LISTENING CAMPAIGN:
WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

ACLU SMART JUSTICE Ohio   **ACLU** Ohio

1   BACKGROUND

What is the listening campaign?

A listening campaign is a traditional tactic utilized by many different segments of the public and private sector. It is one of the most important tools for galvanizing supporters, identifying what they are excited about, and figuring out ways to stir people's imagination about why this particular issue matters to them. During the campaign, we focus just as much on the process as the outcome. The tool of listening allows the participants to develop deeper relationships with one another while also feeling a sense of purpose and belonging to the mission of the ACLU of Ohio.

Why did we do a listening campaign?

Every great movement is birthed in the cries of the people. Ohio is in a pivotal point on our journey, one where anything is possible and any direction could be chosen. The COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed life as we know it and people are more isolated than ever. We have people who are currently incarcerated sitting in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day, children being unable to play on playgrounds and millions out of work. Currently, policies are being implemented to reflect the needs of the moment and while this is a good thing, we want to ensure that these policies reflect the needs of the many, rather than the needs of the few. Because of this, the ACLU of Ohio hosted a season of deep listening known as a Listening Campaign. We engaged our organizing base, supporters, members and staff in deep and meaningful conversations about what the hopes, dreams and needs of the moment are and how we can best respond to them.
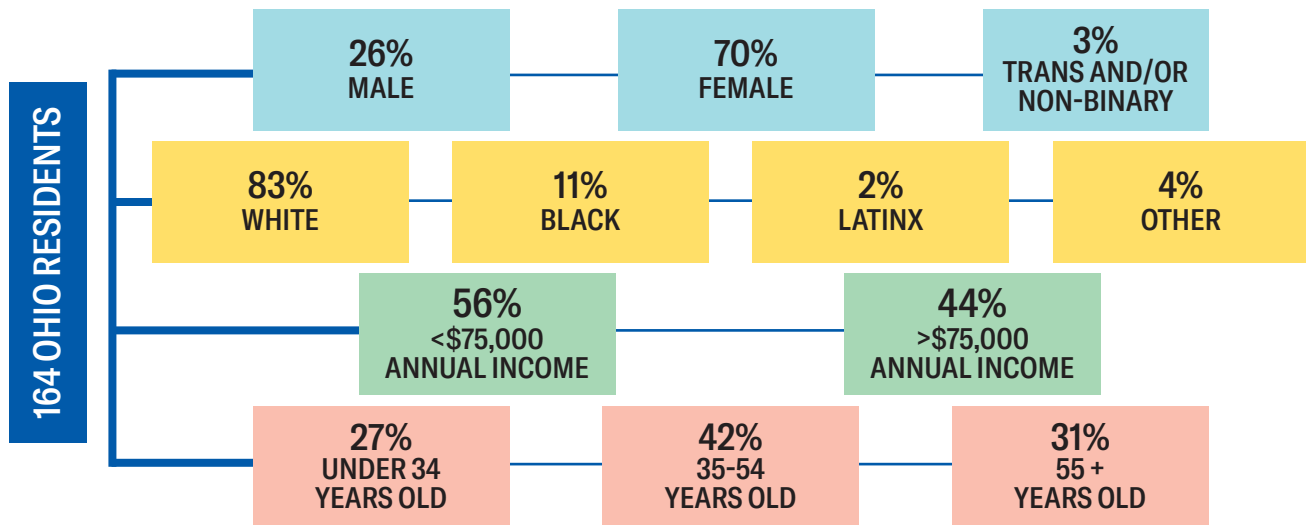
2   METHODS

What we did:

We hosted this campaign through two key avenues: **Community Conversations** and **Community Surveys**. The community conversations were attended by supporters, volunteers and board members. These conversations were hosted by staff and volunteers in an online form to get folks talking about what truly matters to them and to build a community that will last beyond this moment. The conversations focused on gaining qualitative data while the survey focused on gaining quantitative data, both allowing us to do a deep-dive on the key issues that the ACLU has named as priorities. The community survey was hosted through Survey Monkey and pushed on our social media sites as well as utilized as a follow-up to the conversations.

The overall campaign lasted four months, beginning on July 29, 2020, with the Statewide Action Team Call, and ending in December 2020.

