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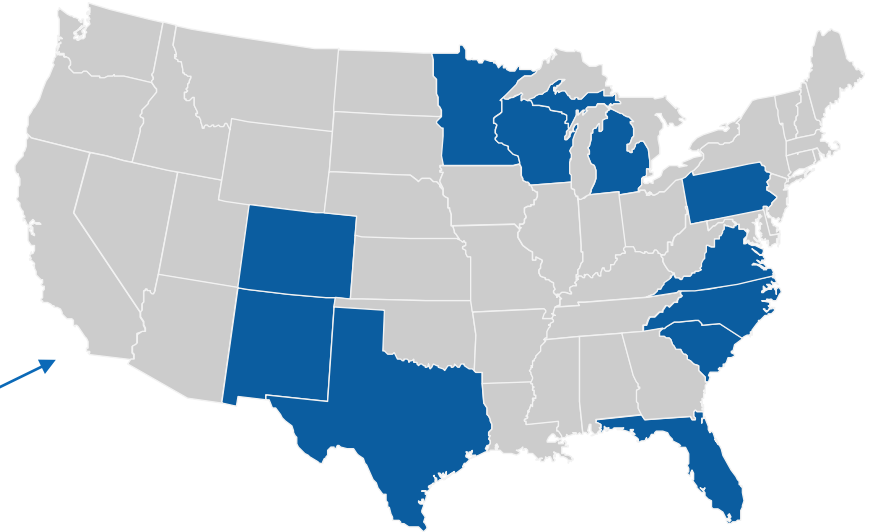
**HART**  
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# TURNING ACTIVISTS INTO VOTERS

*Key findings from two online discussion boards among young nonvoters who engaged in the movement for racial justice, conducted August 2020*

# Methodology

- Two QualBoards among young people (age 18 to 34)
  - One among whites (*17 participants*)
  - One among people of color (*21 participants*)  
= *38 total participants*
- None voted in either the 2016 or 2018 elections (including some who were too young to have done so)
- All have actively engaged in the Black Lives Matter movement, by, for example:
  - Protesting
  - Donating
  - Contacting an elected official
- Fielded August 12 to 14, 2020
- All participants live in VPC states



# Key Takeaways

- **This summer’s nationwide groundswell around addressing racial injustice has energized these young people in new and unprecedented ways.**
  - The protests have imbued these young people with a sense of power (*to make change*), hope (*that change is within reach*), and responsibility (*to support the greater good*).
  - What’s more, they have served as proof of the potency of collective action.
- **These young people desperately want to see change—and, while it isn’t a magic bullet, voting is one key mechanism toward getting there.**
  - Donald Trump symbolizes the hatred, self-interest, and closed-mindedness that they are protesting against. *Voting him out of office is a critical part of the larger fight for justice.*
  - Like protesting, voting is a form of collective action. And whether it’s protesting in the streets or donning a mask, these voters feel deeply that this is a moment in which we must put our self-interest aside in order to support the collective good.
- **Protesting without voting is insufficient—but voting without protesting is not enough either.**
  - Participants have witnessed the effectiveness of the protests in drawing needed attention to an issue and in changing hearts and minds.
  - Now, voting is needed in order to translate the will of the people into the letter of the law.

# Key Takeaways *(continued)*

- **Heading into November, fighting racism and stopping the spread of COVID-19 are the most salient issues on these young voters' minds.**
  - However, there are a plethora of other structural issues that they want to see addressed—and it is the longstanding failure to address them that, for many, has festered deep disaffection with the political system and doubts that candidates will follow through on their promises.
- **The movement was conceived on social media, where it was quickly catapulted to become an omnipresent part of these young voters' daily lives.**
  - Social media provided moment-to-moment updates, resources, and educational tools on the movement.
  - However, the importance of social media transcends logistics and information: it also created a sense of community and, ultimately, duty. The more they saw friends, family, and other connections posting about the movement, the more they were inspired and compelled to get involved too.

# Strategic Recommendations

**While these young people see voting as a logical next step, they are more passionate about the act of protesting than they are about the act of voting. In fact, many only are enthusiastic about voting this November *because of the protests.***

- ➔ It will be imperative to carry this summer's fierce energy forward into the fall, continuing the momentum that the protests started and bringing it to the ballot box. Just as social media was a powerful engine behind the protest movement, so it should be for the vote.
- ➔ We should be careful not to downplay the protests as an agent of change when building up the need to vote. These voters see the success of the protests as evidence of the potential for success in the voting booth. We must emphasize how voting continues what the protests started.

**These young people are angry, frustrated, and fearful for the country's future—but for many, it is this very anger that is driving their enthusiasm to vote. By contrast, if they DON'T vote this November, it will be because they feel hopeless and defeated.**

- ➔ Messaging that validates their anger and translates it into a call to action gives these voters a sense of agency. Furthermore, pointing to electoral and policy “wins” that already have occurred throughout the country at the state and local level provides evidence that voting can indeed lead to positive change.

# Strategic Recommendations *(continued)*

For these voters, this summer's protests have been about much more than just police brutality. They view racism as structural and systemic, and there are many concrete policy changes that they want to see enacted. They are drawn to candidates who not only are able to cultivate real energy around the movement (*talk the talk*), but have concrete, actionable plans for lifting up communities of color (*walk the walk*).

- Highlighting candidates' agendas around tackling systemic racism from multiple angles makes these young people more motivated to support them.

