



Center for Communication and  
Civic Renewal at the University of  
Wisconsin-Madison

# Understanding 2024 Voters in Midwest Battleground States

**A Survey Report on What Divides – and Unites – Partisans  
in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota**

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Dec. 19 update: clarified interpretation of average policy scores.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION  
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## Contents

1. Introduction & Key Findings .....	3
2. Vote or Stay Home? Partisanship & Voting Barriers .....	5
3. Deeply Divided Group Attitudes .....	7
4. Distinctive Policy Views .....	10
5. Political News & Conversation .....	13

## Appendix:

6. About the 2024 Midwest Battlegrounds Election Survey .....	16
7. About the Center for Communication & Civic Renewal .....	17

## Introduction

As U.S. Electoral College voters cast their ballots in state capitals today, we analyze the partisan divides that shaped voting patterns in critical Midwest battleground states.

The 2024 presidential election was a nail-biter. Neither candidate won a majority of votes, and Trump edged out Harris among voters by just 1.5%. The Electoral College vote came down to the same few battleground states as 2020 and 2016. Wisconsin and Michigan were among them once again, flipping from Democrats to Republicans.

Wisconsin had the narrowest presidential vote margin nationwide (0.9%), and the Badger State split enough of its votes to select both Republican Trump and Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin by narrow majorities. Michigan Democrats lost control of the state legislature and Trump flipped the state from 2020 while Wisconsin Democrats narrowed the margins of Republican majorities in both state houses. Trump lost Minnesota by four percentage points, but Republicans won a state legislative majority there, making it a battleground state too.

In this pre-election survey report, we investigate partisan divisions in these battleground states in the days leading up to the 2024 presidential election. Many of the party divides we find are large, but it is important to remember that neither party is a monolith, and our survey data show some cross-party agreement and substantial disagreements within parties too.

## Key Findings

### Voter Turnout

- **Party motivation:** Midwest battleground Republicans were 5 percentage points more certain than Democrats that they would vote, previewing discouraging results for Democrats.
- **Less representative elections:** We find far lower anticipated voting rates among low-income Midwesterners and people of color.

### Party Divides over Groups

- **Party over demographics:** Partisan divides on systemic racism and hostility toward women greatly exceed divides by race and sex, respectively.
- **Class attitudes:** 34% of Republicans distrust Big Business, putting them at odds with some of their party's elites. Only 10% of Democrats distrust unions.
- **Interreligious trust:** Democrats tend to be somewhat more trusting than Republicans of people with different religious views.

## Party Divides over Policy

- **Bipartisan agreement:** Majorities in both parties back gun purchase background checks and state initiatives (public votes) on constitutional amendments.
- **Within-party divisions:** Many Midwestern Democrats are notably cool about cutting police budgets and liberalizing immigration. And many Midwestern Republicans are notably positive about taxing the rich, environmental protection, legalizing marijuana, and independent redistricting commissions that prevent parties from gaining more legislative seats than their vote share allows.

## Political Conversations & Political News

- **Limited cross-talk:** Majorities in both parties only talk regularly with people from their own party.
- **End of discussion:** 41% of battleground respondents stopped talking about politics with someone with whom they disagree online, and 46% said the same about offline discussions. Among those who did online, 72% of Democrats and 52% said it was at least partly due to offensive, abusive, or harassing interactions. Among those who did offline, 48% of Democrats and 24% said it was at least partly due to offensive, abusive, or harassing interactions.
- **Ending relationships:** 1 in 5 have ended a friendship or spend less time with a family member due to political disagreement, including 27% of Democrats and 11% of Republicans. Among them, 71% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans said it was at least partly due to offensive, abusive, or harassing interactions.
- **Partisan news bubbles:** Republicans were far more likely to opt into partisan media news bubbles than Democrats – 20% vs. 2%.

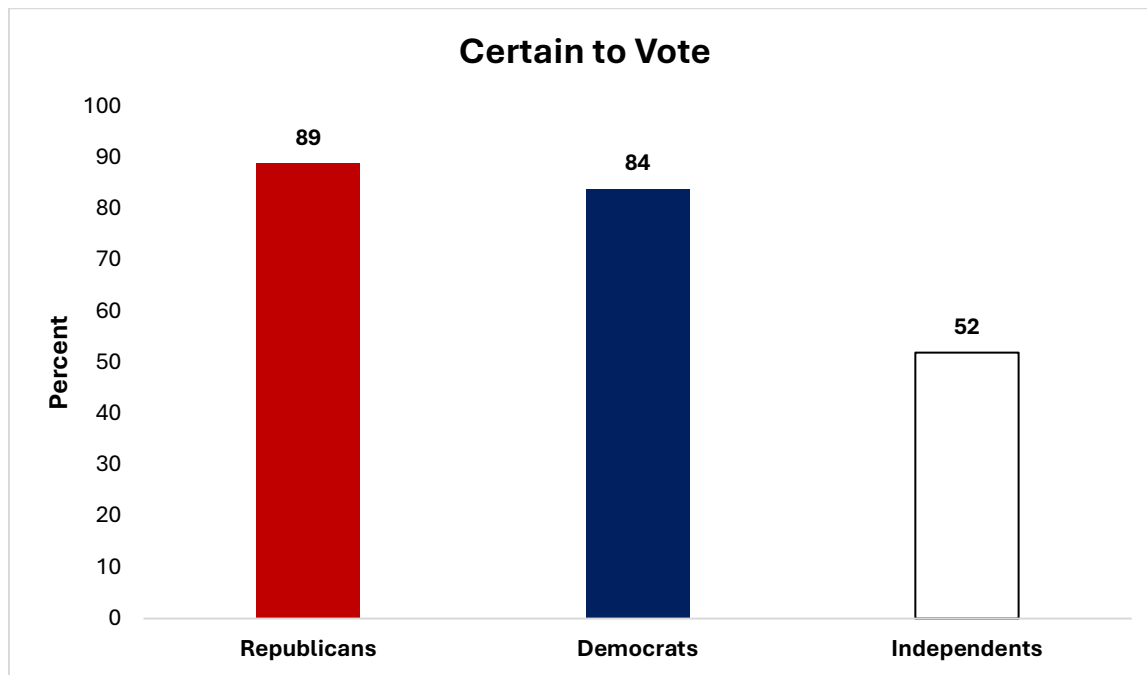
## Vote or Stay Home? Partisanship & Voting Barriers

