

# [***A new Democratic ad campaign targets one of Trump's most loyal blocs: Rural voters***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C16-B5T1-JC5B-G1GC-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

NEW YORK — A Democratic group is rolling out a new $140 million ad campaign that aims to chip away at [*Donald Trump's*](https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump) support among one of his [*most loyal*](https://apnews.com/hub/trump-country) voting blocs: rural voters.

The ads, from American Bridge 21st Century, will begin airing Monday in the northern battleground states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin. They are aimed at swing voters in smaller media markets that are less saturated with political advertising and where they hope to reach people, especially women, who may be on the fence.

“We should compete everywhere," said American Bridge co-founder Bradley Beychok, who said Democrats have too often shied away from rural counties as they have focused on turning out base voters in more urban and suburban areas. In the states that are likely to decide November's election “Margins matter," he said.

The ads, part of the group's broader $200 million effort to defeat Trump, target exurban and rural areas like Erie, Johnstown and Altoona, Pennsylvania; Flint, Saginaw and Bay City, Michigan; and Wausau and Rhinelander, Wisconsin.

They feature testimonials from voters sharing their [*concerns about a second Trump term*](https://apnews.com/article/america-first-trump-biden-russia-ukraine-policy-54080728c6e549c8312c4d71150480ba). The first round focuses on abortion rights and health care access. In one, a nurse who's a mother and grandmother bemoans the overturning of Roe. v. Wade and highlights Trump's [*own words*](https://apnews.com/article/abortion-ban-trump-criminalize-mifepristone-election-7f43c7e9ab192ebe874a1f0b1b7ba60b) on the issue. In another, an OB/GYN shares a heartbreaking story of having an abortion late in pregnancy after discovering the child she was carrying had a fatal abnormality.

Future ads will focus on issues like [*IVF*](https://apnews.com/article/ivf-frozen-embryo-alabama-court-7c968cc00201731d7baba5a284655b0d) and [*democracy and freedom*](https://apnews.com/article/ap-poll-democracy-rights-freedoms-election-b1047da72551e13554a3959487e5181a) as they try to help voters who are turned off by ***politics*** and may not be paying close attention to the election understand the stakes this November.

“People are afraid of Trump. And in some cases you have to remind them why," said Beychok, who said first-person testimonials are the most effective way to reach voters, given the electorate's broad distrust of politicians.

People “want to hear from voters that look like them, that have similar stories,” said Eva Kemp, the group's vice president of campaigns. She said they spent years recruiting participants via door-to-door canvassing and other outreach, identified over 1,500 potential voices across the three states and interviewed hundreds.

They include Lori Cataldi, 57, a nurse who works for a local community hospital in central Pennsylvania and speaks in her ad about abortion rights. “If we reelect Trump, what are women going to lose next?” she asks.

She said she was contacted by the group after her husband wrote a letter to the editor that was published in their local paper and hopes her ad will catch the attention of other women who may be undecided or turned off by the current political climate.

“I’m hoping that it just touches people who might be frustrated, who might be tired of it all. I really hope that it resonates in a way that makes them take pause ... and say, as tired as they are, ‘I really should look close at this,'" she said.

She called on voters to look past what she called “extraneous issues” like the candidates’ [*ages*](https://apnews.com/article/election-2024-age-biden-trump-gaffes-flubs-c46427d30471f79ee695d3e76f4d17f4) or their [*alleged crimes*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-indictments-election-january-6-classified-documents-5cb04868bb1cdf91c19eafdb882af8c0). “Women need to pay attention to what’s important to women. And I’m hoping that it speaks to other women who are just like me," she said.

Trump's dominance in rural countries has been critical to his success. Some 60% of voters who live in small towns or rural areas voted for Trump in 2020, versus 38% who voted for Biden, according to AP VoteCast.

That trend continued in this year’s Republican primary contests. In the early voting states, between 58% and 66% of voters from small towns or rural areas supported Trump, the data show. He was less popular among suburban and urban voters.

Swing voters represent a small sliver of the electorate, especially in a year when both major party candidates are [*so well known*](https://apnews.com/article/presidential-race-rematch-history-biden-trump-cleveland-8d5c41537e397cb02924ef60e1183dca).

But the Democratic group has identified several million swing voters it says fit into four broad categories of potentially persuadable voters: soft partisans, volatile voters who readily switch between parties, anti-MAGA conservatives turned off by the more extreme elements of the Republican Party, as well as “double doubters," which is the name that has been given to voters this cycle who are turned off by both parties' candidates.

Voters in those groups, they say, are predominantly women and from rural and exurban areas.

“Democrats should have learned by now that since Trump was elected in 2016, women have saved democracy election after election," Beychok said.

Another ad features Susan Pryce, 74, a retired nurse who lives in Derry, Pennsylvania, and got involved with the project after she lent her neighbor a laptop to record a follow-up interview during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. She offered a litany of reasons why she does not support Trump, from his comments [*maligning*](https://apnews.com/united-states-government-1c6e01bba8a14fc1a1a4e63370a4c48e) the late Sen. John McCain, a former prisoner of war, to his history of bragging about sexually abusing women.

“I feel like this is the most important election that I've ever voted in,” she said, choking up as she described her family's extensive military history. Her father was a POW in Germany for 21 months during World War II and her husband is a disabled Vietnam War veteran.

“I want to honor everything that they sacrificed," she said, and make sure “there’s a democracy for us here.”

“I want my grandchildren to know that a good leader seeks that office to serve, not for personal gain or personal power," she went on. “I want them to know a good leader respects the Constitution — Constitution that all their relatives who served took an oath to ... that no one is above the law. That every one of us, including the people at the very top, have to have respect for the rule of law," she said.

She also voiced concern about women's rights, describing how women once needed their father's or husband's permission to have certain medical procedures or to get a credit card.

“When Roe v. Wade was overturned, I just felt that I had suddenly become a second-class citizen," she said. “I'm really worried that this is just the tip of the iceberg, that we’re going backwards.”

She said she lives in a rural area that's very conservative, but noted a neighbor had recently put up a “BYEDON" sign, giving her hope.

"I really believe just from the last year, from interactions with people that there are more people that feel like I do but are just quiet and going about their lives," she said. “We’re going to make our voices heard with our vote.”

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Associated Press polls and surveys reporter Linley Sanders contributed to this report from Washington.

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