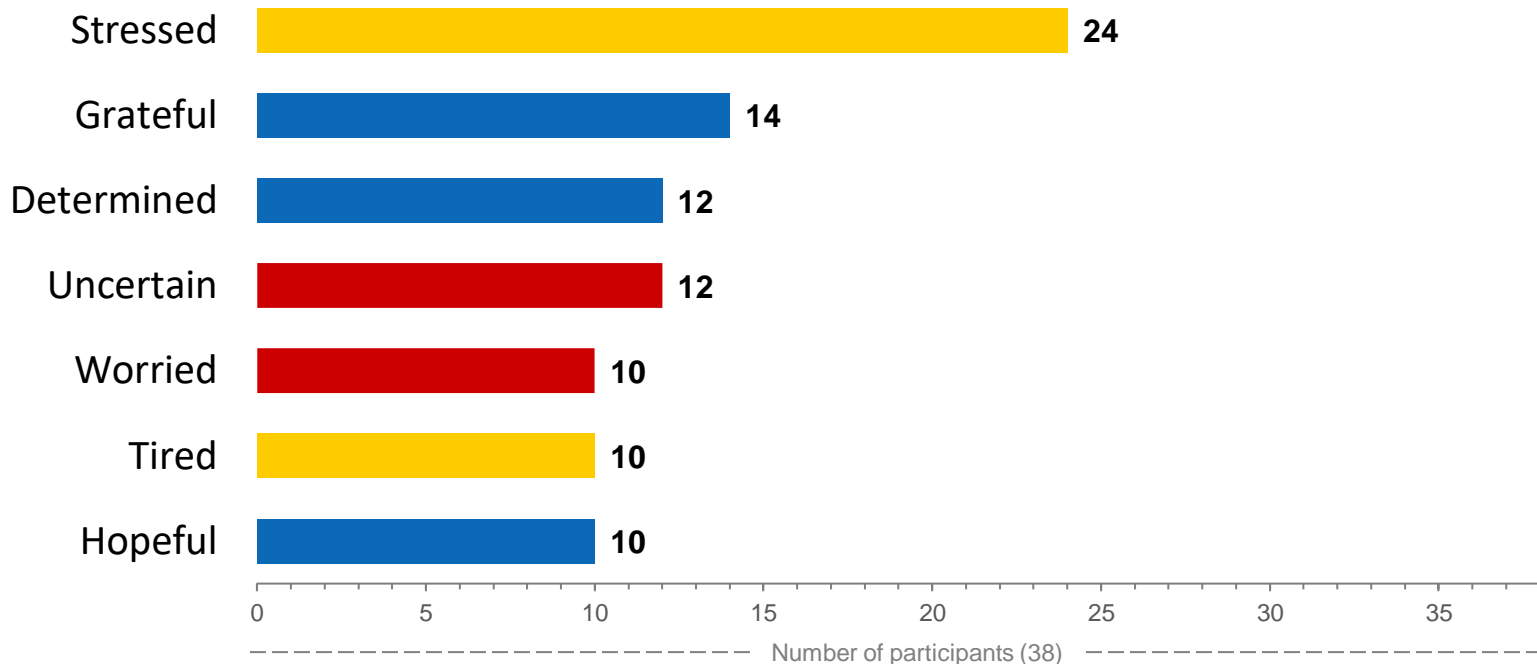
While many are skeptical that real change happens at the federal level, they nearly universally recognize the importance of state and local elections in making a change in their lives. However, the vast majority readily admit that they do not know enough about what is down the ballot and express a desire to learn more.

- Localizing the stakes of this election when it comes to the issues these voters care about (*NOT just racial justice issues, but a whole host of progressive priorities*) will help override their skepticism about the efficacy of voting in the presidential race alone, while making the election feel more personally relevant.

# CURRENT OUTLOOK AND EMOTIONS

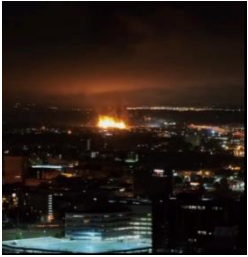
In these uncertain times, participants are feeling stressed and unsure of what's ahead, but are thankful for what they have and determined to soldier on.

*Words that Describe How I Am Feeling These Days*



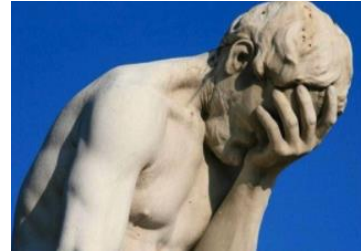


# The three Ps (*police, pandemic, and the president*) have converged to make them feel frustrated and fearful for the country's future.



"This is a photo of Minneapolis where I live, the second night of the George Floyd protests. It has resonated with me in that it emits a feeling of **fear, uncertainty and sadness**. The fact that we **cannot get this pandemic under control because of our country's decisions**, be it people refusing to wear masks and socially distance, or our president's poor decision making. Most of all, the **blatant racism** that is still expressed and the extreme measures that had to be taken just for people's voices to be heard is heartbreaking."

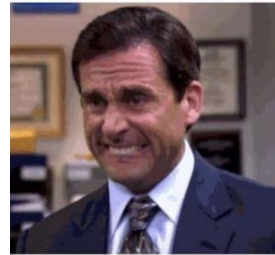
*White woman, age 32*



"My image shows shame. I feel the **direction that our country has moved in recent years is shameful**. The degradation of common morality, the outlawing of immigration which our society was created by, **fanning of the flame of hate** by the current administration, the **lawlessness of police forces** across the country, racists being emboldened. **This feeling of shame and remorse has created a change in me to be more vocal and expressive, and to be part of the solution.**" *White man, age 34*



"It just gets concerning by the day, from the **poor healthcare system** made obvious by the recent pandemic, to the **racial injustice** and unwarranted viral **manslaughter of Black Americans** which resulted in nationwide protests for which security agencies are clamping down on harmless citizens." *Black man, 27*



"I think everyone can agree that this whole year has been a huge mess. Between the **protests and the politicization of public health directives**, it's hard to feel good about anything that's going on right now." *AAPI man, age 34*

*Time traveler: What year is it?  
Me: 2020.*

These young people are *worried* about the nation's current crises, but also quite *angry* about several longer-term, systemic problems.

## SHORT-TERM CONCERNS

- COVID-19: reopening too quickly, resurgence, people not taking precautions
- Donald Trump: response to pandemic, response to protests, lack of empathy
- Lack of financial relief for working people, unemployment
  - Personal finances/economic instability
- Upcoming elections: insecure, Postal Service

## LONG-TERM CONCERNS

- Racism, police brutality
- Lack of a social safety net (*e.g.*, healthcare)
- Disparities: wealth/socioeconomic inequality, racial inequality
- Corruption of those in power
- Climate change
- Divided nature of the country

They express consternation at the unwillingness of their fellow citizens to see the humanity in others and put the common good ahead of their own self-interest—be it on COVID-19 or on racial issues.

“I am angry at the people **unwilling to see a new point of view** and acknowledge its existence/value. I am angry at the people being punished too severely for peacefully standing up for what their believe in to make a change for the better. I am angry at those **refusing to participate in COVID protection measures** because it is inconvenient to them. Basically, **I am angry at those not willing to be open minded and sacrifice to help others around them.**” *White woman, age 19*

“People's **indifference** is something that **slowly kills us.**” *White woman, age 32*

“[I’m angry at] people **not willing to listen and try to understand** the plight of black people in America. **People who don't wear a mask.** People who post false information and theories not based on facts.” *Black man, age 32*

“People think **wearing a mask is a violation of their rights when it’s simply just protect other people.** Its literally not a big deal, but people are so selfish and it gets me angry at first. Also all these racists who are saying **All Lives Matter** and Blue Lives Matter are simply **so uneducated and refuse to have an open mind just angers me even more.**” *Latina, age 21*

## At the same time, the recent (overdue) awakening around racial injustice has instilled them with pride and hope.

“I’m proud to see more good people standing up to injustices of all kinds. **As the negativity has risen, so has the positivity to battle it.**” *White man, age 34*

“I’m proud that **people are starting to open their eyes that racism still exists** and how it plays a role in society, especially people of color. I’m proud that we are getting better now that more people are realizing the above.” *Black man, age 32*

“I am proud of the **amount of people who have taken action to create change** they are passionate about. I feel recently so much more action has been taken to address issues that have been relevant for a long time.” *White woman, age 19*

“Proud that **the truth of the broken and unfair, biased system is coming to light** so that a real change can take place.” *Black woman, age 34*

“I’m proud of the **Americans who are standing up for fellow Americans’ right**. It’s currently the only thing I’m proud of in this country.”  
*White woman, age 19*

“I’m proud that **Black Lives Matter is getting more recognition** and more people are taking it seriously and helping to support it.” *Black woman, age 25*

## Both Gen Z'ers and Millennials express a sense of awe for the younger generation, whose activism has made them more optimistic about the future.