Seventy nine percent of respondents told us they were certain to vote or had already voted early.<sup>1</sup> Why were the rest thinking they might stay home?

### Partisan Voting Enthusiasm

Naturally, people who identify with a party or who consistently lean toward one are more motivated to support their “team.” But partisans may feel more motivated (or not) to vote in a particular election based on the broader political context. And people who don’t feel any attachment to a party may feel more conflicted over their vote choices in ways that keep them home or simply have less interest in politics. Which party turns out their base of supporters best is the most important factor in who wins elections.

47% of survey respondents identified as Democrats or consistently leaned toward the party, compared to 37% Republicans, and 16% who had no party attachment or leaning.



Midwestern Republicans were most likely to report certainty about voting – 89%. Midwestern Democrats trailed them, with 84% sure they’d vote. That 5-point turnout difference helps explain why Midwestern battleground states flipped from “blue” in

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<sup>1</sup> This percentage is higher than known turnout among eligible voters. Even with efforts to get representative samples, survey respondents still are routinely more politically interested and engaged than the general public, and others are reluctant to say (even in an online survey) that they aren’t planning to vote, for social desirability reasons.

2020 to “red” in 2024 – Democrats were less successful at motivating their supporters to vote. Only 52% of people without party attachments said they’d surely vote.

77% of Midwestern Republicans strongly disapproved of Joe Biden’s presidential performance, compared to just 24% of Democrats who strongly approved, suggesting a substantial gap in partisan satisfaction with their own party.

Republicans who strongly disapproved of Biden were far surer they’d vote than Republicans who felt otherwise – 93% vs. 64%.

And Democrats who strongly approved of Biden were somewhat surer they’d vote than Democrats who didn’t – 91% vs. 81%.

### **Accessibility**

Voting accessibility matters a lot for turnout rates. Voting in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota is relatively easy compared to some other states that make it hard for their citizens to cast ballots. These three states provide options like early voting, same-day registration, and mail-in ballots. But even in these high-turnout states, some people have a much easier time making it to the polls than others.

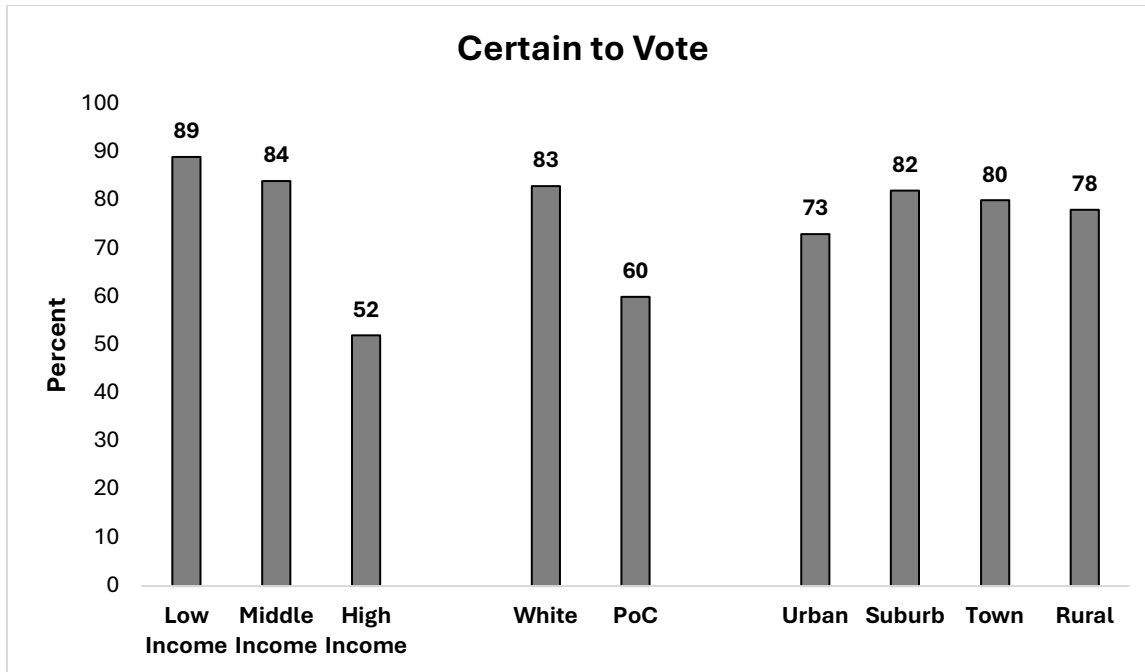
People with low incomes are much less likely to vote than those with middle- and high-incomes, partly because their jobs are less likely to provide flexibility to vote, and because many low-income people are working multiple jobs just to make ends meet.

