Where Are All the Left Populists?

Progressives, Populists, and the Working Class Among 2022 Democratic Candidates

The Center for Working-Class Politics
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Authors

Jared Abbott, Fred DeVeaux, Dustin Guastella, Milan Loewer, and Isaac Rabbani

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The Center for Working-Class Politics is a research institution dedicated to studying the relationship between working-class voters and progressive politics. Its projects include regular surveys of working-class voters, statistical analyses of elections and polling data, and the construction of a comprehensive database of progressive candidate demographics, strategy, and messaging.

Jacobin Foundation produces *Jacobin* magazine, *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy*, and the UK-based *Tribune*. Combined, its publications reach four million people monthly online and one hundred thousand readers in print.

The Center for Work and Democracy was founded in 2019 to connect university research to the challenges facing working people in our increasingly undemocratic society. Inequality has reached historically unprecedented extremes, undermining avenues for social mobility and driving growing political extremism at the expense of social solidarity and collective care. It is the conviction of the center that the renewal of social solidarity and democracy will be driven by working people. Its mission is to rebuild the power and voice of working people and to facilitate a more inclusive polity, economy, and civil society.

Contact

Authors: jared@workingclasspolitics.org
Press: publicity@workingclasspolitics.org

Contents

Introduction

The political left is struggling with working-class voters around the world. In the United States, the Democratic Party has lost more of its support in election after election since 2012. Is there anything that can be done to stop the bleeding or even reverse the trend?

In 2023, the Center for Working Class Politics (CWCP) published *Trump's Kryptonite*, a study that sought to provide some answers to this basic question.[1] We designed a unique survey experiment that asked participants to choose between hypothetical pairs of candidates. We found that candidates who deployed populist messaging, who advocated bold progressive economic policies, and who came from working-class backgrounds were more likely to win support among working-class voters.

With these findings in mind, we next sought to investigate the state of such candidates in the real world today: Who are the working-class champions, where are they running, and how are they performing? To answer these questions, the CWCP, in collaboration with the Center for Work and Democracy at Arizona State University and *Jacobin* magazine, has collected and analyzed data on Democratic candidates in the 2022 midterms. With the help of a team of research assistants, we built a novel, comprehensive dataset on the 966 candidates who ran in Democratic primaries and general elections for House and Senate in 2022. Using text from candidates' campaign websites, we documented their campaign rhetoric, policy platforms, demographic characteristics, and class backgrounds.[2] We were thus able to identify, among other things, candidates who our past research suggests would be effective at winning working-class voters: those who employed populist rhetoric, proposed progressive economic policies, or held working-class occupations prior to their political careers.

More than anything else, our findings reveal just how few Democratic candidates actually meet these criteria. Despite the appeal of forceful, anti–economic elite messaging to the demographics that Democrats desperately need to reach — such as working-class and rural voters — few Democrats actually employ this kind of messaging. Even fewer run on bold progressive economic policies such as raising the minimum wage or a jobs guarantee. Finally, working-class candidates were extremely rare — 2% to 6% of candidates, depending on the measure — and those who did run were typically marginal primary candidates or ran Hail Mary general election campaigns in deep-red districts.

How did progressives, populists, and working-class candidates fare when they did run? In short, quite well. Candidates who used economic populist rhetoric won higher vote shares in general elections, especially in highly working-class districts, rural and small-town districts, and districts where the majority were white and not college-educated. We also find that Democratic candidates running on economically progressive policies were more successful overall than other candidates, especially in majority-white, non-college-educated districts.

Because there were so few truly working-class candidates — defined as those who had *only* worked in working-class jobs before entering politics — it is difficult to generalize about their characteristics or electoral outcomes. That said, if we broaden our attention to candidates with *any* prior experience in working-class jobs, we see that, when such candidates made it through their primary elections, they performed just as well as other candidates in their generals. Unfortunately, however, they did much worse than other candidates in the primary stage, perhaps because candidates with

1 *Trump's Kryptonite: How Progressives Can Win Back the Working Class*, a report published by the Center for Working-Class Politics in collaboration with Jacobin and YouGov (2023).

2 We focus on campaign websites because they are the most comprehensive available source of information on candidate messaging, policies, and personal backgrounds. Also, as recent news has shown, campaign websites are read closely by campaign supporters and can be the source of significant controversy (Olivia Alafriz and Kelly Garrity, "Phillips battles DEI controversy at the worst possible time," *Politico*, January 17, 2024). Candidates must therefore put care into how they choose to present themselves on campaign websites.

working-class experience are more likely to face financial and organizational barriers to running, especially early on. We also find, in line with other research, that candidates with working-class experience were more likely than others to raise up working-class people or champion their issues.[3] All this suggests Democrats face little downside from running more working-class candidates in general elections, and a large potential upside.

In a final analysis, we test whether either of these characteristics — campaign messaging or working-class background — exhibits a strong association with a candidate's election outcome. To do this, we run a series of regressions that control for a variety of important electoral factors. One result that comes through clearly is that employing rhetoric that attacks economic elites — one of the main components of economic populism — is strongly associated with a higher vote share in highly working-class districts.

Our complete findings are detailed below.

3 Nicholas Carnes, "Does the Numerical Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Congress Matter?," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2012).

Data and Methods

With the help of a team of over twenty research assistants, we compiled the campaign websites of all Democratic congressional candidates who ran in either a primary or general election for House or Senate in 2022. We found websites for 892 candidates, or 92.3% of identified candidates.[4] Our research assistants scraped the text of campaign websites and documented each candidate's prior occupations, educational attainment, and various demographic characteristics such as race and gender. They further categorized past occupations by class.[5] In order to measure each candidate's utilization of different types of rhetoric, we used their website's text — in conjunction with related academic work, news reports, and journalistic commentary on the 2022 election cycle — to develop three lists of keywords capturing progressive economic messaging, progressive cultural messaging, and economic populist messaging.[6] Extensive validation testing and some manual revisions confirmed that key terms were used in supportive contexts rather than critical ones.[7] Throughout this report we also draw upon in-depth case studies conducted by our research team.

We then combined our candidate database with data on corresponding district demographics (such as class and racial or ethnic makeup, population, and population density), candidates' campaign finance information, primary and general election outcomes, and district competitiveness.[8] The resulting dataset was used to conduct the analyses for this report. In each of the three sections below, we summarize the prevalence of economic progressivism, economic populism, and working-class backgrounds among 2022 Democratic candidates. We then compare the candidates who met each criterion against their counterparts who did not, as well as comparing the districts in which they ran and their election outcomes. Finally, we employ regression analysis to control for a range of factors that also determine election outcomes in order to investigate the potential effects of campaign rhetoric and class background on election outcomes.

4 Additional sample details are included in the appendix.

5 We employed an occupational categorization scheme from Nicholas Carnes, *White-Collar Government: The Hidden Role of Class in Economic Policy Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), https://press.uchicago.edu/sites/carnes/carnes_Appendix_Ch1.pdf. A detailed description of this categorization is included in the appendix.

6 Particular attention was paid to political keyword dictionaries in Christopher Witko, Jana Morgan, Nathan J. Kelly, and Peter K. Enns, *Hijacking the Agenda: Economic Power and Political Influence* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2021). Each list is described in more detail in its respective section. Complete keyword lists are included in the appendix.

7 To increase our confidence that the database was picking up on meaningful differences in candidates' campaign messaging, we compared it with two commonly used sources for candidate messaging analyses: candidates' tweets and TV ads. First, we used a series of keyword dictionaries employed by Jacob S. Hacker, Amelia Malpas, Paul Pierson, and Sam Zacher ("Bridging the Blue Divide: The Democrats' New Metro Coalition and the Unexpected Prominence of Redistribution," *Perspectives on Politics*, December 27, 2023) to analyze democratic politicians' tweets and found that politicians' relative use of terms in these keyword dictionaries on Twitter was remarkable to their campaign websites. In turn, we transcribed eight hundred TV ads of Democratic candidates in competitive districts and compared the relative use of the keywords in TV ads to candidate websites. With the exception of "abortion," which was mentioned much more frequently in TV ads than on candidate websites relative to other keywords, we again found similar patterns. See appendix for further details.

8 Population and demographic makeup data come from the Census Bureau, and population density from the Congressional District Health Dashboard's District Density Index. Campaign finance data come from the Federal Election Commission and opensecrets.com. District competitiveness data come from the Cook Political Report's Partisan Voting Index (PVI).

Did Economic Progressives Win in 2022?

Economic progressives fared well in 2022. Candidates who ran on progressive economic issues performed better than those who did not, particularly in districts where the majority of residents were working-class or were white and not college-educated. Here are our key findings on the performance of economic progressives in 2022:

- **Less than 30% of Democrats emphasized the need for more high-quality jobs. Less than 5% campaigned on bold progressive economic policies to help workers, such as raising the minimum wage or a jobs guarantee.** Despite polling that demonstrates the popularity of these progressive economic policies across the ideological spectrum, and especially among working-class voters, most Democratic candidates did not focus their campaigns on these issues.

- **Most candidates did not advocate policies that would greatly expand the welfare state — including President Joe Biden's signature legislation.** Medicare for All and paid family or medical leave were mentioned by less than 20% of candidates, and Medicare for All was brought up by fewer than 3% of candidates in competitive districts. Likewise, progressive environmental policies like the Green New Deal were virtually never mentioned in competitive races. Democratic candidates largely did not mention expansive policies to improve the social safety net, including the American Rescue Plan.

- **Economic progressives were less likely to campaign in working-class districts and rural districts.** Those candidates who did champion a progressive economic agenda were more likely to do so in relatively affluent and highly educated districts with smaller working-class populations. Economic progressives are shying away from many of the districts where progressive economic reforms are most needed.

- **Almost no candidates campaigned on highly polarizing cultural rhetoric.** Despite the popular association of progressive politicians with such causes and slogans, Democratic candidates overwhelmingly avoided defending diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, critical race theory in schools, and the like. They also avoided terms often associated with the party's progressive wing, such as "birthing person" and "BIPOC."

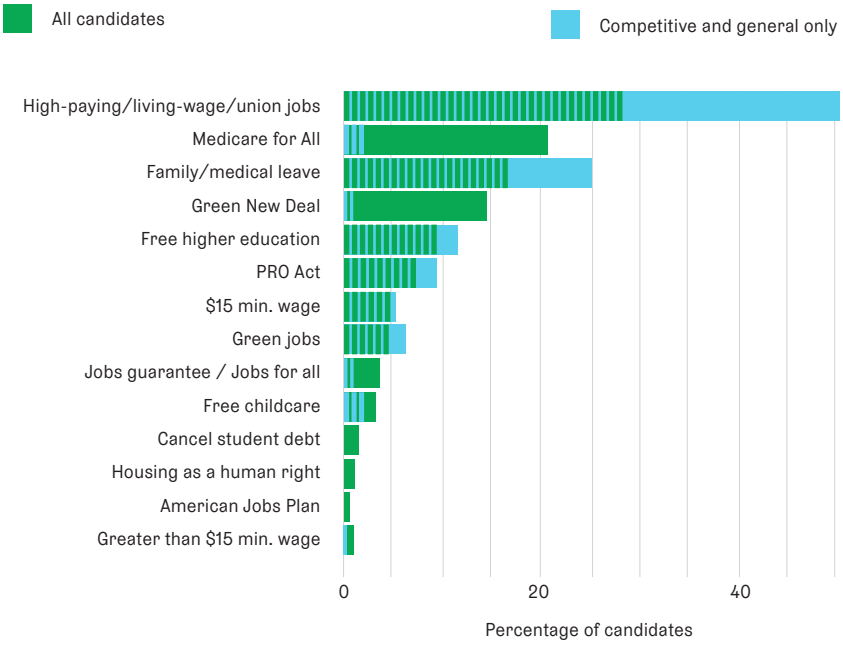
To determine how well economic progressives performed among working-class voters, we first had to develop a measure of economic progressivism for each candidate. To do this, we assembled a list of terms associated with economic policies that are typically supported by the progressive wing of the party. This list contains policies such as Medicare for All, a jobs guarantee, a higher minimum wage, and free higher education.[9]

Figure 1.1 displays the prevalence of the most commonly mentioned progressive economic issues in 2022 Democratic messaging. Overall, good, high-paying, living-wage, or union jobs were the most commonly invoked progressive economic terms, used by over a quarter of the candidates. Medicare for All was mentioned by just over 20% of the candidates, and paid family or medical leave by roughly 16%. The Green New Deal and free higher education were the next most common terms, having been present in, respectively, just under 15% and just under 10% of websites, followed by the stalled working-rights legislation called the PRO Act, which was mentioned by around 7% of the candidates.

9 See the appendix for a complete list of terms.

Progressive Economic Policy Mentions

FIGURE 1.1



NOTE: Bars indicate the percentage of candidates who mention each item at least once.

