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Marquette Law School Poll shows Walker leading Democrats, Obama leading Romney, and state divided on policy issues

Monthly poll series will provide snapshot of Wisconsin voter opinion

Please note: Complete poll results and methodology information can be found online at law.marquette.edu/poll

Milwaukee, Wis. -- Governor Scott Walker holds leads of six to ten percentage points over four potential Democratic opponents in hypothetical matchups for a possible gubernatorial recall election, according to the new [Marquette Law School Poll](#). President Obama holds a similar eight-point lead in the presidential race. Likewise, the state remains divided over a variety of policy issues.

The poll finds Walker ahead of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett by a 50 percent to 44 percent margin. Walker leads the only announced Democratic candidate, former Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, with a 49 percent to 42 percent margin. Walker leads former Congressman David Obey by 49 percent to 43 percent. Janesville Democratic State Senator Tim Cullen receives 40 percent to Walker's 50 percent. While Walker consistently leads his Democratic opponents, the size of the lead is within the poll's margin of error for all but Cullen.

The Marquette Law School Poll of 701 Wisconsin registered voters was conducted January 19-22 by both landline and cellular telephone. It is the first in a series of polls throughout the 2012 election year.

Professor Charles Franklin, director of the Marquette Law School Poll and visiting professor of law and public policy at Marquette Law School, noted, "The old line 'you don't beat somebody with nobody' is true. Other polls have asked only if Governor Walker should be recalled and have found closer races. But in the end, some specific Democrat will face Governor Walker. This poll is the first of the year to match specific potential Democratic challengers against the governor. The results show a competitive race but one in which Governor Walker starts with an advantage."

The potential Democratic candidates are significantly less well known than Walker. Asked to say if they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Walker, fully 95 percent of poll respondents were able to do so. In contrast, 61 percent could give an opinion of Barrett, 44 percent for Falk, 42 percent for Obey and just 18 percent for Cullen. Other possible candidates were not included in this survey.

Among 322 self-identified Democrats and independents who say they are closer to the Democratic Party, Barrett had a favorable-to-unfavorable split of 52-8, Falk 34-9, Obey 34-7 and Cullen 16-4. Democrats were also relatively unfamiliar with the possible candidates, with 40 percent unable to rate Barrett, 57 percent unable to rate Falk, 59 percent unable to rate Obey and 80 percent unable to rate Cullen.

Presidential race

A potential general election between President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney found Obama leading, 48 percent to 40 percent for Romney. A majority of interviews for the poll were completed before Saturday's South Carolina primary results were known.

President Obama was viewed favorably by 50 percent and unfavorably by 44 percent, while Governor Romney had a 30 percent favorable to 42 percent unfavorable rating. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich had a 25 to 53 favorable-to-unfavorable split.

Mike Gousha, distinguished fellow in law and public policy at Marquette Law School, commented, "This poll, like all polls, is a snapshot in time, not a prediction. It's the starting point for a series of monthly surveys that will measure public attitudes in this important and potentially historic election year."

Divided opinion on state policy issues

The poll also asked about specific policies that have been prominent in the political debate over the past year. Respondents were asked if they favored or opposed each policy. On two issues voters strongly supported recent changes in policy, on two the public was nearly evenly divided and on two majorities opposed cuts to specific programs.

- 74 percent favored and 22 percent opposed requiring state workers to pay more for pension and health benefits
- 66 percent favored and 32 percent opposed the state's new voter ID law
- 48 percent favored and 47 percent opposed limiting state employee unions' ability to bargain over benefits and non-wage issues
- 46 percent favored and 51 percent opposed the new law legalizing the possession of concealed weapons
- 38 percent favored and 55 percent opposed limiting the number of people eligible for the BadgerCare health assistance program
- 29 percent favored and 65 percent opposed reductions in state aid to public school

Polling Director Franklin assessed the results this way: "This split in opinion on some parts of Governor Walker's policy initiatives sets the stage for the upcoming campaign. Democrats can point to some issues where the majority opposes the governor's initiatives, while the governor can point to areas where the majority backs his policies. Despite the polarization of current politics there is actually a wide range of support and opposition across the various issues."

The poll asked respondents about job creation strategies. Asked if legislation aimed at increasing jobs in the state had succeeded, 31 percent said the legislation had increased jobs, though 44 percent said it had made no difference and 16 percent said the policies had decreased jobs.

Asked to think about all the changes in state government over the past year, 54 percent said the changes would make the state better off in the long run, while 40 percent said the state would be worse off.

Partisan divisions remain extremely strong, with some 87 percent of Republicans saying they approve of the job Walker is doing as governor while 82 percent of Democrats disapprove of how he is handling his job. Among independents Walker now holds a 54 percent to 34 percent approval majority. Overall, his approval rating stands at 51 to 46. This is in contrast to polls taken last year by other polling organizations which found slightly more disapproval than approval.

The poll also found that 50 percent of respondents thought the state was headed in the right direction, while 46 percent said it was off on the wrong track. For the nation as a whole, only 24 percent said the country was headed in the right direction while 70 percent said it was on the wrong track.

U.S. Senate race

In the U.S. Senate race, among Republican candidates, former Governor Tommy Thompson holds the highest favorable evaluation with 49 percent favorable to 31 percent unfavorable. Former Congressman Mark Neumann has 27 percent favorable to 18 percent unfavorable. Assembly Speaker Jeff Fitzgerald is viewed favorably by 15 percent and unfavorably by 18 percent, while State Senator Frank Lasee has a favorable rating of 5 percent and unfavorable of 9 percent. The public remains largely unfamiliar with the Senate candidates. Thompson is the most widely known with 80 percent able to give an opinion of him, while Neumann could be evaluated by 45 percent, Fitzgerald by 33 percent and Lasee by 14 percent.

The only announced Democratic candidate, Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin of Madison, had a 23 percent favorable to 21 percent unfavorable rating with 56 percent unable to rate her.

Combining self-identified Republican voters and those independents who say they are closer to the Republican party, a subset of 309 respondents, finds that Thompson holds a favorable-to-unfavorable split at 61-22, followed by Neumann at 46-10, Fitzgerald at 27-6 and Lasee at 6-7. The remainder of GOP voters was unable to rate the candidates.

About the Marquette Law School Poll

The Marquette Law School Poll is the most extensive independent statewide polling project in Wisconsin history. Running monthly through the 2012 election, it will provide a snapshot of voter attitudes from across the state on the possible gubernatorial recall election and the campaigns for president and U.S. Senate, in addition to gauging opinion on major policy questions.

Members of the public are invited to attend “[On the Issues with Mike Gousha](#)” at noon today at Marquette Law School, where Professor Franklin will provide further context on the poll results. Similar events will be held at the release of each poll throughout the year.

The poll interviewed 701 registered Wisconsin voters by both landline and cell phone January 19-22, 2012. The margin of error is +/- 3.8 percentage points for the full sample. The Republican subsample had 309 respondents and a margin of error of +/- 5.7 percentage points. The Democratic subsample had 322 respondents and a margin of error of +/-5.6 percentage points. The margin of error for the size of the lead in the governor’s race is 7.0-7.2 points. The entire questionnaire, full results and breakdowns by demographic groups are available at <http://law.marquette.edu/poll>.

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