

September 16, 2020

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

Wisconsin remains a deeply-contested state, both at the national and state levels. Research among people of color, college-age voters, and white progressives with low turnout propensity shows that these audiences largely mirror voters overall in their priorities for healthcare, the economy, and coronavirus.

In particular, these groups care about:

- **Solving COVID-19, for health and economic reasons.** They do not see the situation as improving in the near future and prefer to suffer immediate economic pain now if it means beating back the virus more fully. In the meantime, voters think the state needs to do more to help people wait out the crisis.
- **Police reform.** Events in Kenosha have elevated this issue, with many participants in our qualitative research having witnessed the situation directly. A separate memo will outline views on this topic specifically.
- **Making health care affordable and accessible.** The issue has become more salient during the pandemic, and in other research we have seen that tying health care to the pandemic resonates with voters. Of note, accessibility is particularly poignant with Black voters.
- **Economic reforms that strengthen safety nets in the short-term, and provide good-paying jobs in the long-term.** Voters' top priorities are driven by the pandemic: guaranteeing paid sick leave and making childcare affordable. In the longer term, they respond to job training programs and infrastructure projects that create jobs.

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.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

- **Coronavirus and police reform are top issue priorities.** In the quantitative poll, coronavirus was the top priority alike for African Americans (29%), other people of color (27%), 18-22 year olds (17%), and low turnout white progressives (23%). In qualitative research conducted after/during Kenosha, police and criminal justice reform frequently rose to the top though healthcare, education, jobs, and COVID were also prevalent, though more so among people of color than whites under 30 who place more emphasis on economic inequality.
- **Voters don't know what the legislature is doing, but they assume if anything they are working on COVID, Kenosha.** Both issues rise to the top in qualitative research when voters are asked what Madison has been working on lately, among both people of color and whites under 30. But there was little awareness or confidence in those answers.
 - *"I'm not 100% sure. I think they're focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from that. As well as the Jacob Blake/police brutality protest."* – POC Group, 72% agreement.
 - *"COVID restrictions. Mask Mandates."* – Whites <30 Group, 73% agreement.
- **About half say they have heard about the recall attempt, but most dismiss it as "nonsensical" and a "distraction".** Among the progressive audiences in our qualitative research, roughly half of both the people of color and under 30 white groups each had heard about the recall effort. However, in both groups many described it as "Nonsense", "wrong", "unwarranted and a distraction", "stupid", and "ridiculous".

- **People of color think Democrats fight for equality and justice, while younger whites see a mix of issues.** In qualitative research, voters of color see Democrats in Wisconsin as fighting for equality for people of color, democracy and equality, fighting for working class people regardless of race or ethnicity, and justice. Whites under 30 respond with more of a mix of issues, including diversity and inclusivity, better schools, workers' rights, and the environment.

 - *“BLM, pro choice, pro LGBTQ, and other related human rights.”* – Whites <30 Group, 76% agreement
 - *“Minorities and working and middle class.”* – POC Group, 74% agreement

- **Both people of color and younger whites think Republicans fight for the rich and corporations/donors.** In both qualitative groups this was the overwhelming view, including such responses as “They fight for their wealth and not public service”, “Corporate interests, donor interests, and their own political power”, “Keeping the wealth among the wealthy, gun rights, religious freedom for Christians, white supremacy”, and “Big business and corporations, the wealthy, helping companies instead of employees.”

- **People know about Trump's attacks on the post office and are concerned by them.** Both people of color and whites under 30 in our qualitative research groups report hearing about the post office being defunded and short-staffed by Trump leading to delays in mail delivery.

 - *“Yes, I have heard that it is being destroyed by the post master general, who was appointed by Trump.”* – Whites <30 Group, 82% agreement.
 - *“Yes I heard that they needed more money to get ballots out on time.”* – POC Group, 84% agreement.

- **About two-fifths plan to vote by mail among every activation group.** In quantitative polling, African Americans are the most likely to say they plan to vote absentee by mail (48%) and the least likely to vote in person on election day (20%). Other groups are more divided, with non-Black people of color leaning narrowly to voting in person on election day (38% mail / 43% E-Day) and 18-22 year olds (44% mail / 38% E-Day) and low turnout white progressives (43% mail / 35% E-Day) leaning toward voting absentee by mail. African Americans are the most likely to say they will vote early in person, at 20%.

HEALTHCARE

- Lowering costs, increasing accessibility are top priorities.** To a certain extent these priorities differ by group, with African Americans (30% access, 24% costs) and 18-22 year olds (41% access, 35% costs) putting a greater priority on accessibility while other people of color (35% costs, 28% accessibility) and low turnout white progressives (37% costs, 26% access) more focused on costs. For African Americans, improving the quality of care is also important (25%).
- There is tremendous support for capping drug prices, expanding BadgerCare, and enshrining protections for pre-existing conditions in Wisconsin.** Each of these policies tested with a majority *strongly* in favor in all four activation groups and near-universal support in general. Banning out-of-network or surprise medical bills is also popular, though not in the same league as these other measures.
- Voters in all four activation groups are more likely to support a public option than a fully-public healthcare system.** The greatest divergence is among African Americans, of whom just shy of a majority support a “government-run healthcare system with no costs for individuals but higher taxes” (49% favor / 37% oppose), while a clear majority supports “a state-run, public health insurance option that competes with private insurers on the market” (63% favor / 22% oppose).

