

# Marquette University: Amid major national developments, new Marquette Law School Poll finds Wisconsin voter preferences holding steady in presidential race

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MILWAUKEE – A new Marquette Law School poll of likely Wisconsin voters finds little change in preference or attitudes following the first presidential debate and after President Donald Trump tested positive for COVID-19. While twice as many respondents say former Vice President Joe Biden did better in the debate as say Trump did better, the shift in the vote margin since early September is a single point.

In the new poll, Biden is the choice of 46% of likely voters and Trump is supported by 41%. Libertarian candidate Jo Jorgensen is the choice of 4%, while 8% say they would vote for none of these candidates, don't know how they would vote or decline to say.

In early September, Biden was supported by 47%, Trump by 43% and Jorgensen by 4%. Another 7% said they would vote for none of these candidates, didn't know how they would vote or declined to say.

Other findings from the new poll include:

- A third of respondents think Trump has mild symptoms from COVID-19, while slightly more say they don't yet know how ill he is.
- Most think that in-person campaign rallies should be halted, while a majority

think the debates should continue.

- By a 2-to-1 margin, voters say Biden did a better job in the debate.
- More people than in September say they are very worried by the risk of getting ill from the coronavirus, and support for requiring masks in public places is slightly higher than in August when last asked.
- Over a third say they've stopped talking about politics with someone, and this varies by political party.

The poll was conducted Sept. 30-Oct. 4, 2020. The sample included 805 registered voters in Wisconsin, interviewed by cell phone or landline, with a margin of error of +/- 4.2 percentage points. There were 700 likely voters, with a margin of error of +/- 4.6 percentage points. Five items were added to the survey after Trump announced he had tested positive for COVID-19 and were asked Oct. 2-4 to 355 registered voters. Results for that group have a margin of error of +/- 6.4 percentage points.

Table 1 shows the trend in vote among likely voters from May through September. Jorgensen was not included prior to September. None of the poll-to-poll changes in support are outside the margin of error. There is less variation in support of presidential candidates than in either the 2012 or 2016 summer and fall Marquette Law School polls.

*Table 1: Vote among likely voters, May-October 2020*

Poll Dates	Net Dem-Rep	Joe Biden	Donald Trump	Jo Jorgensen	None/other (VOL)	Don't know	Refused
5/3-7/20	4	49	45	NA	3	2	1
6/14-18/20	6	50	44	NA	3	2	1
8/4-9/20	5	49	44	NA	3	2	1
8/30-9/3/20	4	47	43	4	2	3	2
9/30-10/4/20	5	46	41	4	1	3	4

## Reactions to Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis

Among respondents interviewed Oct. 2-4, after Trump announced that he had tested positive for COVID-19, 33% say they think he has a mild case, 13% say it is a moderate case, 8% say it is a serious case and 3% say it is a very serious case. A

substantial 37% say they don't know how serious Trump's illness is.

Following Trump's diagnosis, 52% say both Trump and Biden should stop holding in-person campaign rallies, while 37% say rallies are safe and should continue.

In contrast, 67% say the vice-presidential and remaining presidential debates should be held as scheduled, while 23% say the debates should be canceled.

Asked about the vice-presidential candidates, all following the announcement of Trump's illness, 33% say they are very confident and 23% are somewhat confident in Vice President Mike Pence's ability to perform the duties of president, while 12% are not very confident and 21% are not at all confident.

For Sen. Kamala Harris, 25% say they are very confident and 20% are somewhat confident in her ability to perform the duties of president, while 11% are not very confident and 29% are not at all confident.

### **Who did best in the debate?**

Among all registered voters polled, 41% say Biden did the best job in the first presidential debate on Sept. 29, while 20% say Trump did best. Fourteen percent say both did badly, while 21% say they didn't pay much attention to the debate. Less than a half of 1% say both candidates did well.

There are substantial differences in perceived debate performance by partisanship, as shown in Table 2. Few partisans give the edge to the other party's candidate, although more than one in five Republicans and Independents volunteer that both candidates did badly, while only 6% of Democrats agree.

*Table 2: Regardless of which candidate you happen to support, who do you think did the best job in the first presidential debate, Joe Biden or Donald Trump, or didn't you pay much attention to the debate? By party identification*

Party ID	Biden	Trump	Didn't pay much attention	Both did equally well (VOL)	Both did badly (VOL)	Don't know
Republican	9	41	25	1	21	3
Independent	24	15	30	1	23	6
Democrat	76	1	15	0	6	2

## Senate action on Supreme Court nominee

Judge Amy Coney Barrett has been nominated to fill the vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court created by the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Forty-four percent think the Senate should vote on this nomination before the November elections, while 51% think the Senate should wait until after the election to decide whether to vote on the nomination. This is a sharply partisan issue, as shown in Table 3.

