

UW-Madison: Poll takes Wisconsin's temperature on policy in lead-up to 2022 elections

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MADISON – The La Follette Policy Poll, released today by UW-Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs, finds residents divided along party lines on issues like climate change and government regulation but generally in agreement on others, such as concerns about healthcare and retirement savings.

According to Professor Susan Webb Yackee, the school's director, the poll "is not a political survey, but instead an investigation of public perceptions about policy issues in the state and national arena."

With Wisconsin poised to be a battleground state in the 2022 elections, residents' opinions on vital policy issues could have national implications.

The polling questions covered a range of topics, including:

- The most pressing issues facing the U.S. and Wisconsin
- Confidence in government
- Personal finances and the economy
- Water quality, climate and the environment
- Government regulation
- Racial equity

Nearly 1,600 residents answered the eight-page survey, distributed by mail to 5,000 randomly selected households, for a 33% response rate. The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 2.5% (at 95% confidence).

"By working with the UW Survey Center, we created an authoritative poll, with responses from every corner of the state, including 71 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. We made sure that we gathered opinions from across the entire state, including in rural Wisconsin," says Yackee.

The poll was in the field from July 14 to September 24, 2021. Because it is representative of the state as a whole, and because it focuses on persistent Wisconsin attitudes rather than attempting to capture a political snapshot, the results provide a revealing portrait of public opinion in a state that could affect the national balance of power this November.

Respondents answered questions about a variety of policy issues, ranking each as: not a problem, a small problem, somewhat of a problem, quite a problem, or an extremely big problem. This allowed the poll to zero in on exactly what's keeping Wisconsin residents up at night.

On every issue, residents are more concerned about what is happening in the nation than the situation in Wisconsin. For example, 39% of respondents thought climate change was an extremely big problem nationally, but only 27% felt the same about climate change in the state. Likewise, 35% of respondents ranked race relations as an extremely big problem nationally, while only 24% thought that was true in Wisconsin.

Yackee explains, "Wisconsin elections are becoming increasingly nationalized—they affect outcomes in the country at large. The La Follette Policy Poll points to some reasons why that is true. Wisconsinites—and I mean all Wisconsinites, Democrats, Republicans and Independents—view public policy issues as more problematic in the U.S. overall than in our state. This suggests that a national lens on public policy issues like healthcare, climate change, the budget deficit and government regulation might get folks more engaged and make them more likely to vote."

Breaking down the data by political identification, age and gender provides some interesting comparisons. For example, Democrats are more concerned about climate change and income and wealth distribution, while Republicans are more concerned about the federal deficit and government regulation.

Younger respondents consistently rank climate change, healthcare and income and wealth distribution as bigger problems than older respondents.

The widest differences in opinions on climate change, healthcare, race issues and income and wealth distribution are apparent when the poll responses are broken down by gender. Respondents identifying as female are more likely to call climate change, healthcare, race relations and income and wealth distribution extremely big national problems than males.

The complete set of poll questions and results is available for download here: <https://uwmadison.app.box.com/s/djnxwiikofa56zcykdzzdv8q4b6n5kws>

Details on the poll's methodology are available here: <https://lafollette-kohl.wisc.edu/la-follette-policy-poll/methodology/>

An interactive analysis of the problem assessment data is available on Tableau here: <https://lafollette-kohl.wisc.edu/la-follette-policy-poll/analysis/>