Community Surveys

Who we asked:

164 OHIO RESIDENTS

26% MALE	70% FEMALE	3% TRANS AND/OR NON-BINARY

83% WHITE	11% BLACK	2% LATINX	4% OTHER

56% <$75,000 ANNUAL INCOME	44% >$75,000 ANNUAL INCOME

27% UNDER 34 YEARS OLD	42% 35-54 YEARS OLD	31% 55 + YEARS OLD

What we asked:

Our survey consisted of 20 questions that were weighted in scale. Each question allowed the responder to rank where they stood on key issues that the ACLU of Ohio is currently focusing on, or will focus on in the near future.

Agree statements:

"I am willing to stand up for what I believe in"

"I support the right to protest no matter the cause."

"Civil disobedience moves us forward as a country."

"Voting is fundamental to changing my city and our state."

"I believe that race has a lot to do with the general outcome of one's life."

"Kids shouldn't be locked up."

"There is clear discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community."

Disaree statements:

"I believe that the criminal justice system works for all."

"I believe that race relations are great in Ohio."

"I believe that formerly incarcerated people have enough resources to be successful."

"Everyone has equal access to cast their vote."

"People need to be detained before their trial to ensure they appear in court."

"My elected officials represent the needs of my community."

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I believe that my city is on the right track	7.45% 12	39.75% 64	29.19% 47	22.98% 37	0.62% 1	161	2.70
I feel good about what I can do to change things	5.00% 8	28.13% 45	26.25% 42	37.50% 60	3.13% 5	160	3.06
I believe that the Criminal Justice System works for all	71.78% 117	24.54% 40	1.23% 2	1.23% 2	1.23% 2	163	1.36
People need to be detained before their trial to ensure they appear in court	45.06% 73	32.72% 53	17.90% 29	2.47% 4	1.85% 3	162	1.83
I believe that formerly incarcerated people have enough resources to be successful	60.74% 99	30.06% 49	4.29% 7	2.45% 4	2.45% 4	163	1.56
Kids shouldn't be locked up	1.84% 3	5.52% 9	8.59% 14	30.67% 50	53.37% 87	163	4.28
My elected officials represent the needs of my community	20.37% 33	48.15% 78	23.46% 38	8.02% 13	0.00% 0	162	2.19
Voting is fundamental to changing my city and our state	1.23% 2	1.23% 2	6.75% 11	26.38% 43	64.42% 105	163	4.52
Everyone has equal access to cast their vote	51.23% 83	34.57% 56	8.02% 13	2.47% 4	3.70% 6	162	1.73
I support the right to protest no matter the cause	1.84% 3	1.84% 3	3.68% 6	31.29% 51	61.35% 100	163	4.48
Law enforcement often times has no choice but to engage protesters	32.30% 52	50.31% 81	10.56% 17	4.97% 8	1.86% 3	161	1.94
Civil disobedience moves us forward as a country	1.84% 3	3.07% 5	12.27% 20	42.94% 70	39.88% 65	163	4.16
The LGBTQ community is protected by Ohio law	24.07% 39	41.98% 68	25.93% 42	7.41% 12	0.62% 1	162	2.19
There is clear discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community	1.23% 2	4.32% 7	12.96% 21	45.06% 73	36.42% 59	162	4.11
I believe that race relations are great in Ohio	59.63% 96	32.30% 52	5.59% 9	1.86% 3	0.62% 1	161	1.52
I believe that race has a lot to do with the general outcomes of one's life	3.68% 6	2.45% 4	9.20% 15	34.36% 56	50.31% 82	163	4.25
I want to get more engaged but I don't know how	5.03% 8	23.90% 38	31.45% 50	32.70% 52	6.92% 11	159	3.13
I feel that my way of life is valued and protected	8.02% 13	27.16% 44	23.46% 38	38.27% 62	3.09% 5	162	3.01
I am willing to stand up for what I believe in	0.61% 1	0.00% 0	0.61% 1	35.58% 58	63.19% 103	163	4.61

Community Conversations

300 + PEOPLE ENGAGED	35 CONVERSATIONS HOSTED

Areas Where Conversations Where Hosted: (not a complete list)

- Cincinnati
- Yellow Springs
- Columbus
- Cleveland
- Athens
- Upper Arlington
- Akron

Groups that Participated:

- ACLU of Ohio Staff and Board
- NAACP
- Upper Arlington Seniors Group
- Action Team Members
- College Groups

General Questions:

What was the general mood of the conversation? Were people talkative? Willing to engage? Needing extra help to engage?

Many found the conversations to be engaging and enlightening. 85% of participants felt the conversations were easy to engage in, that their group was very talkative and eager to share. 15% felt that their group had a little trouble connecting but appreciated the overall design of the conversations and the questions.

