

TO: The Voter Participation Center and The Center for Voter Information

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RE: Politics of Identity and Othering in 2020 Election

On behalf of the Voter Participation Center, we conducted an online survey of 1,000 white registered voters and 400 voters of color in battleground states.¹ The survey was conducted August 28 to September 2, 2020.

Key Findings

- 1. When it comes to racial and other pertinent cultural issues, there is a sharp dividing line between the Trump base and the rest of the electorate -- white non-Trump voters and voters of color.** Voters of color and the white voters who do not support Trump represent the majority of the electorate.
- 2. Voters of color and white Biden voters express profound concerns about inequality in the United States. White Trump voters, on the other hand, express particular consternation with what they view as threats to the traditional American way of life.**

Proportion who rate each issue as a very big or fairly big problem			
	<u>Voters of color</u> %	<u>White Biden Voters</u> %	<u>White Trump voters</u> %
Racial injustice and systemic discrimination against Black and African Americans	83	78	27
Sexual harassment against women in the workplace	73	67	29
Mistreatment of immigrants who came to America to build a better life	70	71	16
The rise in right-wing extremism	66	73	28
Efforts to erase America's history and heritage by taking down statues	33	32	82
Too much political correctness and the censoring of free speech by liberal elites	43	23	76
Immigrants who want to change America instead of adapting to American traditions	34	20	70

¹ Battleground states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

3. All voters—including voters of color and white voters across the political spectrum—voice major concerns about crime and violence in America’s cities. Large majorities of white voters (91% Trump voters, 83% swing voters, 72% Biden voters) and voters of color (82%) say that the crime and violence happening in America’s cities is a very or fairly big problem.

- However, their specific concerns about violence in cities differ: voters of color (73%) and white Biden voters (66%) are more concerned about police violence against Black people than the lack of order, including looting and property damage going on in cities (27% voters of color, 34% white Biden voters).
- In contrast, white Trump voters are overwhelmingly more concerned about the lack of law and order, including looting and property damage (90% are more concerned about this) versus police violence against Black people (10% more concerned).
- And, notably, there is a segment of white swing voters (who have not yet committed to a presidential candidate) for whom threats to law and order and efforts to erase history are seen as major concerns.

4. Nearly seven in 10 white Trump voters (69%) believe that they are losing power in our country with the changes that are occurring in society. These white voters explain in an open-ended question that they believe liberals and Black people (including the Black Lives Matter Movement) are gaining power at their expense.

- But liberals and voters of color do not see it that way: only 14% of white Biden voters and 32% of voters of color believe they are gaining power; in fact, they are more likely to believe that they also are losing power (46% white Biden voters, 38% voters of color). Voters of color and white Biden voters who believe that they are losing power tend to say it’s the wealthy whose power is on the rise.

5. As of now, Trump’s efforts to exploit these divisions have done little to expand his support beyond his core base. Potential new voters in the 2020 presidential election lean heavily toward Biden.

- Among white voters who did not vote in 2016 or voted third-party, 53% say they would vote for Biden compared to only 30% who say they will vote for Trump (16% are undecided). New voters of color break for Biden 62% to 13% Trump.

6. At the same time, white Trump voters continue to view Trump as a patriot and an advocate for the “forgotten American”—validating their view that their voice in society is being diminished and offering to be their champion.

- 93% of white Trump voters and 63% of potential Trump defectors (white voters who supported Trump in 2016 but don’t strongly back him today) agree that he is an American patriot.
- 92% of white Trump voters and 64% of white potential defectors agree that Donald Trump speaks for the forgotten American—the people who are looked down upon by liberal elites.

7. Among Trump's base and with white swing voters—particularly men—his rhetoric and advertising about “angry mobs tearing down statues” and efforts to erase America's heritage have significant traction.

- Out of five media pieces tested from Trump or the Trump campaign, the advertisement with the greatest resonance for white voters depicts protestors tearing down statues while Trump declares that angry mobs will unleash violent crime in cities and try to take away our values, history and culture.
- 71% of white swing voters say they agree with the point Trump is making in this ad and 57% say that he is raising a legitimate issue as opposed to trying to frighten and divide people (24%).
- By contrast, overwhelming majorities of voters of color and white Biden voters disagree with the point Trump is making in all media tested and believe he is primarily trying to frighten and divide people.

8. In terms of potential responses to Trump's racially-motivated rhetoric, the most effective message among both white swing voters and voters of color who are not firmly committed to Biden is an economic populist appeal. The message below rose to the top with these audiences when ranking their top two out of five tested.

All working people--regardless of race, color, or creed--want to see an America where hard work is rewarded and big corporations pay their fair share. Donald Trump has handed out massive tax breaks to big corporations and tried to cut Social Security and Medicare while intentionally trying to pit working people against one another.

9. Explicitly calling Trump racist produces a backlash among some white audiences.

- 59% of white swing men and 63% of potential Trump defectors disagree with a message arguing that Donald Trump has always been a racist.
- Moreover, 66% of white Trump voters and 50% of white men without college degrees say they feel personally offended when people call Donald Trump a racist because it feels like they are also being called racist.

10. For voters of color and white Biden voters, two approaches stand out as particularly resonant: calling for people to stand together against hatred instead and pointing out how Trump is using divisive racial and cultural issues to distract us from his failures on the coronavirus.

Donald Trump is not the leader this country needs. Instead of letting him bring out our worst instincts, we need to stand firmly against hatred and find a way to live and work together across our differences.

Donald Trump focuses on divisive racial and cultural issues as an attempt to distract us from his failures on the coronavirus. He hopes that by stoking divisions and igniting anger, we won't notice that he has failed to deal with the REAL threat this country faces--the deadly pandemic.