

# Insight from the Marquette Law School Poll Goes Beyond Election Contests

The horse races are always going to get big attention. That's a fact when it comes to results of the Marquette Law School Poll. Who is ahead in the campaigns for president or senator or governor and what the trends in support are—the poll data on these questions make news, both in Wisconsin and often nationwide. Just about no one doubts that the poll has become the best and most reliable way of gauging opinion in Wisconsin.

This is partly because the Marquette Law School Poll surveys much more than the status of campaigns. Both as to Wisconsin and with national samples, each round of polling gets at what people think on a wide array of matters. These results get less attention but offer valuable windows on public opinion, and they are part of the reasons that Nate Silver, founder of *FiveThirtyEight*, recently rated the Marquette poll as no. 2 in the entire nation, out of more than 500 that were considered.

## Here are a few recent highlights.

**Data centers.** The Marquette poll of Wisconsin in February revealed a dramatic increase in opposition to large data centers. In October 2025, the poll found that 55% of those polled in the state regarded the costs of the energy-intensive centers as outweighing the benefits, while 44% said the benefits outweighed the costs. By February 2026, opposition had grown, with 70% seeing the costs as greater and only 29% seeing the benefits as greater. Furthermore, in October, there was virtually no difference in opinion based on partisanship. But in February, even with opinion among Republicans being little changed (43% seeing greater benefits, 55% greater costs), opposition among Democrats and independents soared. Among Democrats, 56% saw the costs as greater in October, but 85% said that in February.

Professor Charles Franklin, director of the poll, called it “one of the most sudden changes in public opinion we’ve seen in 14 years of the Marquette Law School Poll.”

**School spending.** Most shifts are gradual but no less illuminating. A good example: Since 2013, the poll has asked Wisconsinites 26 times which is more important to them: reducing property taxes or increasing spending on public schools. In 2013, opinion was close to evenly divided. In following years, peaking in 2018, support grew for school spending, such that it outpolled tax reductions

until 2023. But in eight polls starting that year, tax reduction drew more support. In February 2026, the results had climbed to 60% for tax reduction, 40% for public school spending.

That discovery aligns with results on a separate question, which have shown a trend toward opposing local school referendum proposals. Together, they indicate the headwinds facing advocates of increased school spending in Wisconsin.

“The point is slow but steady change in opinion over several years, in contrast to the sudden change on data centers,” Franklin says. “This illustrates the value of having long-term polling with a consistent question to track opinion change.”

**Partisan divides beyond elections.** On some issues, even ones related not to campaigns but to perceptions of what is going on, Marquette polls for years have shown the striking impact of partisanship on people’s views.

Consider the overall cost of groceries: Is it up or down over the last six months? Republicans these days are much less inclined to say that grocery prices have gone up than Democrats or independents. Or consider immigration or inflation: Republicans see immigration problems as more serious than do Democrats and attach much more urgency to immigration and border control. While majorities of all partisan groups think inflation and the cost of living are of great concern, only 57% of Republicans say this, compared to 86% of Democrats.

In Marquette’s national polls, perceptions of the U.S. Supreme Court also show partisan differences, with Republicans much more likely to approve of the Court’s work than independents or Democrats. That is today. But in July 2021, 58% of Republicans and 60% of Democrats approved of how the Court was handling its work. The past five years have seen a remarkable shift from bipartisan approval to a deep divide.

In Wisconsin, the race for the open seat for governor will be a big story in the second half of 2026. And the presidential election of 2028 is on the horizon. Count on the Marquette Law School Poll to keep the public informed on how those races shape up. At the same time, count on the poll also to continue to offer insight into a much wider range of issues. ■