

An aerial night photograph of a city, likely Chicago, showing a dense grid of streets and buildings illuminated by city lights. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down on the city's layout.

**WORKERS CENTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE**

# POLLING REPORT

**SEPTEMBER 2020**

*A public opinion survey of likely Black voters in Cook County on key economic justice, racial equity, and public safety issues.*



# POLL OVERVIEW

The Workers Center for Racial Justice (WCRJ) recently conducted a poll to assess the public opinions of likely Black voters in Cook County with respect to critical policy issues at the intersection of racial justice, economic equity, and public safety.

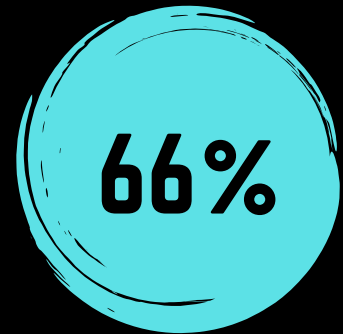
Black voters were asked whether or not they favored policies to cut local spending on the city police department and county jail system, and increase funding to alternative public safety systems, such as social services and restorative justice programs. Voters were also polled on their support for a graduated income tax in Illinois, as opposed to the current flat tax system.

Polling results show overwhelming majority support for all three measures among surveyed voters. WCRJ's poll demonstrates that likely Black voters in Cook County represent an engaged and highly progressive electoral bloc on issues of economic justice, racial equity, and community reinvestment.



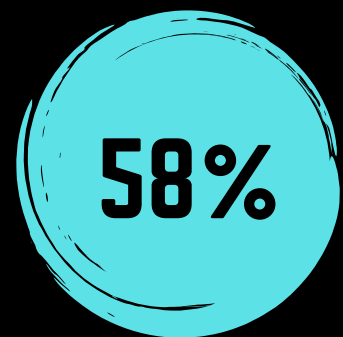
## **SUPPORT A GRADUATED INCOME TAX**

of 667 Black voters polled in Cook County



## **SUPPORT POLICE BUDGET CUTS**

of 673 Black voters polled in Cook County



## **SUPPORT JAIL FUNDING REDUCTIONS**

of 656 Black voters polled in Cook County



# POLITICAL CONTEXT

In the summer of 2020, as political uprisings against longstanding systems of anti-Black oppression captured the national spotlight, Illinois residents and policymakers alike, confronted urgent issues of racial equity, economic justice, and public safety in their own communities.

In Chicago, grassroots opposition to deep seated systems of racialized and abusive policing coalesced around the demand for budgetary cuts to city law enforcement and increased investment in vital social service programs. Similarly, at the county level, activists urged elected officials to divest funding from the Cook County Jail, and redirect public dollars towards more effective and humane alternatives to detention. In their coverage of the 2020 protest movement, dominant media outlets routinely, and without evidence, cast such policy demands as both extremist and inherently unpopular among Chicago residents.

Meanwhile at the state level, with the 2020 elections fast approaching, voters faced an unprecedented juncture for economic justice in Illinois. In the year prior, the state legislature approved a constitutional amendment which would allow Illinois to establish a graduated income tax. Current statute only permits the state to impose a flat taxation system, under which, Illinois' wealthiest households pay income taxes at the equivalent rate of low wage workers. In order to pass the amendment for a progressive income tax, 60% of Illinois voters must approve the ballot measure in the 2020 general election.

Amid this unprecedented moment for racial and economic justice on the city, state, and national stage, WCRJ conducted a poll to learn more about the perspectives of local Black voters on these critical public policy issues.





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# SURVEY QUESTIONS

## 1 / GRADUATED INCOME TAX

Would you support changing the tax system in Illinois so that the wealthy pay a little more money in taxes, so that we can provide more resources for schools, childcare, and affordable housing?

## 2 / PUBLIC SAFETY REINVESTMENT

Would you support defunding the Chicago Police Department and reinvesting those dollars into alternative methods for community safety, like more substance abuse professionals, mental health providers, and domestic violence counselors?

## 3 / ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION

Would you support immediately reducing the budget for and ultimately closing Cook County Jail, and reinvest the money into restorative justice programs and other more humane alternatives to incarceration?

# POLLING IMPLEMENTATION

For the poll, WCRJ targeted Black voters throughout Cook County who had participated in two out of the last three general elections.

In order to capture a representative set of survey responses, WCRJ diversified its means of outreach. Polls were conducted through phone conversations, as well as text messaging. Surveys were facilitated on weekdays and on the weekend, during both the afternoon and evening hours.