Interestingly, despite the growing popularity of minimum wage increases in states such as Florida — which passed a referendum increasing it to $15 in 2020 — only around 5% of candidates mentioned a $15 minimum wage, and virtually none campaigned on a higher one. Likewise, despite previous research conducted by the CWCP and the Winning Jobs Narrative demonstrating the popularity of job creation policies, especially among working-class voters, very few candidates campaigned on a progressive jobs guarantee or used phrases such as "jobs for all."[10]

When we restrict our attention to only those candidates who ran in competitive districts and made it to the general election, a different picture of economic rhetoric emerges.[11] In these races, good jobs and paid family or medical leave were much more commonly invoked — by over half and a quarter of candidates, respectively. On the other hand, general election candidates in competitive districts almost never mentioned Medicare for All or the Green New Deal. Similarly, there was only one Democratic candidate running in a competitive general election who used "jobs for all" or "jobs guarantee" language: Teresa Leger Fernández, who has represented New Mexico's 3rd District since 2021. Leger Fernández stressed that she "wants our state to build a dynamic and innovative economy that creates fulfilling, well-paying jobs for all our kids here in New Mexico."

While there is certainly a range of explanations for why candidates in competitive districts steer clear of many progressive economic issues, many likely fear that pushing policies associated with the left wing of the party will hurt their electoral appeal among moderate voters. Yet, as shown by recent work by Kuziemko et al. (2023) and Abbott (2024), as well as our own previous work, working-class voters respond favorably to many progressive economic policy proposals, particularly those related to job quality and worker rights.[12]

10 See *Trump's Kryptonite*.

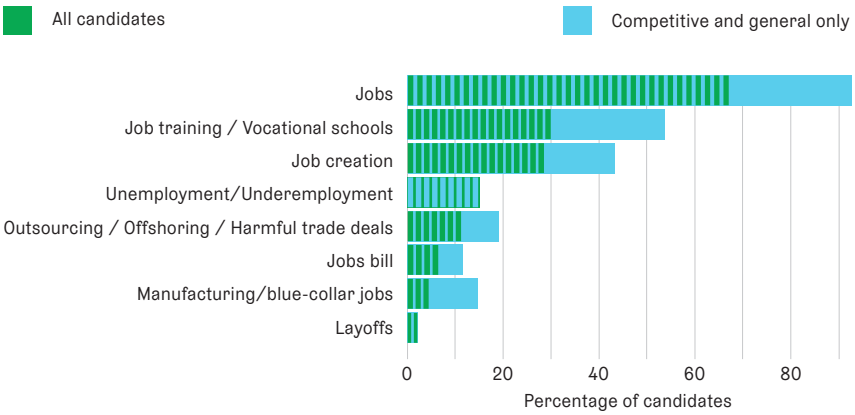
11 For the purposes of this report, a competitive district is defined as one with a Cook PVI within the range of +/-5.

12 Ilyana Kuziemko, Nicolas Longuet-Marx, and Suresh Naidu, *"Compensate the Losers?" Economic Policy and Partisan Realignment in the US* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2023); Jared Abbott, "Working-Class Dealignment: Is It Happening, Does It Matter, and Can It Be Fixed?," *Catalyst* 7 no. 4 (forthcoming); *Trump's Kryptonite*.

That said, it is important to note that while most candidates are not running on the boldest progressive economic policies, many *are* focusing on key bread-and-butter economic issues related to jobs and employment that are likely to resonate with working-class voters. Indeed, over 90% of candidates in competitive general elections mentioned the word "jobs" on their websites. Because many of those mentions are not related to jobs policies, we further examine the content of candidates' statements regarding jobs — and here we find that, in competitive general elections, over 40% of candidates spoke about job creation and over half spoke about some form of job training or vocational schooling.[13]

Percentage of Candidates Mentioning Jobs Policy Terms

FIGURE 1.2

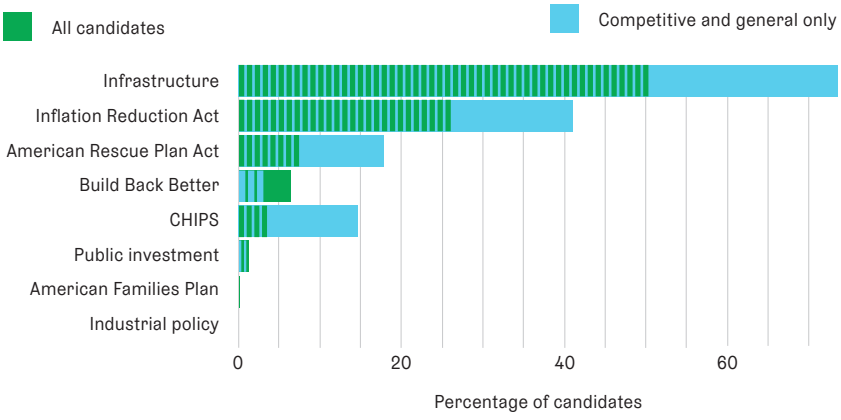


NOTE: Bars indicate the percentage of candidates who mention each item at least once.

Similarly, figure 1.3 shows that a substantial number of Democratic candidates — over 70% in competitive general elections — talked about infrastructure policies, which could also plausibly signal a commitment to expanding government programs to facilitate job creation. That said, we find less emphasis on the signature economic investment policies of the Biden administration — the Inflation Reduction Act, American Rescue Plan Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act — with only 15% to 40% of candidates in competitive general elections mentioning these. Less than 10% of candidates mentioned the Build Back Better Act.[14]

Percentage of Candidates Mentioning Biden Economic Policy Terms

FIGURE 1.3



NOTE: Bars indicate the percentage of candidates who mention each item at least once.

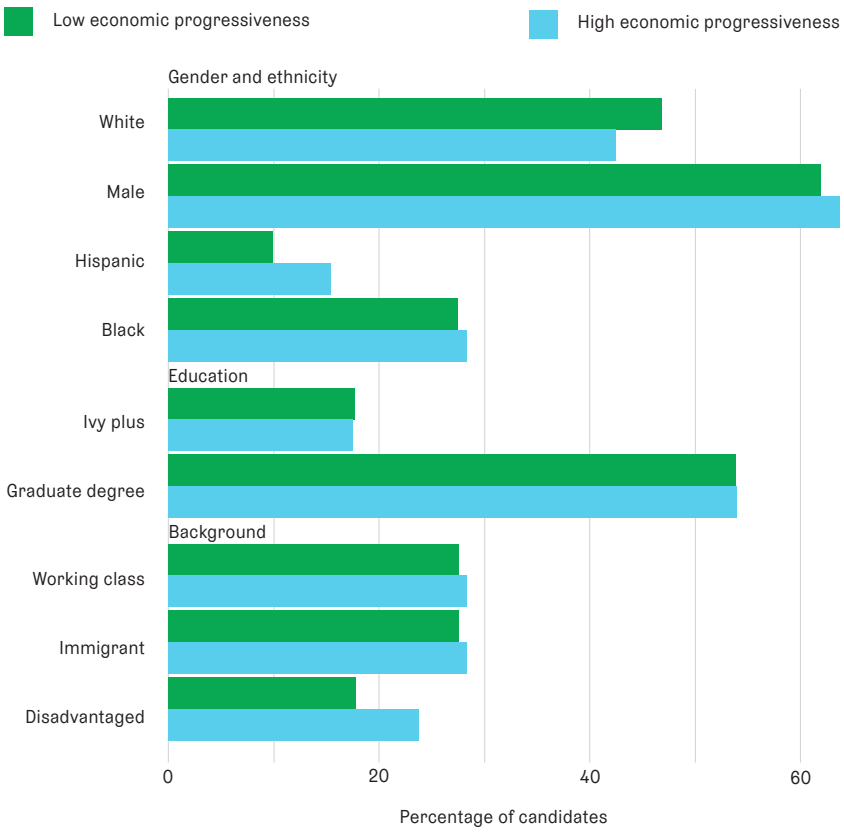
13 See the appendix for a complete list of terms.

14 See the appendix for a complete list of terms.

We turn next to the personal backgrounds of the candidates. Figure 1.4 presents their demographic breakdown by economic progressiveness. Defining economically progressive candidates as those who scored in the top 25% of all candidates on mentions of progressive economic issues, we find significant demographic differences between economic progressives and other Democrats. Candidates who ran on progressive economic policies were much less likely to be white — around 42% of candidates who ran on progressive economic policies were white, compared to almost 54% of non–economic progressives — and were more likely to report coming from an immigrant or disadvantaged background.[15]

Candidate Demographics by Economic Progressiveness

FIGURE 1.4



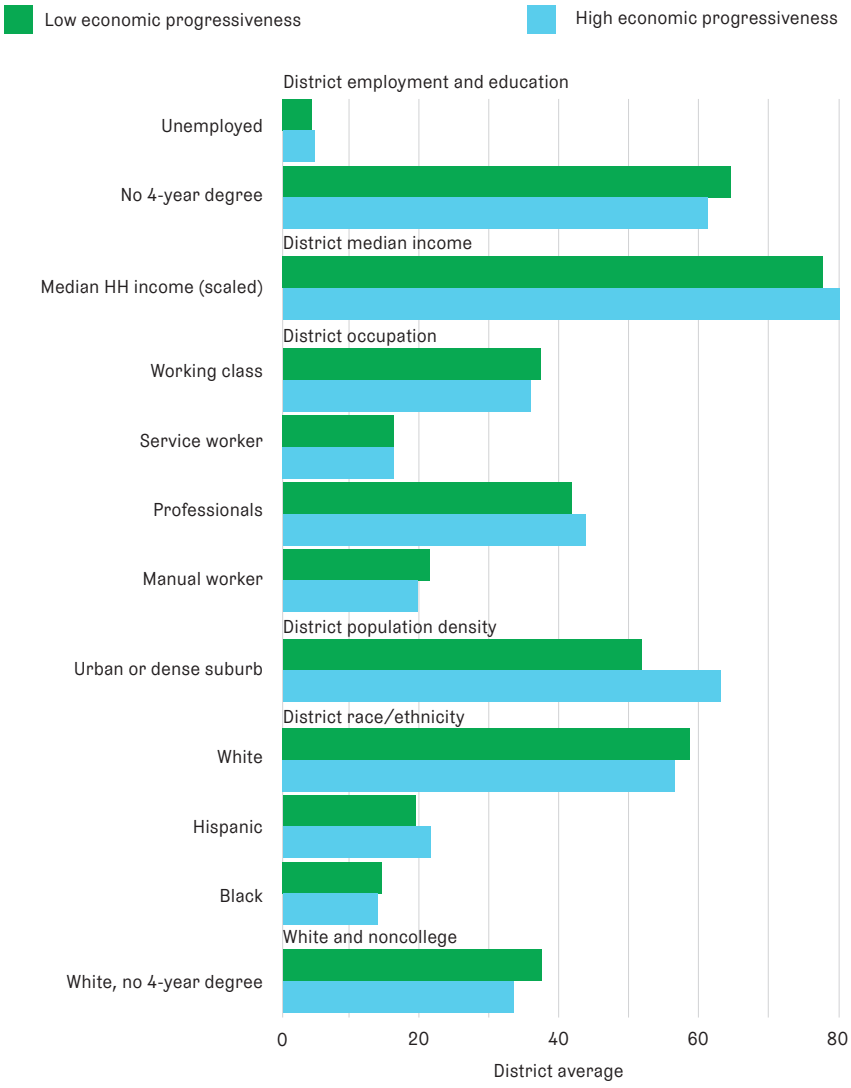
NOTE: "Ivy plus" denotes candidates who attended Ivy League universities or other highly prestigious universities, such as MIT, Caltech, UChicago, Northwestern, Berkeley, Stanford, etc.

Where did economic progressives run in 2022? Figure 1.5 shows what sorts of districts these candidates ran in, as compared to their nonprogressive counterparts. Despite the fact that the candidates advance progressive economic policies in order to help working-class, poor, and disadvantaged Americans, they appear to run in more affluent and better-educated districts with smaller working-class populations.

15 We coded candidates as coming from an economically disadvantaged background when they mentioned experiencing financial hardship, holding low-paying or multiple jobs in their youth, or coming from a poor or working-class family. Candidates were coded as having an immigrant background if they mentioned having immigrated to the United States, either personally or if their family had immigrated to the United States in a previous generation.

