

September 16, 2020

To: A Better Wisconsin Together Institute, Inc.
Fr: Brian Stryker / Molly Murphy / Oren Savir / Graham Willard
Re: WI Activation Voter Research

Wisconsinites have closely followed events in Kenosha, and in particular younger whites and people of color are disproportionately likely to live in the Milwaukee media market where news has been the heaviest. As a result, the issues raised of racial inequality, policing, and protesting are top of mind for these audiences.

The below research highlights their reactions, namely that these two audiences are keenly aware of events on a detailed level, that they largely see police as being in the wrong and Jacob Blake's shooting as being part of a larger national pattern, and that they want action and change. The specifics of what they want vary, but generally these voters respond to:

1. Unity, healing, and coming together to stop the violence – whether by police, vigilantes, or rioters.
2. Pushing for concrete reforms with teeth, such as banning chokeholds and investing in communities of color.
3. Funding social services and reducing the amount of calls police are on, but not via cuts to police budgets. Increasing funding for mental health and social services resonates with voters, but defunding police is unpopular.

Note: the following findings are based on two pieces of research:

- A telephone poll conducted August 9-30 among n=165 African Americans, n=140 additional people of color, n=151 18-22 year olds, and n=144 low turnout white progressives age 23 and older. Given the fielding dates, some interviews were conducted prior to the shooting of Jacob Blake and others afterward.
- Qualitative research conducted September 2, 2020 among n=96 people of color and n=109 whites under age 30.

Key Findings:

- **Combating racism/reforming police are top of mind issues.** In qualitative research with both whites under 30 and people of color, police reform and racism stand out, though notably amid other top-of-mind issues:

 - *“Democracy, racial discrimination and tax payment.”* – POC Group, 75% agreement
 - *“Healthcare, climate change, police reform.”* – POC Group, 75% agreement
 - *“BLM, women’s rights, healthcare for all.”* – W<30 Group, 65% agreement

- **People followed the situation in Kenosha closely, being able to report back events in detail.** Majorities said they had watched the video of Jacob Blake’s shooting among both people of color (82%) and whites under 30 (74%). Most had also heard about Kyle Rittenhouse shooting protesters and many could report specific details including his name, age, the fact that he was from out of state or even specifically from Illinois, and that his mother drove him to Kenosha. Many also knew that Trump had defended Rittenhouse, just days after he had done so.

- **People of color want leaders to hold police accountable and retrain them; whites under 30 say leaders must listen to protesters and make real changes.** Asked what elected leaders should be doing, respondents in the people of color group talked about holding police accountable, retraining police to avoid repeat situations, and notably to heal the community, with some specifically talking about dealing with looters/rioters:

 - *“[Leader need] to listen, and hold the police accountable. Stop victim blaming and acting like their criminal past justifies them being murdered.”* (65% agreement)
 - *“Police retraining.”* (63% agreement)
 - *“ZERO tolerance for anarchy. Plain and simple. These ‘protesters’ also need to be held accountable for their actions.”* (65% agreement, #1 tied)
 - *“To support the community and to begin the healing process.”* (63% agreement)
 - *“They need to try to heal the city and they need to make people accountable who are committing acts of violence or looting.”* (62% agreement)

In the whites under 30 group, responses focused on listening to protesters, reforming police, and making real changes:

- *“Listen to protesters demand for justice. Enact long-lasting change that prevents police from being judge, jury, and executioner.”* (76% agreement)
 - *“They need to reinforce that if someone doesn’t listen to commands right away, that doesn’t give you the right to shoot someone 7 times.”* (75% agreement)
 - *“Empathy and understanding for POC. Body cams for officers. Arrest the officer involved. Make real change to their current police system.”* (74% agreement)
- **Most think that Republicans will do nothing at best and fan the flames at worst, while Democrats generally get the benefit of the doubt.** Though there is cynicism, many respondents expect Democrats to do right on this issue, with many (especially among the whites under 30) specifically citing that Republicans will block them or that Democrats lack majorities in the legislature.
 - **Defunding the police is not popular with people of color.** Majorities oppose defunding police among African Americans (57%) and non-Black people of color (60%), with strong opposition greater than total support for both. In the qualitative research, though there was some support, many of the top responses were opposed, calling it “crazy”, “not sensible”, and “not such a great idea”. Among people of color over the age of 50, nearly all of the top responses were opposed. Notably, few among this group talked about defunding police in terms of the underlying policy ideas, taking it instead at face value of the slogan.
 - **Defunding police has a niche base among younger whites, but it still net unpopular.** A majority of 18-22 year olds (58%) oppose it, as do a majority of low-turnout white progressives age 23 and older (74%). In qualitative research, progressive young whites who supported defunding talked about it in terms of shifting funding.
 - **People may not want defunding, but they want more money into non-police violence prevention.** Whether they supported defunding or not, the people of color and whites under 30 liked the idea to “[shift] resources from police to non-police violence prevention programs, mental health services and other social

services to address problems before they reach the level of police intervention”. In the quantitative poll, a slightly truncated version of the same language garners much more support among African Americans (71% total favor, 55% strongly), other people of color (59% total favor, 36% strongly), 18-22 year olds (73% total favor, 58% strongly), and low turnout white progressives (56% total favor, 25% strongly).

Notably, what comes through in qualitative reactions is that people like the ideas of increasing mental health and social services on their own merit, and likely regardless of whether or not they are tied to shifting resources away from police departments. People view this as more money to help people, not less money to punish police—and we suspect a “more funding for social services” rather than “shift funding out of policing” argument would have been even more popular.

- **Procedural reforms and economic aid to communities of color have near universal support.** Majorities of African Americans, other people of color, 18-22 year olds, and low turnout white progressives favor “reforming police procedures including banning chokeholds and increasing training for de-escalation” as well as “funding economic development in communities of color, such as by increasing funding for programs to support Black entrepreneurship.”
- **Reparations and removing police from schools are unpopular or divisive.** While African Americans support “paying Black Wisconsinites reparations for slavery” (66% total favor, 49% strongly), the measure is deeply unpopular with other people of color (33% favor / 53% oppose) and low turnout white progressives (16% favor / 72% oppose) and it has less than majority support among 18-22 year olds (48% favor / 43% oppose). Removing police from schools is divisive, with both African Americans (48% favor / 48% oppose) and 18-22 year olds evenly split (49% favor / 49% oppose) and other people of color (36% favor / 56% oppose) and low turnout white progressives (23% favor / 62% oppose) opposed.
- **People respond to messages that highlight unity, healing, and stopping violence.** After a message battery in the qualitative research, respondents highlight language of coming together, healing communities, standing against division, and preventing violence. A number also cite messaging that directly named the victims of police violence including Jacob Blake, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, while vagueness was chief concern that bothered voters about

the messaging they heard. This was true whether voters heard language in the race-class narrative or not—what they want is people coming together to solve the problems.

- *“Equality, justice, police should be held responsible.”* – POC Group, 67% agreement
- *“Power to the people, defund police, all races together.”* – POC Group, 67% agreement
- *“We have to stand up against division and chaos. We have to stand up against violence against our people of color.”* – White <30 Group, 76% agreement
- *“That they actually said the names of the Black men who were brutalized by LEOs.”* – White <30 Group, 75% agreement