

**WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO/ST. NORBERT COLLEGE  
THE WISCONSIN SURVEY  
FALL 1999**

**TOPIC: Most Important Problem Facing Wisconsin**

**RELEASE DATE: November 4, 1999**

**SAMPLE SIZE: 403 Wisconsin Residents Over the Age of 18**

**MARGIN OF ERROR: +/-4.8**

**MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING WISCONSIN**

"What do you think is the most important problem facing the State of Wisconsin today?"

	10/94	4/95	10/95	3/96	10/96	3/97	10/97	3/98	10/98
Taxes	21%	24%	21%	9%	14%	25%	18%	19%	30%
Education	5	11	7	7	12	11	11	16	20
Crime	26	14	9	13	10	9	11	11	5
Welfare Issues	21	17	14	16	15	7	10	10	6
Environment	<1	3	2	3	1	5	5	5	2
Drug Problem	1	2	6	1	6	5	4	7	2
Jobs/Unemployment	6	5	4	16	6	4	4	5	2
Economy	1	2	1	5	5	<1	1	3	3
Health Care	3	<1	5	<1	2	<1	2	2	2
Farm Issues	<1	<1	2	5	1	<1	2	2	<1

"Which political party in the State of Wisconsin, the Democrats or the Republicans, do you think would do the best job handling the problem you just mentioned?"

	10/94	4/95	10/95	3/96	10/96	3/97	10/97	3/98	4/99
Democrats	30%	26%	33%	34%	36%	42%	32%	39%	31%
Republicans	35	40	35	33	42	27	31	30	30
Neither	11	16	18	9	6	12	17	10	13
Both	6	6	3	5	1	4	4	7	2
Not Sure	18	13	11	19	15	16	16	15	9

"In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in Wisconsin at this time?"

	10/94	4/95	10/95	3/96	10/96	3/97	10/97	3/98	10/98
Satisfied	--	66%	55%	67%	73%	66%	72%	76%	78%
	--	28	39	30	23	29	25	19	17

Dissatisfied										
Not Sure	--	7	6	3	4	5	4	5	5	

"Would you say that you are financially better off now than you were a year ago, or financially worse off now?"

	10/94	4/95	10/95	3/96	10/96	3/97	10/97	3/98	10/98	
Better off	38%	43%	36%	41%	47%	46%	47%	55%	45%	
Same	34	31	31	28	26	35	28	22	30	
Worse Off	28	25	32	31	25	19	25	22	25	
Don't know	1	<1	<1	<1	2	<1	<1	<1	1	

"Do you expect that at this time NEXT year you will be financially better off now or worse off than now?"

	10/94	4/95	10/95	3/96	10/96	3/97	10/97	3/98	10/98	
Better off	50%	57%	46%	53%	56%	58%	54%	63%	56%	
Same	31	27	21	25	19	28	25	20	21	
Worse Off	15	13	26	14	15	11	14	13	17	
Don't know	5	4	8	8	9	4	7	5	6	

## SUMMARY

For the sixth consecutive "Wisconsin Survey" dating back to the spring of 1997, taxes have been identified as the most important issue facing the state, with concerns about education a distant second. In addition over half of Wisconsinites report that they are financially better off than last year, with 2 out of 3 respondents expecting to have improved financial status in the upcoming year. Finally, while a substantial majority of Wisconsin citizens are pleased with the way things are going in the state, there has been a slight drop from the record percentage of individuals indicating satisfaction last fall. These are some of the findings from the most recent Wisconsin Public Radio/St. Norbert College Survey Center statewide survey released today.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM IN THE STATE

According to the latest "Wisconsin Survey," taxes have once again emerged as the most important problem facing the state, with approximately 3 in 10 individuals identifying taxes as the most important issue at this time. These findings mark a 7% increase over results from the spring 1999 survey, and fall only one percent below the record high level this issue received in the fall of 1998. Education issues remained the second most identified problem area among state residents, with 13% of Wisconsinites

finding problems with schools to be the state's major concern. No other issue received double digit recognition from state residents. Welfare issues that were among the most often cited concerns of Wisconsin citizens during the middle of the decade continue to be near all time lows, with only 5% of state residents identifying welfare as the most important problem facing the Badger State. Crime, while the third most identified problem facing Wisconsin, remains the primary concern to only 7% of state residents, markedly down from our survey five years ago when over 1 in 4 Wisconsinites listed the issue as the major problem statewide.

## **SATISFACTION WITH THE DIRECTION OF WISCONSIN**

Almost one in four residents of the state indicate that they are satisfied with the way things are going in Wisconsin, with only 23% indicating that they are dissatisfied with the state of affairs at this time. While these numbers indicate high levels of approval with the state's direction, they do show signs of departing from the record high levels established last October. The survey results indicate a 5% decrease in the number of Wisconsinites who are satisfied with the way things are going in their home state. While not a major decrease, the drop does fall outside the margin of error employed in the study and may indicate mild erosion of satisfaction levels statewide.

## **OPINIONS OF PERSONAL FINANCE**

State residents continue to have positive views about their financial status and optimism regarding their financial prospects for the upcoming year, yet are slightly less positive in relation to last year's survey results. Over half of Wisconsin's residents indicate that they are financially better off than they were this time last year, with only 21% or 1 in 5 Wisconsinites indicating that they are financially worse off than a year ago. While these results indicate a positive picture of citizen financial conditions, they do mark a 5% drop from last Spring when 60% of state residents indicated they were better off than the year before.

The survey also finds that almost two in three residents expect that they will be financially better off in the year 2000, with only 1 in 5 indicating that the next year will find them worse off financially. These findings represent the second highest level of positive responses to this question in the 16 year history of the WPR/SNC Wisconsin Survey, but also indicate a 6% drop from the 69% of individuals who felt financially optimistic about the upcoming year in last spring's Wisconsin Survey.

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