

# Wisconsin Public Radio & St. Norbert College Survey Center

## THE WISCONSIN SURVEY

### Wisconsin State Politics

Spring 2004

#### **Survey Information:**

Number of Adult Wisconsin Resident Respondents: 402

Interview Period: April 14 – April 21, 2004

Margin of Error: +/- 5% at the 95% confidence level.

#### **Contact:**

Wendy Scattergood

Assistant Professor of Political Science, St. Norbert College Survey Center

DePere, WI 54115

(920) 403-3491

wendy.scattergood@snc.edu

### Survey Highlights

#### **Direction of the State**

- The majority of respondents feel that the state of Wisconsin is going in the right direction (55%), while 35% think we are going in the wrong direction, and 10% are not sure.

	Spring '04	Fall '03	Spring '03
Right	55%	51%	52%
Wrong	35%	43%	38%
Not Sure	10%	6%	9%

- As seen in the table above, there is a slight increase in the percentage of people who think the state is going in the right direction. Fewer feel the state is going in the wrong direction. Changes in both responses are within error margins for the survey.
- Sentiments about the direction of the state are also connected to how people feel about the

**direction of the country.** For those who feel the country is going in the right direction, 69% also feel that the state is going in the right direction.

- **Democrats** are more apt than **Republicans** to say that they feel the state is going in the right direction. Seventy-one percent (71%) of Democrats feel the state is going in the right direction compared to 61% of Republicans, 52% of Independents and 45% of those belonging to other parties.
- **Age** is also related to feelings about the direction of the state. Eighty percent (80%) of the youngest age group (18 to 24 year olds) feel the state is going in the right direction. Agreement with this decreases steadily as age rises, to a low of 47% of those 45 to 54. Seniors are a bit more optimistic than the latter group with 62% of those 55 to 64 and 60% of those over 65 saying they feel the state is going in the right direction.

**Most Important Problem Facing the State of Wisconsin Today**

- Economy and jobs are the most commonly cited responses to the open-ended question of the most important problem facing the state is (32%) of respondents said this. The second most cited problem is taxes and government spending priorities (24% of respondents mentioned this). Then response rates drop down significantly to 8% of respondents mentioning Education, followed by State Budget concerns at 6%. Please see frequencies at the end of this release for full breakdown of responses.

	10/94	10/95	10/96	10/97	10/98	10/99	10/00	3/02	10/02	03/03	3/04
Budget & Deficit								31%	23%	37%	6%
Taxes & Spending	21%	21%	14%	18%	30%	29%	26%	20%	26%	17%	24%
Education	5%	7%	12%	11%	20%	13%	14%	11%	10%	9%	8%
Economy & Jobs	7%	5%	11%	5%	5%	6%	13%	7%	13%	20%	32%
Health Care	3%	5%	2%	2%	2%	4%	8%	1%	4%	4%	4%
Environment	1%	2%	1%	5%	2%	3%	7%	2%	< 1%	< 1%	1%
Welfare Issues	21%	14%	15%	10%	6%	5%	5%	3%	< 1%	1%	1%
Farm Issues	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	3%	4%	< 1%	0%	< 1%	< 1%
Crime/Drugs	27%	15%	16%	15%	7%	9%	4%	1%	3%	1%	3%

- As seen in the table above, there is a dramatic difference in responses about the budget between last year and this. Last year, 37% of respondents mentioned the budget as the most important problem compared to only 6% this year.
- Some of that was replaced by an increase in the number of people saying economy and jobs are the most important problem; up 12% from last year. Also, concern over taxes and government spending increased 7% over last year.

- There is no significant change in response among the other response categories.

### ***Personal Financial Situation***

		Survey History Median	Fall '03	Spring '04
Financial Situation <i>Now</i> Compared to a Year Ago	Better	40%	37%	41%
	Same	26%	24%	26%
	Worse	30%	38%	32%
Financial Situation <i>Next Year</i> Compared to Now	Better	56%	57%	57%
	Same	20%	14%	19%
	Worse	17%	22%	16%