Only 65% of Midwesterners with family incomes under \$30,000 (lowest 25%) were sure they would vote, compared with 79% certain to vote between \$30,000 and \$99,000 (middle 50%), and 91% certain to vote among those with family incomes over \$100,000 (top 25%). About 1 in 10 respondents declined to share their income – 72% of them were certain to vote.

People of color (PoC) also face greater barriers to voting due to long-standing systemic inequalities that inhibit participation. 83% of white Midwesterners said they were certain to vote, or had already cast an early ballot, compared to just 60% of the non-white electorate.

And, despite complaints that rural areas have less political say than cities, the reverse is true in terms of voting participation: roughly 80% of people in rural areas, towns, and suburbs said they were sure to vote, compared to 73% of urban residents.

As a result of these voting disparities, elections don’t fully represent the public, redistributing power toward wealthier, white, and non-urban Midwesterners.



## Sharply Distinctive Group Attitudes

Since the 1960s, Republicans and Democrats nationwide have grown increasingly divided on views related to civic equality by race, sex, religion, and class. These group-based attitudes are the most important dividing line between the parties and the most powerful influence on who calls themselves a Republican or a Democrat.

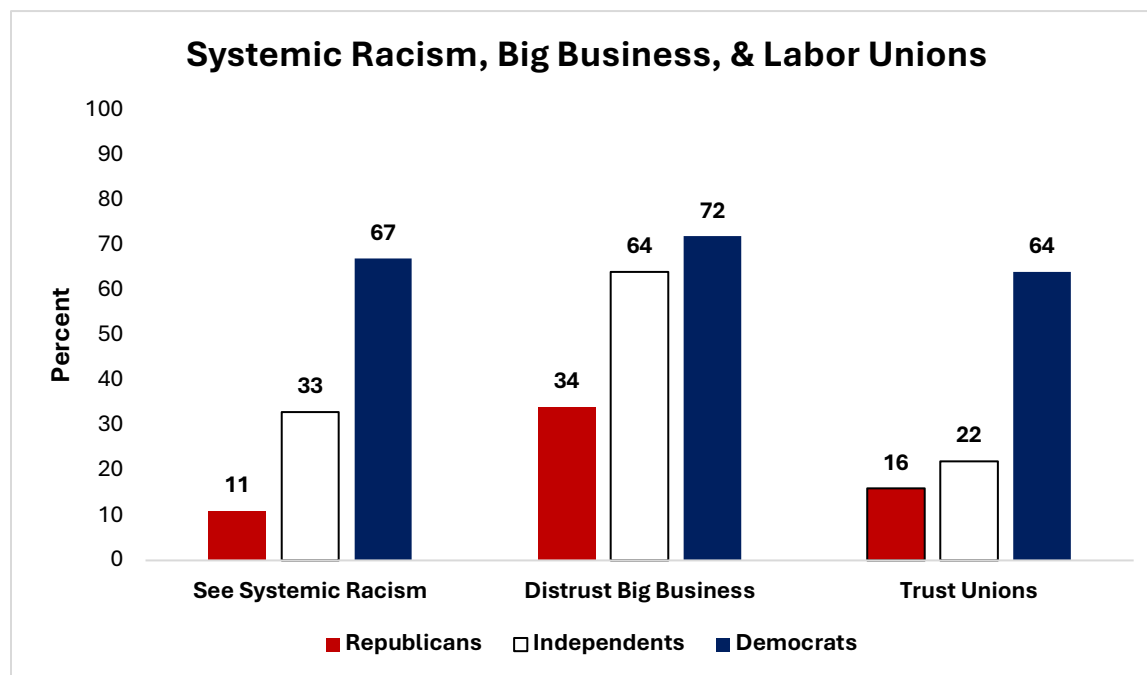
Nationally, Republicans tend to favor maintaining long-standing group hierarchies that advantage the wealth, whites, men, and Christians, while Democrats are more likely to favor reducing those gaps in power, opportunities, and resources. The question here is whether we see similar patterns in Midwestern battleground states – and we do.

### Acknowledging Systemic Racism

We asked respondents whether they recognized how a history of systemic discrimination against Black Americans has produced massive racial disparities in wealth and other measures of opportunity and well-being. “Agree or disagree? Generations of slavery and discrimination make it difficult for African Americans to advance.”

67% of Midwestern Democrats agreed or strongly agreed, compared with just 11% of Republicans. Independents split the difference at 33%. Moreover, the differences were not solely due to Democrats being the primary home of Black voters. The numbers were nearly identical among *white* partisans – 65% for Democrats vs. 10% for Republicans.

Put differently, partisanship distinguished views about the contemporary consequences of systemic anti-Black racism much more strongly than race.



### Big Business vs. Labor

Those running large corporations have long held outside economic and political power over workers and government. Arrayed against them, labor unions have led the fight to provide more economic power and political influence for everyday workers, their families, and their communities.

For a century, Big Business has generally favored Republicans over Democrats, while national unions have generally backed Democrats over Republicans. However, the Democratic Party's embrace of wealthy donors and flagging support for unions since the 1980s has accelerated a neoliberal turn that reduces those distinctions.

We asked Midwestern partisans their levels of trust in big corporations and labor unions. 72% of Midwestern Democrats said they distrust or strongly distrust Big Business, with only 7% expressing some trust. Midwestern Republicans were more divided: 14% express some trust of large corporations, while 34% express some distrust, with the rest in the middle. Independents share Democrats' distrust of big corporations, with 64% distrusting, and only 11% expressing some trust.

