

To: Interested Parties
Fr: Lake Research Partners
Re: Findings from a Battleground Survey on Housing Costs and Tenant Protections¹
Date: August 9, 2024

Executive Summary

Recent polling conducted by Lake Research Partners on behalf of HouseUS and the Tenant Union Federation shows the power and popularity of housing policies and tenant protections among 2024 battleground voters.

Housing and cost concerns are personal for many voters. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of voters across battleground states have a personal connection to housing instability, including 7 in 10 Gen Z voters and more than two-thirds of Independents (68%). A third say the cost of housing, like rent or mortgage, is one of the most concerning financial concerns for themselves and their family (second only to food and groceries), and a majority are concerned about the increased cost of housing, including the cost of rents (57% concerned, 33% extremely concerned).

Solid majorities say housing affordability is a problem not just nationally – 86% say it is a problem, 59% say it is a *very big problem* – but also in their community – 74% say housing affordability is a problem in their community, 41% say it is a *very big problem*. Of concern, **two-thirds believe housing costs will go up over the next year, including nearly 3 in 10 who say costs are likely to go up by a lot.**

Across partisan lines, battleground voters say it is important for the federal government to ensure basic protections for renters and regulate predatory landlords.

Battleground voters' top priority for federally elected leaders, like the president, to address is *increasing the availability of affordable housing for working- and middle-class families* – 59% rate 8-10 (high priority), 76% rate 6-10 (total priority). A solid majority want federally elected leaders to prioritize *protecting tenants against price gouging in rental housing* (55% rate 8-10; 73% rate 6-10) and *regulating landlords and property management companies who take unfair advantage of tenants to increase their profits* (55% rate 8-10; 70% rate 6-10) as well.

Housing is a voting issue. Voters will reward elected leaders who support policies to protect tenants and punish those who oppose these policies. Additionally, at least two-thirds of voters would be more likely to support an elected official who said the three progressive housing messages tested. The top testing message, *Junk Fees*, calls out people's struggles to keep up with rising prices and the need for laws to stop junk fees in housing services (see full text on p. 4-5).

Base support for tenant protections and progressive housing legislation comes from tenants, Democrats, Gen Z voters, women, and Black voters across the battleground states. Swing or persuadable voters who

¹ Methodology: Lake Research Partners designed and administered an online survey that was conducted from July 17-August 2, 2024. The survey reached a total of 1,000 registered voters in the seven battleground states of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The margin of error for total sample is +/- 3.0% and higher among subgroups. Additional sampling information is available upon request.

lean toward supporting legislation and policies with less intensity include suburban voters, Independents, and college-educated voters across the battleground states.

Voters' Financial Concerns, Views of Housing Today, and Issue Priorities

Inflation, or rising costs and prices, rises to the top as the most important issue determining a majority of voters' vote in the November elections (55%), followed distantly by immigration (29%), and abortion (23%). The cost of rent and housing is one of the most important issues for 12% of battleground voters, including 15% of Democrats and 16% of Independents.

When recounting the last 12 months, voters split between saying their personal situation has gotten worse (42%) and that it has stayed about the same (42%). Looking to the future, only about 1 in 5 believe their personal financial situation will get better in the next 12 months (19%). About a quarter of battleground voters say their personal financial situation will get worse (24%), and a plurality say it will stay about the same (41%). Democrats are most optimistic (28% get better), followed by Independents (17%), and Republicans (13%).

Food and groceries are the top financial concern for battleground voters across partisan lines, including 76% of Republicans, 64% of Independents, and 52% of Democrats. The cost of housing, like rent and mortgages, is one of the top financial concerns for a third of battleground voters, including 37% of Democrats and Independents alike and 26% of Republicans.

Across all demographics, a majority of voters see housing affordability, including for renters, as a problem both nationally (86%) and in their community (74%). Across partisan lines, majorities of Democrats (67%), Independents (75%), and Republicans (45%) see housing affordability, including for renters, in the United States as a very big problem. Pluralities of Democrats (45%), Independents (38%), and Republicans (36%) see housing affordability, including for renters, in their community as a very big problem.