- Respondents are slightly more optimistic about their financial situations than when the survey was conducted last spring. People feel somewhat *better off* or at least feel they are maintaining their financial situations and fewer people feel like they are *worse off* this year than last (though this is within error margins).
- Similarly, fewer of this year's respondents feel they will be *worse off* financially next year than they are now compared to respondents' predictions in last year's survey. The number who feel they will be *better off* financially next year held steady at 57%.
- The median percentage response for those who feel they are *better off* this year for the history of the survey is 40%, which is 1% lower than the this year's survey. The 32% saying they are *worse off* this year is slightly higher than the survey's median response rate of 30%.
- Optimism about next year's financial situation is right on target with the survey's historical median and the percentage of respondents feeling they will be *worse off* financially next year is below the median response percentage.
- People who feel they are *better off* financially this year are much more likely to say they anticipate being *better off* next year. Eighty-five percent (85%) of those who feel *better off* financially this year said they felt they will be *better off* financially next year, whereas only 4% of saying they are *worse off* this year feel they will be *better off* next year.
- An interesting finding is that while assessment of one's own financial situation is not statistically significantly related to their perception of whether the state is going in the right or wrong direction, it is significantly related to the direction of the country. As might be expected, those who feel better off this year and feel they will be better off next year are much more likely to say the country is going in the right direction than those who feel they are the same or worse off

financially this year.

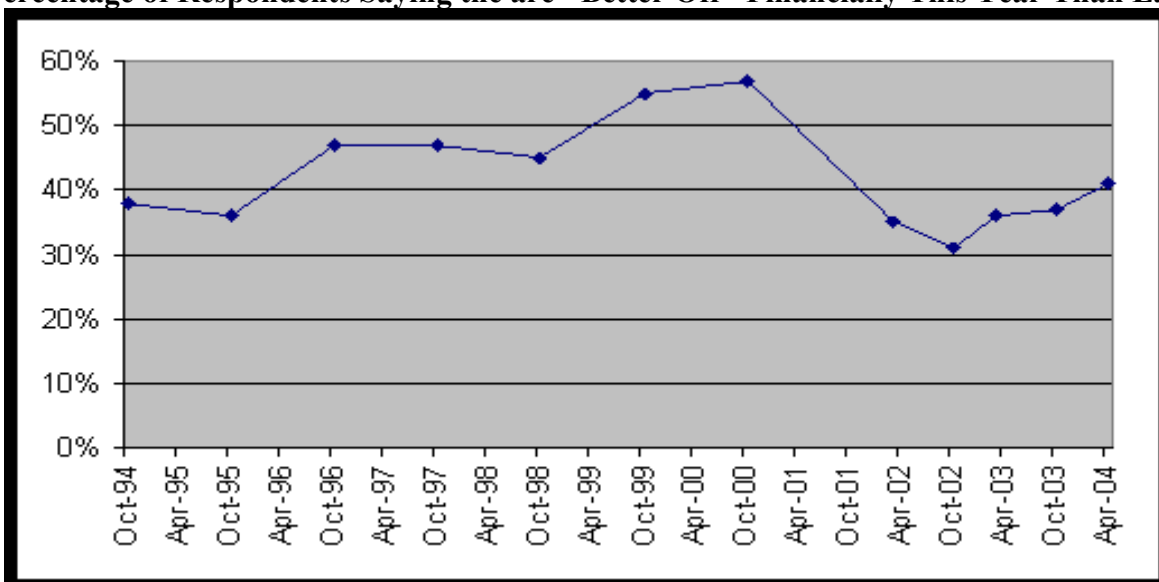
- People over 65 are much less likely to say they are or will be better off. Only 24% of seniors said they are *better off* now than last year compared to 35% of those 55 to 64 and 44% of 25 to 34 year-olds. However, compared to the age breakdown from last year's survey, there is less of a difference this year between age groups. For example last year only 12% of seniors said they were *better off* this year than last as did 40% of those 55 to 64 and 56% of those 25 to 34.
- Wealthier people are more likely than the less wealthy to say they are *better off* now than last year and feel they will be *better off* next year. For those who earn under \$35,000/year, frequency of "better off now" responses are under 30%. Then there is a jump to 43% for those who earn \$36,000 to \$50,000/year. Sixty-six percent (66%) of those who earn \$100,00+ feel they are *better off* this year than last year.

**Historical Comparisons**

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

	10/94	10/95	10/96	10/97	10/98	10/99	10/00	3/02	10/02	03/03	10/03	04/04
Better Off	38	36	47	47	45	55	57	35	31	6	37	41
Same	34	31	26	28	30	23	23	28	18	20	24	26
Worse Off	28	32	25	25	25	21	19	36	50	43	38	32
Not Sure	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

