



INSTITUTE FOR  
REFORMING GOVERNMENT

CITIZENS  
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ACTION

# WHAT WISCONSIN WANTS

THE VIEWS OF 2024 TRUMP  
VOTERS WHO SAT OUT THE 2022  
GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION



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## ABOUT IRG

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The Institute for Reforming Government, along with its partner organization IRG Action Fund, is focused on developing free-market and limited-government reforms, taking action on them, and getting results for Wisconsin. Founded in 2018, IRG has quickly grown into one of the state's largest think tanks, boasting an elite policy team with decades of experience in state and federal government, trade associations, and statewide campaigns. Most importantly, IRG gets results for the conservative movement in Wisconsin.

[ReformingGovernment.org](http://ReformingGovernment.org)

## ABOUT CITIZENS FOR FREE ENTERPRISE ACTION

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Citizens for Free Enterprise Action stands at the forefront of the fight to preserve and expand American prosperity. Our mission is to promote the principles of free enterprise so that all Americans understand the vital role it plays in creating a dynamic economy, driving innovation, and providing people with the opportunity to climb the economic ladder. Through education, advocacy, and engagement, we aim to highlight how policies that support free enterprise lead to stronger communities and greater opportunity for families across the country.

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The Institute for Reforming Government has recently completed another segment of its *What Wisconsin Wants* series, in conjunction with Citizens for Free Enterprise Action, this time focused on 2024 Trump voters who did not participate in the 2022 gubernatorial election. IRG and CFFEA each paid for a portion of the research.

**What We Did.** IRG and CFFEA partnered with Heart+Mind Strategies to conduct deep qualitative research among a limited sample of Wisconsin voters who cast a vote for Donald Trump in 2024 but did not vote in the 2022 elections which featured the statewide race for Governor.



**Why We Did This.** Donald Trump won the state of Wisconsin in 2024 with 49.6% of the vote – the highest total for a Republican Presidential candidate since Ronald Reagan. Among these Trump voters is a segment that did not participate in the 2022 gubernatorial race where Democrat Tony Evers won with an even higher percentage of the vote (51.2%).

Aristotle's *Voter Lists Online* product shows there are just over 140,000 inferred Republican active voters in the state of Wisconsin who were registered in time to vote in the 2022 gubernatorial election but did not participate. These voters all went on to cast a ballot in the 2024 Presidential contest.

President Trump won Wisconsin by fewer than 30,000 votes in 2024 meaning this segment delivered the state for Trump while their non-participation two-years earlier likely gave state-level control to the opposite party.

The Institute for Reforming Government is dedicated to developing and supporting policy reforms that provide all Wisconsinites with the opportunity to succeed, prosper and have their voices heard. If there is a group of voters in Wisconsin that supports the bold change in direction on policy that the Trump Administration represents but does not feel compelled to apply those preferences at the state level, IRG would like to better understand why state-level action is perceived as less important or not ready for significant course change.

What drives such an influential segment of voters to turn out for a presidential election but not for the top state contest? This research explores that question to better understand how state-level government can serve the people of Wisconsin.



## KEY FINDINGS

**Cost of living is the key issue in the state.** People are using different words to describe their cost-of-living challenges – economy, housing affordability, taxes, inflation – but it all comes down to a significant gap between income and the cost to live their lives.

**State elections hit closer to home—but people don't immediately see the impact and are often more drawn to debates at the federal level.** However, engaging in conversation about how much impact and control state government has over voters' daily lives does a great deal to shift the discussion and is a huge motivator for future participation

**Economic and immigration concerns drove votes for Trump.** This segment of voters is largely happy with their choice a year into the administration, with border security and gas prices being clear examples of success. However, voters are still feeling the economic pinch and are waiting for clear and significant progress on cost-of-living issues.

**The gubernatorial race in 2022 was less enticing to these Trump voters.** Most voters in this segment knew the 2022 race for Governor was happening but did not feel a strong drive to participate. Lack of knowledge about the race and candidates was a strong driver of non-participation. Voters understand state and local issues impact their lives but seem to need a reminder in the moment to fully engage in the election process.

**Participation in 2026 for this segment will hinge on being informed and underscoring the importance of state and local elections.** Few are paying attention to November's race today. If they do vote, most of this segment anticipates casting a vote for the Republican. Providing concrete information on candidates, what they plan to do, and how it will impact voters' daily lives is key to getting off-cycle voters to turnout.

### Key ways to drive 2026 voter turnout:



**Make state impact visible.** Show people concrete examples of how state decisions directly affected their taxes, schools, or communities in the past year.



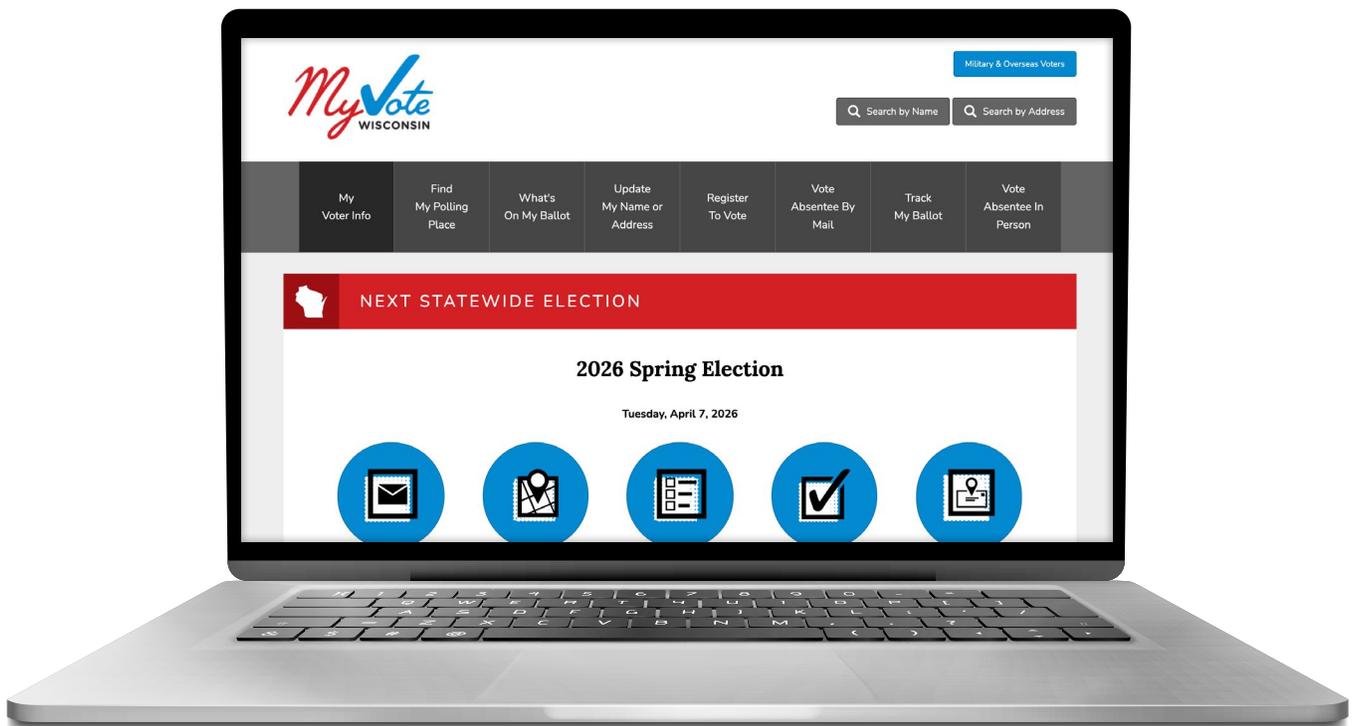
**Simplify state information.** Create easy-to-understand guides showing what state officials actually control versus federal officials.



**Emphasize voting power.** Highlight that individual votes matter more in state races due to lower turnout.

## WHAT WE DID

Heart+Mind Strategies was hired by the Institute for Reforming Government and Citizens for Free Enterprise Action to better understand Wisconsin voters who turned out in 2024 to support President Trump but did not participate in the 2022 state Gubernatorial election. A multi-day, online qualitative bulletin board exercise designed to get deep feedback on complicated topics was undertaken with voters who met this election history criteria. These voters were required to provide their birthdate to participate so their election year participation could be verified by the [myvote.wi.gov](https://myvote.wi.gov) website. In total, 17 voters participated in the study which ran online from December 16 to 19, 2025.



