

September 8, 2020

To: A Better Wisconsin Together Institute, Inc.
Fr: Brian Stryker / Molly Murphy / Oren Savir / Graham Willard
Re: Wisconsin Statewide Landscape Poll Findings, Recommendations

Wisconsin remains a deeply-contested state, both at the national and state levels. But there are a number of popular policies voters support and would like to see implemented, particularly on healthcare, the economy, and coronavirus.

Primarily, voters care about:

- **Solving COVID-19, for health and economic reasons.** People think the economy will come back once COVID is knocked down, but they also think the worst is yet to come from the virus. They want the virus dealt with and see it as a good way to improve the economy—voters respond to linking the two issues together.
- **Making health care affordable, expanding BadgerCare, and protecting coverage for pre-existing conditions.** These are the most broadly popular positions with voters on health care. 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.
- **Urgent economic populism that includes:**
 - Getting Wisconsinites to work making PPE and building infrastructure
 - Providing money immediately to people and small businesses during the pandemic (child care, paid sick days, targeted relief to struggling communities)
 - Job training programs to get people skills who want to work hard
 - Closing corporate loopholes

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The following findings are based on the results of a telephone survey conducted by ALG Research from August 9-16, 2020 in Wisconsin among N=656 likely 2020 general election voters with an oversample of n=153 voters in rural counties. The margin of error for the main sample is $\pm 3.8\%$. The margin of error for subgroups varies and is higher.

- **The state is a tossup.** The political environment in Wisconsin today is precarious: Joe Biden leads Donald Trump in the Presidential race by just two points (47% Biden / 45% Trump), while a generic party vote for legislature is tied (45% Democrat / 45% Republican). Biden's overperformance compared to a generic legislative Democrat is built on his stronger margins among primarily Independents (Biden +5, generic Dem -7) and seniors (Biden +7, generic Dem -1). Otherwise, the dynamics are similar for both and mirror national trends: Democrats and Biden lead among people of color, women, college grads, and voters under 35; Republicans and Trump lead among men, non-college grads, and voters aged 35-64.
- **Donald Trump is unpopular while Tony Evers is broadly popular.** The President's job rating is net negative (47% approve / 51% disapprove), including among white voters (-2), Independents (-15), and seniors (-14). On the other hand, Governor Evers is rated positive by a majority of voters both overall (57% approve / 37% disapprove) and regardless of race, age, or education. Notably, he gets strong marks from Independents (64% approve / 27% disapprove), seniors (60% approve / 32% disapprove), and even a fifth of Republicans (20% approve / 74% disapprove).
- **Democrats are concerned about COVID, Republicans about the economy.** Voters' top issue priorities largely breaks along partisan lines: for Democrats, the top priorities are the coronavirus pandemic (32%), healthcare (15%), and schools (13%). For Republicans, on the other hand, jobs and the economy dominates (38%) with coronavirus a second place but also second-tier concern (13%). Independents fall in the middle (21% jobs and the economy, 18% coronavirus).
- **Republicans plan to vote in person, Democrats by mail.** Just under half say they will vote in person on election day (49%) while about a third of voters plan to vote absentee by mail (34%) and the remaining few will vote early in person (13%). Most likely to vote in person on election day are Republicans (68%), voters age 35-64 (55%), and non-college grads (55%). Most likely to vote by mail are Democrats (51%), college graduates (47%), voters under 35 (44%), and voters in Dane county (59%).

VIEWS OF COVID-19

- **Democrats remain much more concerned about COVID than Republicans.**

77% of Democrats say the worst is yet to come with regard to coronavirus in Wisconsin, while 64% of Republicans say the worst is behind us. Independents side narrowly with Democrats (51% worst is yet to come / 40% worst is behind us).

These attitudes are reflected in partisans' top pandemic concerns: for Republicans it is by far the Governor's stay-at-home order (60%), while Democrats are more bothered by elected officials not taking the virus seriously and being unprepared (47%) as well as the state not doing enough to ease the financial burden on people who are struggling (33%). Independents are split between the financial burden (31%), politicians not taking the pandemic seriously (30%), and the economy (27%).

A majority says the worst is yet to come in the Madison, LaCrosse, and Wausau markets, as do pluralities in the Green Bay and Milwaukee markets—this is not something where Southeast feels one way and the North feels another.

