

Wisconsin Elections 2002 – An Overview

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The Hamilton Consulting Group is closely monitoring the upcoming November general elections as we await the electorate's decision on which party will control the state Assembly and Senate, as well as the Governor's Office. In the Legislature, most observers are expecting the status quo for next session, with the Democrats keeping control of the Senate and the Republicans maintaining majority party status in the Assembly. With the departure of the popular Tommy Thompson, the race for Governor is the first competitive contest for that office in over a decade.

The Race for Governor

The Candidates – Doyle Emerges from Tough Primary to Face McCallum

In the race for Governor, we expect to see a classic Wisconsin close statewide election. Yet, national pundits such as Charlie Cook of the Cook Report are calling the race "leaning Democrat." At the time of this writing, polling numbers appear to support that observation.

Attorney General [Jim Doyle](#) (38%) became the Democrat nominee for governor after defeating Milwaukee area Congressman Tom Barrett (35%), and Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk (27%) in the Democratic primary. In the highly competitive primary, the one surprise may have been how well Doyle fared in Barrett's backyard of southeast Wisconsin, which is the core of a Democratic primary. In the aftermath of the removal of State Senator Gary R. George from the primary ballot, George endorsed the Doyle campaign and appears to have delivered Doyle key wards from his Milwaukee-based district and the portions of Racine and Kenosha. However, Falk far outpaced Doyle in his home base of Dane County and Barrett surprised many by winning in northern counties such as Portage, Eau Claire, Chippewa, and Douglas. Many credit the endorsement of Congressman Dave Obey for Barrett's northern success.

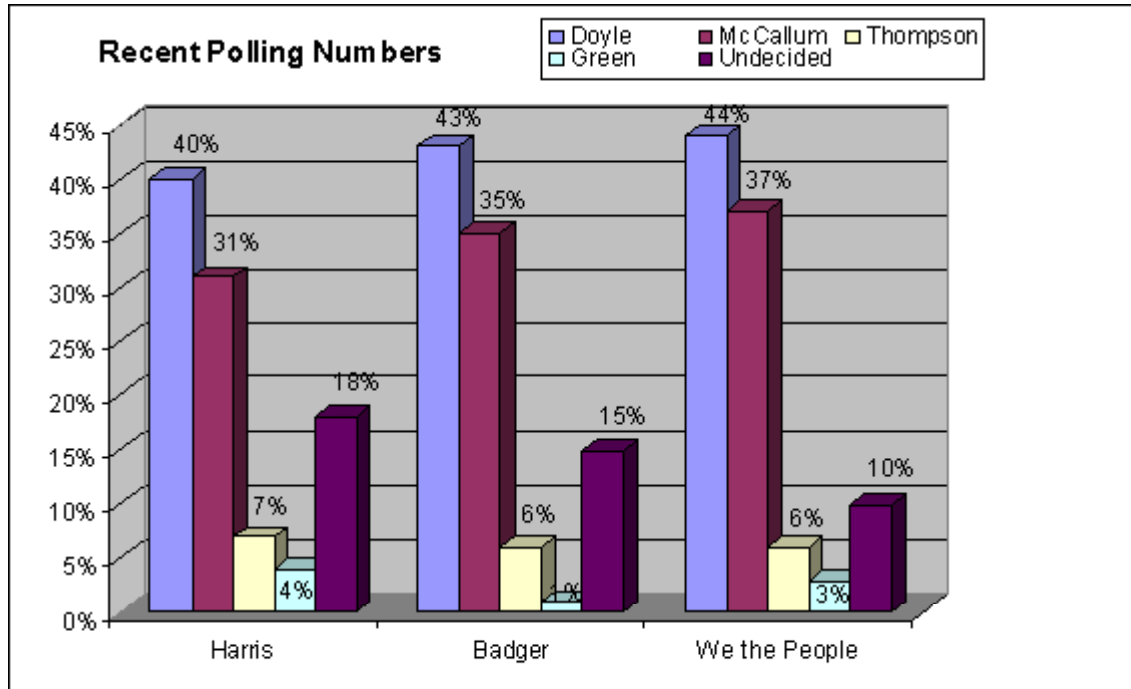
Doyle faces Governor [Scott McCallum](#) in November in what will be the most hotly contested race for governor since Tommy Thompson defeated incumbent Governor Tony Earl in 1986. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy G. Thompson served as governor for 14 years prior to vacating the office for then Lieutenant Gov. McCallum. Not terribly well-known when taking office, McCallum had to overcome some difficult budget issues and polling numbers from the start. While one pre-primary Republican poll had the Doyle-McCallum race a dead heat, subsequent polls indicate a six to nine point Doyle lead.