### LIFE IN WISCONSIN

Most Wisconsin voters who supported President Trump but didn't participate in state elections in 2022 want their state to be more affordable and economically strong. Housing costs, healthcare access, and overall cost of living dominate their concerns. Many also hope to see job growth, better infrastructure, and stronger communities.

#### KEY ISSUES

This segment of Wisconsin voters are very concerned with the cost of living and particularly housing. Multiple people emphasized that housing and living costs need to come down significantly. This is connected to the desire to see more economic opportunities in the state that could help better the lives of residents.

***"I hope the housing market becomes more affordable. The way it is currently, any single person would not be able to afford the outrageous prices."***

*- Rural Republican*

***"I hope that the economy as a whole gets better. Specifically, affordable housing. We are barely able to pay rent and save anything for the future."***

*- Suburban Republican*

***"From living in southeastern Wisconsin, it seems like a big boom of businesses are coming and going to grow the area. I read recently about Eli Lilly's investment into Pleasant Prairie, Foxconn upping their investment in Mount Pleasant, and Microsoft working on their data center. It could be good for the area with more job opportunities."***

*- Urban Republican*

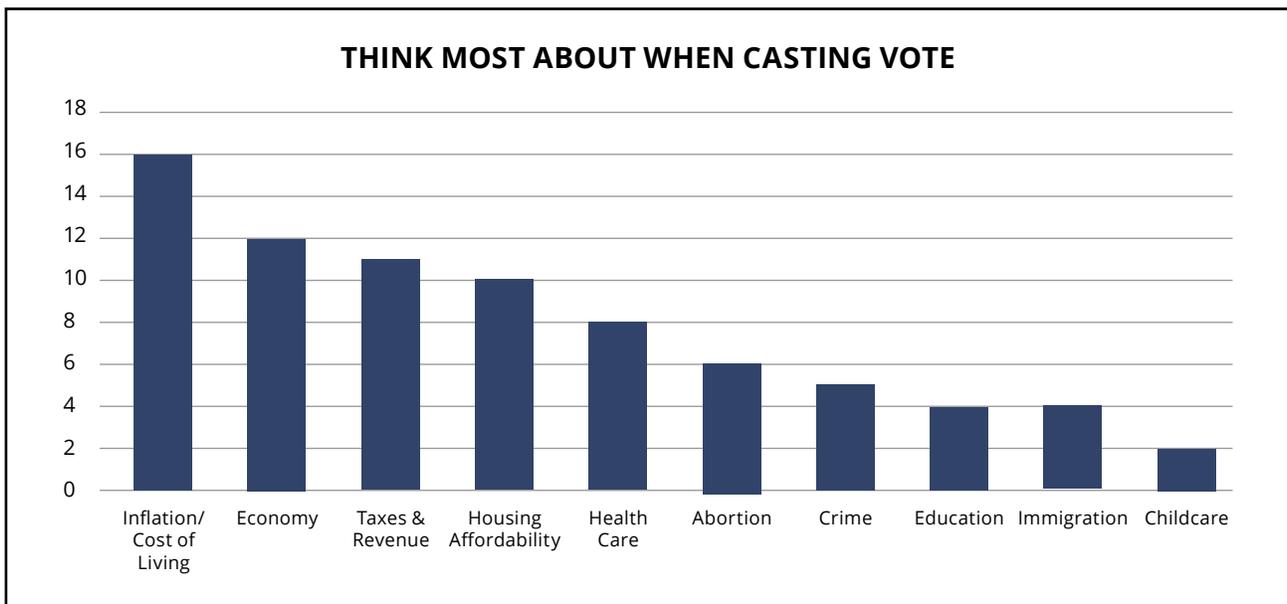
Affordability issues dominate concerns at both the national and state level although at the national level there is more talk about inflation and at the state level there is more of a focus on the affordability of specific items like housing, and taxes. The common thread across all responses is that people feel squeezed financially. They're watching prices climb faster than their paychecks grow, making it harder to afford basics like food, housing, and healthcare.

***“The cost of living has gone up making my family have to pinch pennies a bit more than we used to. We really have to pay attention to what we buy and the prices at the grocery store, and we try to get gas on the days that the price dips.”***

*– Rural Republican*

Other state-level issues include education and the quality of schools in their community, crime and drug use, and infrastructure development like local roads, environmental conditions, and downtown development. At the national level, people also mentioned immigration and tariffs but also interestingly abortion, education and healthcare costs, all of which can be addressed in significant ways at the state level.

Figure 1



## HOW THESE ISSUES SHOW UP IN DAILY LIFE

- **Housing and Rent**

People describe feeling trapped by housing costs. Rent increases have pushed many backs into living paycheck to paycheck, even when there are multiple incomes in the household. One person noted that a house worth \$150,000 six or seven years ago now costs over \$300,000.

- **Food and Everyday Expenses**

Groceries have become a major burden. People report prices doubling or tripling over the past five years, making it hard to feed their families.

***“I’ve witnessed groceries more than triple in cost and it’s not sustainable. People should be able to afford to feed themselves and their families.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

- **Healthcare and Insurance**

Rising deductibles, premiums, and out-of-pocket costs make healthcare less accessible. Some areas have lost hospitals and providers, forcing people to travel further for care.

***“The deductible and out of pocket for my health insurance has increased as well as the premium I pay. Yet my income has not kept up with how much everything costs.”***

*– Urban Republican*

- **Childcare and Education**

Families with young children say childcare costs are so high that both parents working barely covers the expense. People worry about affording quality education for their kids.



# ENGAGEMENT IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

## NATIONAL POLITICS

Most people say they don't follow national politics very closely, though a few pay moderate attention. Many describe their engagement as limited by busy schedules, lack of interest, or difficulty trusting news sources. Those who do follow national news tend to focus on a few specific issues that affect them directly.

***"I don't follow politics at a national level as close as I should. It doesn't always interest me, but that doesn't mean I shouldn't follow along with it to be aware."***

*- Urban Republican*

***"I don't follow politics closely, but my husband does. He enlightens me from time to time on things. Most things are so negative in politics, and that is why I am not really interested."***

*- Rural Republican*

## STATE POLITICS

Most people say they follow state and local politics less closely than national politics, though a few feel more connected to issues happening in their own communities. Many participants admit they don't pay much attention to state-level issues. Several say they only notice state politics when major headlines break through, or they simply feel the effects without actively tracking what's happening.

***"In all honesty, I am usually not following them very closely."***

*- Suburban Republican*

***"Less than a national level. Usually only see something if it's getting headline news."***

*- Suburban Independent*

When people do pay attention to state politics, they focus on issues that touch their lives like education and school funding, environmental protection, and crime in their area.

***"I feel more connected to state politics because that's what is happening in my exact community/neighborhood/city."***

*- Rural Republican*

***"I follow closer than national news. I think the issues with schools and how they are funded and all of the short falls etc. are a big problem."***

*- Suburban Republican*

## **ROLES FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT**

Most people believe the federal government should focus on large-scale issues that affect the entire country, like the economy, immigration, national security, and healthcare. They see the federal level as the right place to handle problems that require consistent national standards or involve resources no single state can manage alone.

State governments should focus on local and practical issues like education, infrastructure, roads, housing affordability, and law enforcement. They see states as better positioned to handle problems that vary by region and affect daily life but only give state government a rating of "okay" to "poor" saying that many issues states should be handling are either ignored or handled ineffectively.

***"Overall, I would say they aren't doing great in Wisconsin right now. The education system and criminal justice system are a mess at the moment."***

*- Suburban Republican*

***"My dad works for the state government, and it seems very slow and behind the times. Also seems like work is just a waste because someone new will come in and want to change everything every few years."***

*- Suburban Independent*

ISSUE	FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD HANDLE	STATE GOVERNMENTS SHOULD HANDLE
Economy and finances: inflation, cost of living, taxes, and national debt	✓	
Immigration and border control	✓	
National security and defense: military and foreign policy	✓	
Healthcare	✓	✓
Constitutional rights and standards: ensuring consistency across all states	✓	
Education and schools		✓
Infrastructure and roads: fixing potholes and maintaining transportation		✓
Housing and affordability: addressing local housing costs and building permits		✓
Law enforcement and criminal justice: handling local crime and policies		✓
Local economic issues: unemployment, small business support, and local funding		✓
Childcare support		

***“I think the federal government should handle issues that affect the country as a whole. This is stuff like the economy and immigration.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

***“State governments can handle more localized issues, like infrastructure, transportation, zoning, and economic development. These are areas where local context helps.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

Respondents don’t necessarily trust the federal government deeply, but they recognize it has the power and scope to address nationwide problems. One person explained that centralized control works better for certain issues than having 50 different state approaches. Issues like defense, economic policy, immigration, and broad regulations are some of those types of issues. However, most believe the federal government is underperforming in managing these issues.