Participants were asked to reply *yes*, *no*, or *undecided* to the questions listed in the box on the left.





# SUPPORT FOR A GRADUATED INCOME TAX

WCRJ asked 667 likely Black voters in Cook County to respond to the following question: *Would you support changing the tax system in Illinois so that the wealthy pay a little more money in taxes, so that we can provide more resources for schools, childcare, and affordable housing?*

403 survey participants responded via text message and 264 responded via phone call. The ages of polled individuals ranged from 27 to 76.

Survey results demonstrate an overwhelming support for the proposed graduated income tax among likely Black voters in Cook County.



## POLLING RESULTS

**79%** YES

**13%** NO

**8%** UNDECIDED





# SUPPORT FOR POLICE BUDGET REDUCTIONS

WCRJ asked 673 likely Black voters in Cook County to respond to the following question:  
*Would you support defunding the Chicago Police Department and reinvesting those dollars into alternative methods for community safety, like more substance abuse professionals, mental health providers, and domestic violence counselors?*

409 survey participants responded via text message and 264 responded via phone call. The ages of polled individuals ranged from 35 to 70.

Survey results demonstrate that a large majority of likely Black voters in Cook County would support police department budget cuts and the reallocation of funds to municipal human services.

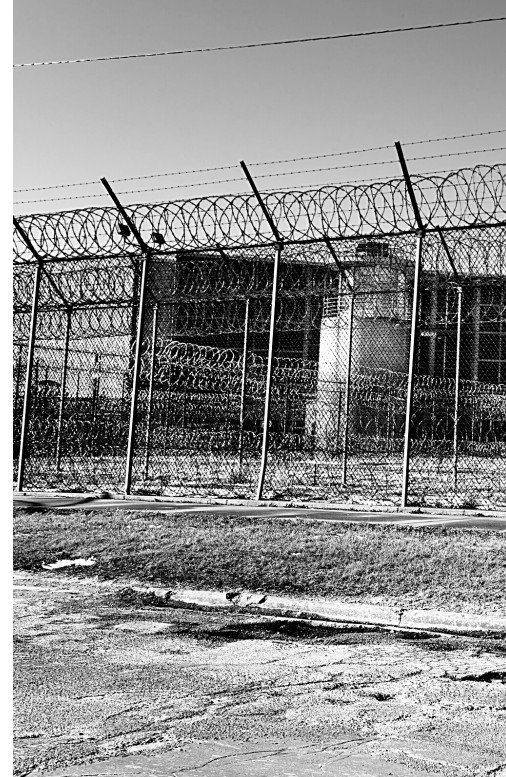
## POLLING RESULTS

**66%** YES

**24%** NO

**10%** UNDECIDED





# SUPPORT FOR COUNTY JAIL BUDGET CUTS

WCRJ asked 656 likely Black voters in Cook County to respond to the following question: *Would you support immediately reducing the budget for, and ultimately, closing Cook County Jail, and reinvest the money into restorative justice programs and other more humane alternatives to incarceration?*

397 survey participants responded via text message and 259 responded via phone call. The ages of polled individuals ranged from 27 to 84.

Survey results show that a significant majority of likely Black voters in Cook County would support budget cuts to the local jail system and increased public investment in alternatives to incarceration.

## POLLING RESULTS

**58%** YES

**26%** NO

**16%** UNDECIDED



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Black voters represent a leading base of support for the Fair Tax Amendment and are vital to its passage in the November 2020 election.** Overwhelming support for the measure among the Black electorate in Cook County (79%) trumps that of the general statewide population, according to recent external polling reports. In order to pass this vital economic justice measure, it is essential that Black voters are effectively mobilized to turn out in the 2020 election.
- **Calls for public safety funding redistribution are popular among Black residents.** Despite media claims and popular narratives to the contrary, demands to cut police and jail budgets and increase community service spending are favored by a vast majority of likely Black voters. In order to advance progressive public safety reinvestment proposals, activists must work to amplify the voices of Black community members.
- **A significant margin of the Black electorate remains undecided on public safety reinvestment issues.** Advocates have an opportunity to grow support for police and jail divestment policies among undecided Black residents through community outreach and political education engagement.

## ABOUT WCRJ

The Workers Center for Racial Justice is a grassroots organization fighting for Black Liberation and a fair and inclusive society that benefits all people. We organize Black workers and their families to address the root causes of high rates of unemployment, low-wage work, and over-criminalization impacting Black communities.