District Demographics by Candidate's Economic Progressiveness

FIGURE 1.5



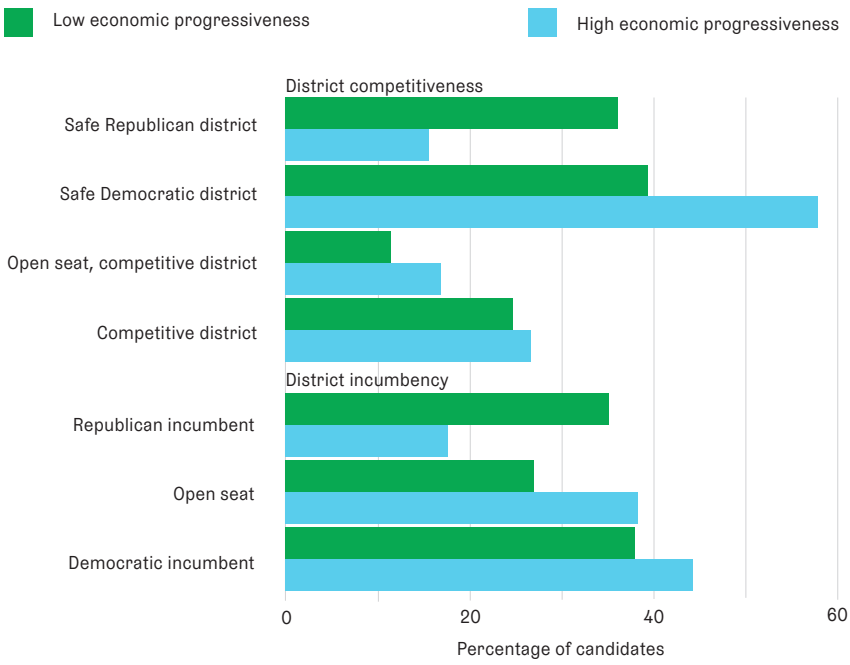
NOTE: We display the scaled median household (HH) income. This corresponds to an average of $80k in districts where candidates employ high levels of progressive economic rhetoric and $77.8k for other candidates.

Of course, another important determinant of whether any candidate, progressive or not, wins a congressional election is the overall safety of the district in which they run. Highly Democratic districts make for easier races, as does running as an incumbent; on the other hand, running in a competitive district, and especially running as a challenger, makes for a more difficult race. Therefore, to understand if economic progressives are outperforming their nonprogressive counterparts, we need to account for differences along these dimensions. Figure 1.6 presents this comparison.[16]

16 In figure 1.6 and thereafter, "Safe Democratic" (resp. Republican) denotes a district with a score of greater than 5 on the Cook PVI scale of district competitiveness.

District Competitiveness and Incumbency Status by Candidate's Economic Progressiveness

FIGURE 1.6



Economic progressives were more likely than other candidates to run in safe Democratic districts, districts with Democratic incumbents, and districts with open seats (including those in competitive districts), and, perhaps unsurprisingly, were less likely to run in safe Republican districts.

Some commentators have suggested that employing progressive messaging around certain cultural issues harms candidates' appeal among working-class voters. Thus, we also examine the prevalence of cultural rhetoric typically associated with the left wing of the Democratic Party. We compiled a list of words and phrases to capture such messaging — which ranges from specific policies such as assault weapons bans and defund the police to more general language associated with the Left such as "Latinx" and "structural racism."[17]

In general, use of progressive cultural rhetoric was uncommon.[18] Figure 1.7 displays the prevalence of the most commonly used terms. By far the most invoked progressive cultural term was "LGBT," which was mentioned by over 30% of candidates. For reference, abortion-related terms were used by over 35% of candidates overall and over 60% in competitive general elections, indicating the emphasis Democrats have placed on the issue in the wake of the *Dobbs* decision. About 12% of candidates incorporated language regarding undocumented immigrants, 7% regarding trans rights, and just over 5% regarding racial justice or anti-racism.

But overall, the kind of progressive cultural rhetoric that many commentators have blamed as a key cause of working-class disaffection with the Democratic Party — from "critical race theory" to "birthing persons" — was almost never used by Democratic candidates in any context. This finding is consistent with recent research examining Democratic Party platforms and Democratic politicians' tweets, which finds that Democrats generally focus less on cultural issues and more on economic ones.[19]

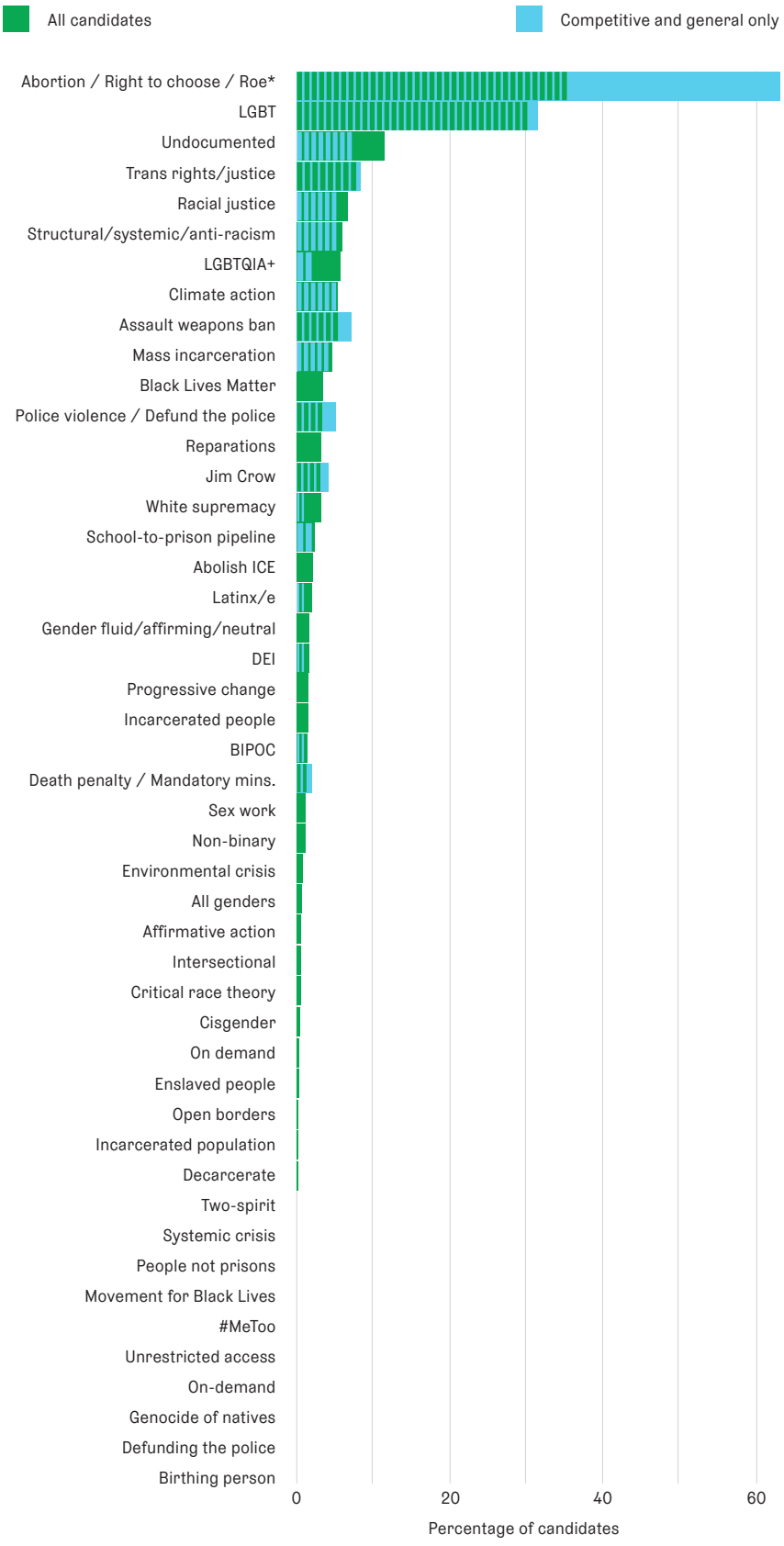
17 See the appendix for a complete list of terms.

18 Note that our analysis excludes negative or ambivalent mentions of the issues. We manually reviewed all mentions of these issues to identify and remove such mentions, leaving only those that were voicing clear support.

19 Hacker et al., "Bridging the Blue Divide."

Percentage of Candidates Mentioning Progressive Cultural Rhetoric Terms

FIGURE 1.7

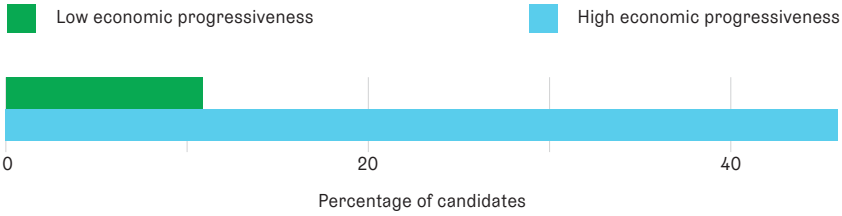


NOTE: Bars indicate the percentage of candidates who mention each item at least once.
* The terms "abortion," "right to choose," and "*Roe*" are difficult to categorize. Unlike many other terms included in this figure, these terms are not unambiguous indicators of progressive cultural rhetoric — especially given their high prevalence among candidates. Due to their centrality in the 2022 midterms, we include them here as a benchmark for the prevalence of other progressive cultural terms.

Do candidates who run on progressive economic policies typically also employ progressive cultural rhetoric? That is, are these candidates typically down-the-line progressives, or is their progressivism focused primarily on economic issues? As shown in figure 1.8, the answer is very much the former: economic progressives were dramatically overrepresented among the relatively few candidates who used progressive cultural rhetoric. Of the candidates who ran on progressive economic issues, 45% also employed progressive cultural rhetoric, compared to just 11% of other candidates. In most cases, then, Democratic candidates tended to be across-the-board progressives or centrists.

Proportion of Candidates That Use Progressive Cultural Rhetoric

FIGURE 1.8

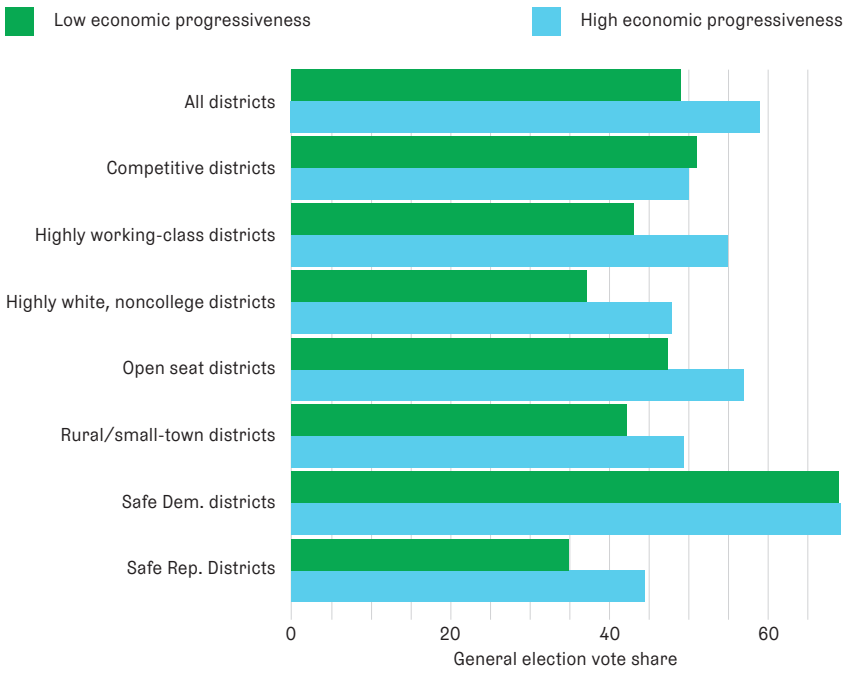


NOTE: "High economic progressiveness" denotes candidates who scored in the top 25% of all candidates on mentions of progressive economic issues.

Finally, how did candidates who ran on progressive economic issues actually fare in their elections? Overall, these candidates performed better than nonprogressives, particularly in highly working-class districts, in majority-white, noncollege districts, in rural and small-town districts, and in districts with open seats, as shown in figure 1.9. In general, 2022 was a good year for economic progressives.

General Election Vote Share by Economic Progressiveness

FIGURE 1.9



NOTE: For comparability, this analysis excludes states that have nonpartisan primaries. High working-class and white, noncollege districts are the top 25% of all districts for each variable.

Candidates who advocate progressive economic policies often situate those policies in a narrative that calls out the economic elites who stand between the American people and economic justice. In the next section, we turn to candidates that employed this kind of messaging.

Did Economic Populists Win in 2022?

Economic populists fared well in 2022. Candidates who employed economic populist rhetoric performed better than those who did not, especially in majority-white, noncollege districts. Here are our key findings on economic populists in 2022:

- **Few candidates campaigned on anti-elite rhetoric.** Less than 20% of candidates employed economic populist talking points targeting large corporations, billionaires, or Wall Street price gouging.
- **Pro-worker rhetoric, however, was common.** Over 70% of candidates mentioned workers, and nearly 50% mentioned labor or unions.
- **Strong economic populists competed in the toughest races.** Candidates who utilized high levels of such messaging were nearly twice as likely as other candidates to run in competitive districts.
- **Economic populists performed especially well in districts with majority-white, noncollege populations and in highly working-class districts.** Their average vote shares were, respectively, 12.3 and 6.4 percentage points higher than other candidates' in such districts. Economic populists also performed better than other candidates in rural and small-town districts, where their average vote share was 4.7 percentage points higher.
- **Rhetoric calling out economic elites for hurting ordinary Americans was positively associated with vote share in the general election.** This result is robust to controlling for a variety of factors that determine electoral outcomes and to a range of statistical specifications.

