



MEMORANDUM

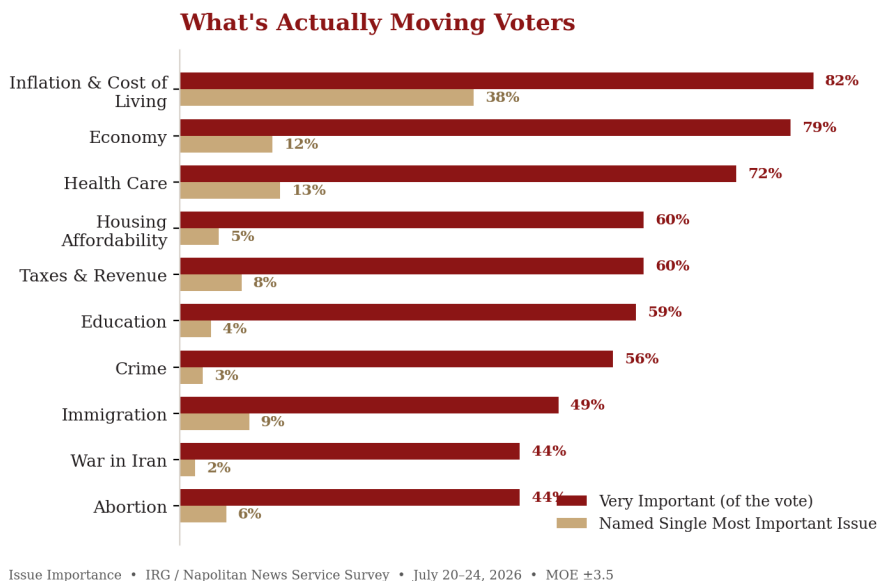
TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Chris Reader, Chief Operating Officer, Institute for Reforming Government
DATE: July 30, 2026
RE: Reading the Wisconsin Electorate Ahead of the Governor's Race

A new poll commissioned by IRG paints a more complicated picture than the topline approval numbers and general thought suggests: Democratic officeholders remain net-positive on job approval and Republicans are underwater, yet Republicans have real openings on the issues voters say matter most, and independents — the group that will decide the race — are not locked in.

The poll of 800 Wisconsin registered voters was fielded by RMG Research for the Napolitan News Service on July 20–24, 2026 (margin of sampling error ± 3.5 points).

WHAT'S ACTUALLY MOVING VOTERS

Inflation and the cost of living remain the dominant concern, named “very important” by 82% of voters and the single most important issue by 38% — more than double the next-highest answer.



Issue Importance • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • 800 WI Registered Voters • July 20–24, 2026 • MOE ± 3.5

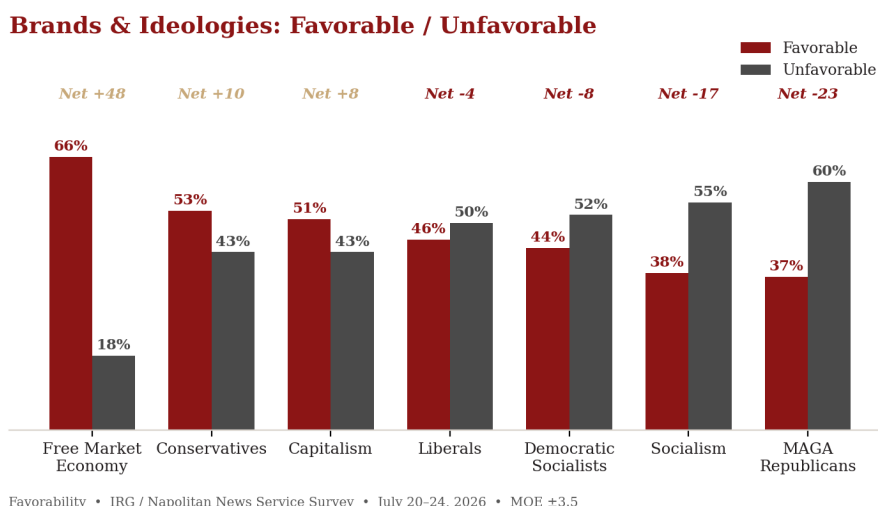
But the story beneath affordability has shifted: the share citing food costs as their top financial concern has fallen 13 points since October 2025 (from 50% to 37%), while gas prices have more

than doubled as a concern (5% to 12%) and housing costs have ticked up. The pattern splits sharply by age — voters 18–34 name housing costs as their top concern (38%, more than double food costs), while voters 65+ still cite food costs first (49%, the highest of any group).