***“For issues that affect basic rights and require consistency, I trust the fed more because it can create a shared baseline across states. Having national standards helps avoid major gaps in enforcement or quality depending on where someone lives.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

***“For the most part, I feel like all of these issues are in a negative slide and not being handled well.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

## TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

Across both levels, people struggle with trust. Most say they don’t trust politicians or government institutions much. People get their political news from social media, TV, and friends rather than official sources. Many mention it’s hard to know what to believe because there’s so much conflicting information and bias in the media.

***“Nope. I don’t trust ANY government.”***

*– Rural Independent*

Instead of being more trusted, respondents see state governments as better suited for certain issues because:

- Local knowledge matters — state leaders understand regional problems better
- Smaller scale works better — some issues are too local for federal control
- More invested in outcomes — people feel state officials care more about their specific communities

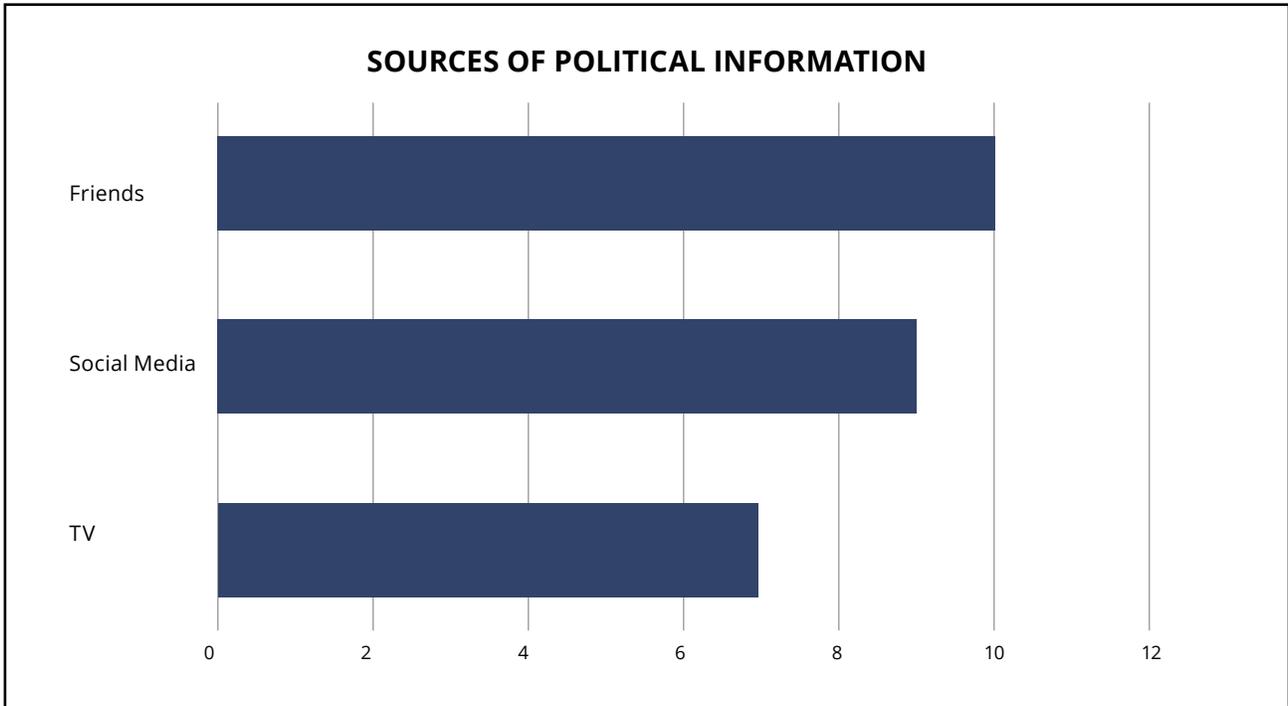
***“I feel that on the local and state levels, the people making the decisions are more invested in the outcomes for the people in their principalities or state.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

***“I feel like all of these are the most trustworthy and effective at the local levels. I think the politicians and institutions that are the closest to their people and communities have the greatest impact and generally have the best intentions.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

With trust hard to come by in politics right now, and many struggle to find reliable sources of information. Most people take a cautious approach. They try to research issues themselves, look at multiple viewpoints, and make their own decisions rather than relying on any single politician or institution. Many say they only believe something when they see it actually happen, not just when politicians promise it.

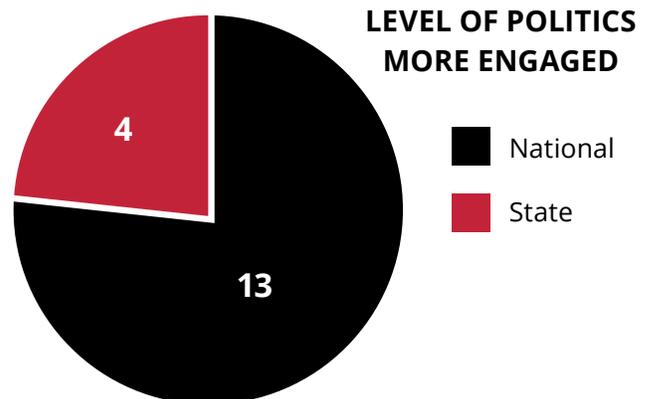


People see several major issues that both federal and state governments are failing to address effectively. These are also the issues that are most important to this group of voters - the rising cost of living, particularly housing and childcare, which affects families across the country but gets little real action from either level. The lack of action on these key issues undermines trust in all levels of government.

**ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS**

Most people feel more engaged with national politics because it gets more media coverage and feels like it has bigger impacts on their lives. National issues show up constantly on social media, TV, and news feeds, making them easier to follow. People also say national politics affects major things like jobs, housing, taxes, and border control.

*Figure 2*



However, some people feel more connected to state politics for different reasons. They say state issues feel closer to home and more meaningful because they directly affect their community. These people mention that state politics is what happens in their neighborhood and city, so it feels more personal and relevant to daily life.

Key Reasons for National Political Engagement	Key Reasons for State Political Engagement
More visible: National news dominates social media and TV coverage	Feels personal: State politics directly touches your community and neighborhood
Broader impact: People believe national decisions affect the whole country	More meaningful: People feel their vote and voice matter more locally
Easier to find information: More sources cover national politics than state politics	Specific local concerns: Issues like school funding, environmental protection, and crime feel more immediate
Major issues: Immigration, inflation, and taxes get national attention	

## STATE VS. FEDERAL IMPACT

People have mixed views about whether federal or state elections matter more, but most recognize that both levels of government affect their daily lives. However, people struggle to see concrete results from state-level voting, even though they understand it should matter. This gap between belief and visibility is the real challenge. While many people discuss national politics, state and local elections rarely come up. When conversations do happen, they typically focus on complaints about current officials rather than upcoming elections.

**Federal elections feel more real.** Most people focus on presidential elections because they get more media coverage and feel more consequential. Many vote in federal elections out of habit or duty, but fewer make the effort for state races.

***“I was always taught that you must vote for president. It is your duty as an American citizen.”***

*– Suburban Republican*

**State elections hit closer to home—but people don’t see the impact.** Several people acknowledge that state decisions affect schools, roads, taxes, and public safety. Yet they struggle to connect voting outcomes to actual changes in their lives. People recognize that lower voter turnout in state elections means individual votes have greater power. This is a compelling reason to participate, but it doesn’t overcome the visibility problem.