To determine the impact and relevance of economic populist rhetoric, we first must define what such rhetoric looks like. We define economic populist rhetoric as that which points to economic elites as responsible for putting the country on the wrong track and that, conversely, raises up ordinary working people as the heroes in society. Some candidates do one or the other, but economic populists do both. For instance, President Biden often talks about the importance of the working class for our country's success, but generally shies away from direct rhetorical attacks on corporate elites or billionaires. Economic populists try to connect with working-class voters by both affirming their grievances against economic elites and conveying that the working class has been unfairly neglected in politics.

Perhaps the most famous example of successful economic populism in a difficult electoral context in 2022 was John Fetterman, whose campaign sought to appeal to Pennsylvania's large and diverse working class, from the postindustrial steel towns of western PA to the poverty-stricken neighborhoods of North Philadelphia. On his website, Fetterman called out economic elites eight times and voiced explicit support for workers twenty-two times.

Also in Pennsylvania, Iraq War veteran and union organizer Christopher Deluzio held on to Conor Lamb's old seat in western Pennsylvania's 17th District (a district with a Cook Partisan Voting Index [PVI] of 0) with a strongly economic populist agenda that explicitly called out large corporations (ten times on his website) and emphasized the importance of improving the lives of working people and strengthening unions (thirty-five times):

> I believe in fighting for our common good, for our shared prosperity, for a government that serves all of us — not just the biggest and most powerful corporations. We should be making things in this country, right here in western Pennsylvania with our union brothers and sisters doing the work. The American people never agreed

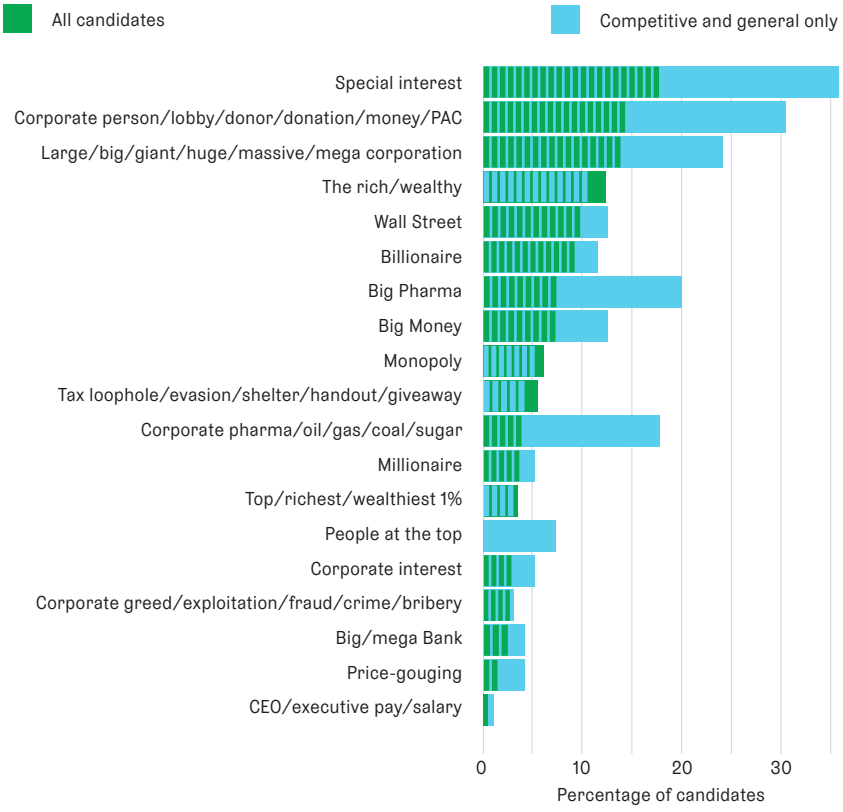
to ship our jobs overseas. We never agreed to let mega corporations swallow up competitors and kill small businesses. We never agreed to sell the dreams of millions of hard-working families to the highest bidder.

Another economic populist success story in 2022 was Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, who ran and won in Washington's rural 10th District (PVI 5), which lies in and around Tacoma. Gluesenkamp Perez, whose website called out economic elites ten times and mentioned workers twelve times, also emphasized her commitment to financial independence from large corporate donors.

Figure 2.1 displays the prevalence of the most commonly used anti–economic elite terms in 2022 Democrats' messaging.[20] Despite the frustration Americans were feeling in the face of rising inequality, sustained inflation, and declining real wages, comparatively few candidates tapped into these feelings by naming a clear economic villain. Indeed, the most common such approach, calling out special interests and large corporations, was only deployed by slightly under 20% of candidates. Meanwhile, between around 10% and 15% of candidates criticized the rich, billionaires, and Wall Street. Related language critiquing economic elites, from monopolies to corporate greed, were used in still fewer cases. That said, it appears that candidates in competitive general election races were more cognizant of the electoral advantages of running on anti–economic elite messaging, as they were much more likely to do so.

Anti–Economic Elite Rhetoric Mentions

FIGURE 2.1



NOTE: Bars indicate the percentage of candidates who mention each item at least once. Since the term "special interest" is too broad to necessarily imply a critique of economic elites, we do not include it as one of the anti–economic elite terms when classifying candidates' rhetoric. We include it in this graph as a benchmark to highlight terms' relative prevalence.

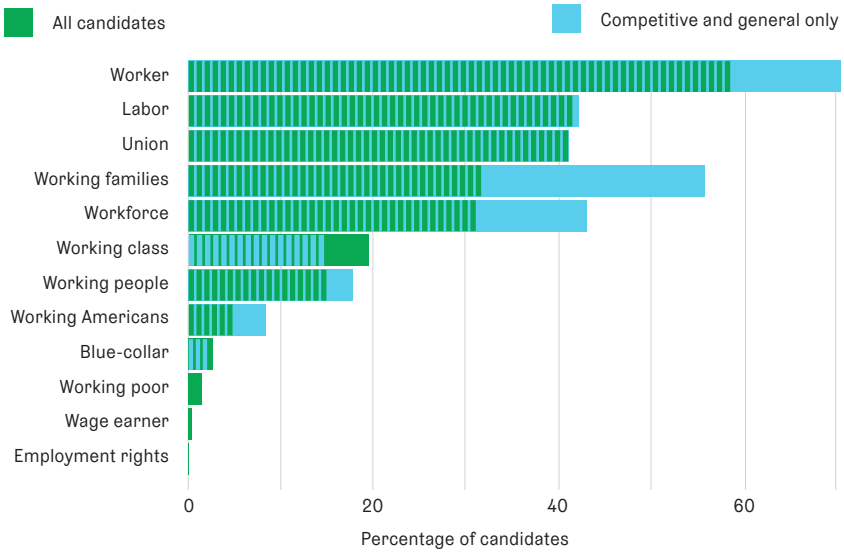
On the other hand, figure 2.2 displays the prevalence of pro-worker rhetoric. This type of messaging was much more common than anti–economic elite messaging, with over 70% of Democratic candidates mentioning workers at least once on their campaign websites, over 40% mentioning labor or unions, and over 30% mentioning working

20 See the appendix for a complete list of terms.

families (55% in competitive generals). Interestingly, very few candidates mentioned "blue-collar" people or spoke specifically about the working poor. Overall, though, these results indicate that many Democratic candidates saw the value of messaging that centers workers.

Pro-Worker Rhetoric Mentions

FIGURE 2.2



NOTE: Bars indicate the percentage of candidates who mention each item at least once.

In table 2.1, we report the twenty-six general election candidates who were the strongest economic populists. These are the candidates who ranked in the top 25% for both pro-worker and anti–economic elite rhetoric. Economic populists ran the gamut in terms of region, ideology, and district competitiveness. The list includes progressive mainstays such as Jamaal Bowman, Ilhan Omar, and Pramila Jayapal, as well as newer progressive champions who prevailed in more competitive races, such as John Fetterman and Summer Lee.

Strongest Economic Populists

TABLE 2.1

Candidate	State	District	General election winner	Cook PVI
Val Almonord	GA	3	No	R+18
Mandela Barnes	WI	Senate	No	R+2
Jamaal Bowman	NY	16	Yes	D+20
Nikki Budzinski	IL	13	Yes	D+3
Trudy Busch Valentine	MO	Senate	No	R+10
Heidi Campbell	TN	5	No	R+9
Shamaine Daniels	PA	10	No	R+5
Chris Deluzio	PA	17	Yes	R+0
John Fetterman	PA	Senate	Yes	R+2
Robert Garcia	CA	47	Yes	D+22
Marie Gluesenkamp Perez	WA	3	Yes	R+5
Jimmy Gomez	CA	34	Yes	D+32
Pramila Jayapal	WA	7	Yes	D+36
Marcy Kaptur	OH	9	Yes	R+3
Daniel Kildee	MI	5	Yes	R+1
Summer Lee	PA	18	Yes	D+8
Adam Martin	OK	1	No	R+14
Jamie McLeod-Skinner	OR	2	No	D+2
Wiley Nickel	NC	14	Yes	R+2
Ilhan Omar	MN	5	Yes	D+30

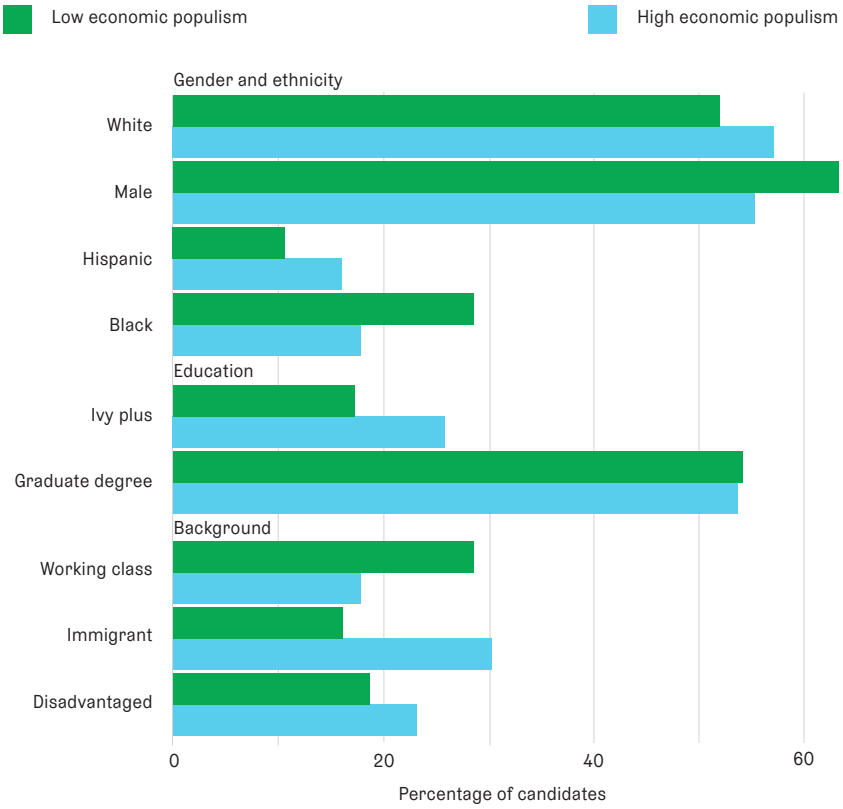
Delia Ramirez	IL	3	Yes	D+20
Josh Riley	NY	22	No	0
Max Rose	NY	11	No	R+6
Andrea Salinas	OR	6	Yes	D+4
Patrick Schmidt	KS	2	No	R+11
Michelle Vallejo	TX	15	No	R+15

Less well known success stories on the list include Christopher Deluzio and Wiley Nickel, who campaigned less as capital-*P* Progressives than the candidates above but nonetheless repeatedly called out economic elites and raised up working people on the campaign trail. We also see that candidates ran economic populist campaigns in swing districts but lost, such as Mandela Barnes and Jamie McLeod-Skinner, and that others waged smart but doomed economic populist campaigns in deep-red districts, such as Anheuser-Busch heiress Trudy Busch Valentine.

Figure 2.3 compares the demographic profiles of candidates who ran on economic populist rhetoric against those who didn't. We find that candidates who scored highest on economic populism were more likely to be white and female than other candidates and were more likely to mention a history of immigration in their families. Interestingly, given economic populists' focus on the scourge of economic elites and the virtues of working-class Americans, these candidates were significantly more likely to have attended an Ivy League or other highly prestigious postsecondary school. Relatedly, economic populists were about two-thirds as likely as other candidates to have held a working-class job.