"I am **proud of the younger generation** coming together to protest and to make real change happen with police reform and pushing the BLM movement forward." *White woman, age 32*

"I think that **my generation has changed so many societal rules and broken barriers that generations** before us could not even fathom. **Gen Z comes off as very progressive and I am extremely hopeful** that we will change the world for the better." *White woman, age 19*

"What makes me hopeful is **seeing a lot of my younger peers getting more involved in politics**. For years, people have always dismissed younger people as a voting block, since we don't show up, but seeing a lot of my friends and classmates try to inform others of civil rights movements such as BLM and information regarding voting makes me hopeful for the future." *White man, age 19*

"Some things going on in the country that make me feel proud is **the younger generation's push to vote and be involved in their government**. With the Black Lives Matter movement I have been blessed to see so many young people stand up for what's right even against adults and their peers." *Latina, age 22*

"**I am proud that young people are collectively taking a stand against a variety of issues across many different platforms**. Five years ago, I don't know that I would have corrected or argued with a relative or acquaintance who was spouting . . . but now I feel like it is my duty because I see so many other people speaking out on social media or on the news . . . and **I know that a lot of my friends have also been pushed to be more outspoken about things** they see because they know they won't be the only ones calling people out." *White woman, age 25*



# THE MOVEMENT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

# These young people (*all nonvoters or brand-new voters*) have been newly activated by this summer's protests in a way that was not true before.

- Prior to this summer, these young people were not particularly active around racial justice issues.
  - To the extent that they had been socially active in the past, it was generally on other social issues (e.g., environment, gun safety, mental health advocacy, homelessness, disability issues, education, animal shelters).
  - Several respondents of color had a history of donating to or signing petitions on behalf of racial justice organizations, but among white respondents, this summer has been a true awakening.
- The vast majority grew up in a household in which politics was not openly discussed.
  - Many became aware of the importance of politics later in life (during high school or college years)
  - Among white participants, several express that their parents hold different (more conservative, sometimes racist) views than their own, or consider politics to be taboo.

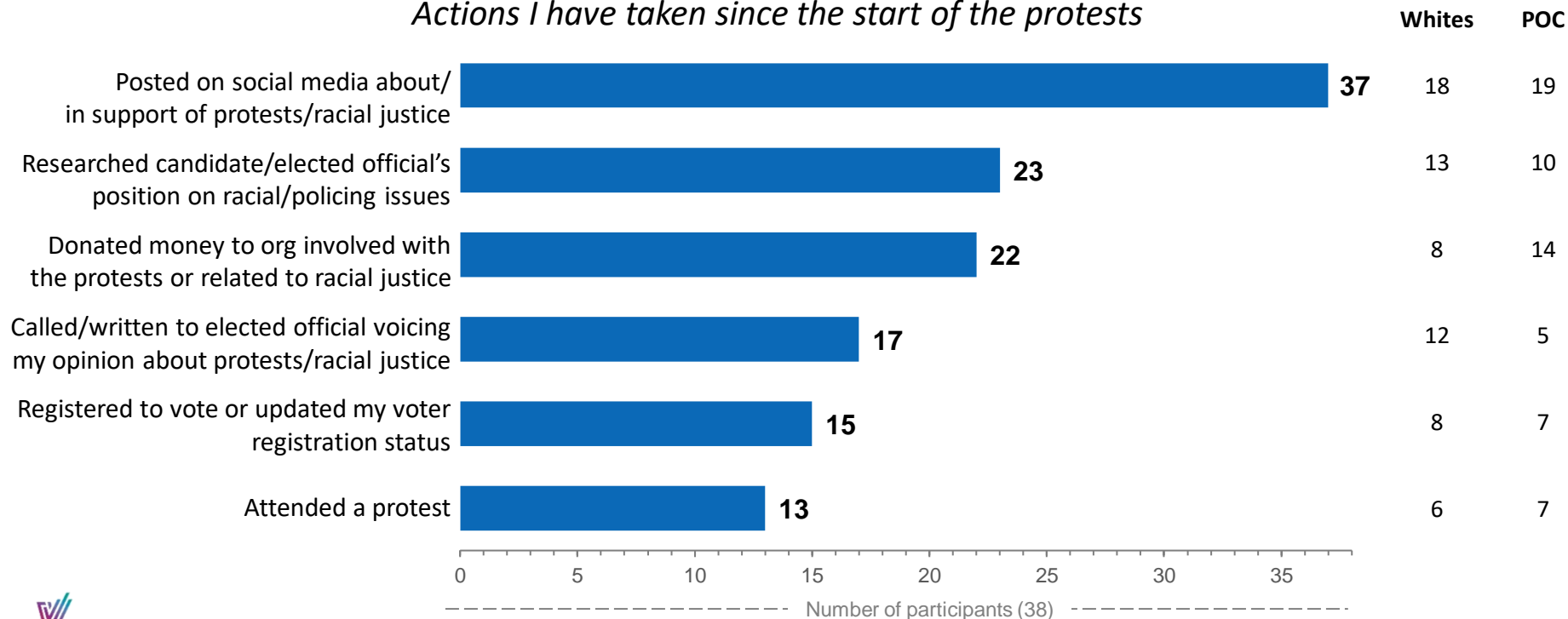
- In terms of what spurred them to take action, several mention the visceral emotional impact of watching the video of George Floyd's killing:

"I decided to do something when I saw a man kneel on another man's neck for eight minutes straight while he begged for him to get up and called for his mother." *AAPI man, age 18*

"I remember forcing myself to watch the entire video. . . . I remember when he cried out for his mother, something inside of me just burst. It was like touching something inside of me that has never been touched. I was outraged. I was broken." *White man, age 31*

Since the start of the protests, they have taken a variety of meaningful actions to support the movement, as well as to raise awareness and educate themselves about racial justice issues.

*Actions I have taken since the start of the protests*





## For white voters, this movement has been about waking up to and reckoning with their own privilege.

“I’ve definitely **become more aware and acknowledged my privilege**. . . . I realized I need to take action and not sit on the sidelines. I think as a white male I’ve been aware of ‘checking my privilege’ a lot recently, but that **also means going out or showing support where I can**. Just because I am not being racist doesn’t mean I am contributing anything.” *White man, age 32*

“I think they’re about the fact that as a country and society, we have suppressed and ignored the very real racism and injustice in our country for years. So much so that a lot of us convinced ourselves that we “were past that,” myself included. I have Black friends, I’ve dated Black guys before, so I told myself I was progressive. **But I’ve learned that I’ve been pretty ignorant. I’ve ignored the white privilege that so clearly exists and I’ve been pretty naive. The movement has really opened my eyes to that.**” *White woman, age 28*

“We marched through streets of uptown Charlotte, NC . . . I felt very paradoxical being there. **A white man, doing something actively for the advancement of Black and brown people other than conversations.** It felt good but it felt bad that it felt good. I tell myself all the time “you’re not one of ‘the good ones’” because there are no good ones. **I am white, therefore, I have experienced privilege whether or not I know it and that’s not good.** Anyway, I felt like I was doing something necessary.” *White man, age 31*

For Black voters, this movement represents an affirmation of what they've always known to be true; they express hope that shining a brighter spotlight on racism will lead not only to increased empathy, but to actual change.