- **Voters are cautious about reopening and think we are in for a long road back to normal.** Most think life will not return to normal before 2021, including a majority of Republicans. Voters largely agree that it is better to suffer short-term economic pain and get back to normal sooner (56%) over letting businesses reopen and get back to work now (41%). As on other measures, Republicans are the exception to this, but majorities agree regardless of race or education. There is a small regional divide with the Wausau and Minneapolis markets leaning in favor of reopening, while voters in the Green Bay, Madison, and Milwaukee markets prefer to reopen slower.
- **On schools, the consensus is hybrid learning and locally-based decisions.** Voters on net oppose both full in-person instruction (44% support / 50% oppose) and fully remote learning (43% support / 52% oppose) – with Democrats supporting remote and opposing in-person learning and Republicans the reverse, while Independents oppose both. However, hybrid learning has net support across the board (57% support / 36% oppose), including in every media market and across party lines, though Republicans are much tighter (+4) than Democrats (+36) or Independents (+25). Voters also agree that local district administrators and school boards should make decisions about school reopening

(43%) over Governor Evers (21%), teachers (18%), or President Trump and Secretary DeVos (13%).

VIEWS OF HEALTH CARE

- **Cost is most voters' top concern, ahead of accessibility and quality of care.** Most voters prioritize getting healthcare costs down (35%) over increasing accessibility (27%) or improving quality of care (16%), though accessibility remains the top priority for Democrats (43%) as well as people of color (37%).

 - *Premiums are narrowly voters' top cost concern.* Voters worry most about premiums (32%) followed by prescription drug prices (27%) and surprise/out-of-network billing (24%).
- **Safeguarding protections for pre-existing conditions and capping prescription drug prices have near-universal support.** Both policies are overwhelmingly popular, with 77% strongly favoring capping drug prices (91% total favor) and 70% strongly favoring making it a law that pre-existing conditions must be covered in Wisconsin even if Congress removes those protections federally (85% total favor). These are popular across the board and regardless of party. Banning out-of-network bills is also popular (67% total favor, 49% strongly), though not quite to the same level.
- **BadgerCare is popular, and people want more of it.** Expanding BadgerCare to cover more people is broadly popular (68% total favor, 46% strongly), with even Republicans net supportive (47% favor / 41% oppose). Among every group except for Republicans, *strong* support outpaces total opposition by double-digits. Even among rural voters expanding BadgerCare is very popular (42% strongly favor, 62% total favor, 28% total oppose).
- **Voters favor a public health insurance option but oppose a government-only system.** We split-tested support for “state-run public health insurance that competes with private insurers” (61% favor / 28% oppose) against “a government-run healthcare system with no costs for individuals but higher taxes” (43% favor / 51% oppose). The single-payer program has a niche base where a few groups pick it as the most important thing to do on health care, a base that’s

composed of voters aged 18-34 (23%), Democrats (25%), and people of color (30%), but it's unpopular with Independents (42% support / 53% oppose).

VIEWS OF THE ECONOMY

- **Voters think the economy is bad but will come back quickly once COVID-19 is gone.** All told, 61% of voters say the economy is either already in or heading toward a recession – but 58% also say the economy will recover quickly once the virus is gone.
- **Voters' top economic priorities are largely short-term: beat the virus and put money in people's pockets now.** These views that the economy will come back are reflected in voters' top priorities for getting the economy back on track – getting coronavirus under control so we can safely reopen (38%) and putting money in the middle class's pockets by cutting middle-class taxes and reducing costs like child care and health care (26%). The latter is driven primarily by Republicans (38%), while Democrats (48%) and Independents (45%) are much more concerned with beating the pandemic.
- **The economic policies we tested are incredibly popular, with infrastructure, a small business fund, and job training leading the pack.** A majority *strongly* favors each policy, with the exception of raising the minimum wage which is nevertheless still highly popular with both Democrats and Independents:

% Favor	All	Dem	Ind	Rep
Creating jobs building infrastructure like roads and bridges	93	96	92	90
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	91	95	85	91
Job training classes for people to get a raise or retrained for a job that is a better fit for the new economy	89	95	87	84
Laws that encourage people to produce essential healthcare goods in America like drugs, medical masks, and ventilators	87	92	87	82

Guaranteeing workers can get paid sick leave when they are sick or have to take care of a sick loved one	86	97	86	77
Making childcare less expensive so people can afford to go back to work	84	93	82	75
Targeted economic help to communities that are struggling like rural areas and communities of color	81	93	86	67
Ending unaccountable corporate giveaways like the FoxConn deal and only giving tax incentives to companies that deliver on the jobs they promise.	72	78	66	71
Banning taxpayer-funded contracts to companies that ship jobs overseas	67	64	64	72
Raising the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour	58	87	57	28

VIEWS OF RACE AND POLICING

Note: this poll fielded prior to the shooting of Jacob Blake.

