

*****FOR RELEASE ON MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2000*****
Wisconsin Public Radio/St. Norbert College Survey Center
The Wisconsin Survey
Spring 2000

TOPIC: 2000 Presidential Election Straw Poll

RELEASE DATE: April 3, 2000

SAMPLE: 574

MARGIN OF ERROR: +/-4.1%

General Impressions of Presidential Candidates

"I would like to ask you a series of questions about next years presidential election. For each of the candidates that I mention please tell me if you have heard of this person, and if so tell me if your general impression of that person is favorable or unfavorable."

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Unfamiliar	Not Sure
George W. Bush	52%	40%	8%	<1%	<1%
Al Gore	50	41	8	<1	1
Patrick Buchanan	13	63	13	8	3

Issues in Presidential Selection

"Next, I would like to know which issues will be most important to you in the upcoming presidential election. For each issue that I read please tell me if the issue is very important, somewhat important, not too important or not important at all. Let us begin with foreign policy issues, would you say foreign policy issues in the upcoming election are. . .?"

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Too Important	Not at all Important	Not Sure
Foreign Policy Issues	53%	40%	6%	1%	<1%
Candidate's Character	65	29	4	2	<1
Social Security/Medicare Issues	74	24	1	<1	<1
Abortion Policy	38	39	15	7	2
Nation's Economy	78	20	1	<1	<1

Moral Standards	65	27	6	2	<1
Health Care Issues	72	25	3	<1	<1
Taxes	65	31	3	<1	<1
Crime	70	26	3	1	<1
Education	81	17	1	<1	<1
Campaign Finance Reform	26	43	20	10	2

General Election

"If the next presidential election were held today, and Al Gore was the Democratic nominee, and George W. Bush was the Republican nominee, which candidate would you vote for?"

	Spring 1999	Fall 1999	Spring 2000
Al Gore	42%	36%	46%
George W. Bush	50	51	46
Neither	4	6	3
Not Sure	4	8	6

Summary

With Al Gore and George W. Bush clinching their respective party nominations by mid-March, Wisconsinites lost any chance for the April 4th primary to influence the outcome of the nomination process. However, the statistical dead heat that arises in this spring's survey between the presumptive nominees precurse a tight battle for Wisconsin's eleven electoral votes during the fall campaign.

In a match-up between Al Gore and George W. Bush, 46% of respondents favored each candidate respectively with three percent (3%) saying neither and six percent (6%) not sure. This number indicates a dead heat between the two candidates. When examining the trend data between Gore and Bush since last spring, Gore has made considerable progress in closing the public opinion gap between himself and Bush. In spring of 1999, 42% of respondents favored Gore and 50% favored Bush. By the fall of 2000, Gore saw his support drop six percentage points to 36% and Bush ticked up one percentage point to 51%. Now, the survey results show that Gore has improved his numbers by ten percentage points to 46% while Bush declined five percentage points to 46% thereby creating this dead heat between the two candidates.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SUPPORTERS

Support for the presidential candidates varied significantly by the characteristics of Wisconsin's electorate. As may be expected Wisconsin's Democrats and Republicans overwhelmingly indicate intent to vote for their party's candidate this fall, with 84% of Democrats backing Gore and 90% of Republicans supporting Bush. Similarly, among individuals describing themselves as very liberal Gore maintains a 4 to 1 advantage, while Bush holds over a 5-to-1 lead among the state's very conservative. Also of interest is Governor Bush's standing among Catholic voters in the wake of the controversy surrounding his visit to Bob Jones University. Currently Bush trails Gore by 7 percentage points (50-44) among Wisconsin Catholics, while maintaining a ten point lead among Protestant Wisconsinites (53%-43%). Not surprisingly the Vice President holds a substantial lead over Bush among the state's union members, with 57% of union members backing Gore compared to 36% supporting Bush. Vice president Gore also does well among voter's in Wisconsin's larger cities, holding a 6% lead over the Texas Governor, while Bush holds a 6% lead over Gore in Wisconsin communities under 10,000 citizens. As in past presidential elections in Wisconsin, voter income plays a major role, with individuals from households earning less than \$40,000 strongly supporting Gore, while their counterparts from families making over \$40,000 significantly more likely to back Bush.

Perhaps the most important demographic factor in this race will be the voter's gender. As President Clinton rode the support of women to an overwhelming victory in 1996, the Vice President has been buoyed by an increase in support among the state's women. Last November we reported that Gore and Bush were statistically even among Wisconsin's women voter's with Bush finding 46% support and Gore gaining 44%. In the post five months Gore's fortunes have made a turn for the better as he now holds a 10 percentage point lead (53%-43%) over Bush among Wisconsin females. Conversely Bush maintains a 10% lead among men in the state, with 51% supporting the governor and 41% supporting the vice president.

FAVORABILITY RATINGS

The two major candidates for the presidency share almost identical favorability ratings among the state's residents. This finding marks a major departure from last November when Bush maintained big leads over Gore in both favorable and unfavorable ratings. Currently Governor Bush is viewed favorably by 52% of Wisconsinites, with 40% maintaining unfavorable views. Vice President Gore receives almost identical ratings from state residents with 50% viewing him favorably and 41% viewing him unfavorably. The current results mark positive gains by the Vice President who saw his favorable rating increase by 9 points (41% to 50%) since the fall, with a respective 6% (47% to 41%) decrease in the percentage of Wisconsin residents who rate him negatively. Conversely, the Texas governor has seen a 4% (56% -52%) drop in favorability among state residents, with a 10% increase in the number of residents viewing him unfavorably. These results may be explained by the difficult struggle Bush was engaged in during the early primary season. The battle with Arizona Senator John McCain may have cut into Bush's advantage over Gore by eroding Bush's once dominant 2 to 1 favorable to unfavorable rating in the state.

ISSUE IMPORTANCE

The survey also provides insight into the issues that will be most important to Wisconsin voters this November. The results indicate that education is perceived, as the most important issue in the upcoming election, with over 8 out of 10 residents stating that education was very important to their decision. Closely behind education were issues dealing with the nation's economy (78%), Social Security and Medicare (74%) and health care (72%). Issues dealing with the candidate's character and the nation's

moral standards trailed behind this first group of issues, with 65% of Wisconsin residents rating character and moral issues as very important to them. Among issues examined in this study, abortion and campaign finance reform were viewed as least important in terms of the presidential election, with 38% and 26% of residents rating these issues as very important for their upcoming election decision. Interestingly supporters of Bush and Gore view the importance of these key issues almost identically, with the biggest variation found on the campaign finance reform issue. More specifically, 51% of Gore supporters indicated that the issue is very or somewhat important, while 44% of Bush supporters provided similar ratings.

CONCLUSION

As we approach the end of primary season and attention turns towards the general election of the fall, the presidential race appears to have tightened to a dead heat within Wisconsin. The results of the latest WPR/SNC Survey Center "Wisconsin Survey" have confirmed the widely held view that the Badger State will be a key battleground in the race for the White House.

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