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# **EMBARGO**

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## **GASOLINE PRICES ARE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING WISCONSIN**

### **-- Majority of Residents Blame Domestic Oil Companies --**

With some of the highest gas prices anywhere in the nation, it is no surprise Wisconsin residents consider the price of gas to be the single most important problem facing the state. When Wisconsin residents were asked in an open-ended question, what they think is the single most important problem facing the state that government should be addressing, almost one-quarter (24%) of statewide residents responded with 'gasoline prices'. The rise in gas prices is having the greatest impact in the Milwaukee suburbs (38%) and Waukesha County (42%), where more than four out of ten residents rate gas prices as the single most important problem facing the state.

- **Regions:** The importance of gasoline prices as a problem facing the state varies substantially across regions: Madison, 15%; La Crosse/Eau Claire, 20%; Green Bay, 22%; South-East, 24%; and City of Milwaukee, 26%.

Overshadowed by gas prices that topped \$2.00 a gallon, taxes were rated as the most important issue facing the state by 17% of residents. The importance of taxes, as with gas prices, shows considerable variability across regions of the state ranging from a low of 6% within the City of Milwaukee to a high of 27% in Waukesha County.

Crime/Criminal Justice (9%) and Schools/Education (8%) round out the top four state issues as rated by Wisconsin residents. These are some of the key findings from the most recent survey of 1,001 Wisconsin residents conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. and Harris Interactive, Inc. between June 26 and June 29, 2000.

**MOST IMPORTANT STATE PROBLEM 1990 - 2000**

	June 00	July 99	July 98	July 97	Sept. 96	Sept. 95	July 94	Nov. 93	May 93	Nov. 92	Jan. 92	Sept. 91	Jan. 91	Sept. 90
Gasoline Prices/Gasoline Taxes	25%	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Taxes	17%	24%	18%	21%	16%	20%	19%	18%	30%	18%	26%	23%	33%	30%
Crime	9%	12%	16%	17%	22%	19%	22%	22%	10%	10%	13%	14%	15%	13%
Schools/Education	8%	11%	10%	10%	10%	10%	6%	8%	11%	7%	7%	14%	7%	9%
Welfare/Social Issues	6%	11%	11%	16%	17%	19%	18%	14%	13%	12%	10%	10%	8%	9%
Health Issues	6%	5%	4%	2%	3%	3%	10%	11%	8%	9%	8%	5%	2%	3%
Environment/Recycling	4%	3%	5%	5%	2%	2%	2%	2%	4%	2%	4%	5%	7%	11%
Unemployment/Jobs	2%	2%	3%	3%	5%	4%	5%	11%	6%	16%	13%	7%	6%	4%
Loss of Business/Economy	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	4%	11%	7%	4%	5%	3%

In a similar question, residents were asked to choose from a list of five issues, the one issue they think needs the most attention from state government. While 'Lowering Gasoline Prices' was again rated most important by 28% of residents, in this instance both improving public education and reforming the tax system follow closely behind with 24%.

- 'Combating Crime and Violence' is rated as the top issue needing the most attention by City of Milwaukee residents (29%).

While the emergence of gasoline prices as a state issue may turn out to be a short-term problem, from a long-term perspective, it is interesting to note the stability of public education as an issue with Wisconsin residents. Even as gasoline prices occupy the media forefront, public education remains an important issue to state residents slipping only one point since 1999 (from 25% to 24%).

- Thirty-one percent (31%) of La Crosse/Eau Claire residents rate 'Improving Public Education' as the top issue needing the most attention by state government.

The table below provides additional trend data for this question.

**ISSUE NEEDING MOST ATTENTION FROM WISCONSIN STATE GOVERNMENT**

	<b>June 00</b>	<b>July 99</b>	<b>July 98</b>	<b>July 97</b>	<b>Sept. 96</b>	<b>Sept. 95</b>	<b>July 94</b>	<b>Nov. 93</b>
Lowering Gasoline Prices	28%	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Reforming the Tax System	24%	32%	24%	24%	16%	14%	16%	17%
Improving Public Education	24%	25%	28%	26%	22%	18%	12%	16%
Combating Crime and Violence	16%	22%	27%	22%	32%	24%	29%	30%
Improving the Environment	7%	8%	7%	6%	5%	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Reforming the Welfare System	N.A.	11%	14%	22%	23%	29%	28%	21%

Note: Reforming the Welfare System was not included in this year's survey.

Although residents currently rate gasoline prices as the number one issue facing the state, over two-thirds (67%) of residents report that the recent gas price increase has not caused any financial hardship within their own household.

- While overall 32% of residents do report financial hardship; this burden is felt more acutely by those with income below \$30,000 (46%), by residents of South-East Wisconsin (42%) and by those aged 18 to 24 (41%).

