until Labour won the General Election of July 2024. Prior to this, she cofounded the research and strategy consultancy Britain Thinks, and was pollster to Gordon Brown when he was British Chancellor of the Exchequer, and then as Prime Minister. She is the author of two books on public opinion, “Talking to a Brick Wall” (2010), and “Beyond the Red Wall” (2020). In 2024, Deborah was nominated for a life peerage by Keir Starmer, and sits in the House of Lords as Baroness Mattinson of Darlington.

**Claire Ainsley** is Director of PPI’s project on Center-left Renewal. From 2020-22 she was Executive Director of Policy to Keir Starmer, Leader of the Opposition and the U.K. Labour Party. Prior to this, she was Executive Director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. In May 2018, she authored “The New Working Class: How to Win Hearts, Minds and Votes.

**Tom Brookes** is a pollster and campaign strategist. He was Senior Strategic Advisor to Keir Starmer, Leader of the Labour Party, now British Prime Minister from 2021 until shortly after Labour’s election victory in 2024. He has since moved to the U.S., where he works as a freelance pollster and strategist.

## Notes





The Progressive Policy Institute is a catalyst for policy innovation and political reform based in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to create radically pragmatic ideas for moving America beyond ideological and partisan deadlock.

Founded in 1989, PPI started as the intellectual home of the New Democrats and earned a reputation as President Bill Clinton's "idea mill." Many of its mold-breaking ideas have been translated into public policy and law and have influenced international efforts to modernize progressive politics.

Today, PPI is developing fresh proposals for stimulating U.S. economic innovation and growth; equipping all Americans with the skills and assets that social mobility in the knowledge economy requires; modernizing an overly bureaucratic and centralized public sector; and defending liberal democracy in a dangerous world.

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