*Table 3: Do you think the Senate should vote on the nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court before the presidential election or wait until after the election to decide whether or not to vote on the nomination? By party identification*

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## **Attitudes concerning COVID-19**

In October, 27% say they are very worried about being ill from the coronavirus, an increase from 21% in September. Twenty-one percent say they are not at all worried, virtually the same as the 19% in September.

Table 4 shows how worries have varied since March, when the percent very or somewhat worried was at the highest level seen so far. Since June, the percent who are very worried has fluctuated, seemingly in line with periods of increasing or decreasing numbers of new cases of COVID-19 in the state, while the number of those not at all worried has stabilized close to 20%.

*Table 4: Taking into consideration both your risk of contracting it and the seriousness of the illness, how worried are you personally about experiencing coronavirus? March-October 2020*

Poll date	Very worried	Somewhat worried	Not very worried	Not worried at all	Already had COVID-19 (VOL)	Don't know
3/24-29/20	30	40	18	11	0	0
5/3-7/20	25	35	20	19	0	0
6/14-18/20	19	36	21	24	1	1
8/4-9/20	27	36	17	19	1	0
8/30-9/3/20	21	39	19	19	1	0
9/30-10/4/20	27	34	16	21	2	0

Half of respondents think the pandemic will continue for another year or more before things start to return to normal, while 20% say it will be under control within three months. These results are shown in Table 5.

*Table 5: When do you think the coronavirus outbreak will be under control and things can get back to normal? October 2020*

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A plurality, 47%, think the Big Ten conference and University of Wisconsin—Madison should play football this fall, while 40% think they should not play.

In October, 72% agree that masks should be required in public places, while 26%



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While substantial majorities in all regions support a mask requirement, there are partisan differences which have persisted since August, as shown in Table 7. Republicans are divided on the issue, while a large majority of independents support requiring masks and Democrats are almost unanimous in support.

*Table 7: Support for requiring masks by party identification by poll, August and October 2020*

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## **Views of protests, BLM and Evers' response to events in Kenosha**

Approval of protests over police violence against Black Americans declined from June to early August, prior to events in Kenosha, but barely moved following the late-August Kenosha shootings and protests, as shown in Table 8.

*Table 8: Approval of protests against police shootings, June-October 2020*





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Forty percent approve of the way Gov. Tony Evers handled events in Kenosha following the police shooting of Jacob Blake in August, while 44% disapprove of his

response.

### Approval of Trump’s handling of protests

Table 10 shows approval, since June, of Trump’s handling of protests since the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. There is little change from September to October.

*Table 10: Approve or disapprove of Trump’s handling of protests, June-October 2020*

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**Views of Trump, Biden, Pence and Harris**

Favorable and unfavorable views of Trump have been stable in recent months. Trump has held a 42% favorable rating since June, with 53-to-55% unfavorable.

Biden’s favorable rating has slowly increased, with October showing the first net favorable rating for him this year at 48% favorable with 45% unfavorable.

The full trends for both Trump and Biden are shown in Tables 11 and 12.

*Table 11: Favorable or unfavorable view of Trump, January-October 2020*

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*Table 12: Favorable or unfavorable view of Biden, January-October 2020*



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The vice-presidential candidates are less familiar to respondents, with 17% unable to give a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Vice President Mike Pence and 23% unable to give an opinion of Sen. Kamala Harris.

Tables 13 and 14 shows favorable and unfavorable ratings for Pence and Harris this fall.

*Table 13: Favorable or unfavorable view of Pence, September-October 2020*







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**Trump’s handling of the economy**

Handling of the economy remains Trump’s strongest area of approval, with 51% approval and 45% disapproval in October. The full trend since May is shown in Table 16.

*Table 16: Approve or disapprove of Trump’s handling of the economy, May-October 2020*



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### Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic

After an initial approval rating in March of over 50% for his handling of the coronavirus outbreak, Trump's approval rating has fallen to 41% in October, unchanged from September. The full trend is shown in Table 17.

*Table 17: Approve or disapprove of Trump's handling of the coronavirus outbreak, March-October 2020*

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Evers' handling of the coronavirus issue brings approval from 56% and disapproval from 38%. That is a one-point decline in approval from September. The trend in



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**Choice of ballot type for November election**

The number of voters who say they will vote absentee by mail has leveled off at about a third of the total, compared to 43% who said in May that they planned to do that. The number who say they will vote in person on Election Day continues to rise. Table 20 shows the trend since May.