> " It was lovely. People were quite talkative and open, didn't need any help to engage. A couple of us even stayed on for an extra half hour chatting about other things! "
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

Would you say that the conversation was successful? What, if anything, felt like it worked? What, if anything, felt like it needed to change?

All participants asked felt that the conversations helped them understand what they care about and what others care about more deeply. They left feeling connected to other ACLU Supporters and activists and felt grateful for the time to have an intentional conversation.

> " Yes, definitely successful. There was some awkwardness in silence, but I think it was a good thing in making people think and speak up. "
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

Community Conversation Questions:

1. *What do you feel hopeful or excited about in your region and the broader Ohio community?*

- People feel really hopeful that so many people are seeing the need for change, not only in their lives but in society at large. Many respondents were glad to see people's views on race being challenged, people wanting to get engaged in the political arena and willingness to make themselves uncomfortable to work towards equity.

- Some participants struggled with finding things that they felt hopeful for. Those participants cited the election, Covid and racial injustice as sources of anxiety.

- Highest ranking issue buckets/comments:
  - Highlighting and addressing racism and racial injustice.
  - Organizing, community engagement and social awareness of the need for change
  - Young people stepping into roles of leadership, passing the torch and finding common ground between generations/people groups

> "
> **In my community, the young people have participated in protests and are really interested in what's going on in our world and that gives me hope.**
>
> – Community Conversation Participant
> "

> "
> **Grateful because conversations are happening, but it feels problematic that media only shows all of the unrest, not really showing positive conversations like this one.**
>
> – Community Conversation Participant
> "

2. *Do you feel that Ohio's laws protect you and your family/friends and enable you to live your fullest lives? Why or why not?*

- The general consensus regarding this question was that the laws do not and have not protected all people. Many of our respondents were white and lifted up their privilege in contrast to how they see people of color treated. There were also comments highlighting reproductive rights and the legislation that continues to take away a person's right to choose what's best for themselves, their body and their family.

- LGBTQIA rights seemed to bubble up occasionally.

- Highest ranking issues/comments:
  - Anti-choice laws are against what many Ohioans actually want and limit a person's right to do what they believe is best for them, their families.
  - Laws are not equally enforced. Black people are consistently jailed and harmed at higher rates than white people.
  - The legislature is out of touch with what most Ohioans want but because of gerrymandering, the balance of power remains skewed

> **"**
> Living in Lake County, in an affluent white community, we all feel protected, but largely because of where I live, the fact that I'm a white male, the whole system revolves around protection of me and my family.
> **"**
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

> **"**
> They're fine at protecting people like me, old white guys; but if you look at the prison population and see what police are doing, what happens to those who are vulnerable, minorities, unpopular political views, are not treated well at all; laws are doing precious little to protect them.
> **"**
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

3. *Many times people are treated as guilty by the justice system and society well before they've been convicted of a crime and long after they've served their time if found guilty. Do you believe people are presumed innocent until proven guilty in your community? If so, why? If not, what would you like to see different?*

- This question brought up strong feelings and even stronger responses for most of our participants. In their response it is clear that the ACLU supporters are aware of how broken the criminal justice system is. Many people pointed to police killings of unarmed black people, over incarceration of minority communities and their own privilege as evidence.

- People are not only concerned with the partiality that the laws are applied, or not applied, but also the systems which the police and judges use to track citizens.

- Virtually no one felt that people who were returning from incarceration had equal access to the tools and resources to reestablish their lives. Virtually all participants felt that Bail Reform was necessary in addressing the racial disparities in jails and prisons.

- Highest ranking comments/issues:
  - Bail Reform and the need for it
  - Serving on a grand jury and/or grand jury experience feeling "rigged"
  - Racial bias in policing, the court system and the justice system at large and how that has devastated communities of color

> **"**
> People should not have to know the specific wording and ways to act with law enforcement so your rights are not violated.
> **"**
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

> **"**
> After serving on grand jury, realized lack of justice. System is set up to assume people are guilty. Once you have that assumption it's hard to fix that.
> **"**
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

4. *Access to casting a ballot is one of the cornerstones of American citizenship. Do you feel that every Ohioan has fair and equal access to the ballot? Have you or anyone you know ever experienced difficulty voting?*

- Many participants felt that all Ohioans did not have equal access to the ballot and casting their vote. Some cited economic inequity as a reason, understanding that those who need to work cannot simply take off of work to vote. These participants felt that it was important to ensure people are off work on Election Day.