***“I just don’t really know what the effects are that I feel on a state level. Maybe if I paid more attention, I would know what impacts I felt for the year that my state elections were responsible for.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

***“Your vote means more when there are less people voting and you have a chance to make a bigger change in things that affect your day-to-day life.”***

*– Suburban Republican*

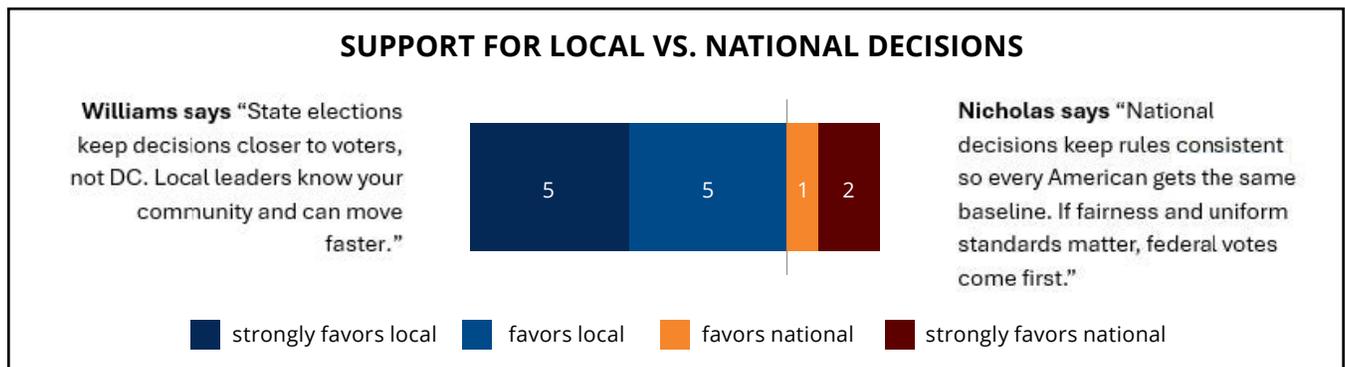
To better understand how Trump 2024 voters who did not participate in the 2022 gubernatorial election view the difference between state and national politics, the study had participants evaluate pairs of statements and explain why one statement resonated with them more than the other.

## LOCAL VS. NATIONAL DECISIONS

Most of this segment favors local decision-making, believing communities are too different for uniform rules and that local leaders understand their areas better than distant federal officials. They see federal rules as too broad and inflexible for the real differences between states and cities.

People who support national-level decision-making give two main reasons: ensuring equal standards across the country and making decisions that affect all Americans fairly. However, even among this group, there is recognition that states might need room to adjust rules for their specific situations.

Figure 3



***“Each community is so different and it’s not a ‘one size fits all’ across the United States. For this reason, I think local leaders can make better decisions in communities that they have lived in and been a part of for many years.”***

*– Rural Republican*

***“I agree more with the idea that state elections and outcomes hit closer to home. However, national decisions matter as well, but I don’t necessarily agree with the ‘one size fits all’ uniformity of standards is always the best outcome for every issue. Each state and its people face different challenges.”***

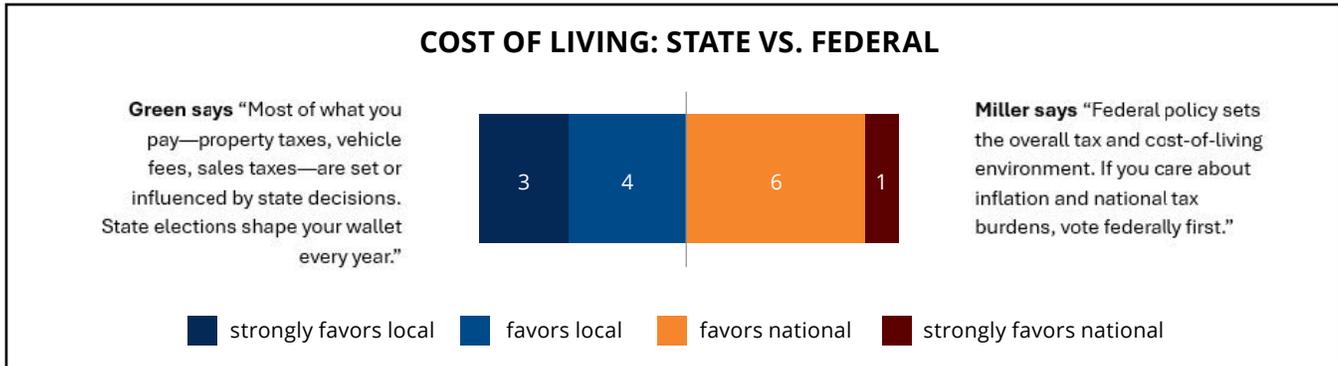
*– Suburban Independent*

## COST OF LIVING: STATE VS. FEDERAL

Voters in this segment are split over which level of government has the most impact over cost of living and economic issues. Most people who chose the statement that argues state elections have a greater impact on cost of living focused on how state-level taxes and decisions directly shape their daily finances. They see state policy as meaningful because it controls property taxes, sales taxes, and local fees that add up quickly. Many people mentioned specific examples from their own lives. Property taxes came up repeatedly, especially for homeowners dealing with reassessments. Sales taxes, wheel taxes, and local fees also matter because people encounter them regularly.

People who focused on federal-level policy impact cited several practical reasons for their choice. Many pointed out that federal taxes and policies have a more direct impact on their daily finances than state-level decisions. They mentioned things like federal income taxes, interest rates, and inflation as major factors affecting their household budgets.

Figure 4



***“My home was just reassessed this year and saw a large increase in fair market value, which affects my property taxes.”***

– Urban Republican

***“I see lots of people moving to states with low cost of living and that is due to state government voting.”***

– Rural Republican

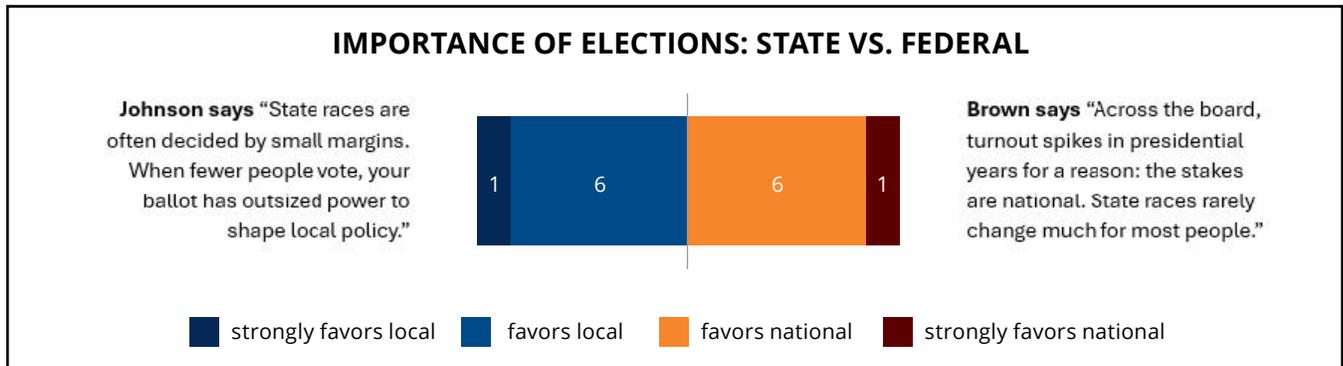
***“I believe that the cost of living influences a big amount of what I pay on a daily basis. Most people don’t buy a car each year, and sales tax rates don’t increase a lot, so voting federally to me has a bigger impact, even though they both have an impact.”***

– Urban Republican

**IMPORTANCE OF ELECTIONS: STATE VS. FEDERAL**

This segment of voters is split on the relative importance of state and federal elections. Half of respondents who picked an option said they understand their vote at the state level has outsized impact due to smaller numbers of voters overall. The other half struggled to see the impact of their state-level vote but firmly felt their federal vote mattered.

Figure 5



***“Your vote means more when there are less people voting and you have a chance to make a bigger change in things that affect your day-to-day life.”***

– Suburban Republican

***“I don’t agree with Brown that state races rarely change much for people. I think people just don’t pay as close attention on a state level.”***

– Rural Republican

***“I just don’t really know what the effects are that I feel on a state level. Maybe if I paid more attention, I would know what impacts I felt for the year that my state elections were responsible for.”***

– Suburban Independent

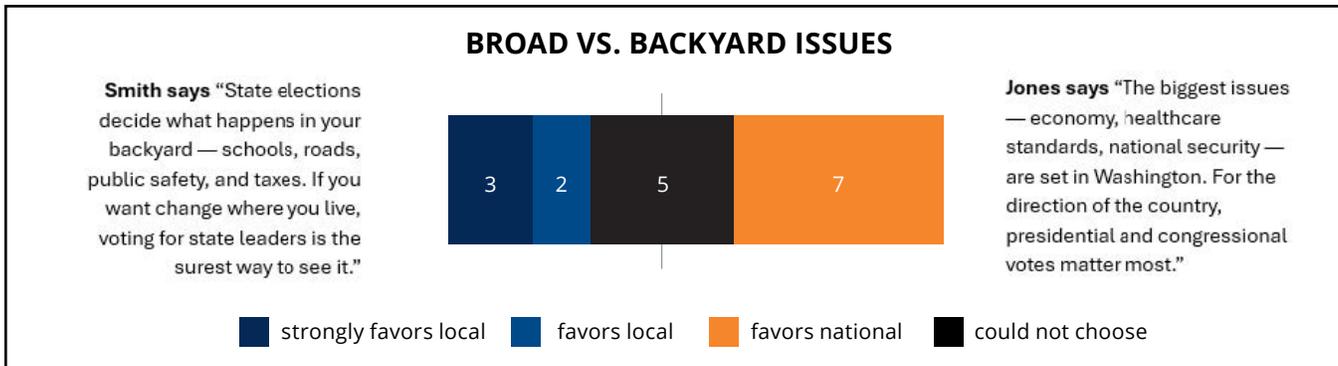
### **BROAD VS. BACKYARD ISSUES**

Despite being split on other state v. federal issues, more voters in this segment agree that the biggest issues are handled at the federal level. They see federal elections as more important because the president and national government set the overall direction for the country. While they acknowledge that state and local issues matter, they think national policies create the foundation that affects everything else, and that state power is more limited.