*Table 20: Ballot type, by poll, May-October 2020*

Poll date	Election Day, in person	Early, in person	Absentee by mail	Probably/might not vote	Don't know
5/3-7/20	39	11	43	2	4
8/4-9/20	46	12	35	3	3
8/30-9/3/20	50	14	32	2	2
9/30-10/4/20	54	10	32	1	3

Most Republicans intend to vote in person on Election Day, with fewer than one-fifth planning to choose absentee by mail. By contrast, almost half of Democrats expect to proceed absentee by mail, as shown in Table 21, more even than on Election Day.

*Table 21: Ballot type by party identification, October 2020*

Party ID	Election Day, in person	Early, in person	Absentee by mail	Probably/might not vote	Don't know	Refused
Republican	69	11	18	1	2	0
Independent	59	4	22	6	6	3
Democrat	39	11	47	1	2	0

There have been changes in the preferred type of ballot since May, with a smaller percentage in each partisan category choosing absentee by mail, though large partisan differences persist, as shown in Table 22.

*Table 22: Ballot type by party identification, by poll, May-October 2020*

Party ID	Poll date	Election Day, in person	Early, in person	Absentee by mail	Probably/might not vote	Don't know
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Republican	5/3-7/20	59	13	25	1	2
Republican	8/4-9/20	67	12	15	3	3
Republican	8/30-9/3/20	69	11	18	1	1
Republican	9/30-10/4/20	69	11	18	1	2
Independent	5/3-7/20	30	15	43	5	6
Independent	8/4-9/20	39	15	27	13	5
Independent	8/30-9/3/20	41	18	29	8	3
Independent	9/30-10/4/20	59	4	22	6	6
Democrat	5/3-7/20	21	9	62	3	5
Democrat	8/4-9/20	27	12	55	2	3
Democrat	8/30-9/3/20	34	16	47	2	1
Democrat	9/30-10/4/20	39	11	47	1	2

May was the high-water mark, among all partisan categories, for the percentage saying they would vote absentee by mail. Republicans and independents have been relatively stable in their type of ballot since August, though independents are a bit more likely to say they will vote in person in the October survey. The percentage of Democrats choosing absentee by mail has declined since May while their intention to vote in-person on Election Day has increased.

With substantial partisan differences in choice of ballot type, there are large differences in candidate choice by ballot type, as shown in Table 23 among likely voters. The margin for Trump among Election Day voters has declined over time, while Biden's advantage among absentee and early in-person voters has remained strong over the last two months.

*Table 23: Vote by ballot type by poll wave, May-October 2020*



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### **Stopped talking about politics**

Just over one in three respondents, 36%, say they have stopped talking about politics with at least one person because of disagreements over the presidential election, while 63% say they have not done this. This is little changed from October 2016, when 34% said they had stopped talking and 65% said they had not.

Democrats are more likely to have stopped talking about politics than are Republicans or independents and have become more unwilling to talk in 2020 than in 2016. Table 24 shows the comparison by party for 2016 and 2020.

*Table 24: Is there anyone you have stopped talking with about politics due to disagreements over the election for president? By party identification and by year, October 2016 and October 2020*

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**Family financial situation**



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### **Views of state officials**

Tables 28-30 present the recent favorability ratings of elected officials in Wisconsin and the percentage of respondents who haven't heard enough or say they don't know.

*Table 28: Evers' recent favorability trend*

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Table 30: Sen. Ron Johnson's recent favorability trend



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## About the Marquette Law School Poll

The Marquette Law School Poll is the most extensive statewide polling project in Wisconsin history. This poll interviewed 805 registered Wisconsin voters by landline or cell phone from Sept. 30-Oct. 4, 2020. The margin of error is +/-4.2 percentage points for the full sample. There are 700 likely voters with a margin of error of +/- 4.6 percentage points. Five items were added to the survey after Trump announced he had tested positive for COVID-19 and were asked Oct. 2-4 with a sample size of 355 registered voters and a margin of error of +/- 6.4.

The partisan makeup of the sample, including those who lean to a party, is 44% Republican, 45% Democratic and 10% independent. The partisan makeup of the sample, excluding those who lean to a party, is 29% Republican, 29% Democratic and 41% independent.

Since January 2017, the long-term partisan balance, including those who lean to a party, in the Marquette poll has been 45% Republican and 45% Democratic, with 9% independent. Partisanship excluding those who lean has been 30% Republican and 29% Democratic, with 40% independent.

The entire questionnaire, methodology statement, full results and breakdowns by demographic groups are available at [law.marquette.edu/poll/results-and-data](http://law.marquette.edu/poll/results-and-data).