"The protests and the overall movement is about being heard. **Demanding to be heard, listened to, and understood, you could even call it a cry for help.** I hope that the movement gains more allies and discussions start to be made. I hope that police will receive proper training when it comes to POC. I hope that judges will be evaluated to make sure they're not imprisoning innocent Black men and women. **Overall, I want people to understand and feel for black people, that our lives matter too.**" *Black woman, age 18*

"I feel like the protests are about getting equality and justice for black lives. **We keep getting mistreated or killed left and right and we have had enough.** I hope to see a change for the better with all the protests and petitions going around. **I hope that people are actually listening and understanding** why we are doing this." *Black woman, age 25*

"The larger movement is about getting justice for the countless number of innocent Black people who have been killed over the years by law enforcement, for things that those of another race would only get a slap on the wrist for. **I hope the movement shows other races that this happens to Black people for no reason at all and we have to move differently to protect ourselves.** We have to be cautious about what we wear, how we talk, and what we do in everyday situations." *Black woman, age 34*

"I hope that the movement will **help people to recognize their internal bias, and educate themselves on how to make sure that their bias does not evolve into outright racism.** I would like to see racial issues discussed more openly, so that people have opportunities to learn, open their minds, and ask uncomfortable questions. I also hope that there will be more accountability for law enforcement, and that people will begin to understand the **history behind inequality for the black community.**" *Black woman, age 28*

Across boards, participants see the movement as about much more than just police brutality; it is about systemic racism writ large, and there are several concrete goals they want to see emerge from it.

“It's about police brutality, but I'm hoping it would increase awareness that there are issues that still disproportionately affect Black Americans. **It's in housing, it's in education, it's in incarcerations.** I want to see increased awareness and laws that help provide equality for everyone and it's promoted from not just Democrats, but Republicans . . . I feel that police are there to punish instead of rehabilitate, and wish we had **better social programs that helped people get better instead of putting them in jail.**” *Black man, age 32*

“To me, this movement is about:

- the nation recognizing the Black community's history of being abused and marginalized, and how that has created a **society of racism**;
- establishing a genuine sense of equality across all races;
- building **more opportunities for the black community to advance economically, politically, and educationally**;
- holding law enforcement, government officials, really anyone and everyone accountable for racist beliefs and actions.”  
*Black woman, age 28*

Across boards, participants see the movement as about much more than just police brutality; it is about systemic racism writ large, and there are several concrete goals they want to see emerge from it.  
*(continued)*

“The protests and the larger movement is about ensuring [that] Black and brown lives be treated as equals, so that they matter, in a world that has for so long neglected them and treated them as less. **I hope the protests lead to systematic change, including more opportunities for Black and brown communities** and getting rid of institutions, such as the police force, which enforce such institutionalized racism.” *White man, age 19*

“The protests are about systemic racism in this country . . . The change I would like to see is **more investment in poor communities** where people of color have been forced to live. I would like to see **schools that are mainly children of color get more funding** and the **same opportunities as those with primarily white children**. I would like to see our police reformed and retrained and require more training and education to become a police officer.” *White woman, age 30*

# Social media has been a powerful catalyst behind the movement, putting updates, information, and ways to help (literally) within their grasp.

- Social media is the main way these young people got logistical information around the protests, including when, where, and how to participate.
  - Information was funneled chiefly through what their own friends and family (trusted sources) or by what local activist organizations in their area were posting.
  - Across ages, **Instagram** is the most often cited app, although some use Facebook and some younger participants use Snapchat.
- For those who were not able to attend a protest in person (or chose not to due to concerns around COVID-19), social media has provided an avenue by which they can feel a true sense of solidarity with the protestors.
  - Those who were able to protest in person describe the experience as exciting and empowering: “It is a sensational experience, it is as if you are in a World Series supporting the same team, all protesting something that is unfair. It’s something captivating and exciting.” *White man, age 29*
- In terms of staying up-to-date with BLM, participants also rely heavily on social media and their other in-person social networks. Several (across groups) look to prominent people and activists of color.
  - Many have used social media—especially Instagram—as a place to post and repost educational materials and ways to get involved (e.g., businesses to support, petitions to sign, organizations/bail funds to donate to).
  - To the extent that they read or watch the news, they try to seek out “unbiased” sources (CNN is mentioned frequently).



# TRANSLATING ENERGY INTO VOTES

# When it comes to achieving the goals they want to see, protesting is seen as necessary but insufficient.

## → Protests are an essential first step.

- Respondents recognize that the protests have helped bring mass attention to a pressing issue—including among the public, the media, and those in power (political or corporate).

## → Change is possible, but it won't happen overnight.

- The protests have ignited the initial spark, but more work needs to be done. Participants are (cautiously) optimistic but realistic about the power of protests to effect change.
- Individual change (hearts and minds) feels like it is already happening, but systemic change (policies and structures) is dependent upon the actions those in power, in whom they lack faith—especially the current president.

## → We can't let the flame burn out.

- Participants are nervous that between COVID-19 and the upcoming elections, the news media will shift its focus away from the BLM movement, and it will become just another passing phase.



**Voting is a way to continue  
the forward progress that  
the protests have started.**

## Along with protesting, voting is seen as another tool in their arsenal toward fighting for a better future.

- The protests have heightened their sense of the power of collective action and what it can achieve; voting is another form of collective action.
- Voting is seen as part of a continuum with protesting: voting this November is a way to build on the momentum that the protests have already started.

“Seeing these protests even during a pandemic shows strength in numbers can really make a change, meaning **if we all band together to vote as well, we can make a change.**” *Latina, age 21*

“Many people feel like they can't make a difference, or that voting doesn't change anything. But . . . they are both equally important. **We can protest AND vote, and double our effectiveness** in fighting racial injustices.” *Black woman, age 28*

“Protests are born out of raw emotion (which is needed). **Voting is putting follow-up action behind the demands** behind protesting.” *White man, age 31*

“To be honest I think the protests are just one facet of the larger movement, which is based on finally creating a change. **I think the protests are a way to gain traction for this movement, and then we must encourage everyone to vote . . .** I hope this election more people will be inspired and motivated to vote.” *White woman, age 19*



# The protests have inspired many new and drop-off voters who otherwise may have sat out the election to cast a ballot this November.

