

To: Interested Parties
From: GBAO, on behalf of Navigator Research
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From “White Privilege At Its Finest” To “Hopeful” – Black Americans On The Capitol Attack, COVID, And Their Expectations Of The Biden Administration

As the January Capitol attack unfolded, many around the country publicly wondered how the events would have been different if the attackers were Black. The respondents we spoke to in our February focus groups did not wonder; they immediately knew. This sharp-edged observation stands in contrast to the optimism and hopefulness that President Biden can “clean house” and “change the tone of the nation.” This memo includes the findings from three focus groups of Black Americans as we discussed the Capitol attack and the aftermath, hopes for what comes next for the country under President Biden, as well as concerns about COVID and the vaccine. (We’ll have a second release with findings from the same focus groups on a discussion about democratic reforms like the filibuster.)

Our groups were conducted online on February 22, 2021 with Black Americans in three markets: Atlanta, GA (more politically engaged), Philadelphia, PA (less politically engaged women), and Detroit, MI (less politically engaged men). Political engagement was defined by a combination of either educational attainment or a self-reported frequency of following news and current events. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

January 6th Capitol Attack: “A Showcase Of Privilege”

- Our respondents were quite familiar with the events on January 6th. And for these Black Americans, **there is an obvious racial double-standard in how the Capitol attackers were treated.** When making this point, our respondents are unanimous, quick, and clear.



Reactions To The 1/6 Capitol Attack

Atlanta Women



“The whole thing was racist.”

“If a Black man had done that they would not have been let go.”

“I haven’t seen any justice yet. I’d like to see some justice.”

Detroit Men



“White privilege at its finest.”

“You would’ve seen some dead Black people up in there.”

“If there had been Black people you would’ve seen helicopters, SWAT teams, National Guard, everybody.”



Philadelphia Woman

“Well, they’re getting treated very well... There was the one woman who needed to go on vacation, so they let her go to Mexico. And the other guy who had the hat on, he wanted to be transferred to a prison where he could get organic food. These aren’t things that we could have asked for as Black people.”

- **Race also strikes many as the motivation behind the planned attack.** Several label the attack as a “showcase of privilege.” One Philadelphia woman explains the attackers were “used to a level of control that’s been taken away.” Others focus on the deliberate nature of the attack. A Detroit man notes: “they were trying to disenfranchise our votes—people who look like me and you.” Similarly, an Atlanta man explains, “It was definitely planned and racist. They were pretty much trying to overtake the government or stop the electoral college’s process.”
- **Many blame Trump (and the Republican Party) for inciting the attack, “hying up” the crowd, and deflecting responsibility.** Most respondents do not see this as an isolated or surprising incident, since they blame Trump for creating a culture allowing many to “broadcast” their racism, as opposed to “keeping it private.” Others further blame Republican politicians “enabling Trump and supporting the lies” and who are more “concerned about their personal political future and their racist constituents than they are about [doing] the right thing.” An Atlanta woman suggests Republican leaders “basically kind of dumb it down as far as Trump steering the riot itself.” Some respondents specifically cite Senators Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz and Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene as examples of politicians fueling the fire.
- **That said, some express empathy toward attackers,** who they view as “misguided” and “lied to.” “They thought they were doing the right thing,” offers one Detroit man. In Atlanta, a man blames social media: “A lot of this information is being fed to individuals, and although I understand that a lot of them are racist, I think a lot of the racial tension was built up over time just from the type of information that they’re exposed to, day in and day out to kind of guide their thinking, which ultimately led to what they did that day.” Some respondents suggest rehabilitation or mental health treatment is needed in addition to traditional legal remedies.

- **In fact, beyond the attackers, many respondents strive to show empathy across the board to a variety of groups:** “Middle-Easterners” who would have been similarly profiled, “poor white people” affected by the filibuster and failed politics (the topic of a separate report on these groups), immigrants “still in camps,” and landlords “who are small businesspeople too.”



Detroit Man

“This is basically the opposite of 2016, if you really think about it. Because a lot of people who voted for Hillary Clinton, and I was one of them, believe that election was stolen, too. The difference is that, while we were mad and upset and believe that Trump stole it, regardless of how he did it, we had to accept it. Swallowed hard and accepted it. Didn’t like it. But there was none of the anger, and those types of things that you saw coming out. I didn’t hear Hillary claiming the election was stolen over and over and over again. And so, the people that supported her had to accept it, because she did. And that’s kind of what he was alluding to, was that the person at the head of this, if they kind of act and comport themselves in a certain way, their followers have no choice but to go along with it.”

Hopes For The Biden Administration: “With The New President, Hopefully, Prayerfully, They’re Going Up”

- **Nearly every respondent describes the country negatively**, using words such as “scary,” “chaotic,” or “unrest.” When pivoting to their own situation, some recount stories of struggling without family connection or with remote school. Yet others reflect positivity or personal resolve, using phrases like “pretty well,” “hanging in there,” or “trying to stay safe.”