People vote for lots of reasons, but Democrats that pull their punches toward Big Business may be losing a significant pool of votes to Republicans. The question is whether interracial class solidarity can trump racial divides for whites.



Views on labor unions are almost a mirror image: 64% of Midwestern Democrats trust or strongly trust unions, with only 10% distrusting them. 16% of Midwestern Republicans trust unions, while 52% distrust them. Independents split the difference again on unions: 22% trust and 32% distrust.

Fully 26% of Midwestern Republicans distrust large corporations *and* labor unions. 21% of Independents feel the same. Despite many Republican-leaning and mixed-party locals, hostility toward unions even among those who distrust Big Business impedes both these voters' economic opportunities and Democrats' electoral chances.

## **Hostility toward Women**

Since the 1980s, the parties have sharply diverged on their views of women's roles in society, and whether steps should be taken to address social, political, and economic inequalities by sex that disadvantage women.

We asked respondents their views related to what is called hostile sexism – whether they strongly agreed, strongly disagreed, or something in between, that “most women fail to appreciate all that men do for them,” and that “most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.” We combined answers to both questions on a scale from 0 (least sexist) to 100 (most sexist).

Midwestern Democratic women averaged 27 out of 100, while Democratic men had an average score of 37.<sup>2</sup>

Midwestern Republican women averaged 48 out of 100, while Republican men had an average score of 61.

Put differently, party distinguished views on women much more than sex.

Midwestern independents split the difference, with women averaging 39, and men averaging 49 out of 100.

## **Religious Pluralism**

Christianity is the dominant religion in the U.S. among voters and leaders, and Christian conservatism strongly shapes some federal and state policies, though neither the U.S. nor the states have official religions.

In a healthy pluralistic democracy, trust across lines of difference is ideal, though the U.S. falls short of those ideals. Notably, here (and perhaps everywhere), *some* religious views are civically harmful – bigoted or authoritarian while others religious views encourage embracing one's fellow humans and support community-based assistance to

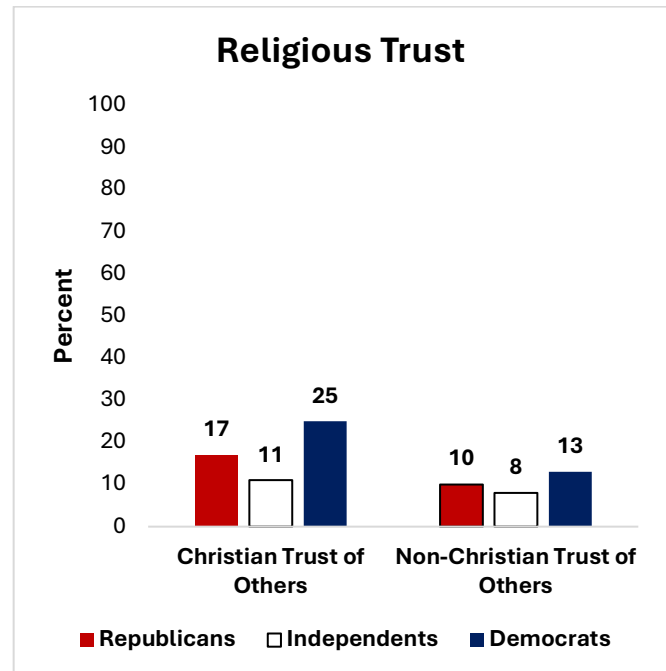
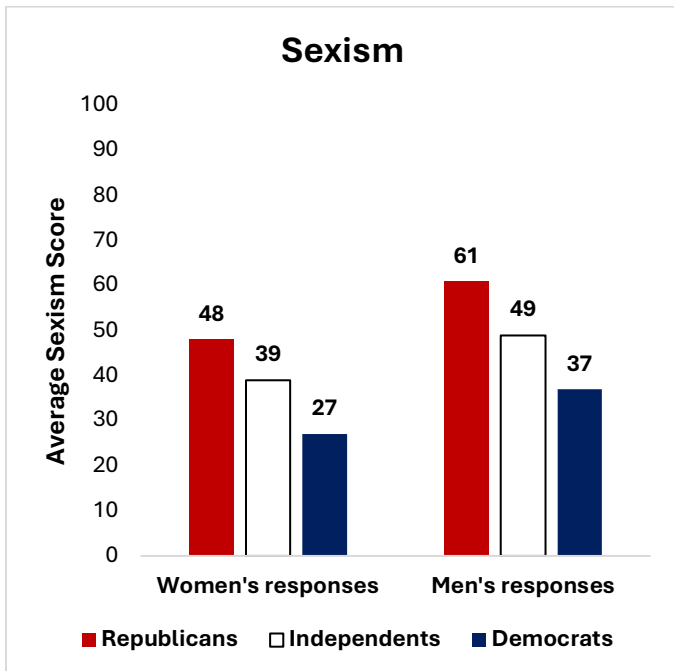
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<sup>2</sup> 1% of respondents identified as non-binary, which is too few to analyze separately with any precision.

those in need. With that in mind, we asked how much respondents trust or distrust people with different religious views than their own.

Overall, we see low levels of trust in religious others.

Among Midwestern Christians, Democrats trust people with other religious views more than Republicans – 25% vs. 17%. Among non-Christian Midwesterners, Democrats and Republicans trust people with other religious views at similar levels – 13% vs. 10%. For Independent Christians, it's 11%, while non-Christian Independents are at 8%.