- Fewer than 40% of voters think Wisconsin has not done enough to treat Black people fairly.** A plurality of voters thinks the state has been about right or gone too far in treating Black people fairly (38% not enough / 37% about right / 11% gone too far). The differences are largely partisan and racial, with Democrats (64%) and people of color (51%) saying the state has not done enough, while Republicans say it's been about right (55%). Independents are divided (37% not far enough), as are white voters generally (37% not far enough). Regionally, a majority of voters say the state has either been about right or gone too far in the WOW counties (58%), in the Green Bay market (58%), and in the Wausau market (64%) as well in rural areas (57%). The LaCrosse market is about evenly split (43% not far enough / 41% about right or too far).
- However, there is broad support on specific policies for reforming police procedures and investing in Black communities.** Nearly two-thirds of voters strongly support banning chokeholds and increasing de-escalation training for police (81% favor, 64% strongly), with little difference between white voters and people of color. This includes 66% support among Republicans and 76% support among rural voters.

Voters also support funding economic development in communities of color, such as increasing funding for programs to support Black entrepreneurship (76% favor, 49% strongly). Support is high across the board, including among Republicans (62%), white non-college voters (71%), voters in the WOW counties (76%), and rural voters (68%).

- **Defunding the police is very unpopular, while the idea behind it is evenly split.** Voters narrowly support “shifting resources from police departments to non-police violence prevention and mental health services” (48% favor / 46% oppose). Support is highest among Democrats (77% favor) and voters under 35 (63%) but it is vastly more popular among white Democrats (74%) than among people of color generally (55% favor / 42% oppose). There are few groups among whom support or opposition rises higher than 60% or lower than 40% - it is simply a contentious issue across the board.

In contrast, the phrase “defund the police” itself is deeply unpopular (22% favor / 74% oppose), it’s even net negative among both people of color (49% favor / 50% oppose) and Democrats (41% favor / 53% oppose). The only group among whom it has net support is voters under 35 (54% favor / 40% oppose).

- **Removing police from schools and reparations are also deeply unpopular.** Fully two-thirds oppose removing police from schools (26% favor / 66% oppose), including people of color among whom *strong* opposition (42%) is greater than total support (34%). Paying Black Wisconsinites reparations for slavery is also deeply unpopular (20% favor / 70% oppose / 58% *strongly* oppose).

OTHER ISSUES

- **On taxes, populism is good.** Voters’ top priorities when it comes to taxes are incentivizing companies to offer job training programs (25%), closing corporate loopholes (23%) and eliminating tax breaks for companies that move out of Wisconsin or fail to create jobs they promised (20%). These all outweigh a middle-class tax cut paid for by people making \$500,000 or more (16%), but the lowest priority is a property tax freeze (8%).

- **There is sky-high support for:**
 - *Evening the field for small family farmers* (96% support, 80% strongly). This is about making sure small family farms get the same advantages as big farms and that big factory farms have to play by the rules.
 - *Protecting drinking water and holding polluters accountable* (95% support, 80% strongly). Notably, this proposal does not reference PFAS, as most voters are unaware of PFAS (76% never heard of it). Instead it references “toxic, cancer-causing chemicals.”
 - *Supporting essential workers* (92% support, 76% strongly). This specifically references nurses, first responders, and grocery store workers and making sure they have access to paid leave, health insurance, and fair pay.

- **Voters are also highly supportive of:**
 - *Making education funding more equitable* (83% favor, 59% strongly). Support is high in every media market and across party lines.
 - *Allowing workers to bargain collectively* (81% favor, 58% strongly), specifically for safety standards, training, and better pay. This is supported by both union households (91% favor, 67% strongly) and non-union households (78% favor, 56% strongly)
 - *Redistricting reform* (78% favor, 60% strongly) via creation of a non-partisan commission to redraw legislative district lines rather than letting politicians draw their own districts. Support is lower for this among Republicans but is nevertheless still high (66% favor, 38% strongly). Independents are very supportive (80% favor, 62% strongly).

- **A majority of voters *strongly* agree that we need to act now on climate change by reducing carbon pollution.** Altogether 75% agree (52% strongly), including a majority of Republicans (50% agree / 45% disagree) and three-quarters of Independents (76% agree / 22% disagree).

- **Making Roe v. Wade the law of the land in Wisconsin has majority support.** Voters broadly favor ensuring Wisconsin law protects access to abortion even if Roe v. Wade is overturned nationally (57% favor / 33% oppose), with more strongly favoring (43%) than are at all opposed. Nearly all Democrats (83%), most Independents (54%), and nearly a third of Republicans (30%) support this, as do a plurality in the WOW counties (47% favor / 37% oppose) and a majority of rural voters (51% favor / 39% oppose).