% Favor	African Americans	Add'l POC	18-22 year olds	Low turnout white prog. age 23+
Creating a state-run, public health insurance option that competes with private insurers on the market	63	64	69	62
Creating a government-run healthcare system with no costs for individuals but higher taxes	49	60	58	55
<i>Difference</i>	<i>+14</i>	<i>+4</i>	<i>+11</i>	<i>+7</i>

COVID-19

- **Majorities say the worst is yet to come and that short-term economic pain to get us back to normal sooner is a better approach than reopening now.** In all four activation groups, a majority says that the worst is yet to come rather than that the worst is over (though this is tightest among 18-22 year olds, among whom the margin is 51-45) and do not expect life to go back to normal before the end of 2020. Majorities across every group also agree by wide margins that “the best way to reduce the economic pain from coronavirus is to fight the disease, which may mean short-term economic pain but ultimately will get businesses back open and back to normal sooner” over an argument that “the best way to reduce the economic pain from coronavirus is to let businesses open up and get back to work.”
- **Voters’ top concerns are that we reopened too fast, officials did not take the virus seriously enough, and too little is being done to ease the financial burden for people.** Though proportions vary across activation groups, these are the top three concerns for every group – the only exception being 18-22 year olds who also express concern that “the Governor forced businesses to close and people to stay at home, ruining the economy and hurting our freedoms.”
- **On schools, voters support remote and hybrid learning but oppose full in-person instruction.** Majorities of African Americans, other people of color, and 18-22 year olds favor both remote learning only and hybrid learning with some days in class and some days online, though people of color generally are more supportive of remote learning only and 18-22 year olds prefer hybrid learning.
- **Low-turnout white progressives are an exception and oppose remote learning.** They oppose both full reopening for in-person instruction (36% support / 55% oppose) and remote learning only (43% support / 46% oppose), but a majority favor hybrid learning with some days in class and some days online (60% support / 28% oppose).

ECONOMY

- Beating coronavirus is the top priority for the economy.** This is what the most voters say is most important to getting the economy back on track, whether among African Americans (50%), other people of color (49%), 18-22 year olds (41%), or low turnout white progressives (44%).
- People of color are less certain the economy will recover quickly after the pandemic is over.** A plurality of African Americans expect a slow recovery (45% economy will recover quickly / 49% not quickly), and only a narrow majority of other people of color think the economy will bounce back (50% quickly / 46% not quickly). In contrast, 18-22 year olds (58% quickly / 38% not quickly) and low turnout white Progressives (55% quickly / 38% not quickly) are more bullish on a post-COVID economic recovery.
- Voters want a stronger safety net.** With COVID-19 highlighting the weaknesses in the existing system, the top economic proposals we tested that had the broadest appeal are making childcare less expensive and guaranteeing paid sick leave. Long and short-term job boosting measures such as creating job-building infrastructure, job training classes, and encouraging people to produce essential care goods in America are also popular. Voters are generally less concerned with trade or outsourcing-related measures like ending corporate giveaways.

% Strongly favor	AA	Other POC	18-22	Low T-O WP
Making childcare less expensive so people can afford to go back to work	81	71	69	60
Guaranteeing workers can get paid leave when they are sick or have to take care of a sick loved one	78	76	71	59
Laws that encourage people to produce essential care goods in America like drugs, medical masks, and ventilators	74	70	55	59
Creating jobs building infrastructure like roads and bridges	70	59	53	52
Ending unaccountable corporate giveaways like the FoxConn deal and only giving tax incentives to companies that deliver on the jobs they promise	49	45	40	52

A small business fund that gives loans to companies with fewer than twenty-five employees to help them stay open and pay workers during the pandemic	75	68	70	51
Job training classes for people to get a raise or retrained for a job that is a better fit for the new economy	83	65	58	51
Targeted economic help to communities that are struggling like rural areas and communities of color	82	66	60	48
Banning taxpayer-funded contracts to companies that ship jobs overseas	50	37	30	42
Raising the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour	76	57	48	40

OTHER AREAS

- **Other issue areas that have high-to-universal support among activation groups include:**
 - *Strengthening laws to protect drinking water and hold polluters accountable.* This measure has *strong* support from more than 75% of voters in every group.
 - *Fixing the education funding formula so funding is more equal per district.* More than 80% support this in every activation group, including a majority in every group that strongly favor it.
 - *Protecting essential workers like nurses, first responders, and grocery store workers.* Specifically, ensuring these workers have access to paid leave, health insurance, and fair pay – which garners more than 90% total support and more than 70% strong support in every group.
 - *Helping small family farmers.* Specifically forcing big farms and factory farms to play by the rules so that small family farms are not disadvantaged. More than 90% of voters support this in every activation group, including more than 70% who strongly support it is in every group.