### Distinctive Policy Views

Americans' policy views are often instantiations of broader group attitudes – whom to help and whom to harm. It's no surprise that partisans are divided on policy, though they are less divided on some policies than others. Where do partisans stand in Midwestern battleground states?

We asked respondents a series of policy questions on 5-point scales, anchored by opposing positions on either end. These are average scores scaled from 0 (support the opposite) to 100 (fully support), rather than percentages. A score of 50 means evenly split between the two poles. The charts below present the results.

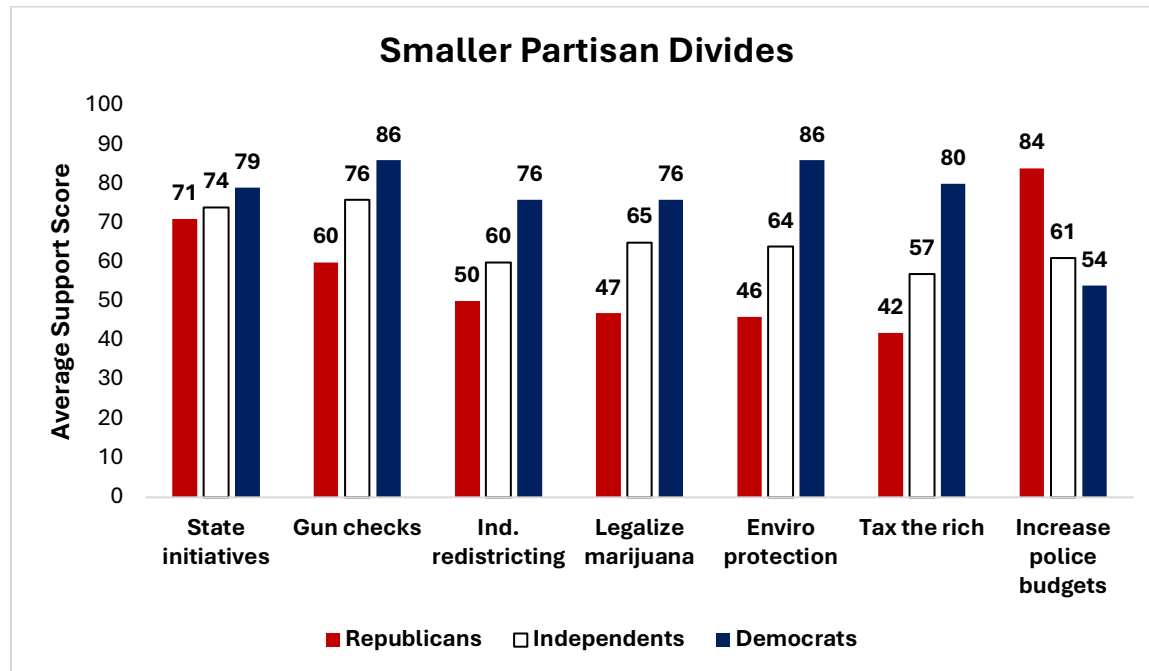
Several findings stand out. We'll start in an unconventional place: bipartisan agreement.



Majorities in both parties (and independents) support state initiatives (public votes) on constitutional amendments and gun purchase background checks.

Other areas show smaller partisan divides, including independent redistricting commission that prevent parties from getting more legislative seats than their vote share allows, legalizing marijuana, environmental protection, and taxing the rich.

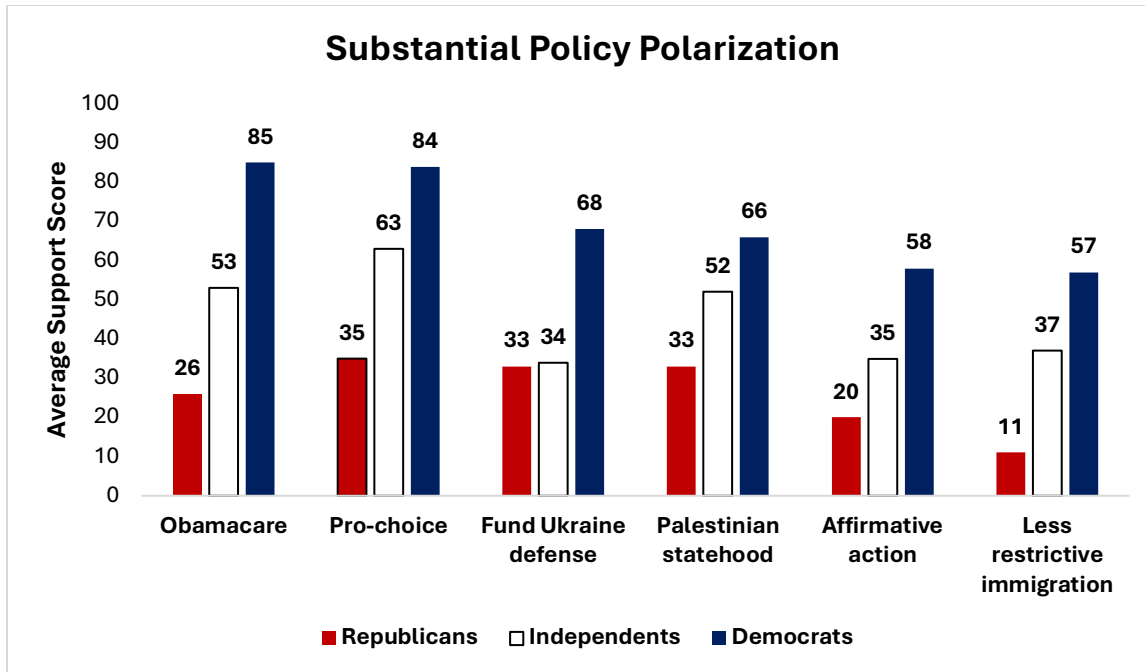
Similarly, while Republicans and Independents support increasing police budgets, Democrats choose the middle ground, for maintaining current police budgets.