Tommy Thompson's brother, [Ed Thompson](#), is also running for governor as the Libertarian candidate. While his poor showing on primary day has raised doubts about the extent to which he'll impact the general election, his campaign provides an interesting and somewhat challenging prospect to both the Doyle and McCallum campaigns. Although most assume Thompson would pull voters away from McCallum, it appears that he is pulling support from both campaigns.

Jim Young is another 3rd party candidate, running as a member of the Wisconsin Green Party. (WGP) grew out of a founding convention at St. Croix Falls in 1988. (In 1996, the relative success of Nader/LaDuke presidential campaign enabled the Green Party to retain its ballot status.) Young was born in Milwaukee, and is currently the assessor for the City of Sun Prairie. Among other things, Young believes the head of the Department of Natural Resources should be an elected position within state government.

Polling – Close, but Doyle Leading

Predicting election outcomes is always a risky business (particularly for contract lobbyists). And polling data, even only a month out from the election, is only a snapshot. Nevertheless, three recent polls show Doyle leading McCallum by virtually the same margin – 7 to 9 percent. A poll released Oct. 6, 2002 by Harris Interactive shows that in a four-candidate race, Doyle leads McCallum by 40 percent to 31 percent. (Go to WisPolitics.com to see [HarrisInteractive Poll.](#)) A University of Wisconsin Survey Center [Badger Poll](#) that was released in late September 2002 showed Doyle with an 8 point lead (43% to 35%). And, an Oct. 4-7 survey by "We the People-Wisconsin" (conducted by Research 2000 of Rockville, Md) showed Doyle with 44 percent and McCallum at 37 percent.



Although we look at all polls with a degree of skepticism, certain trends identified by polls are worth watching.