Candidate Demographics by Economic Populism

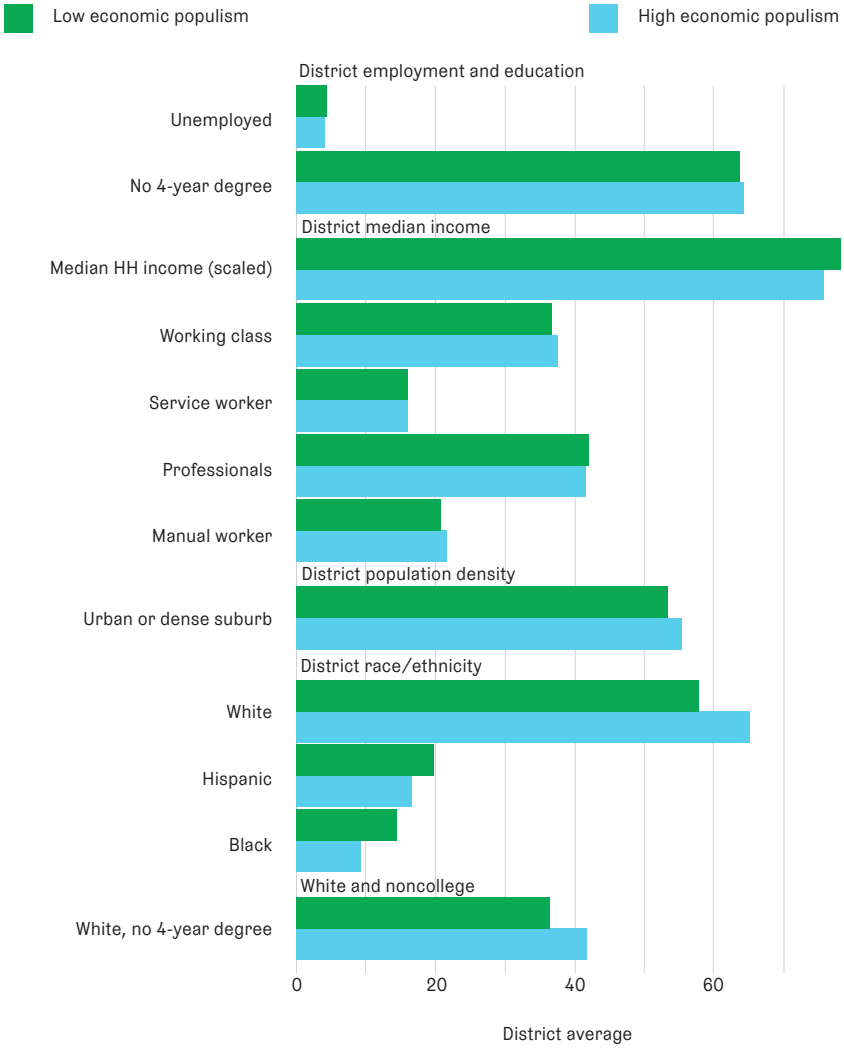
FIGURE 2.3



Given that economic populists' unique blend of anti-elite and pro–working class sentiment seems tailor-made for districts that are economically disadvantaged and have large concentrations of working-class residents, it is somewhat surprising that the districts where economic populists ran did not have significantly higher levels of unemployment, higher percentages of noncollege individuals, lower median incomes, or larger percentages of residents with working-class occupations than other districts. That said, as figure 2.4 shows, economic populists *did* run in districts that were more rural and had higher concentrations of white, noncollege residents.

District Demographics by Economic Populism of Candidate

FIGURE 2.4

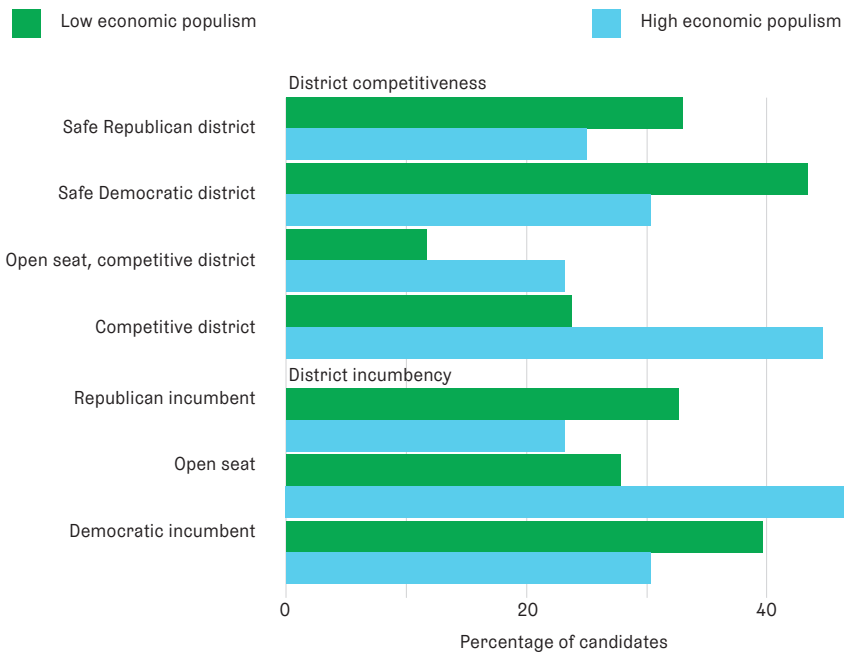


NOTE: We display the scaled median household income. This corresponds to an average of $75.5k across districts where high economic populists run and $78.2k across districts where low economic populists run.

What sorts of races did economic populists run in? Figure 2.5 shows that economic populists were almost twice as likely as other candidates to run in competitive districts, and they were substantially less likely to be incumbents. When candidates run as economic populists, they typically do so in comparatively challenging electoral settings.

District Competitiveness and Incumbency Status by Economic Populism of Candidate

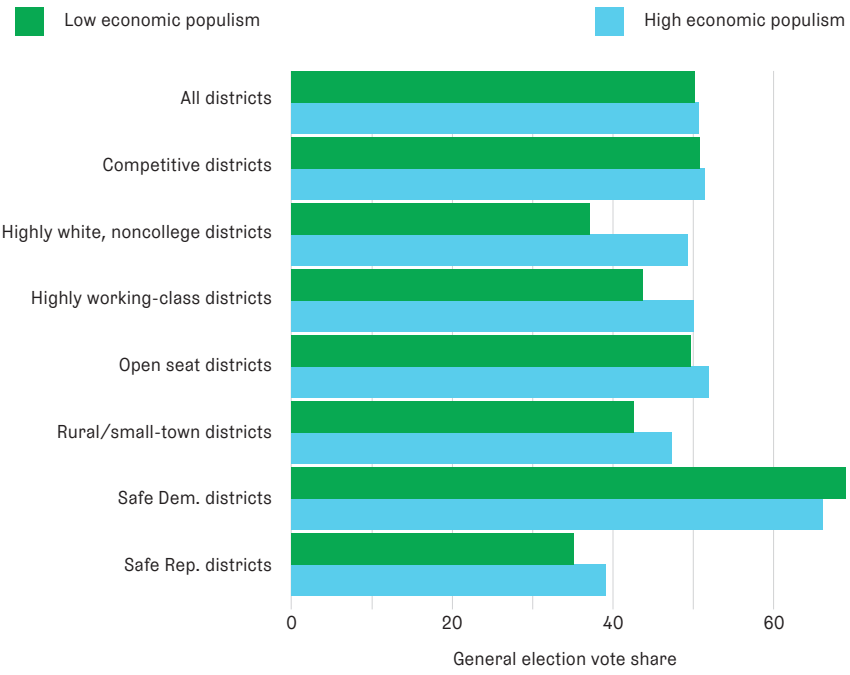
FIGURE 2.5



Finally, how did economic populists fare in their elections? Overall, they received slightly higher vote shares in general elections than other candidates did. Economic populists excelled in districts with majority-white, noncollege populations and in highly working-class districts, where their average vote shares were, respectively, 12.3 and 6.4 percentage points higher than other candidates'. Economic populists also performed better than other candidates in rural and small-town districts, where their vote share was on average 4.7 percentage points higher than others'.

General Election Outcomes by Economic Populism of Candidate

FIGURE 2.6



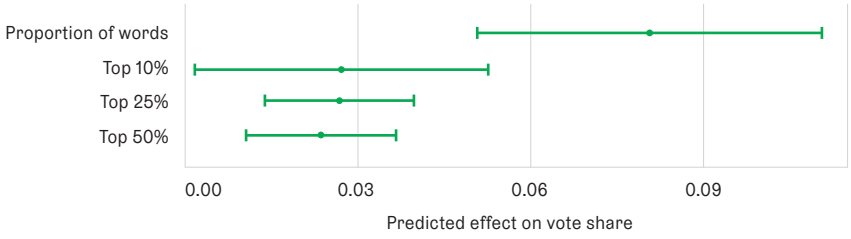
NOTE: For comparability, this analysis excludes states that have nonpartisan primaries. Highly working-class and white, noncollege districts are the top 25% of all districts for each variable.

These results could of course be driven by a wide range of confounding factors. To investigate whether this relationship might be causal, we estimate the performance of economic populists in highly working-class districts, this time controlling for a variety of candidate, district, and election-specific characteristics that influence electoral outcomes. After accounting for these factors, we find no clear evidence that economic populism impacts general election performance.

However, since our measure of economic populism combines pro-worker and anti–economic elite messaging, we also test whether either of these two styles is independently associated with electoral success, regardless of a candidate's use of the other style. We rerun the aforementioned analysis for each form of messaging. Our results, presented in figure 2.7, indicate that anti–economic elite messaging was indeed associated with a higher vote share in districts with high concentrations of working-class voters. In highly working-class districts, the predicted vote share of candidates who utilized high levels of anti–economic elite rhetoric was roughly 4 percentage points higher than for candidates who did not. (This difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.) This result is robust to a wide range of alternative statistical specifications, definitions of anti–economic elite candidates, and the inclusion or exclusion of "special interests" as an anti–economic elite term.

The Effect of Candidates' Use of Anti–Economic Elite Rhetoric on General Election Vote Share in Highly Working-Class Districts

FIGURE 2.7



NOTE: This figure plots the additional vote share associated with use of anti–economic elite rhetoric, using four different measures of such rhetoric: a continuous measure capturing the share of words on a candidate's website that are anti–economic elite and three binary measures indicating whether a candidate ranked in the top 10%, 25%, or 50% of candidates on the word count — and the proportion of total word count — of anti–economic elite rhetoric. Controls include office (House or Senate), incumbency status (incumbent, challenger, or open), candidate race, class and occupation, district population and partisanship (PVI), and the percentages of the district that are working-class and white, noncollege. The figure displays 95% confidence intervals. Results are robust to a wide range of alternative specifications, as well as the inclusion or exclusion of "special interests" from the list of relevant terms and the inclusion or exclusion of pink-collar occupations from the list of working-class occupations.

Did Working-Class Candidates Win in 2022?

Candidates with working-class experience performed well in 2022, if they could make it out of the primary.

- **Working-class candidates were vanishingly rare.** Only 2.3% of Democratic candidates worked exclusively in blue-collar jobs before entering politics. If we also include pink-collar jobs such as teachers and nurses, this figure is 5.9%.

- **Around 20% of candidates held *some* sort of working-class job in the past.** These candidates with working-class experience were far less likely to hold a graduate degree or to have attended an Ivy, and were more likely to say that they came from a financially disadvantaged background.

- **Candidates with working-class experience were more likely to run in more Republican districts and against Republican incumbents.** They were much less likely to run as an incumbent. That said, they weren't more likely to run in districts with large working-class, unemployed, or noncollege populations.

- **Candidates with working-class experience were more likely to use pro-worker language.** This relationship holds even after controlling for a wide range of candidate and district characteristics.

- **Candidates with working-class experience fared poorly in primaries.** This is likely not due to voter bias against these candidates but because candidates with working-class experience are more likely to face financial and organizational barriers to running, especially early on.

- **When they made it to the general election, candidates with working-class experience performed about as well as other candidates.** The small group of candidates with primarily working-class occupational backgrounds who made it to the general election performed poorly, largely because almost all competed in deep-red districts.

Any way you slice it, working-class candidates were vanishingly rare among 2022 Democrats.[21] If we define this group as candidates who reported only ever having working-class jobs (excluding any jobs in politics), then twenty-one were working class. This represents just 2.3% of the 925 candidates for whom we were able to identify a job. Such candidates included two sitting congressmen in former union leaders Donald Norcross (NJ-1) and Jimmy Gomez (CA-34), as well as one 2022 challenger who ran a strong campaign in a competitive district but narrowly lost: Rudy Salas (CA-22). Salas was an agricultural worker before getting involved in politics. Two other working-class candidates competed in general elections in deep-red districts, where they were defeated easily: Mary Jo Woods (TX-17) and Meg Gorman (TN-3).