**Percentage of Respondents Saying the are "Better Off" Financially This Year Than Last**

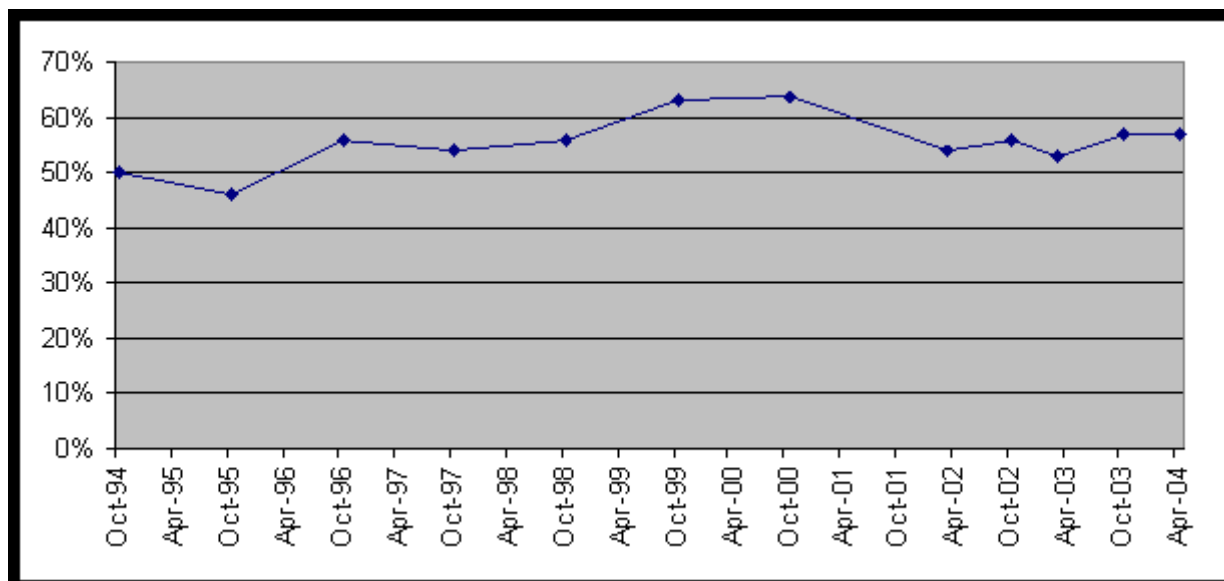


- In the graph above, people seem to be feeling that we are coming out of financial doldrums, where the fewest people saying they are "better off" this year than last bottomed out in October of 2002

and has been steadily increasing since.

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

	10/94	10/95	10/96	10/97	10/98	10/99	10/00	3/02	10/02	03/03	10/03	04/04
Better Off	50	46	56	54	56	63	64	54	56	53	57	57
Same	31	21	19	25	21	15	20	22	13	17	14	19
Worse Off	15	26	15	14	17	20	9	15	22	26	22	16
Not Sure	5	8	9	7	6	1	7	9	9	5	6	8



- Comparing peoples’ assessment of their financial pasts and prognoses, there is a pattern of respondents feeling more optimistic about the future than they are about their immediate past. There is less variation in financial prognoses from year to year than there is in assessment of financial recent past.
- However, optimism about future finances is still slightly below the peak of 1999 and 2000.

## FREQUENCIES

*Generally speaking, would you say that things in the State of Wisconsin are going in the right direction, or are they going in the wrong direction?*

- Right Direction.....55%
- Wrong Direction.....35%
- Not Sure.....10%
- Refused.....< 1%

*What is the most important problem facing the State of Wisconsin today?*

- State Budget & Deficit.....6%
- Taxes and State Spending Priorities.....24%
- Economy and Jobs.....32%
- Education.....8%
- Government Ethics/Integrity/Caucus Scandal.....4%
- Health Care/prescription drug coverage.....4%
- Elderly Care.....1%
- Crime/drugs.....3%
- Racism/Diversity.....1%
- Poverty/issues of the poor.....1%
- Child Care.....1%
- Public Morality.....1%
- Other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_ ).....6%
- None.....1%
- Don't Know/Not Sure.....7%
- Refused.....0%

"Other" Responses:

- Environment (1%)
- Drinking & Driving (1%)
- Less than 1% response rate
- Disabilities
- Gas Prices
- Transportation
- Small Farms (losing them)
- Water
- War/Military
- Gay Rights
- Law Enforcement/Judicial System
- Educated people leave the state
- Too much control by the federal government
- Should be allowed to carry concealed weapons

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

- Better off now.....41%
- Worse off now.....32%
- Same (volunteered).....26%
- Not Sure.....1%
- Refused / NA.....0%

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

- Better off now.....57%
- Worse off now.....16%
- Same (volunteered).....19%
- Not Sure.....8%
- Refused / NA.....1%