Put differently, Midwestern Republicans are notably positive toward gun background checks and state initiatives, and neutral on legalizing marijuana, taxing the rich, and independent redistricting, plus environmental regulation and taxing the rich. And Midwestern Democrats are neutral toward police budgets.

The biggest partisan *gaps* appear on Obamacare, abortion, affirmative action, Palestinian statehood, Ukrainian defense, affirmative action, and less restrictive immigration. Even so, we see more softness in Democratic support for affirmative action and less restrictive immigration than on healthcare, abortion care, and foreign policy.

Democratic voter support for Palestinian statehood stands in notable contrast with Democratic leaders, who have shown little inclination to practically support statehood.



## Political Conversations & Political News

The people voters talk with about politics and the news they consume influence how they vote *and* reflect their preexisting views. Conversations with friends and family are especially persuasive (and mobilizing) in politics. But those conversations can be highly aversive, and so many Midwesterners have ended those talks and even ended or limited relationships as a result. Finally, the most politically active people often choose news and discussions with like-minded views and avoid dissenting ones.

### Political Conversations

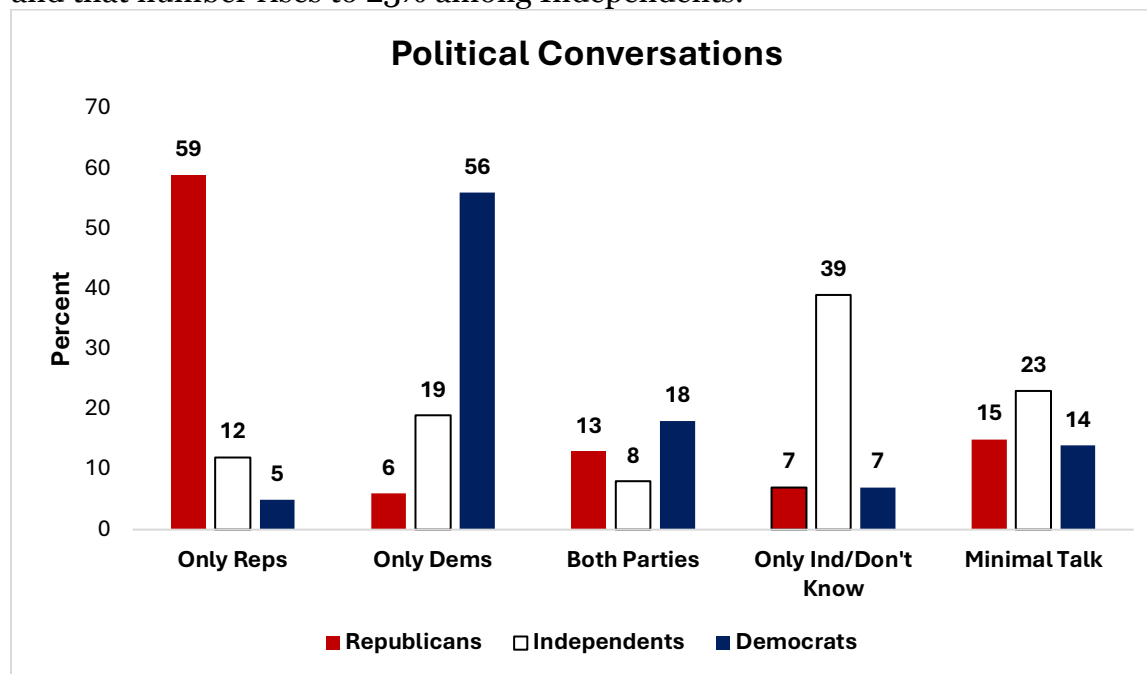
There are lots of reasons why conversations with opposing partisans might be rare – for example, residential segregation and social homophily make it more likely that political discussion partners are more similar than different, even before accounting for motivations to avoid talking to political opponents. We are interested in who talks with opposing partisans, and who doesn't.

We asked people to tell us up to three people they talk with most about politics (if at all), how often they do so, and what party those people align with. We group people into five categories: only talk to Republicans, only talk to Democrats, talk to both parties, only talk to Independents (or don't know party), and those who hardly talk politics at all. As with news consumption, we categorize political conversations based on frequent interaction (“fairly often” or more) rather than “occasional” discussion or less.

Most partisans in Midwest battleground states only talk regularly about politics with people from their own party, with similar levels for Democrats (59%) and Republicans (56%). And a plurality of Independents (39%) only talk with other Independents or don't know the party affiliations of the people they talk regularly with.

Only 18% of Democrats and 13% of Republicans regularly talk politics with people from both parties.

Finally, around 15% of partisans say they don't talk regularly about politics with anyone, and that number rises to 23% among Independents.



### Stopping Talk & Ending Relationships

**Social media talk:** 41% of battleground respondents stopped talking about politics with someone with whom they disagree online, including 52% of Democrats and 32% of Republicans. Among those who did, 72% of Democrats and 52% of Republicans said it was at least partly due to offensive, abusive, or harassing interactions.