If we expand our set of working-class roles to also include certain service-professional occupations (pink-collar jobs) — such as elementary and high school teachers, librarians, social workers, nonprofit workers (excluding directors and executives), and nurses — then we find fifty-six candidates who worked exclusively working-class jobs before entering politics, or 5.6% of all candidates. The vast majority of these fifty-six ran uncompetitive primary races. That said, this list also includes three sitting congresspeople in addition to Norcross and Gomez: Maxine Waters (CA-43), Mark Takano (CA-39), and Bennie Thompson (MS-2), who were all K–12 teachers before running for office. There were eleven additional candidates from this group who also

21 We classify manual laborer jobs, service industry jobs, and union employee jobs as working class. We employ the occupational classification schema from Carnes, *White-Collar Government*.

competed in the general election, though, in addition to Salas, only one — Gary Josephson (OH-10), a longtime union organizer — received more than 40% of the general election vote. Interestingly, other than Salas and Josephson, all eleven of these candidates ran in safe Republican districts — a fact that largely explains their weak electoral results.

Summary of Working-Class Candidates (Manual Workers, Service Workers, and Pink-Collar Professionals)

TABLE 3.1

Definition of working class	Total candidates	Percent of all candidates	General election	Competitive general election races	Elected to office
Working-class jobs only (manual or service worker) + previous political job	21	2.3	5	1	2
+ Select service professionals	56	5.9	16	1	4
At least one working-class job (manual or service worker)	182	19.7	62	39	8

Working-Class Candidates Who Competed in 2022 General Election Races (Manual Workers, Service Workers, and Pink-Collar Professionals)

TABLE 3.2

Candidate	State	District	General election result	Working-class occupation (quoted from website)
Donald Norcross	NJ	1	won	Assistant business manager of Local 251, electrician, former president of the Southern New Jersey Building Trades Council, president of the Southern New Jersey AFL-CIO Central Labor Council, union representative
Jimmy Gomez	CA	34	won	Political director for United Nurses Associations of California, working at a fast-food restaurant and a local retail store stocking shelves, organizer, director of United Nurses Association of California
Bennie Thompson	MS	2	won	Schoolteacher
Maxine Waters	CA	43	won	Teacher, Head Start volunteer coordinator
Mark Takano	CA	39	won	Substitute teacher, teacher, Rialto Unified School District
Jeanne Hendricks	MN	6	lost	Nurse, nurse anesthetist, secretary in a law office, high school science teacher
Tabitha Johnson-Green	GA	10	lost	Registered nurse
Gary Josephson	OH	15	lost	Union representative and president of CWA Local 4501.
Stephen Houlahan	CA	48	lost	Nurse
Wendy Norman	ID	2	lost	Teacher
James "Jimmy" Beard	KS	1	lost	High school math teacher

Matthew Fyfe	IN	9	lost	High school math teacher, organizer and leader in his teachers' union, aide in the library, bus driver
Marisa Wood	CA	20	lost	Public school teacher
Mary Jo Woods	TX	17	lost	Worked at a blueberry processing plant
Meg Gorman	TN	3	lost	Service industry, customer service team at Whole Foods Market
Rudy Salas	CA	22	lost	Working in the fields

In short, given the small number of working-class candidates overall and the preponderance of working-class candidates who did not mount competitive primary campaigns or who ran in the general election but did so in deep-red districts, there simply were not enough working-class candidates running in 2022 to allow us to meaningfully assess their characteristics or their electoral fortunes.

Therefore, we turn to candidates who mention working in at least one working-class job in their lives. Of the 925 candidates for whom we were able to find an occupational history, only 182, or 20%, had held *some* working-class job at *some* point in their lives.[22] To be clear, this is quite a broad definition, and yet 20% still trails tremendously behind the 47% to 67% of the general population that is working class.[23] This approach has obvious limitations, since many of these candidates only held working-class jobs for a short time and often in the distant past. Even so, for the remainder of the report, this is the set of candidates that we will focus on, for practical and theoretical reasons.

The practical reason is that, as we discussed above, were we to operationalize the notion of working class more restrictively, we would have too few candidates to analyze at all. The theoretical reason to focus on candidates with any working-class experience is that, when a candidate signals they have such experience, it is likely that voters take note of their humble roots and perceive that candidate as being more working-class than others. Further, candidates' workplace socialization in working-class jobs, even if for an abbreviated period, could plausibly shape their ideology and political preferences (i.e., more pro-worker, more progressive economics, etc.), making them distinct from other candidates.

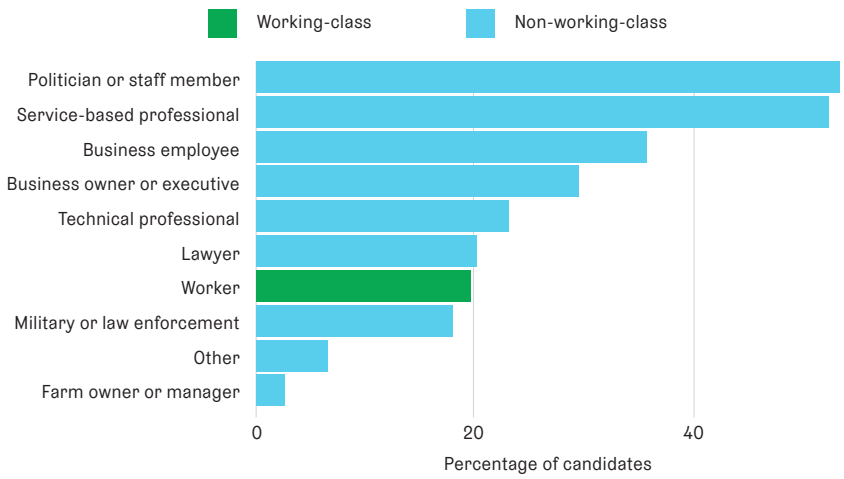
Figure 3.1 displays the frequencies of various occupations among candidates.

22 Note that for this and the following analysis we limit our set of working-class occupations to those in the strict classification of Carnes, *White-Collar Government*. That said, with a few minor differences, all the results hereafter are robust to inclusion of pink-collar workers.

23 Going by a widely used occupation-based operationalization from Daniel Oesch, "Labour Market Trends and the Goldthorpe Class Schema: A Conceptual Reassessment," *Swiss Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (2003), our analysis of the 2021 General Social Survey indicates that 47% of the adult population of the United States is working class. If, by contrast, we use education and income as a proxy for working-class status, with individuals who did not receive a four-year college degree and falling in the bottom two-thirds of the income distribution falling under this classification, this figure rises to 67%.

Prevalence of Occupations Held by 2022 Democratic Candidates

FIGURE 3.1

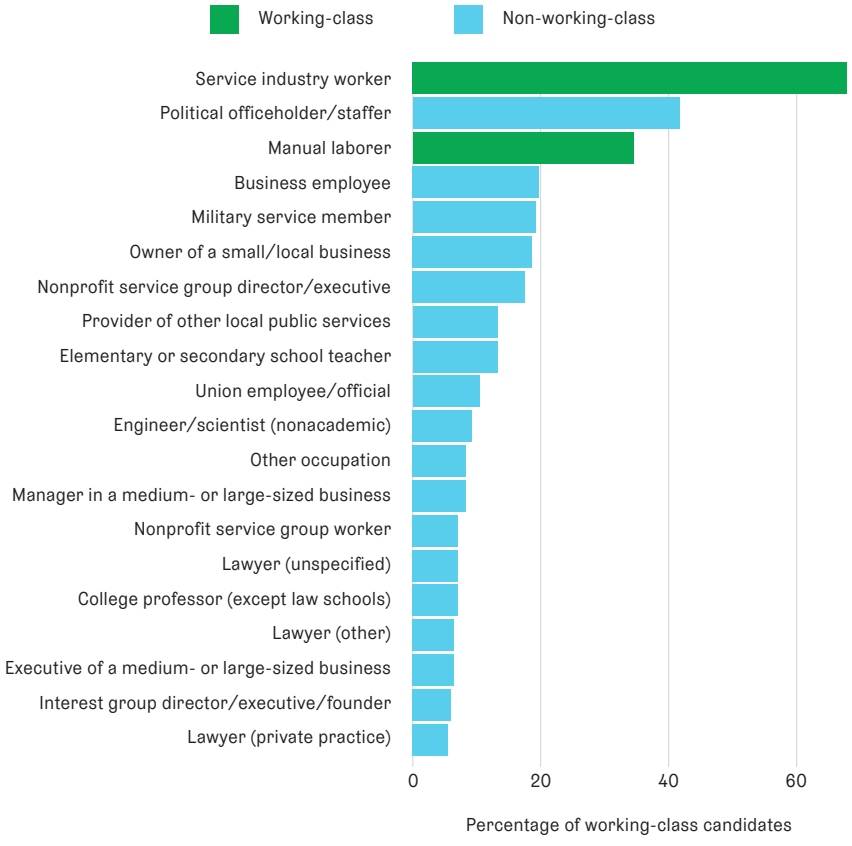


NOTE: This graph reports the share of candidates who mentioned working a job in the given occupational category at least once in their lives. For instance, 20% of candidates mention having worked in at least one job as a lawyer.

Of the 182 candidates with working-class experience, most had been in the service industry (67%) vis-à-vis manual labor (27%). These candidates had held a wide variety of other occupations as well. For instance, around 40% had had some kind of political experience, ranging from campaign staffing to a previous elected position, while roughly 20% had worked in some capacity as white-collar business employees or served in the military.[24]

Occupations Held by Candidates With Working-Class Experience

FIGURE 3.2



24 The category of white-collar business employees includes a wide range of office or business jobs, ranging from sales and marketing to office managers and real estate agents. For the complete occupational categorization, see the appendix.

Of these 182 candidates, only forty-five (25%) ran in competitive districts. And of these forty-five, only thirteen made it to a general election. Table 3.3 lists these candidates.

Candidates With Working-Class Experience in Competitive Districts

TABLE 3.3

Candidate	State	District	General election result	Working-class occupation (quoted from website)
Mark Kelly	AZ	Senate	won	Dairy Queen
Angie Craig	MN	2	won	Worked two jobs and took out a little in student loans to put myself through state college
Melanie Ann Stansbury	NM	1	won	Bussing tables
Josh Gottheimer	NJ	5	won	Stocking shelves for his dad
Teresa Leger Fernandez	NM	3	won	Flipped burgers at her uncle's rodeo
Steven A. Horsford	NV	4	won	Worked multiple jobs to help support his younger siblings
Henry Cuellar	TX	28	won	Washing dishes
Val Hoyle	OR	4	won	Waitress
Andrea Salinas	OR	6	won	Painting homes, barista
Annette Taddeo	FL	27	lost	Working her way through college waiting tables in Alabama
John Lira	TX	23	lost	Busboy
Robert Asencio	FL	28	lost	Worked different jobs to support himself
Rudy Salas	CA	22	lost	Working in the fields

Figure 3.3 summarizes the demographic breakdown of candidates by whether they had working-class experience. Overall, candidates with working-class experience were slightly more likely to be white and male and less likely to be black. The biggest differences are by education: while nearly 60% of their counterparts held a graduate degree, less than 40% of candidates with working-class experience did. Similarly, the latter were about half as likely to have attended college at an Ivy or equivalent (11% vs. 20%). Lastly, candidates with working-class experience were more likely to say that they came from a financially disadvantaged background on their websites (24% vs. 18%).