Overall, residents are approximately split over the effect the price increase has had on their driving habits and travel plans. Slightly more than half (52%) say that they have made no changes while 47% report changing their driving and travel plans because of the price increase. The financial effect of price increases on the driving habits and travel plans of Wisconsin residents is demonstrated by the differences among household income categories shown below:

**Have higher gasoline prices caused you to change your driving habits or travel plans?**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,000 or Less</b>	<b>\$15,000 - \$30,000</b>	<b>\$30,001 - \$50,000</b>	<b>\$50,001 - \$75,000</b>	<b>Over \$75,000</b>
Yes	47%	53%	54%	50%	46%	30%
No	52%	43%	44%	50%	53%	70%

A large majority (69%) of Wisconsin residents also seem willing to eliminate discretionary travel if gas prices continue to increase this summer, while 28% say that they will not drive less than they might have otherwise.

- Among those most willing to postpone travel plans are residents aged 18 to 24 (78%) as well as residents of the La Crosse/Eau Claire area (75%) and the Milwaukee suburbs (75%).

Looking ahead 6 months from now, more than half of Wisconsin residents (53%) are optimistic that gas prices will be lower, while 29% think they will remain the same and 15% believe they will be higher. Among the most optimistic are college graduates (59%) and those with income over \$75,000 (64%). Residents who are more likely to feel that prices will continue to increase are those aged 18 to 24 (39%) and those with incomes of \$30,000 or less (22%).

- Liberals are slightly more likely to see higher prices in the future compared to conservatives (18% and 14% respectively) while Independents (18%) tend more toward continued price increases compared to both Republicans (12%) and Democrats (13%).

When Wisconsin residents were asked who they think is to blame for rising gasoline prices, 36% overall say domestic oil companies, followed by 21% who feel it is the foreign oil producers who are behind recent price increases. Blame is placed evenly on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and elected officials (both 12%), while only 3% blame consumers.

- Democrats and Independents are much more likely to blame domestic oil companies (41% and 40% respectively), compared to Republicans at 30%. Likewise, liberals (38%) and middle of the road residents (39%) are also more inclined to blame domestic oil companies than are conservatives (29%).
- Republicans lean more toward blaming the Environmental Protection Agency (18%) than do the Democrats (8%) or Independents (9%). Liberals and

Independents (both 5%) are slightly more inclined to blame consumers than all residents (3%).

This being an election year, the role that gasoline prices may play in the upcoming presidential election is open for speculation. When Wisconsin residents were asked who they believe would do a better job of ensuring a supply of reasonably-priced gasoline, 39% chose Bush, 28% selected Gore, 10% believe neither, and 21% are not sure. As expected, choices break more strongly when partisanship is considered:

- Seventy-six (76%) of Republicans believe Bush will do a better job while 58% of Democrats think Gore is the better choice. Independents select Bush 2 to 1 over Gore (40% to 21%). Middle of the road residents are more evenly split between Bush and Gore (35% and 31% respectively).

The partisan nature of this issue is also evident geographically, with the typically Democratic City of Milwaukee believing Gore will perform better than Bush, 38% to 25%. Outside of Milwaukee, those areas that have felt the gas price increases most acutely are also areas that tend Republican. In these areas we find stronger support for Bush compared to Gore: South-East Wisconsin, 42% to 26%; Milwaukee suburbs, 46% to 22%; and Waukesha County, 58% to 21%.

**WISCONSIN RESIDENTS REMAIN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT STATE ECONOMY  
AND THEIR OWN ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES**

Despite indications that the economy is cooling, due in part to the intervention of Alan Greenspan and the increase of interest rates, Wisconsin residents continue to remain optimistic about the future of the state economy and their own family's economic future. Positive views about the economy continue to be a reason that residents perceive the state as heading in the right direction. Among those who think the state economy will improve, 78% say the state is heading in the right direction. Among those who think the economy will stay the same, 70% approve of the state's direction, while only 42% of those who think the economy will get worse approve of the state's direction.

**WISCONSIN RESIDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ECONOMY 1988-2000**

**-- Expected Trend in State Economy --**

	June 00	July 99	July 98	July 97	Sept. 96	Sept. 95	July 94	Nov. 93	May 93	Nov. 92	Jan. 92	Sept. 91	Jan. 91	Sept. 90	Jan. 90	Sept. 89	Jan. 89	Sept. 88	Jan. 88
<b>Improve</b>	23%	24%	24%	25%	26%	23%	26%	24%	25%	36%	23%	24%	9%	19%	25%	30%	25%	26%	25%
<b>Stay Same</b>	61%	61%	63%	61%	57%	58%	54%	53%	52%	45%	44%	51%	40%	50%	50%	50%	54%	48%	43%
<b>Get Worse</b>	13%	12%	11%	12%	12%	15%	18%	20%	20%	15%	30%	22%	47%	27%	20%	15%	18%	23%	30%