- Issues such as urban cores having less polling locations, polling locations having multiple precincts in them and the legislature limiting access to the ballot were all themes. The participants felt that they had a good understanding of some of the issues facing Ohioans who wanted to vote but did not cast their ballot.

- Highest ranking comments/issues:
    - Limited drop boxes
    - Voter suppression tactics employed by legislature and political parties
    - Mail-in ballots, early voting and not trusting the system

> "
> **There is an issue of access to the right resources such as internet access, transportation, and simple knowledge of how voting operates.**
>
> **– Community Conversation Participant**
> "

> "
> **The system is working the way that it's designed to work: voter suppression. Black/POC are targeted by this. Both parties are guilty.**
>
> **– Community Conversation Participant**
> "

5. *If you were able to change one thing about the current political climate in Ohio, what would it be and why?*

- The need for addressing gerrymandering was brought up multiple times in multiple conversations. Participants felt that addressing this would help to remedy the voter suppression and supermajority issues facing Ohioans. There were also several people who thought that adding a third party would be wise as well.

- The political climate and how divided our country is and feels was also a key issue that people discussed. There was a desire to find common ground, root out division and inequity, and move forward together.

- Highest ranking comments/issues:
    - Gerrymandering
    - Supreme Court
    - Finding space to connect, have hard conversations and build bridges

> "
> **We need to move away from left vs right to power vs powerless. The powerful are dividing us to maintain power.**
>
> **– Community Conversation Participant**
> "

agree candidates **change** climate compromise corruption Court democrats different discussed education **election** end everything extreme funding

gerrymandering
important individuals

information **issue** **judges** level lives matter **money** needs

ohio open **party** **political** politicians

power public representation **representatives** respect rights

state **system** third **vote** wants work

> " It really feels like there's an "us vs them" attitude, a complete chasm between people right now."
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

> " We need to see changes in the statehouse make-up to be more representative of the political leanings of Ohio as a whole, not just isolated areas. The super-majority is dangerous because one party never has to consider the other, no matter the party. "
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

6. In addition to the topics we have covered, what else is affecting your neighborhood and/or family that needs attention?

- During this question, participants listed some of the issues facing their communities that the ACLU is not currently addressing. Though the answers had a wide range, a few were really consistent; the housing crisis and lack of affordable housing, addressing inequities in the education system, both in how it's funded and how discipline is given, and police accountability and ending qualified immunity.

- A lot of participants offered ideas on how to address the issues in racial bias within the police department. Ideas such as mental health access for police, to having more social workers available for mental health crisis calls, to having a higher standard of accountability were all lifted.

- Racism, again, was at the center of the responses. Through all of the different issues lifted, many participants drew conclusions that these problems were issues because of racial inequity and racism. Whether it was healthcare, schooling, policing, the legislature, racism was the common thread.

> " I feel troubled by what I see in my neighborhood and country generally as far as inequality; getting worse with the pandemic, layoffs, seem structural; in some ways, the country is entering period of depression similar to 1930s. "
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

> **"**
> Until we have at the state level legislation that place responsibility on individual officers for their own conduct, we'll continue to see officers shielded by court decisions made at the SCOTUS level.
>
> – Community Conversation Participant
> **"**

access ACLU affordable better black budget care community concern cops covid digital education election esp everyone food funding going health healthcare help housing huge inequality issues justice lack law local mental money needs neighborhood officers Ohio pandemic person police problem public response school social state stop system teachers trump work

> **"**
> Our major issue was on the topic of healthcare. Access to healthcare is very difficult and expensive if you are unemployed, or not qualify for the benefits. There is also discrimination within the healthcare institutions against POC, many cases where individuals are blatantly mistreated. Healthcare should not be a difficult thing to obtain.
> **"**
>
> – Community Conversation Participant

4 NEXT STEPS

How we'll use this information:

The goal of a listening campaign isn't just to get people talking, it's to also get people engaged in creating the solutions to the issues discussed. We will use the wisdom that we harvested from our participants to gain clarity about what our priorities should be and how we should address them. Our organizing team is committed to working in local communities to maintain relationships with our participants and other community leaders to build local policy and issue campaigns that reflect what we heard over these four months.

How YOU can get involved:

Join the Action Team, ACLU of Ohio's on the ground organizing base, to stay up to date about campaigns we're working on in your city!

ACLUOhio.org/ActionTeam