Candidate Demographics by Class Experience

FIGURE 3.3

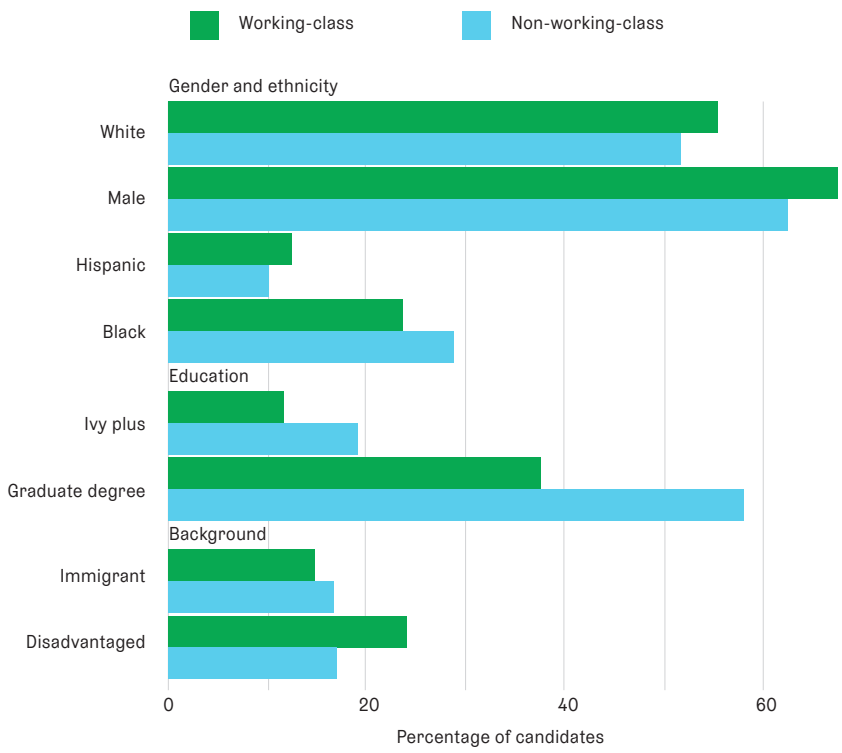
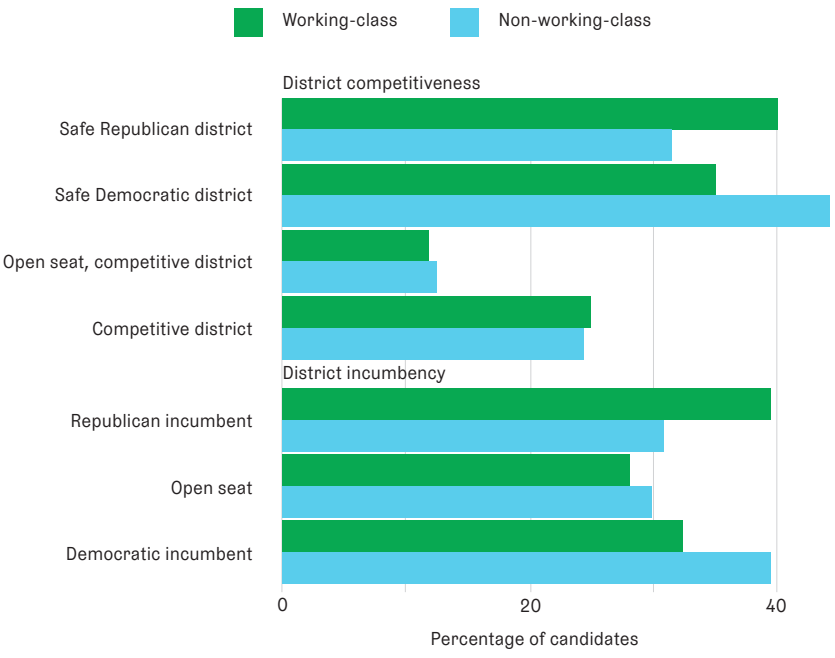


Figure 3.4 summarizes the types of elections that candidates with working-class experience and their counterparts ran in. The former were more likely to run in safe Republican districts and less likely to be running as incumbents. Thus, in 2022, Democrats with working-class experience disproportionately ran in more difficult races.[25]

District Competitiveness and Incumbency Status by Candidate Class Experience

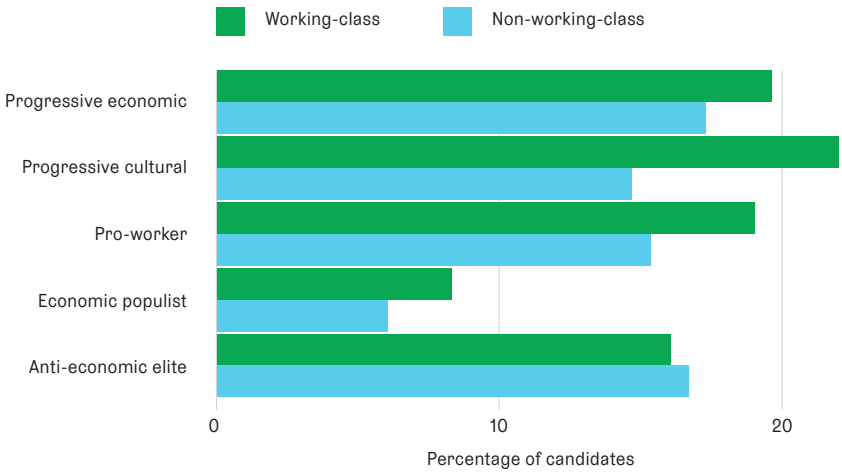
FIGURE 3.4



25 Candidates with working-class experience generally ran in districts that were demographically similar to those of other candidates. We document the small differences that do exist in the appendix.

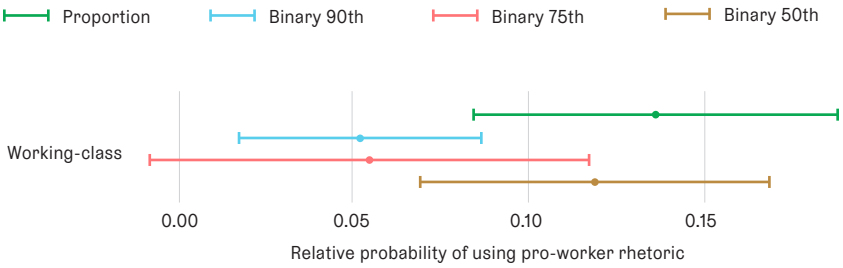
Candidates with working-class experience were far more likely to be vocally progressive on social and economic issues and to utilize pro-worker language. For instance, roughly 25% of such candidates ranked among the most socially progressive based on their campaign rhetoric, compared to only 15% of other candidates. However, candidates with working-class experience were about as equally likely to use anti–economic elite language.

Campaign Rhetoric by Candidate Class Experience
FIGURE 3.5



To further explore how closely candidate class is related to rhetoric, we ran regressions predicting the probability of each rhetorical category based on a set of candidate characteristics, including race, gender, and incumbency status as well as important district and election characteristics. We find that, controlling for these factors, the only type of rhetoric closely related to a candidate's working-class experience is pro-worker language. Figure 3.6 displays this result, which holds across several different definitions of pro-worker rhetoric.

Effect of Candidates' Working-Class Experience on Rhetoric
FIGURE 3.6



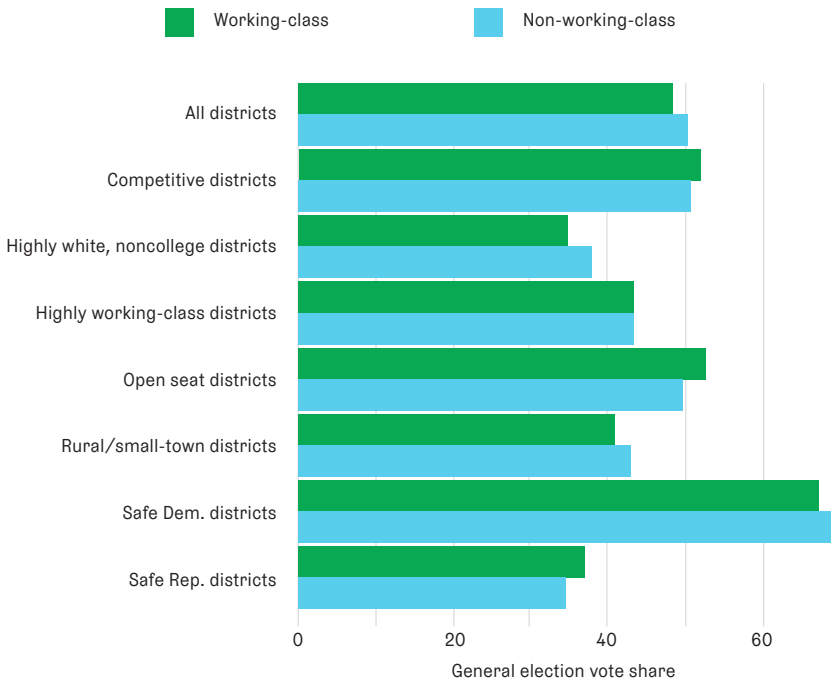
NOTE: This graph reports the difference in predicted probability of utilizing pro-worker rhetoric between candidates with working-class experience relative to other candidates (baseline). Each estimate uses a different threshold to classify candidates as pro-worker.[26] Controls include office (House or Senate), incumbency status (incumbent, challenger, or open), candidate race, district population and partisanship (PVI), and the percentages of the district that are working-class and white, noncollege. The figure displays 95% confidence intervals.

26 The three binary definitions identify candidates as pro-worker if they have both (1) a higher number of pro-worker terms on their website than X% of all other candidates and (2) a larger proportion of pro-worker terms on their website than X% of all other candidates — where the threshold X is the figure indicated in the definition name. For instance, candidates who are classified as pro-worker under "binary 50th" have both a higher number and proportion of relevant words than 50% of all other candidates. The fourth classification, "proportion," simply uses a continuous measure of the proportion of pro-worker terms on a candidate's website.

Finally, how did candidates with working-class experience fare in general elections compared to other candidates? As it turns out, there weren't large differences, as shown in figure 3.7.

General Election Vote Share by Candidate Class Experience

FIGURE 3.7

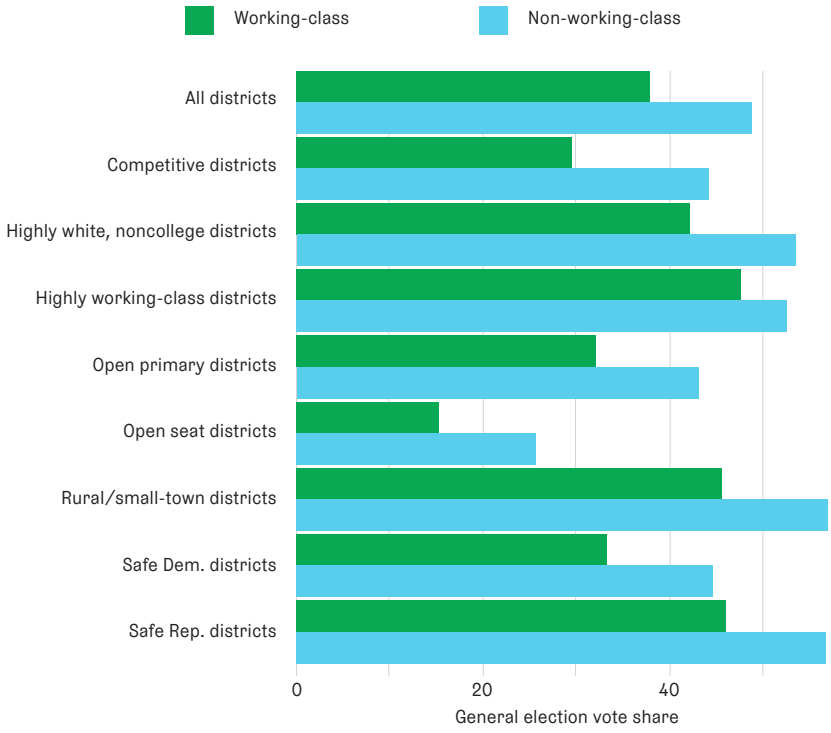


NOTE: For comparability, this analysis excludes states with nonpartisan primaries. High working-class and white, noncollege districts are the top 25% of all districts for each variable.

When it came to primary elections, however, candidates with working-class experience performed worse than their counterparts. As figure 3.8 demonstrates, this was true regardless of district competitiveness or incumbency status. And as figure 3.9 shows, working-class experience was strongly associated with worse primary outcomes even after controlling for a variety of candidate and district characteristics.

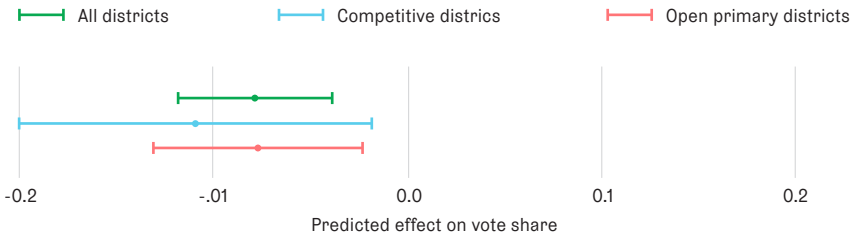
Primary Election Vote Share by Candidate Class Experience

FIGURE 3.8



The Effect of Candidates' Working-Class Experience on Primary Election Vote Share

FIGURE 3.9



NOTE: This graph reports the predicted difference in vote share between candidates with working-class experience relative to other candidates (baseline). Controls include office (House or Senate), incumbency status (incumbent, challenger, or open), candidate race, class and occupation, district population and partisanship (PVI), and the percentages of the district that are working-class and white, noncollege. The figure displays 95% confidence intervals. Results are robust to a wide range of alternative specifications and definitions of working-class experience.

Summary: Few and Far Between

The 2022 elections went far better for Democrats than expected, given the typical thermostatic swing against the incumbent party in midterms and media commentators' dire predictions. As other research has shown, there were multiple reasons for this — among them, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and subsequent abortion prohibitions, as well as a slate of particularly extreme Republican candidates. But it is far from certain that these advantages will remain as salient in 2024. And as we've seen, there are clear improvements to be made to Democratic messaging.