When asked for a few words of their own on what’s most important this fall, 26% gave an answer related to government integrity when asked to state their most important issue, 23% gave an answer related to the economy.

THE FREE MARKET IS THE MOST POPULAR BRAND IN WISCONSIN

“Free market economy” tests at +48 net favorable, outperforming every party and ideology label tested, on the right or the left.



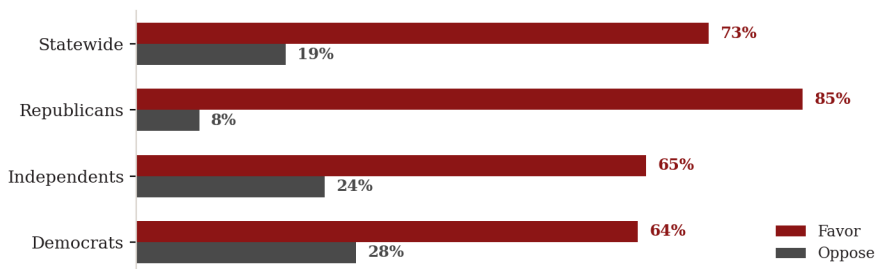
*Favorability • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • 800 WI Registered Voters • July 20–24, 2026
• MOE ±3.5*

FISCAL RESTRAINT IS A CROSS-PARTISAN WINNER

A proposal to eliminate the personal income tax by 2030 wins 73–19 statewide, and it holds up across party lines: Republicans favor it 85–8, independents 65–24, and Democrats 64–28.



Eliminate the Personal Income Tax by 2030

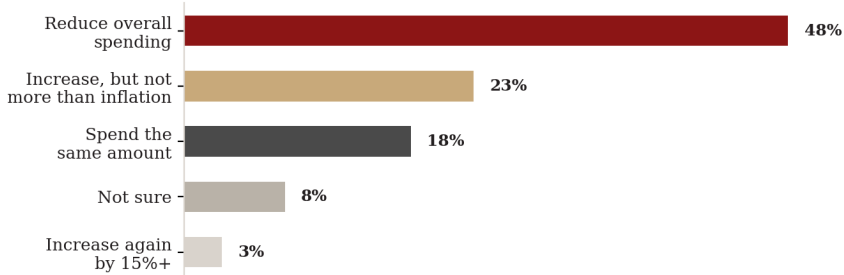


Fiscal Policy • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • July 20-24, 2026 • MOE ± 3.5

*Fiscal Policy • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • 800 WI Registered Voters • July 20–24, 2026
• MOE ± 3.5*

On the 2027 state budget, 66% of voters want spending held flat or reduced — including half of Democrats — versus just 3% who want another double-digit increase.

2027 State Budget: What Should Lawmakers Do?



Fiscal Policy • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • July 20-24, 2026 • MOE ± 3.5

*Fiscal Policy • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • 800 WI Registered Voters • July 20–24, 2026
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GROWTH, SOCIALISM, SCHOOL CHOICE, AND MORE

- Growth over inequality: Voters prefer policies that create economic growth over policies that reduce economic inequality, 64–31.
- Socialism as a threat: A plurality (48%) say socialism threatens America’s founding ideals of freedom, equality, and self-governance, versus 39% who disagree — with 13% unconvinced.
- School choice: Voters want to keep Wisconsin’s 35-year-old parental choice voucher program rather than end it, 50–38. Support skews young, lower-income, and Black — not the affluent voters sometimes assumed to benefit most.
- Other issues that are major liabilities for candidates: Positions to dismantle ICE (41 for - 46% against), cut prison population in half (30-49), defund police as a first step to