The Issues – It’s Still the Economy

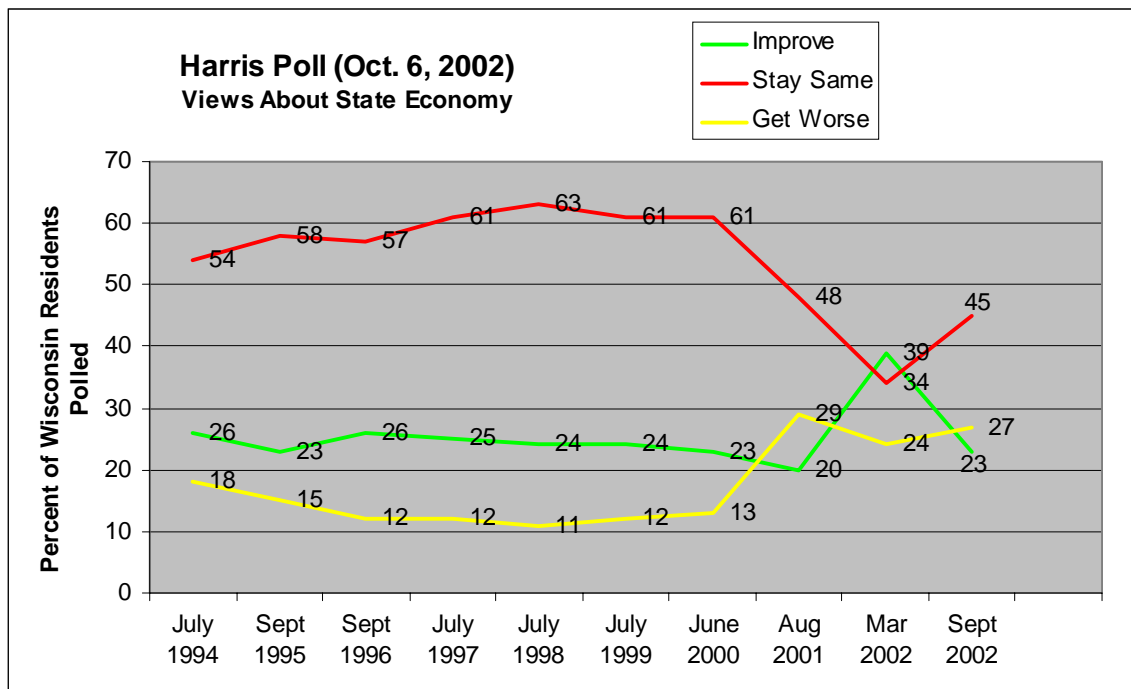
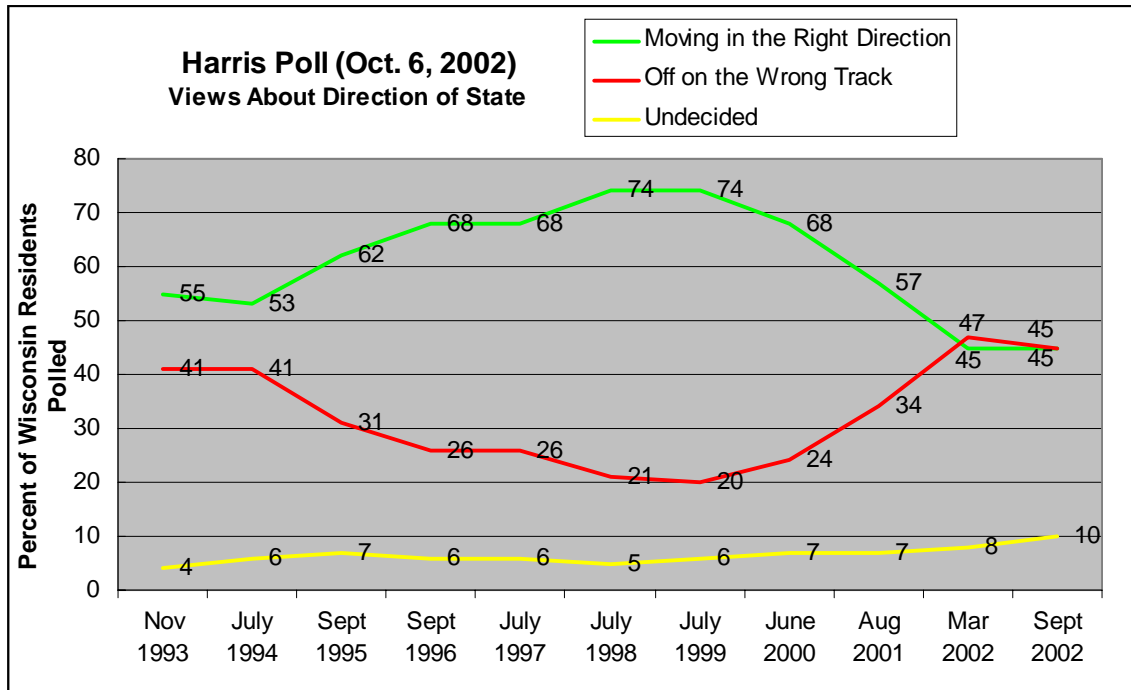
As always, the public’s perception regarding the state of the economy will be a dominant factor in the upcoming election. How will Wisconsin’s apparently intractable budget deficit and the soft economy inherited by McCallum play out in the election? In a somewhat related issue, will the “time for a change” message bring it home for Doyle, or merely give Thompson a boost?