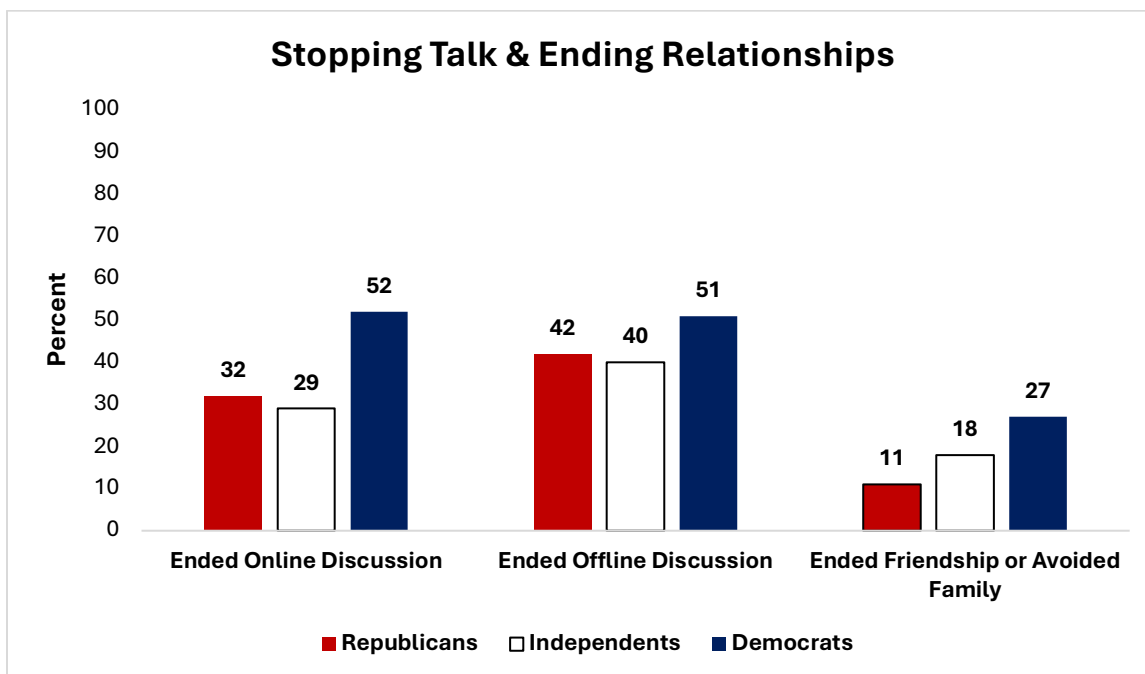
59% of Independents said they cut off social media politics talk simply because someone was talking too much about politics, compared to 46% for Republicans and 39% for Democrats.

**Offline conversations:** 46% said the same about offline discussions, including 52% of Democrats and 42% of Republicans. Among those who did offline, 48% of Democrats and 24% said it was at least partly due to offensive, abusive, or harassing interactions.

38% of Independents said they cut off offline political talk because someone was talking too much about politics, compared to 23% for Republicans and 25% for Democrats.

**Ending relationships:** 1 in 5 battleground state residents have ended a friendship or spend less time with a family member due to political disagreement, including 27% of Democrats and 11% of Republicans. Among them, 71% of Democrats and 50% of Republicans said it was at least partly due to offensive, abusive, or harassing interactions.

37% of Independents said they ended a friendship or avoided family because they were talking too much about politics, compared to 25% for Republicans and 26% for Democrats.



## Political News

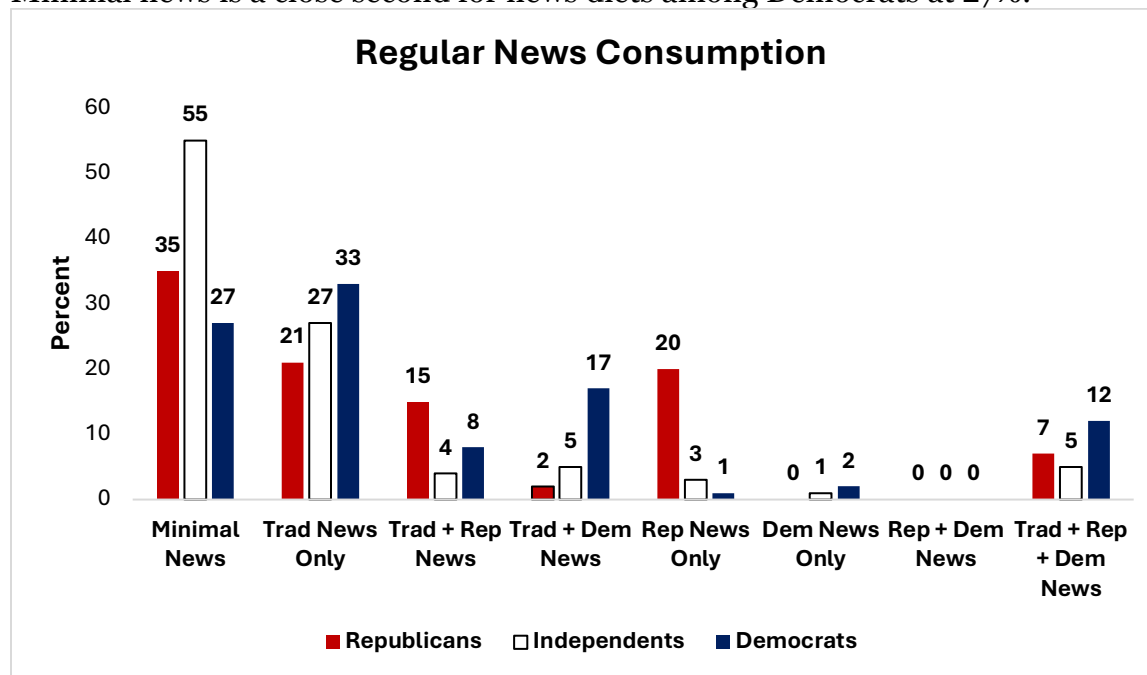
We also wanted to learn what types of media sources people get their information from. Are Midwesterners stuck in partisan media bubbles or exposed to a broader range of political information?