People who chose that state elections and the impact on “backyard” issues are more important believe that state and local decisions have the most direct impact on their everyday lives. They see state government as controlling the issues that matter most to them personally. State decisions also feel more personal because they shape what happens in your immediate area and directly affect your family.

A significant portion of respondents (5) could not choose between these two options.

Figure 6



***"I believe that this happens at the state level as far as schools, roads, public safety, and taxes."***

*- Rural Independent*

***"Smith does make some very valid points about the state making decisions and laws that are closer to home and maybe have more initial effect on your family."***

*- Suburban Republican*

These tradeoff questions show the foundation this segment of voters has when deciding how to participate in elections. State elections and governance are closer to home – which makes it more personal and effective – but also feels less important to the sweeping, high visibility issues handled at the federal level. For those reasons, people say the Presidential election feels more significant. Voters point to the scale of impact, the amount of media coverage, and the belief that the president has more power to create change.

***"I think the presidential election feels more significant to me because it sets the tone for the entire country on the economy, policies, um, issues that affect everybody."***

*- Suburban Independent*

***"It impacts the whole country, the United States, versus just our state of Wisconsin."***

*- Suburban Republican*

***"I think the presidential election is more important than the governor election because I tend to care more about the issues that the president deals with and more national issues as opposed to state and governor elections. I don't care so much about those minor problems, and I tend to care more about the presidential election."***

*- Suburban Independent*

***"The president has more power to actually like make change and like do things and move things along versus the governor is asking other people for help."***

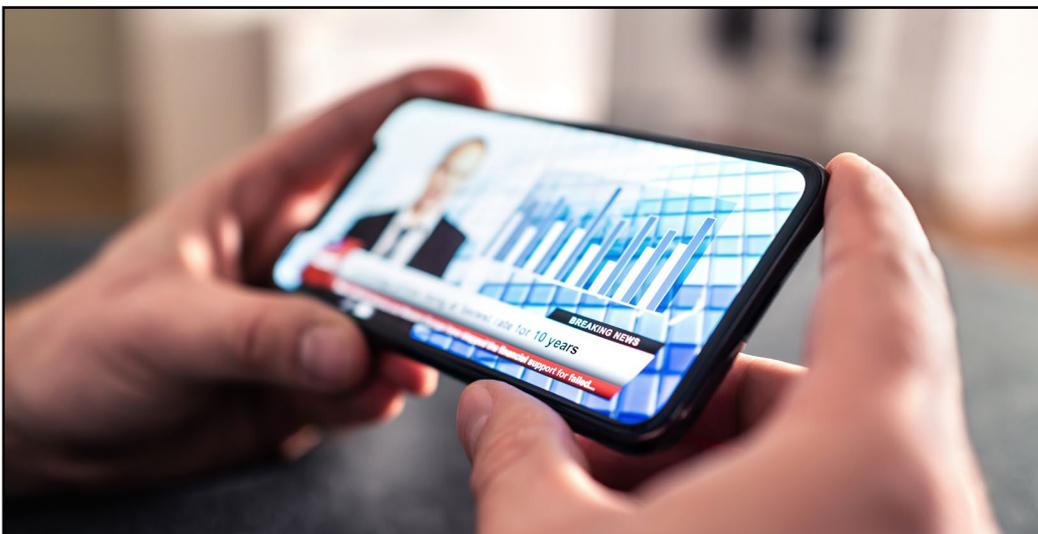
*- Urban Republican*

***"I think as a voter, people tend to feel that presidential elections carry more weight because the issues that we tend to see being capitalized in the news or being highlighted, we think that all decision-making power tends to come from the highest level of authority within our country, which would be the president. And therefore, we tend to feel the changes, or we think we feel the changes from a presidential election more drastically than we do those from a state level."***

*- Suburban Independent*

***"There's so much kind of hype and news and social media around the presidential race that's just significantly more than governor's races."***

*- Rural Republican*



## 2024 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

This audience largely made their 2024 Presidential election choice for Donald Trump based on economic concerns. Most expected him to tackle the economy, bring down costs of living, and cut taxes. Addressing government waste and inflation were also ways they expected President Trump to better the economy.

***"Money. Biden really messed up our economy."***

*- Rural Independent*

***"One of the major factors was also how the economy was under President Biden and how much things had increased in cost."***

*- Urban Republican*

***"I primarily voted based on economic and fiscal issues. I believed he would focus on reducing government involvement, keeping taxes lower, and prioritizing policies that would make my money go further."***

*- Suburban Independent*

Immigration was another major focus issue. Many felt the border needed stronger control and that illegal immigration had gotten out of hand. Abortion and national security were also issues that came up as reasons to support Trump in 2024.

***"Immigration. Immigration. Immigration. And he 100% did solve that problem. He closed up the borders and started deporting people who were here illegally."***

*- Suburban Republican*

***"Border control, housing, high cost of living, taxes, abortion. If I am on the fence between two candidates, I always go with the one who is pro-life."***

*- Rural Republican*

## IMPACT OF CAMPAIGN ADS

Across all responses, voters consistently said political ads were background noise that didn't change their minds. Many found them annoying or untrustworthy. Personal conversations mattered more with many choosing to discuss their feelings and choices with family before voting.

***"Personally, I don't think commercials are effective at all. People just see them come on the TV and immediately get annoyed and don't pay attention."***

*- Suburban Independent*

## PROGRESS SINCE 2024

Views on how much progress President Trump has made are mixed, but many see some wins. Those focused on immigration feel Trump delivered quickly. Gas prices and border security also came up as concrete improvements.

***"I think we've made some progress on security of the Mexican border to limit further illegals, and we've started to deport more. Regarding taxes, tax rates are now lower, child tax credits are higher, etc."***

*- Rural Republican*

However, those focused on the economy are less satisfied. While some noticed gas prices dropping, many say the overall cost of living hasn't improved enough to help their wallets.

***"Progress has been slow. While things have improved some, it hasn't been enough to help the pocketbook."***

*- Urban Republican*

A few voters feel it's still too early to judge, while others express frustration that progress isn't matching their expectations. However, most voters in this segment said they would not change their vote for Trump after a year of his presidency. Their reasons center on a few main themes: confidence in Trump as the better choice, concerns about the alternative candidate, and some positive feelings about the results to date. A few voters expressed hesitation or concern about Trump's performance, though they still wouldn't change their vote.

***"I wouldn't change my vote, I felt then and feel today that Trump was the one we needed to come in and deliver on promises of change."***

*- Suburban Independent*

***"I wouldn't. I don't think Kamala would do a better job."***

*- Urban Republican*

***"I really don't think I could support the way-liberal democratic economic policies. Unfortunately, I feel like we gained a somewhat stable economic situation and are paying for it in social unrest and lack of morality...The only thing I might have done differently is not to have voted at all."***

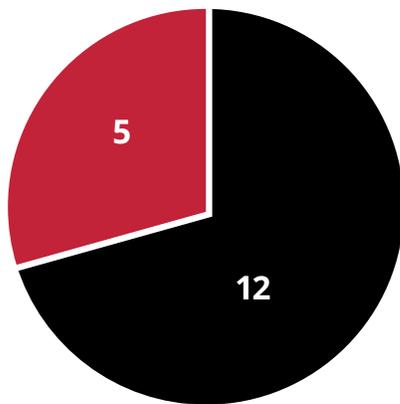
*- Suburban Independent*

## 2024 SENATE VOTE

A majority of those who cast a vote for President Trump in 2024 recall voting in the Senate race and nearly all of those who voted cast their ballot for Republican Eric Hovde.