A solid majority of voters (57%) are concerned about the increased cost of housing, including the cost of rents, and 33% of voters are extremely concerned. Those most likely to be *extremely* concerned include Independents (46%), lower-income voters (46%), low turnout voters (44%), voters in Arizona (42%), and Black voters (40%).

Two-thirds of voters expect housing costs, including how much it costs to rent and buy a home in the U.S., to go up over the next year (67%), including 29% who expect housing costs to go up a lot. Across demographics, more than a third of Gen Z voters (35%), Black voters (38%), Independents (37%), renters (35%), and low-turnout voters (34%) expect housing costs to go up *a lot*.

Eight in 10 voters (82%) say current interest rates make it harder for people to be able to pay rent or buy a home, including 57% who say current interest rates make it much harder. While majorities across partisan lines say current interest rates make it harder, a solid majority of Republicans (67%) and Independents (57%) are most likely to say current interest rates make it much harder.

Voters' Support for Federal Government Action

Battleground voters across partisan lines say it is important for the federal government to ensure basic protections for tenants, including 52% of Republicans, 63% of Independents, and 88% of Democrats. Across partisan lines it is also important for the federal government to *regulate predatory landlords*, including 59% of Republicans, 74% of Independents, and 91% of Democrats.

- Across generational lines, solid majorities of Gen Z (84%) and Millennial voters (77%) say it is important for the federal government to *ensure basic protections for renters*, as do at least six in ten Boomers (62%) and Gen X voters (66%).
- At least seven in ten voters across generational divides say it is important for the federal government to regulated predatory landlords: 82% of Millennials, 79% of Gen Z voters, 71% of Gen X voters, and 71% of Boomers.

However, elected leaders up and down the ticket are underwater when it comes to their job performance addressing rising costs of housing and protecting tenants in the country. Except for Black voters (who are net-positive in their ratings of President Biden and Democrats in Congress) and Republicans (who are net-positive in their ratings of Republicans in Congress), voters across demographics give local government, state government, Democrats in Congress, Republicans in Congress, and President Joe Biden net-negative ratings on their handling of rising costs of housing. Except for Republicans (who are net-positive in their ratings of Republicans in Congress), voters across demographics are net-negative in their ratings of how the different entities handle protecting tenants.

At least half of battleground voters say a federally elected leader, like the President, should prioritize all housing-related issues tested. Voters say *increasing the availability of affordable housing for working- and middle-class families* should be the top priority for federally elected leaders.

Top Testing Items	% Priority, 6-10 (% Top Priority, 8-10)
Increasing the availability of affordable housing for working- and middle-class families*	76 (59)
Protecting tenants against price gouging in rental housing*	73 (55)
Regulating landlords and property management companies who take unfair advantage of tenants to increase their profits*	70 (55)
Protecting tenants against hidden fees, or “junk fees,” in rental housing*	70 (51)
Regulating predatory landlords and property management companies*	69 (53)
Increasing the availability of rental housing that is affordable for working- and middle-class families*	68 (53)

*Split-sampled question

Reflecting the core values and priorities for housing among voters, top testing proposed federal policies draw focus on safety, accessibility, affordability, anti-discrimination, and fairness.

Top Testing Items	% Favor (% Strongly Favor)
Require all landlords to keep their properties in good and safe condition and ensure that homes are accessible for people with disabilities	88 (73)
Enforce existing laws that make it illegal for landlords to deny a tenant housing based on race, physical and mental ability, and family makeup*	84 (72)

Make it illegal for landlords to engage with property management software companies that use algorithms to collude with one another and inflate rental prices	76 (61)
Pass rules that annual rent increases cannot be higher than increases in the cost of living*	75 (59)
Pass laws so tenants cannot be evicted without a valid reason*	74 (58)

*Split-sampled question

Nearly three-quarters of battleground voters support federal regulations that would make it illegal for landlords to charge additional mandatory fees (“junk fees”) for renters – 74% support, 55% strongly support. Across partisan lines, 73% of Democrats, 62% of Independents, and 36% of Republicans *strongly* support this regulation. Though intensity is low among Republicans, 6 in 10 support the regulation overall.

- Across battleground states, 59% of Arizona voters, 56% of Georgia voters, 56% of Michigan voters, 56% of Pennsylvania voters, 55% of North Carolina voters, 51% of Wisconsin voters, and 45% of Nevada voters strongly support this legislation.
- At least half of voters across generational lines strongly support this legislation, including 51% of Boomers, 54% of Gen X voters, 62% of Millennials, and 62% of Gen Z voters.