Over the last year, the Governor and the Legislature have had a rocky time trying to solve the state’s budget crisis. Although McCallum proposed sweeping changes to the way the state provides local funding, local governments and their supporters in the Legislature generally rejected it. In the end, the budget gap for this biennium was closed by the one-time use of the remainder of the state’s \$6 billion tobacco settlement. This, in turn, created an even greater challenge for the next budget.

The state fiscal condition, a projected \$2.8 billion biennial (2003-05) deficit, is the issue driving the Doyle and McCallum campaigns. The key question is whether or not the state can cut enough to solve the deficit. The alternative would be to raise taxes. Both McCallum and Doyle have rejected raising taxes, but neither has presented concrete proposals that would appear to balance the budget in the near term. Doyle’s promise to cut 12,000 state jobs, along with his no tax

pledge, may have, however, negated the usual Republican advantage on tax/fiscal matters. (Go to these Web pages to see [McCallum's Pocketbook Protection Pledge](#) and [Doyle's Budget Deficit Principals & Strategies.](#))

Probably more pressing on voters' minds than Wisconsin's budget woes is the status of the state's economy. Several recent polls found worsening attitudes by Wisconsin residents over the general direction and economy of the state. Doyle's "time for a change" message appears to play off this increasing dissatisfaction on the direction of the state. In addition, the ongoing caucus investigation in the state Legislature could bolster this theme. But some GOP strategists predict that "time for a change" voters may go to the Thompson camp rather than Doyle.



One interesting aspect of the Badger Poll indicates a gender gap for McCallum. Although holding a slight lead among men, McCallum trails Doyle among women by a 51% to 34% margin. This appears to be the result of many women indicating education and health care are major priorities for the upcoming election.

Other Statewide Races

Lieutenant Governor

For the first time in Wisconsin history both major party lieutenant governor candidates are women. Green Bay activist [Barbara Lawton](#) (54%) defeated State Senator Kevin Shibiliski (46%) (D-Stevens Point) to become Doyle's running mate. McCallum appointed State Senator **Margaret Farrow (R-Elm Grove)** in early 2001. In the general election, the office of lieutenant governor is not elected separately from governor. As in Presidential politics, the governor and lieutenant governor run as a ticket.

In her second year as Wisconsin's 42nd lieutenant governor, Farrow serves as part of the administration of Gov. Scott McCallum. Farrow was elected in 1976 to the Elm Grove Village Board, where she served as a trustee until 1981, when she was elected Village President. She won election to the State Assembly in 1986, and special election to the State Senate in 1989. She was re-elected to the Senate three times, and served there until her appointment as Lieutenant Governor.

Lawton ran unsuccessfully for the Wisconsin State Senate in the 30th District in 1996 and was Ed Garvey's running mate as the Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor in 1998.

Attorney General

For the first time in decades, there is no incumbent attorney general. The seat was vacated by Attorney General Jim Doyle's run for Governor.

In the race for Attorney General to replace outgoing AG Doyle, Democrat [Peg Lautenschlager](#), former county prosecutor, state representative and federal prosecutor in Wisconsin's western district, faces Republican and Outagamie County District Attorney [Vince Biskupic](#).

The race became competitive after State Senator Brian Burke (D-Milwaukee) announced earlier this year that he would not seek the office after Dane County District Attorney Brian Blanchard charged Burke with 18 felonies as a result of the ongoing investigation.

The governor's race may dictate who will become the next attorney general – a large margin of victory on the top of the ticket could provide coattails to this very important yet somewhat ignored race. A close race will highlight the importance of southeast Wisconsin in a statewide race. Both candidates are from the Fox Valley; therefore, the battleground will be metropolitan Milwaukee and its suburbs.