Figure 7

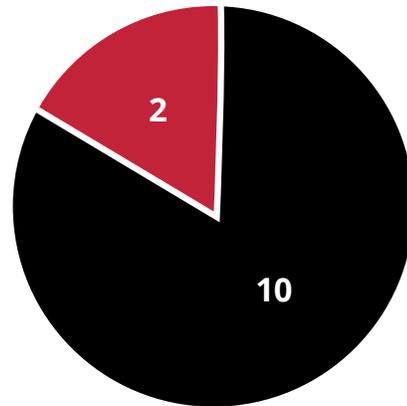
2024 SENATE RACE PARTICIPATION



■ Yes ■ No

Figure 8

2024 SENATE VOTE



■ Eric Hovde ■ Tammy Baldwin

Most voters who participated in the Senate race applied similar decision-making logic as their presidential choice, prioritizing party alignment and policy concerns.

***"He fell into the party I agreed with more at the time."***

*- Urban Republican*

***"I voted for him for similar reasons to my presidential vote. I am fiscally conservative, and those policies were my consideration and the most important factor for me."***

*- Suburban Independent*

***"If I recall, I voted Democratic for all other races but the Presidential. Maybe just to balance out my vote, as I was conflicted about voting for Trump."***

*- Suburban Independent*

However, the Senate race saw less engagement overall, with several respondents choosing not to vote in that contest despite voting for president. The single respondent who explained their choice indicated it was a matter of personal preference rather than a specific objection to the candidates. Beyond that, the other four participants who abstained in the Senate race left no comments about their reasons for abstaining.

The responses suggest that skipping down-ballot races may simply reflect how voters prioritize elections. Some people focus their attention and effort on the presidential race and don't extend that same engagement to other contests, even when they appear on the same ballot.

# 2022 WISCONSIN GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

## AWARENESS

Most people had some awareness of the 2022 Wisconsin Governor's race, but their knowledge varied widely. Some knew basic details about the candidates, while others remembered very little or nothing at all. Those who were aware typically knew the race involved incumbent Tony Evers and Republican Tim Michels. A few could recall that Evers won the election.

However, many people said they didn't pay close attention or couldn't remember much about it now. Several people said they probably heard about the race at the time but couldn't remember details now. A few mentioned they were too young, distracted, or focused on other things to pay attention to the election.

***"I knew that Evers was running again"***

*- Urban Republican*

***"Yes. I know it was between incumbent Tony Evers and Tim Michels, and Evers won."***

*- Suburban Independent*

***"I honestly had no idea about any of it."***

*- Rural Independent*

## DECISION NOT TO VOTE

Most people who didn't vote in the 2022 governor's race made a conscious choice not to vote, usually because they felt uninformed or unengaged. Others simply couldn't vote due to life circumstances like being out of town, working long hours, or having young children at home.

Lack of information or confidence was the most common reason people did not vote in the 2022 election. About 10 people said they didn't vote because they didn't know enough about the candidates or felt unprepared to make an informed decision. While some campaign messaging reached these voters, most treated it as background noise or tuned it out because they were not paying attention to the race.

***“I felt as though I wasn’t really educated enough or did enough research to vote for any of the candidates because I know that my decision could have an impact on who runs our state.”***

*– Rural Republican*

***“I didn’t hear much about it and felt I couldn’t make an informed vote.”***

*– Urban Republican*

***“I did not feel strongly enough swayed in one direction or the other in order to participate.”***

*– Suburban Independent*

The campaign material as it existed in 2022 had very little impact on turning out this segment of voters. Where voters in this segment did see campaign ads, they may have turned people away. A few respondents said the negative tone of ads actually discouraged them from voting.

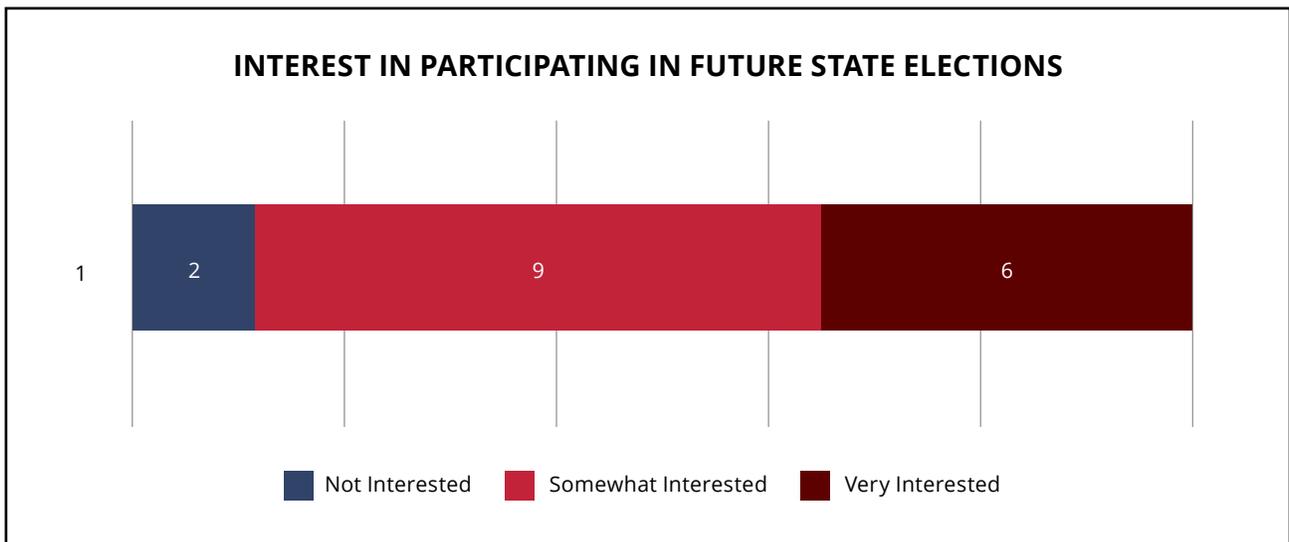
***“They were all just bad talking the other candidate. It made me not like the person the ad was supposed to be for.”***

*– Suburban Republican*

## FUTURE STATE ELECTION PARTICIPATION

Most Trump voters who did not participate in the 2022 elections show moderate to strong interest in state and local elections moving forward, though their reasons vary. Some are motivated by wanting their vote to matter and shape their community, while others need more information to feel confident about voting. A smaller group feels disconnected from these elections and doubts their vote makes a real difference. Most fall into a middle group that recognizes these elections matter but lacks the confidence or knowledge to participate. Considering this group of voters did not participate in the last off-cycle election, motivations to participate in the future may be overstated.

Figure 9



***"I feel I can help shape what's happening locally with my vote."***

*- Rural Republican*

***"Overall, I just feel as though state elected officials don't have an impact on my way of life."***

*- Rural Republican*

***"I want my voice to matter but honestly I don't have the same knowledge as I do with National elections."***

*- Suburban Republican*

Voting in state elections would be more appealing if there was more practical support to vote with more confidence. That includes:

- Better information: A non-partisan website showing candidates and their positions on key issues
- More visibility: Social media coverage and earlier announcements about upcoming elections
- Clearer impact: Examples of how past state and local votes created real change
- Less negativity: Reduced attack ads and candidate bashing during campaigns
- Easier logistics: Clear information about when and where to vote, plus workplace flexibility on election days

### **INTENT TO PARTICIPATE IN 2026**

Most respondents show moderate to low interest in the 2026 governor's race right now but say they will make a plan to vote when the election gets closer. Very few are paying close attention at this early stage, though several say they'll engage once campaigns heat up or specific issues emerge that matter to them.

