



David Binder Research

Wisconsin Qualitative Research Summary Conducted June 29-July 1, 2020

Summary

Four live online focus groups were conducted with rural and suburban, undecided voters in Wisconsin. Groups were divided by gender and education level: one group was conducted among women without college degrees, one was conducted among men without college degrees, one was conducted among college-educated women, and one was conducted among college-educated men.

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Wisconsin voters are extremely concerned about the future of the economy – in the country and in Wisconsin – and also with the social unrest in the country. Many believe that the economy won't be able to fully recover until there is some common ground reached on social and racial issues. Throughout these sessions, rural and suburban swing voters express concerns with President Trump's divisive and self-interested governing style, which they feel is creating real problems for the country during the civic unrest and ongoing health and economic crises. In particular, voters feel that Trump's inability to listen to experts is hampering his ability to lead us through the COVID pandemic.

As we've seen in past research for Focus On Rural America, many swing voters and soft Trump supporters like what they perceive as Trump's successes, but don't like the way he acts. They say he is divisive and self-centered, and there are regular calls for someone to "take away his phone." Trump's behavior is embarrassing to them, and some of these Wisconsin swing voters say he is diminishing our standing with other countries. However, some voters are willing to dismiss some of Trump's shortcomings if the economy is improved and on the right track by November.

Some suburban and rural Wisconsin swing voters say Trump's behavior is a critical problem that prevents the country from getting through current crises, especially since they believe that true economic recovery and some type of common ground and healing for the nation are inexorably linked. The country's current circumstances have created an opening to present a favorable contrast between Biden and Trump, especially on issues that directly affect them in their rural and small town communities. Voters would be extremely receptive to an economic message of helping main street businesses rather than giant corporations and cutting taxes for those who work the hardest rather than those who make money on dividends and interest.

Most prominently, voters express concerns about small businesses generally, but especially those located in rural and suburban parts of Wisconsin. While a few men feel that the decline of small businesses was inevitable, even before COVID accelerated the process, most are acutely concerned about the damage that even a small loss of small businesses will do to the sustainability and social fabric of their communities.

There appears to be a growing opinion that Trump is helping out the big businesses and his big city friends and forgetting small town America. This is strengthened by an opinion raised by several voters that the COVID stimulus packages have helped big corporations more than the small businesses that their communities rely on. As one Wisconsin voter points out: *"I'm not sure he got up to milk cows in the morning."*

There are concerns among rural and suburban voters that Trump is either not understanding or outright dismissing the unique concerns of rural America. Presented with stories about the Secretary of Agriculture dismissing the needs of small farmers, and the Trump administration granting ethanol waivers, voters express concern. On both Sonny Perdue's comment that "the big get bigger and the small go out" and the politization of EPA decision-making on RFS waiver requests, voters are concerned that decisions are being made to benefit large corporations at the expense of local businesses.

Even though there are concerns with Trump's leadership style in times of crisis, there is a percolating discontent with protestors that could continue to play in Trump's favor if Biden ignores this. "Social anarchy" and "defund the police" are both raised by Wisconsin voters as growing concerns. While voters are worried that Trump's divisive approach will continue to exacerbate the issues, they worry that Biden will cater to the far left agenda that will leave communities unsafe and dictated to about how to live their lives.

Overall, Biden is a blank slate to these voters. Most still know very little about Biden about him except outside of the attacks on his mental acuity and age. Also, there is concern among some voters that he is being pulled to the left by progressives in the Democratic party.

In 2016, voters were quickly able to list Trump's goals as President as: 1) repeal Obamacare, 2) build a wall, and 3) end job-killing trade agreements, such as NAFTA. But in 2020, Trump's plans for the second term are vague references to getting the economy going. But voters don't have any idea where Biden wants to take the country. Voters think that Biden is totally different than Clinton was in 2016, and clearly more likeable, but he needs to give them a reason to pick him if he wants to pry these voters away from Trump.