“I think that the next thing for me is to vote, tweet, and otherwise show my support for legislation. The protests have started to die down and we need to focus more now on legislation and supporting lawmakers who want to take decisive actions. **I plan on voting and I haven't done that since I voted for Obama.** I think we need to vote out sheriffs who employ Wild West tactics. We need lawmakers who want to make changes.” *White man, age 32*

“I noticed a lot of the protestors and people supporting the BLM movement, they're also shouting and drilling it in that we need to vote. **My involvement has certainly had a strong impact on how I feel about voting. In the past I didn't feel like I had to vote** and it was never a necessity. Now seeing what my country is going through and has gone through for years under our leader, **I feel a part of responsibility in this and I know I have to vote this year. This honestly may not have been important to me if it weren't being pushed so hard this year through protesting and social media.**” *Black woman, age 34*

“**This is the first year I will be voting.** And it is largely in part due to wanting to be more proactive in ways to give back and create change in our communities and this country . . . **Protests have helped me to see that I'm not just voting for myself, I'm voting for the wellbeing of everyone around me.** Friends, family members, neighbors, etc.” *White woman, age 32*

“Protesting is a way for people to make their voices and issues heard, which then informs politicians on what issues we consider important. **I think that the BLM movement has increased people's likelihood to vote,** because they have seen what can happen when no one votes or shares their stances. On the flip side, they've seen how change can happen through protesting. **So I hope more people will now vote, because they like the feeling of personally creating change in their community.**” *Black woman, age 28*

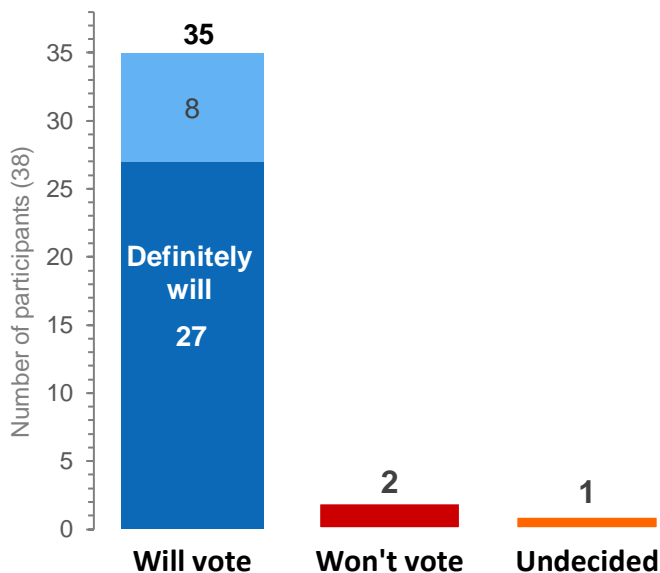
## Note of caution: a number of these young people are still disillusioned with the voting system—specifically at the federal level.

- Top-of-mind, many have negative associations with the word “elections.”
  - corruption, joke, anxiety, partisan, confusion, hopeless, disappointment, drama, media circus, stressful, dishonesty, frustrated, nervous, fear, exhausting, worried, disheartening, failed promises
- Some believe that the voting system is **rigged** or **unreliable**.
  - Worries about mail-in voting this year and issues with USPS
  - Decry Electoral College system because it takes power away from the people
- Many express the feeling that **all politicians are corrupt**. Others think that, no matter who wins the presidential election, the change they want to see is unlikely to occur.

“Voting doesn’t count, the illusion that a group of individuals have the compassion to put themselves aside for the greater of the country is unimaginable. There have been Democrats and Republicans in office yet the same injustices still exist.” *Black woman, age 34*
- Many feel **LOCAL elections ultimately are more important** than national ones, and some cite examples of the passage of state/local laws that were beneficial in their community.
  - Creation of a police accountability board in Arizona
  - Partial ban on single-use plastics in Pennsylvania
  - Renaming a suburb in Colorado
  - Banning greyhound racing in Florida

However, the stakes this year are so high that most of these young people are putting aside their reservations and committing to voting: it's their way of making their voice heard, continuing to fight for progress, and supporting the collective good.

### Likelihood of Voting in November



### Top Motivations for Voting (**CHANGE** is the paradigm):

- Getting Trump out of office and preventing further damage
- Doing their part/contributing in any way they can toward making a positive change

"The terrible news day in and day out. The horrible handling of the COVID situation to increase deaths. The encouragement of racists to continue to be racists. **I could name like hundreds of things that are making me angrily enthusiastic about voting this November.**" *White woman, age 32*

"I definitely will vote this year so I can do my part in **contributing to change that we desperately need.**" *Black woman, age 34*

"I fear that if everyone doesn't vote, the racism in the country will worsen. **I want to be a part of changing the nation for the better, and I feel like voting is an effective method.**" *Black woman, age 29*



# Donald Trump is antithesis of everything they are protesting for, and embodiment of everything they are protesting against.

- **Trump is an obstacle toward making progress.** They are voting not simply to register their opposition to Trump, but to take an action that's absolutely critical in the larger fight for a more just America.

**"It's not just voting against Donald Trump, for me it's voting against injustice, cruelty, racism, inequality.** For me I would love to see Trump lose horribly because of everything he has done to so many people . . . but for me it's not just to see him lose. **The reason I am voting in November is because we cannot allow this to continue, we have to change for the children, for the world.** I am very fired up and enthusiastic to vote against Trump." *White woman, age 30*

"Trump has proven be a racist both in comments and actions I do not think that's what we need to move forward. **Getting the results we need requires a better leadership at the top.**" *Black man, age 27*

- Respondents of color in particular express stress, nervousness, and even outright fear about what another four years under Donald Trump would look like.

"I get stressed because I don't know what could happen, and **honestly scared at the possible outcome** of not seeing any change." *Black woman, age 28*

"What comes to my mind when I think about the elections is fear. **I'm fearful because I felt the same way when Trump was elected and this could occur again unfortunately.** I would like for our country to at least be organized and not chaotic." *Black woman, age 23*

# Trump's handling of the protests and of racial tensions more generally has shown them not only that he is racist, but that he actively incites racially motivated anger, violence, and division.

- Respondents believe that **Trump's language and rhetoric are not only hateful, but dangerous**. Many hold him personally responsible for fanning the flames of hate and ultimately encouraging violence.
- They were **particularly incensed when Trump tear-gassed a peaceful crowd** of demonstrators in order to clear the way for a photo-op, and they disapprove of his sending in military-style forces to break up peaceful protests.