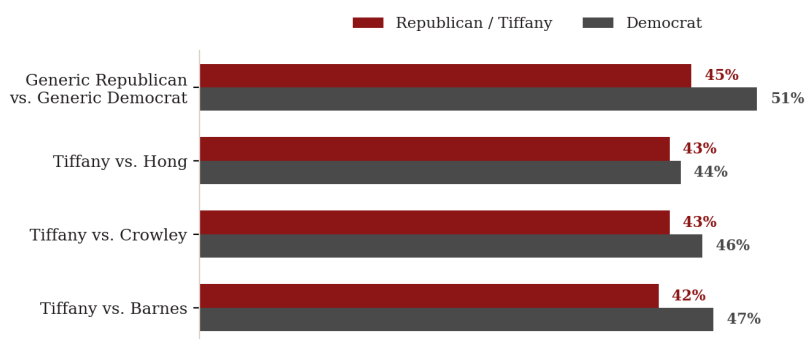


abolishing police (12-78), vote not to certify the 2020 election (12-78), and saying America deserved the 9/11 attacks (4-91) are all net losers with voters.

NOW, THE RACE

Named Democratic candidates are running weaker than the generic Democrat. The generic ballot has barely moved since April (from D+7 to D+6).

The Governor's Race: Head-to-Head Ballot Tests



Ballot Tests • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • July 20-24, 2026 • MOE ± 3.5

Ballot Tests • IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey • 800 WI Registered Voters • July 20–24, 2026 • MOE ± 3.5

Republican Tom Tiffany runs five points ahead of that already-frozen generic-ballot number in a head-to-head against State Representative Francesca Hong, despite his own –6 personal favorability rating. Her Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) affiliation carries a real cost: statewide, voters say they would be less likely to support a DSA-affiliated candidate by a net of –18 points — and that number nearly triples among independents, to a net of –52.5. Hong’s own coalition also shows softness: lean Democrats back Crowley and Barnes at 83–86%, but only 67% for Hong, with 18% saying “someone else” and 13% unsure.

THE PERSUADABLE MIDDLE LEANS TIFFANY

Pure independents — the voters least anchored to either party — favor Tiffany against all three Democrats tested. Separately, voters aged 55–64 are the only age bracket where Tiffany leads all three Democrats outright (48–51%) — a more reliable target than voters 65 and older.

ONE GOP PROBLEM IS INTENSITY

President Trump’s strong disapproval outweighs strong approval by a ratio of roughly 2.5-to-1; Governor Evers’ intensity is nearly balanced. On enthusiasm to vote in the governor’s race, Democrats (89%, 61% “very”) and Republicans (85%, 54% “very”) are both energized — but pure independents are not, at just 41% enthusiastic overall and only 23% “very” enthusiastic.



The gap in this race isn't just between the parties; it's also everyone else, and independents are not yet showing up.

THE BOTTOM LINE

1. **The environment favors Democrats — but it's softer than it looks.** Democratic officeholders are net-positive on job approval, yet Obama and Bush still outperform every actual 2026 candidate, and independents are checked out, not persuadable.
2. **Affordability and fiscal restraint are Republicans' strongest ground.** "Free market economy" beats every brand tested (+48); eliminating the income tax wins 73–19 across party lines.
3. **Once real candidates are attached, the Democratic advantage doesn't fully translate.** The generic ballot hasn't moved since April, leading Democrats underperform it, and independents lean Tiffany against all three tested matchups.
4. **Candidate identity is the single biggest variable in how these matchups move.** A DSA affiliation costs a candidate far more with independents (–52.5) than statewide (–18), and lean-Democrat coalition cohesion varies by candidate as well.

The underlying attitudes are clear and durable: Wisconsin voters remain anchored to affordability, fiscal restraint, and free-market economic policy across party lines — attitudes IRG will continue to track through Election Day as part of our ongoing public opinion research.

Source: IRG / Napolitan News Service Survey of 800 Wisconsin Registered Voters, conducted by RMG Research, Inc., July 20–24, 2026. Margin of sampling error ± 3.5 percentage points. This survey of 800 Registered Voters was conducted online by Scott Rasmussen on July 20–24, 2026. Field work for the survey was conducted by RMG Research, Inc. Certain quotas were applied, and the sample was lightly weighted by geography, gender, age, race, education, internet usage, and political party to reasonably reflect the population of Registered Voters. Other variables were reviewed to ensure that the final sample is representative of that population. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 3.5 percentage points.