

WISCONSIN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

WISCONSIN VOTERS SHOW STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE DEATH PENALTY

Taxes and Healthcare are the Most Important Issues in the State

Wisconsin voters show strong support for this November’s advisory question on establishing a death penalty in Wisconsin for first degree intentional homicide convictions supported by DNA evidence. Fifty-four percent of the voters favored the amendment while 37% were opposed to it. These are among the key findings from the most recent survey of 600 likely Wisconsin voters conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute and Diversified Research. In this survey, likely Wisconsin voters were asked if they favored or opposed an advisory referendum that would establish a death penalty in Wisconsin for convictions of first degree intentional homicide if the conviction was supported by DNA evidence. Support for this issue crossed most demographic groups across the state. The opposition to the death penalty came from some specific groups. Residents of Madison opposed the death penalty by 60% to 31%, as did voters in Southeast Wisconsin by 46% to 45%. Voters who told us they were going to vote for Jim Doyle opposed the death penalty by a 49% to 45% margin. Those saying they supported Mark Green favored the death penalty by 64% to 28%. The margins changed when we got into questions of political identification and ideology. Among Republicans, the margin was 66% in favor to 27% opposed. Among Independents it was favored by a 53% to 36% margin, but among Democrats 50% opposed it, while only 41% supported the death penalty. There were similar gaps based on ideology. Conservatives supported the death penalty by a 64% to 27% margin, while liberals opposed it by a 55% to 35% margin. Among people who said they were middle-of-the-road, 53% favored it, while 38% opposed it. Finally, there was also an enormous gender gap on this issue. Men favored the death penalty by a 61% to 31% margin, while women supported it by a 47% to 42% margin. This is an issue we have also asked in the past, and it has always been supported by the majority of voters and residents of Wisconsin.

Would you favor or oppose a death penalty in Wisconsin for first degree intentional homicide, if the conviction is supported by DNA evidence?									
	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
Favor	54%	51%	61%	49%	59%	64%	31%	45%	64%
Oppose	37%	30%	36%	37%	35%	30%	60%	46%	28%
Don't Know	9%	19%	4%	14%	6%	6%	9%	9%	8%

Taxes continue to be the most serious problem in Wisconsin for 26% of the state's voters, followed by Healthcare at 16%, Education at 14%, General Economic issues at 9%, Government issues at 7%, and finally Jobs at 5%. Gasoline prices, which were an enormous issue in June 2006, have fallen to just 2% as the number one issue among voters in Wisconsin. There were, however, interesting differences among demographic groups on these issues. For example, 38% of the residents of Waukesha County thought taxes was the number one issue, closely followed by 34% in the Milwaukee suburbs. Only 16% of the residents of Madison thought it was the number one issue. Healthcare, however, was the number one issue in the La Crosse/Eau Claire area for 29% of voters who named it as their primary concern. In the City of Milwaukee, 23% saw crime as the most important concern. The real differences over issues depended on one's political identification and ideology. Among Republicans, 38% of the voters thought taxes was the number one issue compared to 19% of the Democrats and 22% of the Independents. Among liberals, only 10% thought taxes was the number one issue, compared to 34% of conservatives and 25% of voters who described themselves as middle-of-the-road. Healthcare was similar — 10% of the Republicans named it as the number one issue compared to 25% of the Democrats and just 12% of Independent voters. Among liberals, 25% thought healthcare was the number one issue compared to only 8% of conservative voters and 17% of voters who described themselves as middle-of-the-road. Clearly these issues, especially in a political year, will be important depending on where candidates live and run. It is also interesting that few issues in this survey have the intensity that gas prices did in our last two polls.

In your opinion, what is the single most important problem facing Wisconsin that the government should be doing something about?									
	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
Taxes	26%	29%	34%	38%	15%	33%	16%	30%	24%
Health Care Issues	16%	8%	19%	4%	20%	29%	16%	9%	15%
Education	14%	15%	8%	16%	15%	7%	17%	16%	17%
Economic	9%	12%	7%	5%	14%	8%	3%	9%	13%
Government Issues	7%	3%	6%	16%	10%	0%	6%	9%	5%
Jobs	5%	3%	11%	7%	3%	0%	6%	4%	3%
Crime	4%	23%	3%	4%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Gasoline Prices	2%	1%	1%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	4%

ABOUT THE STUDY

This study of 600 likely Wisconsin voters was conducted by telephone between September 20 and September 21, 2006. A total of 600 Wisconsin residents were interviewed. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 4% for percentages of the whole sample. For a percentage near 50%, for example, this means that repeated samples would produce results between 47% and 53%, 95 times out of 100.

This study was commissioned by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. The Institute was founded in 1987, and its mandate is to examine issues of public policy facing Wisconsin, using a non-partisan approach.

Dr. Michael LaVelle, President of Diversified Research, a nationally known survey research company supervised the project. Dr. LaVelle has a Ph.D. and has taught statistics and social research methods at the university level. He has been President of Diversified Research since 1982 and has over thirty years experience in survey research.

Most Important State Problem 1988 – 2006

	Jan 1988	Jan 1989	Jan 1990	Jan 1991	Jan 1992	May 1993	July 1994	Sept 1995	Sept 1996	July 1997	July 1998	July 1999	June 2000	Aug. 2001	Sept 2002	Oct 2003	Sept 2004	Oct 2005	June 2006	Sept 2006
Taxes	33%	28%	28%	33%	26%	30%	19%	20%	16%	21%	18%	24%	17%	24%	25%	22%	17%	19%	22%	26%
Health Care Issues	0%	2%	2%	2%	8%	8%	10%	3%	3%	2%	4%	5%	6%	9%	8%	9%	17%	10%	13%	16%
Education	4%	3%	4%	7%	7%	11%	6%	10%	10%	10%	10%	11%	8%	12%	10%	7%	8%	13%	9%	14%
Economic Issues	9%	6%	3%	5%	7%	4%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	4%	5%	6%	4%	5%	9%
Government Issues/State Budget	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	15%	13%	5%	10%	5%	7%
Unemployment/Jobs	11%	8%	4%	6%	13%	6%	5%	4%	5%	3%	3%	2%	2%	4%	6%	16%	16%	7%	5%	5%
Crime	5%	6%	21%	15%	13%	10%	22%	19%	22%	17%	16%	12%	9%	9%	6%	6%	5%	3%	6%	4%
Gasoline Prices/Gasoline Taxes	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	25%	2%	0%	1%	0%	16%	10%	2%