We compiled media sources into three categories – mainstream news (including sources like national network television news, national newspapers, local newspapers, CNN, NPR),<sup>3</sup> pro-Republican news (Fox News, Breitbart, Daily Caller, conservative talk radio, conservative podcasts), and pro-Democratic news (MSNBC, Huffington Post, liberal

<sup>3</sup> The full list also includes *Politico*, *Vox*, *Buzzfeed*, fact check websites, state newspapers, international news, *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *NPR*, local TV news.)

podcasts). Various combinations of mainstream news, Republican, and Democratic media types produce 8 news diet categories.

The most prevalent news diets for Midwestern Republicans and Independents involve not consuming much news at all – 35% for Republicans and 55% for Independents. Minimal news is a close second for news diets among Democrats at 27%.



Democrats are far more likely than Republicans to only consume traditional news, at 33% vs. 21%. 15% of Republicans and 17% of Democrats regularly consume both traditional news and media from their own side. Perhaps surprisingly, 8% of Democrats and 2% of Republicans regularly consume traditional news and an *opposing* party media source.

Aggregated across all the news diet categories, 45% of Republicans consume traditional news, compared with 70% for Democrats and 41% of Independents. In some ways, Republican consumption of traditional news is still surprisingly high given decades of vilification by conservative leaders.

20% of Republicans regularly consume only Republican-sourced media content, contrasted with just 2% of Democrats.

Finally, 12% of Democrats and 7% of Republicans regularly consume news from all three categories – traditional, Republican, and Democratic. Overall, Democrats have more diverse news diets than Republicans, meaning they are more likely to hear a diverse range of political views. Republicans are more likely to select media environments that regularly advance their party’s views.

## About the 2024 Midwest Battlegrounds Election Survey

The 2024 Midwest Battlegrounds Election Survey (pre-election wave) was administered online by [YouGov](#) from October 17 to November 4, 2024. YouGov supplied a demographically weighted representative opt-in sample of 1,185 adult residents of four Midwestern states: Wisconsin ( $N=333$ ), Michigan ( $N=272$ ), Minnesota ( $N=289$ ), and Iowa ( $N=291$ ). We apply demography-based survey sample weights to better align estimates with state populations.

In this report, we focus on respondents in the three battleground states – Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota ( $N=894$ ).

Although non-probability samples do not have traditional margins of error, percentages from these three states have a virtual margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percentage points for point estimates near 50%, with smaller margins for estimates as they move toward 0% or 100%. Estimates for Democrats in the two states have margins of error of  $\pm 5$  percentage points, and estimates for Republicans are  $\pm 6$  percentage points, due to fewer Republicans in the sample, which we'd expect given fewer people who identify as Republicans in these states (not just how they vote).

We also fielded a national survey with many of the same questions, and we're fielding post-election surveys for additional insights, all for later reports and scholarly work.

The 2024 Midwest Battlegrounds Election Survey was supported by the John S. and James L. [Knight Foundation](#), which advances research at the intersections of media and democracy.



## About the Center for Communication & Civic Renewal

The Center for Communication & Civic Renewal (CCCR) is an interdisciplinary research team housed in the School of Journalism & Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. CCCR's research aims to understand Wisconsin public opinion and the state's broad political communication ecology, drawing upon frameworks and methods foundations in communication, political science, sociology, psychology, and computer science. Dr. Michael Wagner leads the Center as Faculty Director, Dr. Dhavan Shah is the Center's Research Director, and Dr. Nathan Kalmoe serves as Executive Administrative Director for the Center.

The Center's public opinion polling is one of three analytical components in its broader efforts studying political communication in Wisconsin, the Midwest, and beyond. Over the years, we have also conducted in-depth interviews with hundreds of citizens throughout the state to understand how they're talking and thinking about politics. And we have conducted large-scale computational analyses of social media and news media content throughout the Wisconsin, the United States, and the world.

CCCR's past research is synthesized in the book, [\*Battleground: Asymmetric Communication Ecologies and the Erosion of Civil Society in Wisconsin\*](#), published by Cambridge University Press in 2022, along with several peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals, and public-facing essays published in national news outlets including the *Washington Post*, *Vox*, and *TechStream* as well as local outlets like the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, the *Capital Times*, and the *Wisconsin State Journal*

Our March 2023 report, "[Civic Fracture & Renewal in Wisconsin](#)," assessed the public's civic attitudes and behaviors and found worrisome signs of social and political conflict in 2022 Wisconsin and U.S. midterm election survey comparisons. These included ending relationships over politics, safety fears in politics, and views supporting for political violence among a minority of citizens – but we also identified vital agreement across divides in ways that may help repair American democracy.