



June 12, 2025

Workers are Exhausted, Strapped and Angry with Corporations and Government

Americans' anger at corporations and the politicians enabling them is at a boiling point.

To: Interested Parties
From: GQR/Dignity of Work Institute

Workers of all types almost universally say they are fighting daily to stay afloat financially. Their finances force them to make painful choices, not just between wants and needs, but between necessities like housing, groceries and health care. People are exhausted and express desperation as they describe their daily battle to make ends meet. The gap between the money they have coming in and what they need to cover costs is growing. A series of focus groups conducted by GQR and the Dignity of Work Institute details those struggles and how the depth of workers' anger and desperation is reaching a boiling point.¹

Executive Summary

- Workers are unified by their experiences and their struggle to manage rising costs on stagnant wages. Across gender, age, location and race, people in these diverse focus groups are living similar daily experiences and feeling the same pressures. The economy is not working for any of them, and they want to see drastic change.
- Across the board, workers are angry with "greedy" corporations and the politicians who they see as enabling them. The big corporations are taking advantage of them, and the people responsible for helping – politicians – are seen as actively enabling them.
- The absence of allies forces them to look inward to improve their situations, relying on their own efforts and ambitions – including gig work and other side jobs or projects. Many are piecing together their income from multiple sources instead of surviving on one job.

¹ GQR conducted six focus groups from May 5-7, 2025. Group 1: Urban youth aged 18-29, mixed race and gender. Group 2: Rural or small town white non-college men, mixed age. Group 3: Suburban mothers with children under 26, mixed race and age. Group 4: Urban Hispanic women under 60. Group 5: Urban Black men under 60. Group 6: Mixed geography white non-college women aged 30-49. We remind readers that focus group findings are not statistically projectable, but this platform provides a depth and texture impossible to pull out of a set of representative crosstabs. We chose these groups based on the groups struggling most in our earlier survey.

The survey was conducted among 1,300 (1,000 base and 100 each Black, Hispanic, and age 18-29 oversamples) registered voters nationally from February 13-23, 2025. Respondents were selected using the voter file. The full survey is subject to a margin of error of +/- 3.10 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval; the margin of error is higher among oversamples and subgroups. The data are statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional, age, and gender composition reflects that of registered voters nationally.

- To the extent they are looking for anything from their government, it is to hold corporations accountable. They see politicians as in the pockets of the corporations instead of helping. They do not want more government programs; they want government to play more of a “referee” role in the economy that levels the playing field and allows them to succeed.

“Things are tough.”

On every measure related to money in our discussions – the macro economy, personal financial security and daily costs – participants were extremely pessimistic and beaten down. The extreme nature of the strain on their finances is severely impacting people’s basic economic wellbeing and standard of living, as well as damaging their overall quality of life and, frankly, their ability to live a happy life.

Four out of five participants say they do not feel financially secure, and nine in ten participants think the economy is getting worse. The sources of their financial anxiety are the essentials. Nearly every participant cited the cost of housing, food, utilities, and insurance as the biggest burdens. They go to the grocery store and must “put things back because you can’t afford it that week.” The end of every month means having to “look at your bank account to make sure every bill ain’t going to overdraft you.”

Participants’ vision of what financial success looks like is remarkably basic as well. They simply want to not worry about paying for the essentials.

“Benefit of being stable to me would just have been able to have bills on autopay.”
“You don’t have to pick and choose between the expenses that come up. You just know it’s covered.”
“Be able to get the things that we need versus scrounging and scraping and hoping and praying.”
“Be able to have a nest egg in case of emergencies.”

Their view of the income needed for financial security is well above most of their household incomes and hovers around \$100,000. That figure is above the 2023 U.S. median household income of \$80,610 and two and a half times the individual median income of \$39,982, indicating that most participants believe someone who is “middle class” on paper cannot actually afford a financially secure life. As one participant put it, “\$100,000 is a lot of money, but that’s almost like a living wage right now.” They say by not feeling secure, they lose the ability to experience and enjoy life. They feel a loss of identity outside of working to survive.

People’s financial pressures are deepened by the reality that jobs are not paying enough to help them keep up with costs. As they tell it, the job market is getting tougher with fewer good paying jobs or jobs with benefits available. Many participants see gig work as a necessity to help them get by and supplement their hours and income. Other participants discussed how their hours have been cut and how employers are not offering good benefits, if any at all.

“A lot of people are having to take advantage of, like the gig work like Doordash or Uber, or whatever else, to just kind of fill in, you know, donating plasma to fill in those gaps.”

“Everybody's feeling the burden right now. So I do other things to help me with the inflation. I do a little Uber Eats a little Amazon flex, you know other gigs, and then I go to the [food] pantry. So I go other places to make it easier for me.”

“They’re just being greedy.”

Participants across the groups place the blame for high costs and stagnant incomes squarely on greedy corporations, government and political leadership working together to maintain the system that is keeping them from getting ahead. They specifically name major corporations that deal in the things they need: Big Pharma, real estate corporations, banks, utilities, insurance companies and large retailers. They feel that price gouging is intentional, that corporations are raising prices on things they know consumers cannot go without.

“They know people need to survive off certain things... And them companies know they can continue to raise prices because people need this stuff and they're gonna have to pay it, regardless of if they're living in a 1-bedroom shack or living in a mansion, you're still gonna have to pay for it because you need it. So companies are going to steadily gouge you.”

“Even if they're going up, we still have to pay them. We don't have the option of not paying them and not having them. I mean, we have to have insurance by law. We have to have housing. We have to have food. Companies know this, and so they're like, Oh, we can jack it up another 50 bucks. They've got to pay it, no matter what we can jack it up another \$1,000.”

Participants view politicians and government as being in bed with corporate interests at the expense of the public. They believe that politicians have the power to constrain corporations but choose not to so they can line their own pockets – regardless of party.

“Big corporations themselves are only at fault because our government protects them, and they extend laws that protect big corporations over the interest of society.”

“I think 75 percent of corporations have politicians in their pockets, and you know they’re going to get their agenda...or whatever they want.”

“The big people, politicians or whatever you know, they don’t struggle, so they don’t think of people who struggle.”

Participants do generally expect their lives to get better over the next five years, but not because of outside help. The reasons they expect life to improve are always self-driven: they have personal goals to get more education, earn a promotion, manage their finances better or expect a family situation to change, like kids growing up. They are willing to hustle and work multiple jobs to move toward these goals and see gig work like driving for Uber or delivering for Instacart as opportunities to bring in some extra cash.

“There needs to be an all-around overhaul.”

There is enormous appetite for transformative change to the economic system that puts them – regular people – at the center. The overwhelming focus of concrete changes is on higher wages and lower costs, with an overarching theme of needing to focus on regular people as the priority rather than pushing them to the side.

Participants said they would be helped by both small, common-sense things, like being able to change the due dates of their bills so that they are not all due at the same time, and major economic shifts, like limiting price increases on basic necessities, lower taxes for working people and higher taxes for corporations and forcing companies to raise wages.

“See us and care for us”

As important as any specific issue is the pervasive view that regular people are alone and unseen in their fight against an unfair system. Rhetoric around the economy that focuses on the stock market or unemployment rates is divorced from their reality. One participant summarized the last few years: “The stock market was booming. That’s a clear sign that the rich are getting richer while your wages did not move for 4 years.” Another simply said leaders need to “care for us.”

Despite having seemingly no allies, though, they believe they can survive and improve their own lives. They need their leaders to listen, hear their struggles and put them at the center of their priorities. People are working hard to get ahead – they just need a fair fight.