Protecting tenants and renters is a voting issue. Voters are favorable toward elected leaders who support policies to protect tenants and renters (68% more favorable, 42% much more favorable) and unfavorable toward elected leaders who oppose policies to protect tenants and renters (63% less favorable, 50% much less favorable). Half of Gen Z voters say they would be much more favorable toward an elected leader who supported policies to protect tenants and renters.

Across partisan lines, Democrats are most likely to reward elected leaders who supports policies to protect tenants and renters (89%), followed by three-quarters of Independents (76%) and a plurality of Republicans (48%).

- Democrat: 67% much more favorable (89 more favorable)
 - Strong Democrats and Democratic women are 10 points more likely than weak Democrats to vote for this candidate (71% vs. 61%, respectively).
- Independent: 46% much more favorable (76% more favorable)
- Republican: 16% much more favorable (48% more favorable)

Voters across partisan lines will also punish elected leaders who oppose policies to protect tenants and renters, including 51 of Independents (42% much less favorable), and 46% of Republicans (28% much less favorable) and a solid majority of Democrats (84% less favorable, 74% much less favorable).

Two-thirds or more are more likely to support an elected official who says the following three progressive messages about housing in the United States:

- [Junk Fees] *While people struggle to keep up with the rising prices of goods and services, landlords and property management companies are raking in record-setting profits by using junk fees to engage in price gouging. We need laws that stop junk fees in housing services, including rental properties as well as mortgages.*
 - 76% of voters are more likely to support an official who says this, including 52% who are much more likely to support them.

- Across partisan lines, 72% of Democrats, 51% of Independents, and 34% of Republicans are much more likely to support the official.
- This message rises to the top among a majority of Black voters (64%), Latino/a voters (65%), renters (63%), lower-income voters (58%), urban voters (57%), Gen Z voters (54%) and millennial voters (57%).
- [Record Profits] *Housing is the single biggest expense for most people, and yet over the last few years, corporate landlords made record-breaking profits by setting high rents and evicting many residents. We need the President to make sure all landlords who receive loans backed by public dollars are regulated so that tenants are protected from outrageous rent hikes.*
 - 73% of voters are more likely to support an official who says this, including 47% who are much more likely to support them.
 - Across partisan lines, 67% of Democrats, 45% of Independents, and 30% of Republicans are much more likely to support the official.
- [Not Enough] *The federal government has not done enough for the more than 50% of Americans who are one paycheck away from disaster. With many facing skyrocketing rents and mortgage rates, our government should take action to make it possible for working people to afford a place to call home.*
 - 69% of voters are more likely to support an official who says this, including 44% who are much more likely to support them.
 - Across partisan lines, 63% of Democrats, 46% of Independents, and 25% of Republicans are much more likely to support the official.

Voters' Personal Connections to Housing Issues

At the end of the survey, voters were asked a series of demographic questions to capture their housing experiences. A majority of voters own their current home, with a mortgage (38%) or without a mortgage (20%). About three in 10 (29%) rent, and 9% live with their parents or relatives and do not pay rent. Of renting battleground voters, four in ten do not believe they will ever own their own home, including 74% of Boomers and 41% of Gen X voters. Younger voters are more optimistic with 58% of Gen Z voters and 48% of millennial voters saying they believe they will own a home of their own in the future. Of those who don't think they will ever own a home of their own, the top reason is that currently available homes are too expensive (60%).

More than six in ten voters (64%) have a personal connection to housing instability, defined as having trouble paying rent, overcrowding, moving frequently because of cost, staying with relatives, or spending the bulk of your household income on housing. A majority across partisan lines have a personal connection to housing instability, but Democrats and Independents are more likely to say they have either personally experiencing it now or have in the past (45% of Democrats and 55% of Independents). At least seven in ten renters (73%), voters of color (71%), Gen Z voters (71%), Gen X voters (71%), and Democrats (70%) have a connection to housing instability, as do two-thirds or more Independents (68%), suburban voters (67%), and voters in Arizona (67%), Georgia (66%), and Michigan (66%).