**"People have done horrific acts because of what he says.**

An example is the hate crime shooting in El Paso, TX at Walmart. A person was motivated by Trump and just randomly shot fire in Walmart because the place was mostly Latinos/Hispanic. **People are more open about racism because of who he is."** *Latina, age 21*

"Trump doesn't care at all about civil rights. Also, living in Minneapolis and seeing the President tweet, **'When the looting starts, the shooting starts'** and being afraid to walk down the street, clearly he knows nothing about de-escalating a situation." *White woman, age 32*

"His walk to that the church in DC really did it to me, where he had protestors tear gassed so he could have a photo op. Just completely disrespectful and ignorant. **I was on the fence about voting until that moment."**

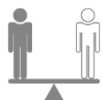
*White man, age 19*

"His lack of empathy for Americans getting hurt in these protests angers me. The way he protects the police actions is enough to make anyone angry. The way he describes Americans who have the right to protest is degrading. **The way he openly agrees with how the police are treating protesters with force and tear gas is horrific."** *Latina, age 21*

Tackling racial injustice and combating the coronavirus are the top issues on their minds as they think about voting in this unique and unprecedented election cycle—but there are several other policy areas they want to see addressed.

### RACIAL JUSTICE

- Police reform
- War on drugs
- Criminal justice reform
- Systemic racial bias



### SOCIAL ISSUES

- Women's rights
- LGBTQ equality
- Human rights
- Gun safety
- Immigration/family separations



### COVID-19

- Stopping the spread
- Encouraging masks
- Developing vaccine



### HEALTHCARE

- Expanding coverage
- Mental health
- Medicare
- Abortion/reproductive access



### ENVIRONMENT

- Climate change



### ECONOMIC

- Wages
- Welfare/safety net
- Relief for those affected by COVID-19
- Helping poor communities
- Affordable housing
- Help for small businesses
- Wealth inequality, tax wealthy
- Jobs
- Unemployment
- Student debt



They want to see candidates who are as genuinely engaged and committed to racial justice as they are: by being vocal (*especially on social media*) and taking action.



### CANDIDATES WHO ARE VOCAL PUBLICLY AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

“**AOC:** She isn't afraid to ask tough questions, and will publicly call people out for lack of support or for racist comments, especially when she threatened corporations' empty claims against BLM. I heard about her on social media.” *White man, age 19*

“**Ocasio-Cortez** has been so committed to racial justice and fighting racism . . . I started following her and would read her tweets and watch her videos. She is constantly talking about BLM and how black people face racism everywhere.” *Latina, age 32*



### CANDIDATES WHO HAVE A PLAN

“**Elizabeth Warren,** she wanted to rebuild structure and wealth for low income communities especially African American communities because she felt like they were deprived of the economic wealth they deserved.” *Black woman, age 23*

“**Kamala Harris . . .** She understands what it is like to experience life as a Black person in America . . . I believe in her commitment because of her main platform points. She wants to end mass incarceration, and also make universities (including historically Black universities) debt-free.” *Black woman, age 28*



### CANDIDATES WHO TAKE ACTION

“**Ilhan Omar** has been an activist for most of her life, fighting to dismantle systematic racism by abolishing ICE and private prisons.” *White woman, age 32*

“**Bernie Sanders:** he was an advocate even when it wasn't trendy of popular to do so.” *Latina, age 22*

Overwhelmingly, participants tell us that state and local elections matter a great deal—but they admit that their level of knowledge about these candidates is low and express a desire to do more research on down-ballot races.

**“I think they matter, I just never really paid them attention.** I don’t really hear about them doing anything so I would have to read into that more.” *Black woman, age 25*

“They **definitely matter, but I do not find that I have time to research** and form opinions on all of them. I wish I could.” *White woman, age 19*

**“I have to read more about our officials and who is running, but yes they are important.** I have realized, especially with this pandemic, that all forms of government are important.” *Latina, age 21*

**“I think they matter, but I'm not very informed** when it comes to mayor/state/city elections. I hope I can get more informed.” *White woman, age 21*

“Sadly, I do not keep up with the state and local elections. **I should because they’re probably making decisions that affect me directly, but I never hear about them.** It’s kinda like they’re **out of sight, out of mind.**” *Black woman, age 34*

**“I think they're all important—and I need to start paying attention.** I have not done a good job of that in the past . . . I think a lot of impact can come from the local elections.” *White woman, age 28*

**“I haven't really researched anything about my local officials which I should. But they do matter.** Each part of the government has a job to do. Local governments has their own power different than the president. They have the option to **open up schools and the economy** within their states.” *White man, age 18*



# Thinking ahead to voting this November, most see voting by mail as a good alternative to voting in-person during the pandemic.

“I plan on voting from home as that is the **safest option** for me and everyone around me.” *White woman, age 30*

“It will be not likely that I will be at a polling place because **I'm very cautious about the pandemic so I made sure ahead of time I could get my ballot early and I could receive it by mail.** I did place the request for early voting.”

*Black woman, age 23*

“I have **requested an absentee ballot** already because I do not want to go to the polls because of long wait times/**COVID.**” *White woman, age 19*

I already signed up for online voting and **I don't want to risk getting sick** especially because when I voted in the primaries it was not required for voters to wear a mask.” *AAPI man, age 18*



## Yet concerns about the reliability of mail-in ballots loom large as the president moves to defund USPS.

“Recently **Trump** said in an interview that he is **purposely trying to defund USPS so that not a lot of people vote by mail**. This was trending on Twitter and I really hope it’s not true but knowing Trump he will definitely try to stop them.” *Latina, age 21*

“The defunding of the USPS because more democratically vote through mail. How is this even legal, you clearly state that **you don’t want to allow mail in voting because you will lose? WOW.**” *Black woman, age 34*

“**I am tempted to vote in person due to the sketchy things that are happening with the postal office**. I don't trust now that my vote will be counted, but am also torn in whether it is worth the risk of contracting COVID—a choice no one should logically need to take, but here we are.” *White woman, age 32*

“I firmly think that Donald Trump and his administration are **lying and seeking to do their own voter fraud by claiming that the election is already rigged**. I see so much from Trump lately about **not wanting to fund the Post Office so that people can't vote by mail.**” *White man, age 32*



# MESSAGING AND CREATIVE TESTING

These voters see voting as working in tandem with protesting in the fight for racial justice, especially if we elect the right candidates and build on the energy of the protests to make our voices heard.

### *Most Motivating Reasons To Vote this November*

#### WHITE VOTERS

**ELECT RIGHT CANDIDATES:** Protesting only works if we also vote to elect the right candidates at the national, state, and local level who will listen to our demand for change. We need to vote so that we elect candidates who will work for us, not against us.

“After protesting I truly understand that although it does bring awareness to the situation, **protesting isn’t effective unless you vote for people that are willing to make the change** you wanna see.” *White woman, age 19*

“I think that **voting can be an act of protest** to choose candidates who are in favor of the people, that force or energy that we should see in November at the polls.”  
*White man, age 21*

#### VOTERS OF COLOR

**POWER OF UNITY:** When we came together to mobilize in historic numbers against police brutality, we proved that not even a pandemic could silence our demand for change. Now we must build on that energy to demand change at the polls this November.

“**People are willing to risk their lives** or be exposed to show that they want racial injustice to end. It has motivated me because seeing others risk their lives during a pandemic like my family and friends **shows that everyone wants** a change for the country for **racial injustice to end.**” *Black woman, age 23*

Voters of color also are highly motivated to vote by a desire to honor victims of police brutality and do their part to keep these injustices from happening again.