***"Whenever I start getting bombarded with ads. I will specifically make up my mind right before the election by doing a little research."***

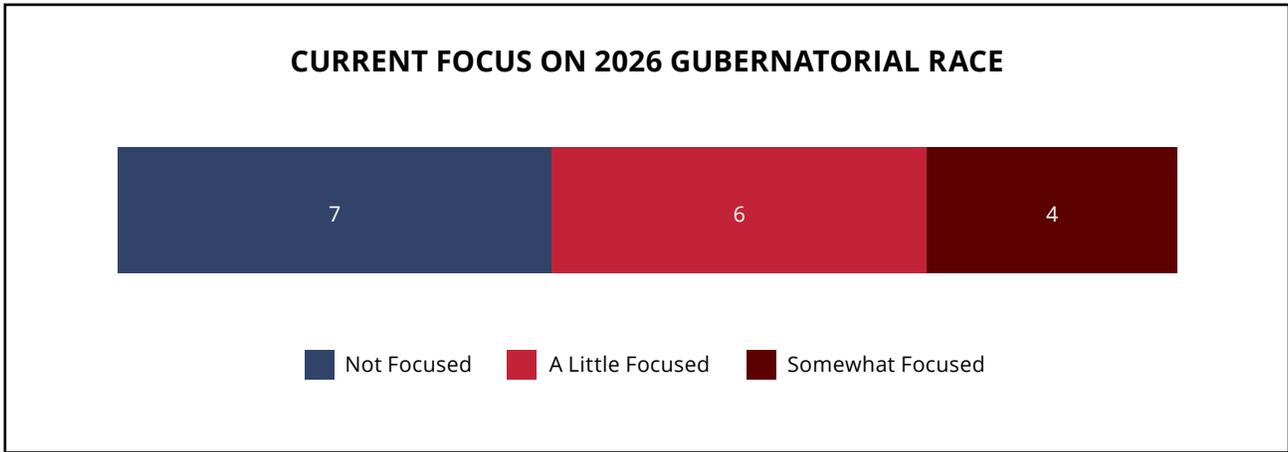
*- Suburban Independent*

***"Probably around September or whenever social media presents it."***

*- Suburban Republican*

There is very little focus on the 2026 gubernatorial race right now and despite not participating in 2022, about half of this group says they are likely to participate. This group of voters who supported President Trump largely plan to vote for the Republican candidate in 2026, even without knowing exactly who that will be.

Figure 10



*“Maybe now, as I just heard my first “blip” today. Also, the participation in this [research] has made me a little more eager and/or likely to pay more attention and to possibly vote this year.”*

- Suburban Independent

Figure 11

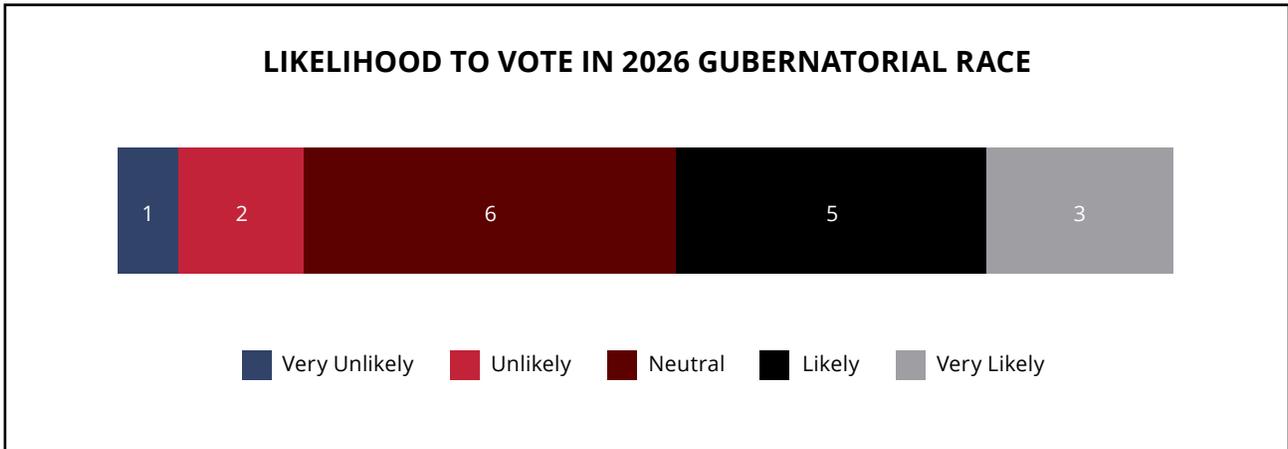
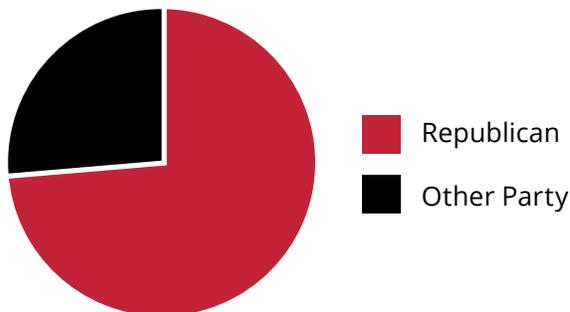


Figure 12

### CURRENT 2026 VOTE LEANING



*I normally vote Republican, because the party aligns with more of my personal values, but I don't categorize myself as only Republican, I look into both parties' ideas more to decide before casting my vote.”*

- Urban Republican

## MOTIVATION TO VOTE IN STATE AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

People in Wisconsin have different reasons that would push them to vote in the next governor's election, but most fall into a few clear categories. Some need better information about candidates and their plans. Others care about specific issues like taxes, education, or how politicians behave during campaigns.

**Better Information and Transparency:** Many people want clearer, easier ways to understand what candidates actually plan to do.

***"Just being informed and having it explained to me in a way that I would understand is what would make me more likely to vote."***

*- Rural Independent*

***"I would 100% vote in the next election if I could easily read information on the policies that each candidate plans to roll out and exactly how it would impact my day-to-day life." I feel like there's not an easy way to get that information today, and you have to do a lot of studying to read between the lines and understand how it would impact you. There is a more tangible way to say, here's what life A and life B looks like under each candidate and what my day-to-day life would look different under each one. That would make me feel a lot more opinionated and feel more strongly about voting."***

*- Suburban Independent*

**Specific Issues:** A few people focus on particular topics that matter to them personally.

***"As a homeowner, probably something related to healthy taxes would be a big one."***

*- Suburban Republican*

***"A candidate that was serious about working on and improving the educational system and early childhood education and care in Wisconsin."***

*- Suburban Independent*

***“One thing that could really get me out to vote would be them talking about taxes and what they’re going to do about it. Where I am in Milwaukee, we contribute a ton of money to the state, and we don’t get a lot of it back. I’d like to see that change some and some of the tax dollars that we’ve been put come back towards us and help us with some of the infrastructure projects and things like that.”***

*– Suburban Republican*

**Campaign Behavior:** Some want candidates to focus on solutions instead of attacking each other.

***“The one thing that would make me 100% likely to vote in the Wisconsin governor’s election is clean campaigning.”***

*– Urban Republican*

At the very end of the research, participants were given a summary of reasons that may motivate people to vote in state and local elections. These non-2022 voters were asked what would have the most impact on their future state and local election participation. The impact that state elections can have on daily life is a key reason to participate. People care most about issues that touch their everyday lives. They want to vote on things they can actually control, and that affect them directly, like taxes, education, and healthcare.

More importantly, directly discussing the impact that state and local elections have on people’s lives fueled them to be more engaged at this level of government.

***“Completing this questionnaire and answering questions that make me realize I am not involved nor informed on this subject.”***

*– Rural Independent*

Figure 10  
(See Appendix for full reason wording)

