
New Directions

Winning back working America

Presentation for PPI Las Vegas retreat | September 2025

Deborah Mattinson, Claire Ainsley, Tom Brookes

The challenges and opportunities facing Democrats

Around the world, center-left parties in government and in opposition are facing the challenge of radical right-wing parties. Each party needs a cross-class coalition, but it is working-class voters with whom the parties need to reconnect with to win sustainable majorities again.

PPI's project on Center-Left Renewal, launched in 2023, has been conducting research with working-class voters to inform the strategies of center-left parties.

This slide deck is a summary of the research presented at the September 2025 Las Vegas retreat of PPI's 'New Directions for Democrats' series. It builds on research with working-class voters in the US, UK, Germany and Australia conducted in 2024 and 2025, featured in PPI's recent publication 'Build Back Belief' by Deborah Mattinson, Claire Ainsley, and Tom Brookes.

The research highlights the main challenges and opportunities facing Democrats in the Autumn of 2025.

Listening to working families: what we did

We heard from non-college-educated Trump 2024 voters in August 2025. The participants were previously Democrat voters and open to the Democrats in the midterms, living in the Mountain West States



Nevada



Arizona



New
Mexico



Colorado

This builds on research with working-class voters in four countries, conducted across 2024 and 2025



USA

Focus groups and desk research from pre-election 2024 to spring 2025



Germany

Focus groups after February 2025 federal election



UK

Focus groups and diary exercise in June 2025



Australia

Focus groups after May 2025 general election

Why the Democrats lost – and still aren't on the pitch

Trump's change agenda has a powerful appeal to working Americans who feel they have nothing to lose

Working American voters feel...

Anxious and pessimistic about the future

- Working harder than ever but getting less in return
- Shut out of American Dream – for them and their children

“

We're squeezed out of the American Dream. That doesn't exist anymore, unless you're wealthy.

(Man, Mountain West States)

”

Deeply distrustful of 'corrupt political elites'

- Don't think gov can deliver – slow, ineffective
- Don't think politicians care – see them as a 'corrupt', self-interested elite

“

There's a group, and they're at the top of the pyramid. We're all at the bottom, and we're just here to help make them rich.

(Woman, Mountain West States)

”

Trump represents 'change'

- Trump's promise to smash a failed system key to his appeal
- Happy to see things 'shaken up' – 'at least it's something different'

“

If the Republicans were a drink, they'd be Red Bull. Trump is doing a lot of things, trying to move fast and shaking things up.

(Man, Mountain West States)

”



The Democratic Party brand remains weak, showing no improvement since Trump entered office

- Democrats seen as 'weak', 'disorganized'
- No clear leader or central purpose associated with the Party
- Seen to focus on 'niche' progressive issues rather than things that matter



“*Prius. Electric and looks like you could push it over.*
(Woman, Mountain West States)”



“*Oat milk latte... Kind of wishy-washy, watered down.*
(Man, Mountain West States)”

- Republicans by contrast seen as 'strong'
- Associated with 'family values' – 'old fashioned', patriotic and principled
- Still seen as the party of the rich – but the Democrats don't fare much better

“*Dodge Ram, Built American, American muscle.*
(Man, Mountain West States)”



“*Whiskey. Goes down rough but gets you where you want to be.*
(Woman, Mountain West States)”



Democrats are seen as out of touch, not ‘for me’

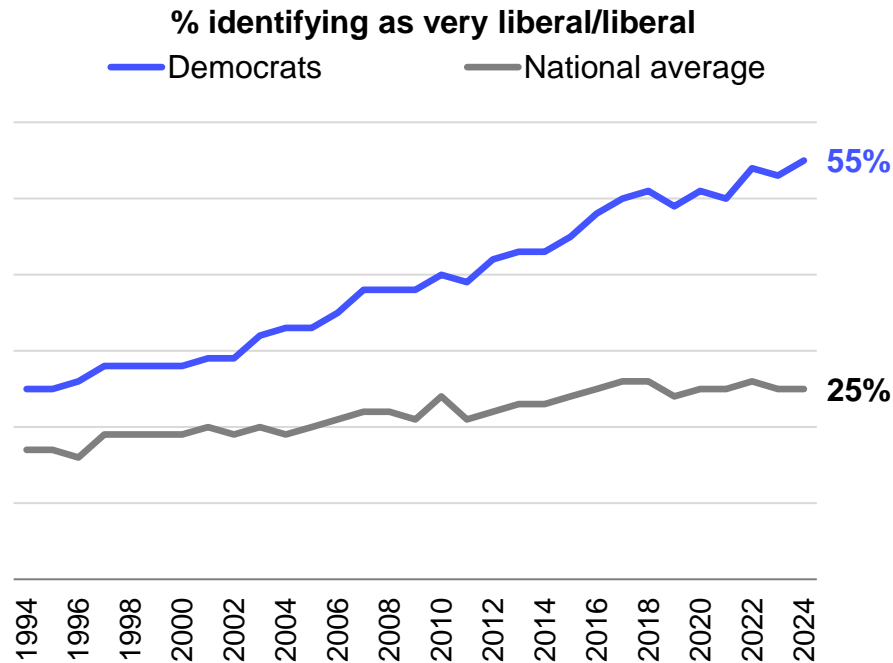
- The Democratic Party is no longer seen as on the side of ordinary working people
- Some even go as far as describing the Party as “*corrupt*,” delivering for vested interests over the people
- Today, voters feel Democrats prioritize the interests of minority groups and radical causes, not the working/middle class
- Voters did not feel the Biden administration had a notable positive impact on their lives – instead associating it with inflation and the pursuit of ideological goals

“*Instead of putting the country and the working class first, they progressed teaching about sex. They focused too much on other things instead of the working class. They forgot the middle class that put them there.*”

(Man, Mountain West States)

These voters are angry about what they see as ‘radical’ liberal overreach on social issues

Democrats have grown much more liberal than the average American:



Gallup Poll Social Series.