### *Most Motivating Reasons To Vote this November*

**HONOR VICTIMS:** George Floyd and so many Black men and women have suffered and died because of police brutality. We must honor them by continuing to say their names and also casting ballots in their names to help stop these injustices from happening again in the future.



“Although I couldn’t do anything to help save **George Floyd** from his untimely death, **I can do my part in voting** to make sure we get someone who will make sure this stops happening.” *Black woman, age 34*

“We are **voting to hopefully never have another George Floyd or Breanna Taylor.**” *AAPI man, age 18*

Every time I hear about the recent Black people that were murdered by police, I just think **we have to do this for them.**” *Latina, age 21*

“I remember when I heard about **Trayvon Martin.** I made a promise to myself that I'd never forget his name and the **only things we can do is protest and vote.**” *Black woman, age 18)*

# Michelle Obama's message to channel anger and frustration into action by voting is motivating for these voters (*especially for voters of color*) and makes them feel empowered to push for change.

"I love how she said **channeling our feeling into activism** and into this democracy . . . We have to do more than just protest." *Black man, age 32*

"People in the past took action and did something when they were angry or wanted a change. **We can't just sit at home and hope for it to change**, we have to go out and help, vote, use our voice and stay confident." *Black woman, age 25*

"Protesting won't move you as far as protesting with a purpose. You can be angry over what happened, but you **have to use that anger to drive you towards a purposeful protest with a clear goal and to take action by voting** to progress your agenda." *White woman, age 25*

HART RESEARCH

 Michelle Obama [@MichelleObama](#)

To anyone who's feeling invisible: Know that your story matters. Your ideas, your experiences, your vision for our world all matter.

Your anger—that matters too. But left on its own, it will only corrode, destroy, and sow chaos—on the inside and out.

4:04 PM · Jun 7, 2020 · Twitter Web App

1.6K Retweets and comments · 8.3K Likes

 Michelle Obama [@MichelleObama](#) · Jun 7

Replying to [@MichelleObama](#)

Dr. King was angry. Sojourner Truth was angry. Lucretia Mott. Cesar Chavez. The folks at Stonewall—they were all angry.

But they were also driven by compassion, by principle—by hope.

71 · 1.2K · 6.4K

 Michelle Obama [@MichelleObama](#) · Jun 7

And if you hold strong with the same faith that carried all those giants before you toward real, measurable progress—you will change the course of history.

50 · 840 · 3.1K

 Michelle Obama [@MichelleObama](#) · Jun 7

So if you're spending a lot of time hashtagging and posting right now, that's useful, especially during a pandemic. But it's only a beginning. Go further.

70 · 956 · 3.5K

 Michelle Obama [@MichelleObama](#) · Jun 7

Text everybody you know to join you in exercising their constitutional right to protest. Send all your friends a link to register to vote at [WhenWeAllVote.org/register](#). And show up to vote in every election.



Register to vote  
When we all vote, we can change the world.  
[@whenweallvote.org](#)

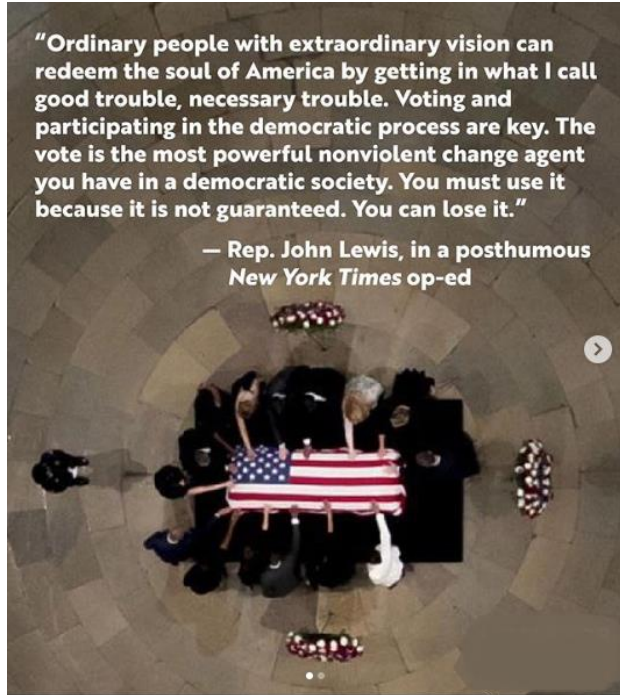
202 · 3K · 8.7K

 Michelle Obama [@MichelleObama](#) · Jun 7

This is how you can finish the work that the generations before you started. By staying open and hopeful, even through tough times. Even through discomfort and pain. Channel your feelings into activism and into this democracy that was designed to respond to those who vote.

140 · 2K · 13K

## A message that emphasizes people's power to enact change with their vote resonates with these young activists.



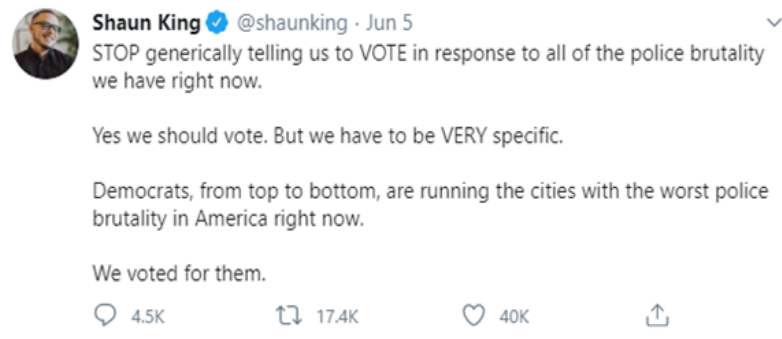
While this image of John Lewis' funeral and quote is less motivating among these voters relative to Michelle Obama's tweet, the essence of what works overlap: these voters connect to the idea of tapping into their power to make change.

Voters connect more with a message that invites them to both protest AND vote, as opposed to messages that they see as negative or that could dissuade people from voting.