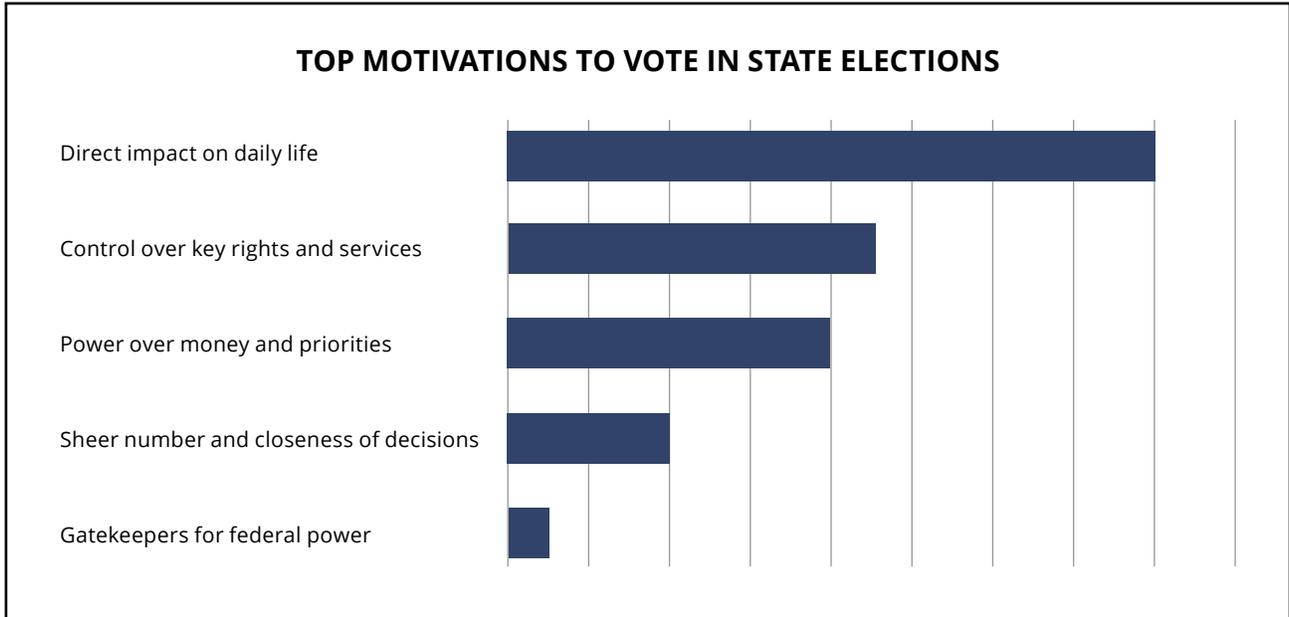
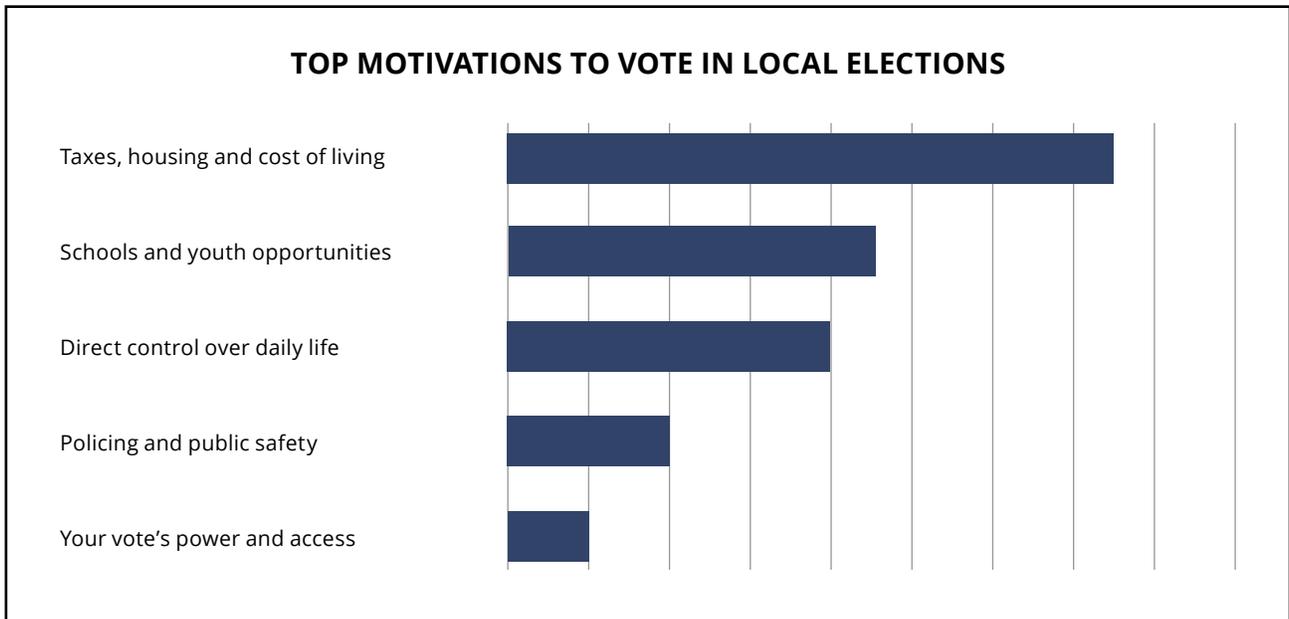


Figure 11  
(See Appendix for full reason wording)



Discussing the ways that state and local government can impact their lives unearthed motivations these voters already have but were not applying to state and local contests. Many people said they didn't realize how much power their vote actually has at the state level. They thought most decisions came from Washington, but learning that states control education funding, taxes, and civil rights changed how they think about voting.

***"I think knowing how much my vote could matter is huge, I just had never thought of it like that. I just assumed that it was only a small drop in a large bucket. Also control over money is important because that is something that I encounter daily. Prices rising and cost of living is basically just surviving not even saving."***

*- Suburban Republican*

***"I am a new educator (2nd year in), and I knew the state decided on curriculum standards and education funding, but again, I thought the federal government had a higher say, which I now realize is false."***

*- Urban Republican*

***"States decide rules for abortion, gun ownership, voting access, and many civil rights protections, often making your rights broader or narrower than in neighboring states. The rights of the people need to be protected."***

*- Urban Republican*

***"I would vote for a local official who would make the cost of living quite cheap. With a cheap cost of living, I will have extra money for other things like family or travel."***

*- Rural Republican*

***"I never thought twice about who actually has 'more' control over ideas close to home, especially when it comes to schools and law enforcement. I see now that voting, even at a local level, has an almost bigger impact than voting at the federal level."***

*- Urban Republican*



## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

	Number of Respondents
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	4
Female	13
<b>Age</b>	
18-24	3
25-34	5
35-44	4
45-54	2
55-64	3
65+	0
<b>Geography</b>	
Urban	4
Suburban	8
Rural	5
<b>Income</b>	
Less than \$25,000	1
\$25,000-\$49,999	2
\$50,000-\$74,999	1
\$75,000-\$99,999	3
\$100,000-\$149,999	6
\$150,000-\$249,999	2
\$250,000 or more	1
Refused	1
<b>Education</b>	
High school	2
Some college	4
Technical/Vocational	1
College graduate	7
Post-graduate	2
Refused	1
<b>Political Party</b>	
Republican	10
Independent	7

### FULL LIST OF MOTIVATING FACTORS TO VOTE IN STATE ELECTIONS FROM FIGURE 10:

#### Direct impact on daily life

- State governments control public schools, curriculum standards, and most education funding, which affects your kids' classrooms far more than anything decided in Washington.
- States set most criminal laws, sentencing rules, and policing standards, which influence crime policy, prisons, and how justice works where you live.

#### Control over key rights and services

- States decide rules for abortion, gun ownership, voting access, and many civil rights protections, often making your rights broader or narrower than in neighboring states.
- Governors and legislators shape Medicaid, state health programs, housing policy, and social services, which determine who actually gets help and how easy it is to access.

#### Power over money and priorities

- State legislatures write state budgets and tax codes, deciding property taxes, gas taxes, state income or sales taxes, and what gets funded (schools vs. prisons vs. roads).
- Those choices determine class sizes, road quality, college tuition at state universities, and support for things like mental health or addiction treatment.

#### Gatekeepers for federal power

- States help run federal programs (Medicaid expansion, election administration, environmental enforcement), so state officials can either cooperate with or slow-walk federal policies.
- State officials draw congressional districts and set election rules, which can shape who even gets to represent you in Congress and how competitive federal races are.

#### Sheer number and closeness of decisions

- There are many more state and local offices than federal ones, and these races are often decided by very small margins, so your vote can matter more in practice.
- Because state officials are closer to their constituents, organized local pressure (emails, town halls, small groups) can more easily change their behavior than it can a president or senator.

## **FULL LIST OF MOTIVATING FACTORS TO VOTE IN STATE ELECTIONS FROM FIGURE 11:**

### **Direct control over daily life**

- Local officials decide things like zoning, road repairs, trash pickup, parks, and public transit, which you experience constantly just moving around town. School board members shape homework loads, discipline rules, and which programs stay or get cut in your own district.

### **Policing and public safety**

- City councils, mayors, and county boards set police budgets, approve chiefs, and pass rules on use of force and oversight. Local prosecutors (district or county attorneys) choose which crimes to charge, what plea deals to offer, and how harshly to pursue cases, which changes how justice feels on the ground.

### **Taxes, housing, and cost of living**

- Local governments set property tax rates, fees, and many business regulations that directly influence rent, home values, and small-business survival. Zoning and permitting decisions determine whether your area builds more housing, stays unaffordable, or gets new grocery stores, clinics, or factories.

### **Schools and youth opportunities**

- School boards determine curriculum details, school start times, sports and arts funding, and whether to prioritize advanced classes, special education support, or career-and-technical programs. Their choices can change class sizes, teacher quality, and what opportunities local kids have after graduation.

### **Your vote's power and access**

- Local races often have very low turnout, which means a few dozen or a few hundred votes can flip an entire seat. Because officials live in the same community, you are far more likely to see them, contact them directly, and successfully organize neighbors to pressure them to fix problems.



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