- Working-class voters' see the Republicans as more aligned with their values, particularly on social issues
- Real and persistent anger about perceived liberal overreach in the last four years
- Voters feel that Democrats pursued a 'radical' theory of gender identity, forcing it on children and schools

“

I think about how they were encouraging doing sex changes on children and and having us pay for it. That's just horrific to me.

(Woman, Mountain West States)

”

The opportunity

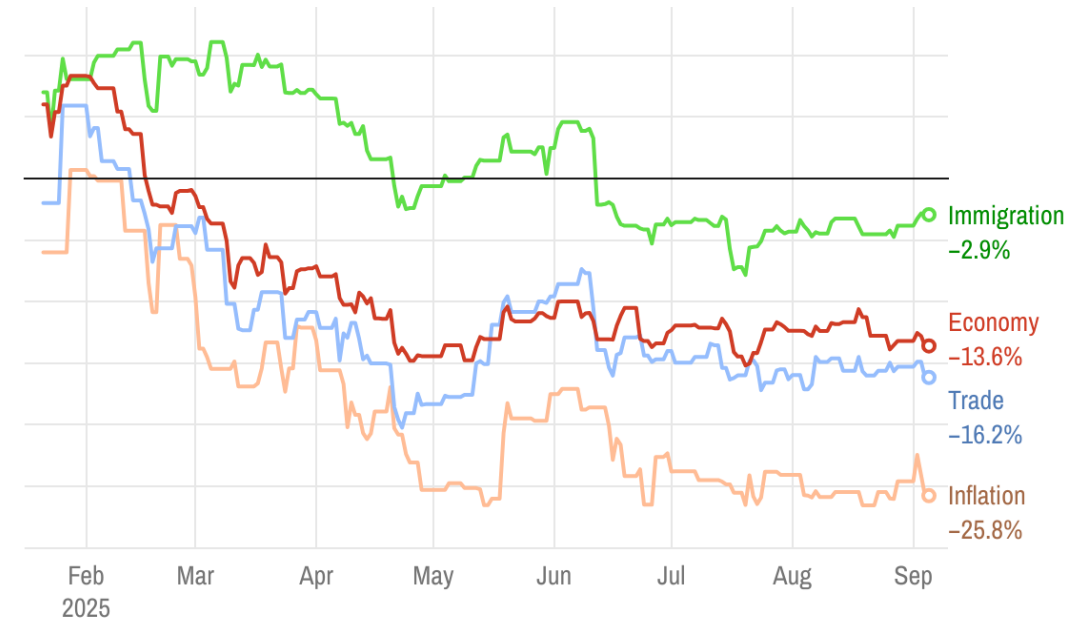
Many still give Trump the benefit of the doubt, but a clear weakness is emerging on the economy

- All praise Trump's action on immigration – seen as acting swiftly and strongly to close the border
- But big doubts are emerging about Trump's performance on the economy:
 - Feel prices have continued to rise and the American Dream remains out of reach
 - Tariffs unpopular – seen as ineffective/chaotic at best, inflationary at worst

“Tariffs made everything go up... I've seen a lot of small businesses not being able to do business... It's like you have to be a millionaire just to go out to eat.

(Woman, Mountain West States)

Trump's ratings on economic issues have fallen further than on immigration



Silver Bulletin. Issue performance tracker.

Working Americans want a relentless focus on costs and affordability

- Cost of living frames everything for working-class voters right now
- They want energy policy to be guided by cost to the consumer – support continued use of fossil fuels and renewables to keep bills down
- ‘Cracking down on monopolies’ is popular and taps into anger at corporations’ profits during the inflation crisis
- Supply-side reforms need to be made more retail – voters do not intuitively draw the link between permitting reform and why that means cheaper housing – and there is anxiety about automation

“
All the grocery stores in my town are owned by one company, so they have no incentive to compete over beef prices.
”
(Man, Mountain West States)

Democrats are strong when we focus on opportunity, and leave ideology behind

- ‘Earn while you learn’ apprenticeship degrees are highly popular, seen as a necessary pivot to vocational skills and away from expensive college degrees
- ‘Teaching kids what it means to be American’ is also seen as a ‘unifying’ initiative in what they feel is an increasingly politicized country
- On education, concern about ‘woke’ ideologies dominate how these voters think about education right now. They want a ‘return to basics’ – a focus on the core subjects and skills, and an end to ideology in the classroom

“
This is what they should have been teaching this whole time. Respecting the flag. History rather than what they’re teaching now.
”
(Woman, Mountain West States)

The task ahead

- The working-class swing voters Trump won are growing more skeptical, but still give him the benefit of the doubt – for now
- The Democratic brand remains badly damaged by the past and present – a clean break is needed
- Opportunity 1: oppose Trump on the issues that matter most to working Americans – costs and the economy
- Opportunity 2: build a platform of credible, optimistic reforms for the future
- Opportunity 3: fix the brand by reconnecting with working Americans

Read July's PPI report 'Build Back Belief':

Build Back Belief



Why Voters Around the World Lost Faith in Government and How to Win it Back

By Deborah Mattinson, Claire
Ainsley and Tom Brookes
*PPI's Project on
Center-Left Renewal*



READ THE
FULL REPORT