Stop saying  
don't protest,  
vote



We voted,  
no results



Vote AND protest





## These young people also gravitate toward the idea that “none of us are free until all of us are free.”

“I chose this message because it was **the only one not telling people NOT to do something**. I believe in the idea that we aren't free until EVERYONE is free, and I think **it's a unifying message**.”  
*Black woman, age 28*

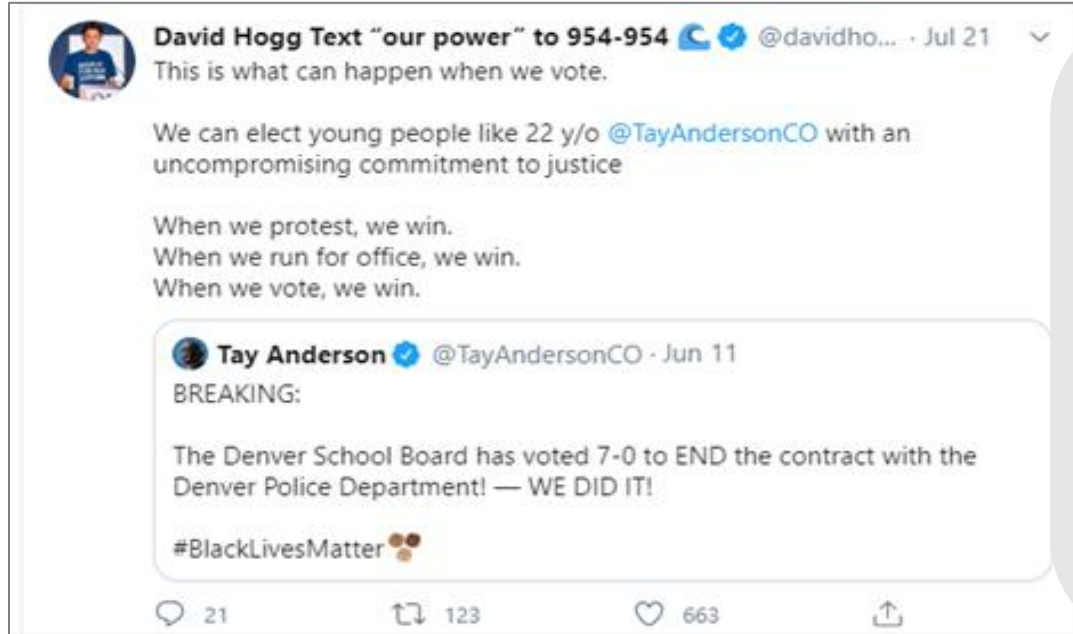
“I think it **perfectly sums up my feelings and the intent behind BLM**. BLM doesn't mean that ONLY Black lives should matter, and ‘all lives matter’ isn't a valid counter-protest because the people that spout that nonsense don't treat all lives as if they matter. Just as ‘none of us are free until we are all free,’ **all lives won't matter until Black lives matter**.” *AAPI man, age 34*

“I absolutely love the message, “none of us are free until all of us are free,” because a lot of people are against lifting up the black community for internalized reasons . . . **We need to band together to rise up**.” *White woman, age 19*

“I enjoy how this post **tries to gather everyone together and does not discriminate against anyone, and it unites people on a human scale**, that we are not free until we are all, implying we are one people.” *White man, age 21*



# Respondents are motivated by real examples of ways voting can lead and has led to positive change on racial justice issues.



“I want to **focus on the positives from this movement** at a time with so much disaster and uncertainty.” *White woman, age 19*

“Like I’ve mentioned before, **voting is essential and can really make the difference** when you vote for people that will actually make change.” *White woman, age 19*

“I love the message of using an example where voting has created real change. To show **we do have power over these elections and it can matter.**” *White woman, age 32*



# These young voters emphasize the urgency of voting this November: to remove Trump from office, to fight for the issues they care about, and to support each other.

*Now imagine one of your friends is not sure about whether they should vote in November. Thinking about everything we've discussed the past few days, what would you tell them about why they should vote?*



## VOTE TRUMP OUT

"I would remind them of all of the time they've complained about Trump. I would show them his **tweets**. I would point to situations like **George Floyd**, the COVID **pandemic response** absolute dumpster fire, the complete **lack of empathy** towards anyone. Donald Trump is a man who sits on a **throne of lies**. He attained his position through **deceit, flamboyance, and preying on** the decaying morale foundation of the Republican Party. Do you want to live in an Idiocracy? I don't." *White man, age 32*



## FOR ISSUES THEY CARE ABOUT

"**If you don't vote, you don't get to complain.** Think of everything that bothers you about your house. Now imagine you had the power to change it or to stay in your house for the rest of your life, never ever leave, and complain. I know you'd change it, because you can't stand the idea of never leaving a situation you don't like. So if you'd do it for your house, why wouldn't you do it for your country? Your laws? Your freedom?" *Black woman, age 28*



## SUPPORT EACH OTHER

"I would tell them that voting is the **most important action they can take** right now. It is the **most selfless act they can commit** we need everyone to vote so that everyone in this country is treated fairly." *White woman, age 30*

"I feel bad for not having voted in the past, but I'm going to get out there this year **to do my part and they need to do the same.**" *Black woman, age 34*

Heading into November, these voters are cautiously optimistic and hopeful, and the idea of sitting this election out makes them feel hopeless.

**If I vote this November,  
it will be because I feel:**

- Empowered
- Mood for change
- Inspired
- Burdened
- Excited
- Frustrated
- Elated
- Angry
- Tired
- Obligated
- Hopeful
- Positive
- Anxious
- Empowered
- Scared
- Motivated
- Strong
- Pressured

**If I DON'T vote this November,  
it will be because I feel:**

- Disappointed
- Dead
- Confused
- Scared
- Trapped
- Disheartened
- Frustrated
- Hopeless
- Forgotten
- Conflicted
- Stressed
- Unhelpful
- Fear
- Indifferent
- Reluctant
- Discouraged
- Sick
- Disillusioned
- Negative
- Defeated
- Unassured
- Weak
- Empowered



# APPENDIX: FULL TEXT OF MESSAGES

## Most Motivating Reasons to Vote this November

	All	Whites	POC
<b>ELECT RIGHT CANDIDATES:</b> Protesting only works if we also vote to elect the right candidates at the national, state, and local level who will listen to our demand for change. We need to vote so that we elect candidates who will work for us, not against us.	23	14	9
<b>POWER OF UNITY:</b> When we came together to mobilize in historic numbers against police brutality we proved that not even a pandemic could silence our demand for change. Now we must build on that energy to demand change at the polls this November.	21	8	13
<b>MANY WAYS TO PROTEST:</b> We must use every opportunity we have to protest against racial injustice. This includes protesting on the streets, boycotting businesses that do not share our values and voting to remove politicians who refuse to listen to us.	15	8	7
<b>LASTING CHANGE:</b> In the face of so much injustice, voting may seem like it is too little too late when compared to immediate action through protesting. But the truth is we need both. We need to protest to demand attention to the issues we care about, and we need to elect candidates who will enact policies that will lead to lasting change on issues of racial justice.	15	7	8
<b>VOTER SUPPRESSION:</b> Donald Trump and the Republicans tried to keep us from protesting by using military tactics against protestors because they don't want things to change. Now they want to discourage people from voting because they know that if more people vote, they will lose. Voting is a way to fight back against these anti-democratic attempts to silence us.	15	8	7
<b>STAKES ARE HIGH:</b> There is so much at stake in this election in the fight for racial justice—from electing district and state's attorneys that will have the courage to investigate and charge police officers accused of misconduct to electing a president that will make racial justice issues part of the agenda.	15	6	9
<b>HONOR VICTIMS:</b> George Floyd and so many Black men and women have suffered and died because of police brutality. We must honor them by continuing to say their names and also casting ballots in their names to help stop these injustices from happening again in the future.	10	0	10