**-- Expected Trend in Family Circumstances --**

<b>Improve</b>	36%	34%	37%	33%	34%	33%	32%	30%	28%	33%	30%	33%	26%	29%	36%	40%	37%	33%	33%
<b>Stay Same</b>	53%	57%	55%	57%	56%	58%	56%	57%	56%	55%	56%	56%	58%	57%	53%	51%	53%	55%	55%
<b>Get Worse</b>	10%	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%	11%	12%	13%	9%	11%	10%	15%	13%	9%	7%	7%	10%	10%

**WISCONSIN REMAINS POLITICALLY COMPETITIVE  
AND MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD IN PHILOSOPHY**

As the table on the following page shows, Wisconsin remains a highly competitive state in which Independents and Middle-of-the Road voters hold the fate of elected officials in their hands. As the 2000 Presidential campaign unfolds, it will be interesting to see how these key groups of voters evaluate the candidates as they learn more about them.

<b>PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN WISCONSIN</b>						
	<b>June 00</b>	<b>July 99</b>	<b>July 98</b>	<b>July 97</b>	<b>Sept. 96</b>	<b>Sept. 95</b>
<b>Party Identification</b>						
Democrat	28%	27%	26%	27%	29%	30%
Independent	30%	32%	34%	34%	29%	29%
Republican	25%	27%	26%	25%	27%	29%
<b>Political Philosophy</b>						
Liberal	16%	15%	14%	12%	12%	16%
Middle-of-the-Road	54%	54%	58%	57%	59%	53%
Conservative	25%	28%	23%	27%	26%	29%

**SUMMARY**

While Wisconsin residents continue to remain optimistic about the future of the state economy and their families economic future, residents are clearly concerned with the high price of gasoline. With substantially more residents believing that George W. Bush would do a better job ensuring a supply of reasonably-priced gasoline, there may be political consequences for Al Gore if high prices continue until the November election.

### **ABOUT THE STUDY**

This study of 1,001 Wisconsin residents vote was conducted by telephone between June 26 and 29, 2000. A survey of 1,001 randomly selected residents has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent for percentages of the whole sample. For a percentage near 50 percent, for example, this means that repeated samples would produce results between 47 percent and 53 percent 95 times out of 100. All interviewing was conducted from the telephone centers of Harris Interactive, Inc.

This study was commissioned by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. The Institute was founded in 1987 and its mandate is to examine issues of public policy facing Wisconsin, using a nonpartisan approach.

Harris Interactive, Inc. is a firm specializing in market research and public opinion polling, headquartered in Rochester, New York. Dr. Gordon S. Black is the author of the survey. Dr. Black has his Doctorate in Political Science from Stanford University and is a widely known authority on public opinion, voting behavior and opinion research methods.

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Gasoline Prices	24%	32%	22%	20%	15%	26%	38%	42%	24%	18%
Taxes	17%	15%	21%	18%	17%	6%	19%	27%	13%	15%
Crime	9%	12%	9%	9%	8%	24%	7%	1%	11%	6%
Schools/Education	8%	5%	8%	8%	14%	8%	6%	4%	9%	11%
Welfare/Social Issues	6%	3%	6%	11%	7%	2%	4%	2%	4%	11%
Health issues	6%	6%	6%	4%	3%	3%	7%	3%	8%	7%
Environmental/Recycling	4%	4%	3%	6%	7%	3%	4%	7%	5%	3%
Governmental Issues	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	3%	6%	2%	4%	3%
Unemployment/Jobs	2%	3%	*	1%	1%	9%	--	--	3%	1%
Farming	2%	*	1%	3%	2%	--	--	--	--	5%
Loss of business/Economy	1%	1%	--	--	5%	1%	*	--	--	--
Gasoline Taxes	1%	1%	--	--	--	1%	*	2%	1%	1%
Other	3%	3%	5%	2%	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
None	3%	4%	4%	1%	--	6%	2%	4%	4%	3%
Don't know	6%	4%	8%	7%	6%	5%	3%	3%	9%	6%
Refused	*	--	--	--	1%	--	--	--	--	--
Decline to answer	3%	2%	2%	5%	5%	2%	1%	2%	2%	6%
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

What do you think is the SINGLE MOST important problem facing Wisconsin that the government should be doing something about? (Open Ended)

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Improving the environment	7%	6%	4%	9%	12%	8%	3%	5%	11%	7%
Combating crime and violence	16%	20%	16%	15%	12%	29%	19%	10%	14%	12%
Reforming the tax system	24%	24%	29%	20%	24%	11%	26%	40%	22%	22%
Improving public education	24%	24%	21%	31%	23%	28%	25%	20%	22%	24%
Lowering gasoline prices	28%	25%	27%	26%	28%	22%	26%	23%	32%	32%
None of these	1%	1%	--	--	1%	2%	--	--	--	2%
Not sure	1%	1%	2%	--	1%	--	2%	2%	--	1%
Decline to answer	*	--	1%	--	--	--	--	--	--	1%
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