What’s one word or phrase to describe how things are going in the country right now?

Terrible Turbulent Bittersweet
 Unpredictable Bad Chaotic
 Scary Confusing Unrest
 Unstable Hectic Unstable

- **President Biden elicits some hope although many also say it’s “too soon” to judge.** On President Biden specifically, respondents are particularly “hopeful” and see him as “changing the tone of the nation.” As one Atlanta man describes him, “He understands that he’s human like we are. He puts his pants on the same way.” Others note how much work there is for Biden. “He’s taking one step at a time” says another, and several explain he has to “clean house” after “four years of chaos.” Nonetheless, others acknowledge they “don’t think enough time has passed” to assess or that it’s “hard to tell right now.” Importantly, a few respondents specifically note the diversity of President Biden’s advisers and his prioritizing of racial justice.

- **Top priorities (beyond COVID/health care) include foreclosure/eviction relief and small businesses.** Most feel Biden’s priorities are aligned with their own. And when asked to pick two from a list, there is some consensus around COVID and healthcare, but also foreclosure/eviction relief, and small business help. As one Detroit man notes, “I have a small business myself as well. So if I stop making money and my clients stop making money and I can’t provide for my family, we have a three-way problem.” In Philadelphia, women worry about families getting evicted: “As a parent I can’t imagine one day having a job and being able to pay my bills and then the next minute I’m evicted.” A few mention climate change and immigration as important issues Biden is also prioritizing.

COVID: “I’m Not In A Hurry To Get The Vaccine”

- **COVID and vaccine safety loom large as worries.** Naturally whether describing either the national or their personal situations, COVID looms large. For some, this leads to a conversation about the COVID vaccine and whether it is trustworthy and safe. Quite a few respondents in each group had either received the first dose or were planning to. However, about half in each group express real trepidation about the vaccine.



Philadelphia Woman

“Well, for me, I’m between a rock and a hard place. I kind of want to get it, but I’m leaning more not to get it because it just seems to me, it takes longer to make a vaccine, create a vaccine and I’m just not sure of it yet, you know? Like down the line, maybe five, six months from now, who’s to say what kind of reaction and make it... In other words, if this hasn’t been out long enough, and I’m just trying to wait to see how it’s going to react down the line on the people that have already received it.”

- **Vaccine-hesitant respondents are largely open to getting vaccinated eventually but cite a variety of reasons for holding back for now.** Further discussion reveals vaccine hesitancy stems from a variety of concerns or reasons, not simply an “anti-vaxx” perspective or distrust of the health care system. Many express openness to getting vaccinated in the coming months, predicting they’ll get the vaccine “eventually” or “five or six months down the line,” given some have concerns about a “rushed” process. Another participant explains he’s already had COVID, so feels less urgency. Others do express doubt about a healthcare system providing a safe or available vaccine for the Black community, or explicitly mention the historical legacy of Black Americans receiving worse health care. Alarmingly, two respondents in separate groups mentioned hearing through their personal network of someone dying after getting the vaccine, even if they acknowledge the information is second or third-hand. Taken all together, views are nuanced, with respondents yearning for better, more current, and more trustworthy information to guide their decision.

Vaccine Hesitancy Can Be Multifaceted

“It seems like the government people that we try to trust or that we want to trust, they’re just our biggest enemy right now. You can’t trust them. You can’t trust anything they say or anything they do... It’s like the vaccine, for instance. I wasn’t impressed to see them all sitting up there taking the vaccine because my whole thing is they may be getting a real thing. We don’t know what we’re getting. They’re going to give them the real thing. We don’t know what they’re putting in our arms.” – Atlanta woman

“They’re continuously coming out with new strands of COVID, so it’s like, why are you giving a vaccine if you haven’t even figured [it] out?” – Atlanta man

“Even as an educator, it’s my time now to get it and I haven’t signed up, but I just wanted to see what kind of effect that it’s going to have on people in the month to come.” – Philadelphia woman

“But I don’t know of somebody personally, but I have a lot of friends that went to school with someone from like West Philly who got the vaccine on like a Monday and he passed away on Thursday. And I don’t know if the cause of death was the COVID vaccine to be exact, but it was just a little skeptical because he was like... I’m 24. He’s the same age as me. Well, he was the same age as me.” – Philadelphia woman

“Let’s just put it real and raw here. We’re all Black men. We know why we’re going to wait. I think we know that. History of this country has dictated why we’re going to wait.” – Detroit man

“I don’t know the person personally. One of my friend’s fathers knew someone who was perfectly fine, took the vaccine and ended up dying.” – Detroit man

“This time last year I went down to New Orleans, had a great time at Mardi Gras. And when I came back, I lost all smell and taste... So I’ve had antibodies. So I’ve given blood. The last three times, the last time was in January, I’ve still got COVID antibodies. Isn’t that the result of the vaccine, that you have antibodies?” – Detroit man