

Brian Knox: The power of public opinion

Posted on Thursday, Jul 27, 2023

The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.

Planned a vacation lately? Did you ask others for their opinions on where to go, what to do, where to stay, dine, etc.? It is likely those opinions helped you optimize your time, budget and location for a more enjoyable experience overall. That is how reliable public input works and helps make a difference, and that's why good public opinion polls are popular, especially among those who represent us on the state and federal levels. Legislators can get a snapshot of what people believe are the most important issues.

All polls are certainly not perfect, and some have significant margins of error causing skepticism. Many cater specifically to political parties and philosophies that can skew outcomes, but others can offer quick, efficient looks at what the public is thinking.

Recently, two of the more popular, unbiased and scientific pollsters released new polls with information on potential key issues for the upcoming election season.

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

According to a July [Quinnipiac University Poll](#), voters surveyed revealed the following on what's most important to them right now (selected excerpts from poll):

31 percent - **the economy**

29 percent - **preserving U.S. democracy**

7 percent - **abortion**

7 percent – **gun violence**

6 percent **immigration**

6 percent **health care**

6 percent **racial inequality**

5 percent **climate change**

Meanwhile, a June [Marquette University Law School Poll](#) in Wisconsin revealed some similar, yet different state-specific issues of concern (selected excerpts from poll):

- **Abortion** – 32 said keep abortion legal in all cases; 34 said legal in most cases; 25 said illegal in most cases; 6 said illegal in all cases; 1 don't know; 1 refused
- **Overturing Roe V Wade** – 95 support; 289 oppose
- **Increasing Shared Revenue** – 211 support; 62 oppose, 25 don't know
- **Which is more important, reducing property taxes or increasing public school spending?** – 50 said reducing taxes, 47 said increasing public school spending; 2 don't know
- **Support or oppose school vouchers** – 266 favor; 226 oppose; 6 don't know
- **Concern about safety and water supply** – 111 very concerned; 144 somewhat concerned; 157 not too concerned; 88 not concerned at all.
- **Concern about PFAS contamination** – 170 very concerned; 178 somewhat concerned; 93 not too concerned; 44 not concerned at all

As legislators return to their districts this summer, expect these and other issues to be discussed at length in local town hall meetings. The most prominent topics will then likely re-emerge to become the potential basis for future legislation and/or campaign platforms. Meanwhile, public opinion polling, both internal/external and alongside focus groups and district meetings, will continue to have its place in advising on top-of-mind concerns for state and federal legislators.

—*Brian Knox is an executive vice president at [Laughlin Constable Public Relations](#) in Milwaukee. He leads public affairs services for the firm's clients.*