Secretary of State/State Treasurer

Two incumbents, Democrat Secretary of State Doug La Follette and Republican State Treasurer Jack Voight, face relative unknown opponents in their respective bids to retain those offices. Doug La Follette was elected Secretary of State in 1974 for one term. He was elected again in 1982 and has been re-elected ever since. La Follette's Republican opponent is Robert Lorge of Bear Creek whose dad and brother have both served in the state legislature. Jack Voight, who is seeking his third 4-year term, is being opposed by Democrat Dawn Marie Sass of Milwaukee.

State Legislative Races

The November elections provide major challenges to the minority parties based on the number of seats in play versus the numbers needed to take control. In the State Senate, the Republicans would need to sweep all three closely contested races to wrestle control from the Democrats, and the Assembly GOP 56-43 majority appears to be well beyond reach of the minority Democrats.

The wild card for post election is the outcome of the ongoing investigations into the state legislative caucuses. The impact of this investigation on majority/minority numbers and legislative leadership is uncertain. It appears likely that no major announcements resulting from the investigations will occur prior to the November 5th election, but any post election charges could certainly impact leadership votes come January 2003.

State Senate – Republicans in Uphill Battle

In the State Senate, with an 18-15 Democrat majority, Republicans have an uphill battle to regain the majority due in large part to State Senator Peggy Rosenzweig's (R-Wauwatosa) defeat in her primary by Republican challenger **Tom Reynolds**. This primary upset of an incumbent Republican moves the 5th Senate District on the target list for the November election.

Some Democratic pundits consider Reynolds too conservative for the general election. Rosenzweig is pro-choice, and supporters say she was unseated when many voters opted to vote in the Democratic gubernatorial primary rather than the Republican primary. GOP analysts indicate the district is 55 percent Republican and should be considered leaning to safe for the GOP.

Assuming three competitive districts for November, the GOP needs to retain the 5th and beat two Democrat incumbents, Senator Jim Baumgart (D-Sheboygan) and Senator Kim Plache (D-Racine) to take over the Senate.

In the 9th Senate District, State Representative [Joe Liebham](#) (R-Sheboygan) is giving up his Assembly seat to challenge incumbent Jim Baumgart. Most observers believe Liebham to be a very strong candidate, and coupled with the district boundary changes in the aftermath of redistricting, has a very real chance of unseating the Democrat. On the other hand, Democrat pundits argue that Baumgart fits the district, has been a maverick, and is an intensive campaigner.

In the 21st district in Racine, builder and Republican primary winner [Cathy Stepp](#) is thought to provide an aggressive challenge to Sen. Kim Plache. Racine is noted for tossing incumbents out and with the current anti-incumbent feelings pervading southeast Wisconsin politics, this race could be a close one on election night.

State Assembly – Republican Margin Too Wide

In the Assembly, the GOP has a 56-43 majority and it is unlikely that the Democrats will make gains of any significance this fall. The Republicans also got a boost when Majority Leader Mickey Foti won an overwhelming victory in a primary challenge that had some observers worried.

There are 12 seats of the 99 that would be considered competitive. A breakdown of the races by the numbers:

- Safe open seats (6 GOP/1Dem) – 7
- Unopposed or third party opposition (25 GOP/25 Dem) – 50
- Safe seats – 30
- Incumbents with competitive races – 6
- Open seats competitive – 6

Incumbents (I) to watch include:

- 28th Pettis (I-R) v. Wolden (D)
- 79th Skindrud (I-R) v. Pope-Roberts (D)
- 86th Petrowski (I-R) v. Starr (D)
- 49th Loeffelholz (I-R) v. Siss (D)
- 5th Meyerhofer (I-D) v. Weber (R)
- 13th Cullen (I-D) v. Adamczyk (R)

Open districts to watch include:

- 26th Van Akkerran (D) v. Zemple (R)
- 43rd Lowrie (D) v. Towns (R)
- 67th Gordon (D) v. Wood (R)
- 70th Vruuwink (D) v. Meyer (R)
- 87th Houdek (D) v. Williams (R)
- 90th Dier (D) v. Van Roy (R)

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