Our analysis of Democratic candidates who ran in 2022 finds a crucial dearth of left-wing populists. Only a small share of candidates ran on progressive economic policies like Medicare for All (21%), raising the minimum wage (5%), or a jobs guarantee (4%). While many candidates used rhetoric that championed working people, few went further in calling out economic elites. And despite the popular demand for politicians who look more like the people they represent, we find that only a tiny fraction of candidates had come from a working-class occupation (2% to 6%), and few had even held a working-class job at least once in their lives (20%). On the bright side, however, we find that the few candidates who did have working-class experience or who ran on progressive policies or anti-elite rhetoric did quite well in general elections, especially in the areas where Democrats struggle most: working-class, rural, and white, non-college-educated districts.

When we further investigate which, if any, of these characteristics are associated with electoral success, we find that Democrats may reap substantial rewards by running on anti–economic elite messaging. Indeed, the resonance of this rhetoric was uniquely pronounced: no other form of messaging or candidate class background exhibited a robust, statistically significant, and positive association with vote share after controlling for relevant district and electoral variables. This is particularly true in highly working-class districts, rural districts, and districts with high proportions of white voters without college degrees — that is, precisely the sorts of districts where Democrats have been hemorrhaging voters.

That said, our previous survey experiment also found that economic populist messaging, economically progressive policy, and candidates from working-class backgrounds are all popular among working-class voters. And yet not nearly enough Democratic candidates address the deep economic anxieties that dog working-class voters or propose the ambitious solutions that resonate with them. Importantly, these shortcomings are not limited to candidate websites; a similar analysis we conducted of 2022 television ads revealed similar disconnects. For example, in a representative sample of four hundred Democratic candidate ads in competitive districts, we find that only 18% even mentioned jobs, let alone any major progressive economic policy proposal, and just 23% used any kind of economic populist language. And despite the appeal of working-class candidates demonstrated in our previous research, they remain few and far between, having been effectively crowded out in the primaries due to insufficient finances and other resources.

In the face of an ever more dangerous opposition, Democrats cannot afford to leave these rhetorical tools on the table. A slate of working-class candidates effectively campaigning on progressive economic policies while attacking the wealthy and the elite could prove a potent force for winning and keeping working-class voters. We hope that 2024 sees Democrats taking this to heart.

Appendix

Sample Details

	Overall (N=966)
Office	
House	852 (88.2%)
Senate	114 (11.8%)
Election outcome	
Lost primary election	528 (54.7%)
Lost general election	210 (21.7%)
Won general election	228 (23.6%)
Incumbent	
Yes	765 (79.2%)
No	201 (20.8%)
District incumbency	
Democratic incumbent	362 (37.5%)
Open	(294 (30.4%)
Republican incumbent	310 (32.1%)

	Overall (N=966)
District competitiveness	
Safe Dem.	411 (42.5%)
Competitive	235 (24.3%)
Safe Rep.	320 (33.1%)
Occupation information	
Found	925 (95.8%)
Missing	41 (4.2%)
Campaign website	
Found	74 (7.7%)
Missing	892 (92.3%)
Education information	
Degree classified	754 (78.1%)
No degree classified	52 (5.4%)
No info found	129 (13.4%)
Missing	31 (3.2%)

Progressive Economic Terms

$15 Minimum Wage / Fight for 15, $16 Minimum Wage / Fight for 16, $20 Minimum Wage / Fight for 20, American Jobs Plan, Better Jobs / Better-Paying Jobs, Cancel Student Debt, Family Leave / Medical Leave, Free / Universal Childcare, Free College, Green New Deal, Good Jobs / Good Paying Jobs, Green Jobs, High/Well-Paying Jobs, Housing as a Human Right, Jobs for All / Job Guarantee, Living Wage, Medicare For All, Parental Leave, PRO Act, Sick Leave, Union Jobs.[27]

Jobs Policy Terms

American made, Apprenticeship, Bad/Harmful Trade Deals/Policies, Blue Collar Jobs, Bring (American) Jobs Back, Create/Increase/More/New/Protect/Provide/Profitable Jobs, In-demand jobs, Job Creation, Job Training, Joblessness/Unemployment, joblessness, Jobs, Jobs Act/Bill, Jobs Overseas, Jobs Policies, Jobs Problem, Layoffs, Manufacturing Jobs, Offshoring, Outsourcing, Put People to Work, Shovel-Ready Jobs, Trade School, Unskilled, Upskill, Vocational.

Biden Economic Policy Terms

American Families Plan, American Rescue Plan. Build Back Better, Chips, Industrial Policy, Infrastructure, Infrastructure and Jobs Act, Inflation Reduction Act, Public Investment.

Progressive Cultural Terms (including abortion terms)

Abolish ICE, Abortion, Abortion Services, Affirmative Action, Against/End Mandatory Minimum Sentencing, Against/End the Death Penalty, All Genders, Anti-Racism, Black Lives Matter / Movement for Black Lives, Ban Assault Weapons, Birthing Person, BIPOC, Climate Action, Cisgender, Colorism, Critical Race Theory, Cultural Appropriation, Decarcerate, Decolonize, Decriminalize Immigration, Defund the Police, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, End Mandatory Minimum Sentencing, Environmental Crisis, Gender Binary, Gender Affirming, Gender Fluid, Gender Neutral, Genocide of Native Peoples, Imperialism,

27 Note that we searched for mentions of all likely versions of each phrase (case differences, slight wording differences, hyphenation differences, etc.), but here and in the dictionaries below we only report one version of each term.

Incarcerated People, Intersectional, Jim Crow, Latinx, Latine, LGBTQIA+, LGBT, Mass Incarceration, Me Too, Non-Binary, On-Demand/Unrestricted Access to Abortion, Open Borders, People Not Prisons, Police Violence, Progressive Change, Racial Justice, Reparations, Reproductive Rights/Justice/Freedom/Autonomy, Right to Choose, Roe vs. Wade, School to Prison Pipeline, Sex Work, Systemic Crisis, Systemic Racism, Toxic Masculinity, Trans / Trans Men / Trans Women, Trans Rights/Justice/Gender, Two-Spirit, Undocumented, White Privilege/Supremacy.

Anti–Economic Elite Terms

Big Bank, Big Money, Big Oil, Big Pharma, Big/Corporate Coal, Big/Corporate Gas, Big/Corporate Sugar, Bribery, Concentration/Centralization/Consolidation/Monopoly of Wealth, Consolidation of Wealth, Corporate Personhood/Lobby/Donor/Donation/Money/PAC/Super-PAC/Giant/Behemoth/Powerhouse/Empire/Conglomerate/Fat Cat/Greed/Exploitation/Fraud/Crime, Economic Elite, CEO/Executive Pay, CEO/Executive Salary, Exploitative/Predatory/Unfair Pricing, Extreme Wealth/Fortune, Fair-Share, Financial/White-Collar Crime, Greedy Executive/Corporation/Company, Large/Big/Giant/Huge/Massive/Mega Corporation, Millionaire/Billionaire, Monopoly, Oligarch, People at the Top / Very Top, Price-Gouging, Privileged Few/Class, Profit-Driven Corporation, Rigged/Unfair/Unjust/Imbalanced Economy, Securities/Accounting Fraud, Tax Loophole/Evasion/Shelter/Handout/Giveaway, The Rich, The Wealthy, Top / Richest / Wealthiest / The 1 Percent / 0.1 Percent, Ultra/Super/Mega-Rich/Wealthy, Upper Class, Wealthy Few/Class, Wall Street.

Pro-Worker Terms

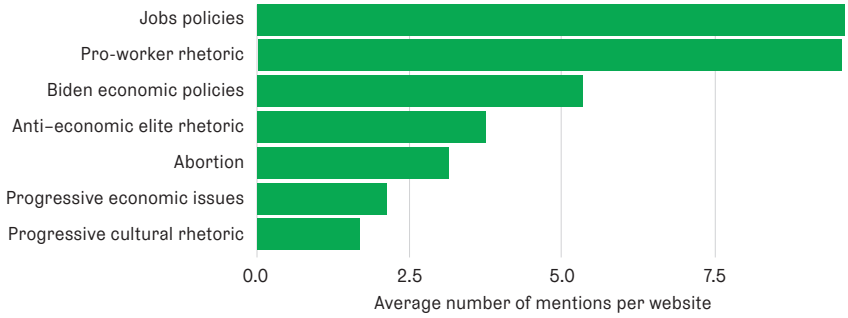
Blue Collar, Collective Bargaining, Employee Association/Organization, Employment Rights, Guild, Labor Activism/Advocacy/Empowerment/Power, Labor Association/Federation/Movement/Organization/Organizing, Organized Labor, Trade Union, Union, Union Representative, Wage Earner, Working American, Working Class, Working Families, Working People, Working Poor, Working-Class, Worker, Worker Power/Solidarity, Workforce.

How Much Does the Messaging Platform Matter?

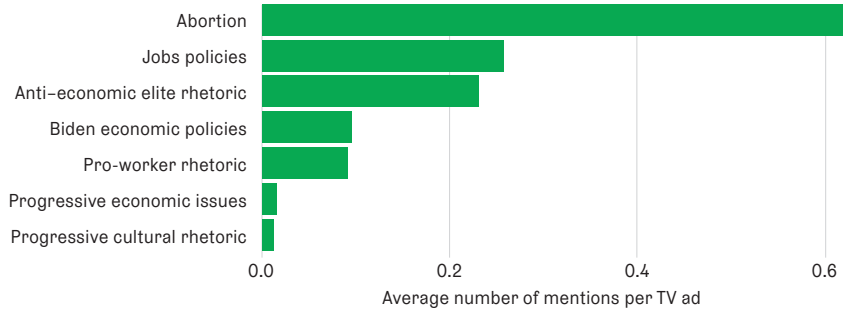
We wanted to know if the candidates' use of the different kinds of language we analyze in this report varied across mediums, since candidates may be targeting different audiences through their websites than they would in higher-cost and higher-stakes media such as TV. To investigate this question, we first calculated the average number of times any word from the dictionaries described above — progressive economic policies, jobs policies, Biden economic policies, progressive cultural rhetoric, anti–economic elite, and pro-worker rhetoric — was mentioned on candidate websites. We then transcribed the texts of around eight hundred Democratic candidates' TV ads in competitive House races and performed the same analysis.[28] The results, presented below, show similar patterns across both mediums: progressive economic and cultural language were the least common — though the relative prevalence of progressive economic and cultural language is even lower in Democratic candidates' TV ads — and jobs policies language was more common than Biden economic policies, anti–economic elite, and pro–worker language. The clearest difference we find between candidate websites and TV ads is that, when forced to be more strategic and focus on a single key issue in their TV ads, Democrats in competitive districts bet big on abortion. Interestingly, candidates' use of anti–economic elite rhetoric was much greater relative to jobs policies and pro-worker rhetoric in the TV ads than on candidate websites, perhaps indicating that candidates in competitive races recognized the value of antiestablishment language among persuadable voters.

28 This database defines competitive races as either toss-ups or with Democratic or Republican "lean" according to scoring by the Cook Political Report.

Comparison of Language Use on Candidate Websites (Competitive Races Only)



Comparison of Language Use in Candidate TV Ads (Competitive Races Only)



Occupational Categories Table

Broad occupational category	Narrow occupational category
Technical professional	Medical doctor
	Dentist
	Veterinarian
	Pharmacist
	Journalist
	Author / Public speaker
	Actor/director
	Musician/entertainer
	Athlete
	Coach / Fitness instructor / Referee
	Architect / Urban planner
	Accountant
	Economist (nonacademic)
	Engineer/scientist (nonacademic)
Business owner or executive	Contractor
	Bank owner / Banker
	Hospital or medical services administrator
	Owner of a small/local business
	Owner of a medium- or large-sized business
	Executive of a medium- or large-sized business
	Media executive / Publisher / Media owner
Business employee	Real estate agent/broker
	Real estate developer
	Bank manager / Investment banker / Stock broker

	Manager of a small/local business
	Manager in a medium- or large-sized business
	Business employee
	Business person (no other information given)
	Chamber of Commerce or Jaycees leader
	College administrator
	Politics/government/public-relations consultant
	Leadership or management consultant
	Scientific or health care consultant
	Other consultant
Farm owner or manager	Farmer / Rancher / Farm owner / Ranch owner
	Farm manager
Military or law enforcement	Law enforcement manager/director
	Law enforcement analyst
	Law enforcement officer/patrolman
	Military service member
Lawyer	Lawyer (private practice)
	Lawyer (corporate)
	Lawyer (other)
	Lawyer (unspecified)
	Government attorney
Politician or staff member	Interest group director/executive/founder
	Interest group lobbyist
	Interest group worker
	Political officeholder or staffer
Service-based professional	Elementary or secondary school teacher
	Elementary or secondary school administrator
	College professor (except law schools)
	Law school professor
	Nurse
	Psychiatrist/psychologist
	Librarian
	Social worker
	Rabbi/minister/priest/reverend/clergy
	Advocate for the elderly
	Provider of other local public services
	Nonprofit service group director/executive
	Nonprofit service group worker
Worker	Manual laborer
	Service industry worker
	Union employee/official
Other	Other occupation
	Vague occupational description