Which ONE of the following five issues do you think needs the most attention from the Wisconsin state government at the present time?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Yes	47%	45%	48%	46%	40%	40%	49%	42%	45%	53%
No	52%	53%	51%	54%	60%	54%	50%	58%	55%	47%
Not sure	1%	1%	1%	--	--	2%	--	--	--	*
Decline to answer	1%	1%	*	--	--	4%	1%	--	--	--
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

Have higher gasoline prices caused you to change your driving habits or travel plans?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Yes	69%	64%	73%	75%	59%	57%	75%	63%	71%	75%
No	28%	32%	24%	23%	41%	36%	23%	37%	29%	23%
Not sure	2%	2%	2%	2%	--	3%	1%	--	--	2%
Decline to answer	1%	1%	1%	--	--	3%	1%	--	--	*
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

If the price of gas continues to increase this summer, would that cause you to Drive Less than you might have otherwise?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Yes	32%	28%	31%	35%	31%	32%	24%	34%	42%	36%
No	67%	71%	68%	65%	69%	65%	76%	65%	58%	64%
Not sure	1%	1%	1%	--	--	2%	--	1%	--	*
Decline to answer	*	*	--	--	--	1%	--	--	--	--
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

Have recent price increases in gasoline caused any financial hardship for you or your household?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Environmental Protection Agency	12%	19%	7%	5%	7%	16%	26%	26%	20%	8%
Elected officials	12%	11%	13%	15%	11%	15%	10%	9%	11%	11%
Foreign oil producers	21%	16%	26%	30%	18%	15%	12%	17%	24%	21%
Domestic oil companies	36%	32%	33%	36%	45%	28%	35%	33%	26%	42%
Consumers	3%	2%	4%	--	5%	2%	3%	1%	2%	3%
Other	4%	4%	5%	3%	7%	4%	3%	2%	3%	3%
Not sure	12%	14%	12%	11%	7%	18%	9%	12%	14%	13%
Decline to answer	*	1%	1%	--	--	2%	1%	--	--	--
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

Who do you think is to blame for rising gasoline prices: The EPA, that is the Environmental Protection Agency, Elected officials, Foreign Oil Producers, Domestic Oil Companies or Consumers [ROTATE]?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Higher	15%	10%	15%	24%	14%	14%	8%	12%	12%	22%
About the same	29%	30%	29%	35%	27%	29%	25%	35%	31%	25%
Lower	53%	56%	53%	39%	56%	54%	62%	51%	55%	51%
Not sure	3%	4%	3%	2%	3%	2%	4%	3%	2%	2%
Decline to answer	*	1%	--	--	--	1%	1%	--	--	--
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

Looking ahead six months from now, do you think gas prices will be Higher than they are today, About the Same, or Lower than they are today?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
George W. Bush	39%	41%	39%	40%	35%	25%	46%	58%	42%	37%
Al Gore	28%	27%	28%	26%	38%	38%	22%	21%	26%	28%
Neither	10%	13%	8%	9%	5%	13%	15%	14%	10%	11%
Not sure	21%	17%	25%	23%	21%	21%	15%	7%	21%	22%
Decline to answer	1%	2%	--	2%	1%	2%	2%	--	1%	2%
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

In the long run, who do you think would do a better job ensuring a supply of reasonably-priced gasoline, Al Gore or George W. Bush [ROTATE]?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Republican	25%	23%	26%	26%	19%	9%	32%	36%	23%	30%
Democrat	28%	33%	23%	27%	37%	48%	25%	20%	31%	22%
Independent	30%	28%	34%	26%	30%	25%	31%	31%	31%	29%
Other party	7%	7%	4%	9%	8%	7%	7%	9%	7%	8%
Not sure	7%	6%	10%	8%	5%	5%	2%	5%	7%	6%
Decline to answer	3%	3%	3%	4%	1%	6%	3%	--	2%	6%
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

Do you normally think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or some other party?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Liberal	16%	18%	13%	14%	24%	24%	19%	14%	18%	10%
Conservative	25%	27%	24%	27%	23%	23%	25%	27%	22%	26%
Middle of the road	54%	51%	57%	52%	47%	45%	54%	56%	57%	58%
Other	1%	1%	*	1%	1%	2%	1%	--	--	*
Not sure	4%	2%	4%	5%	3%	4%	--	--	3%	6%
Decline to answer	1%	2%	*	1%	1%	3%	1%	3%	--	--
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

In politics, do you usually consider yourself to be liberal, conservative, or middle-of-the-road?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

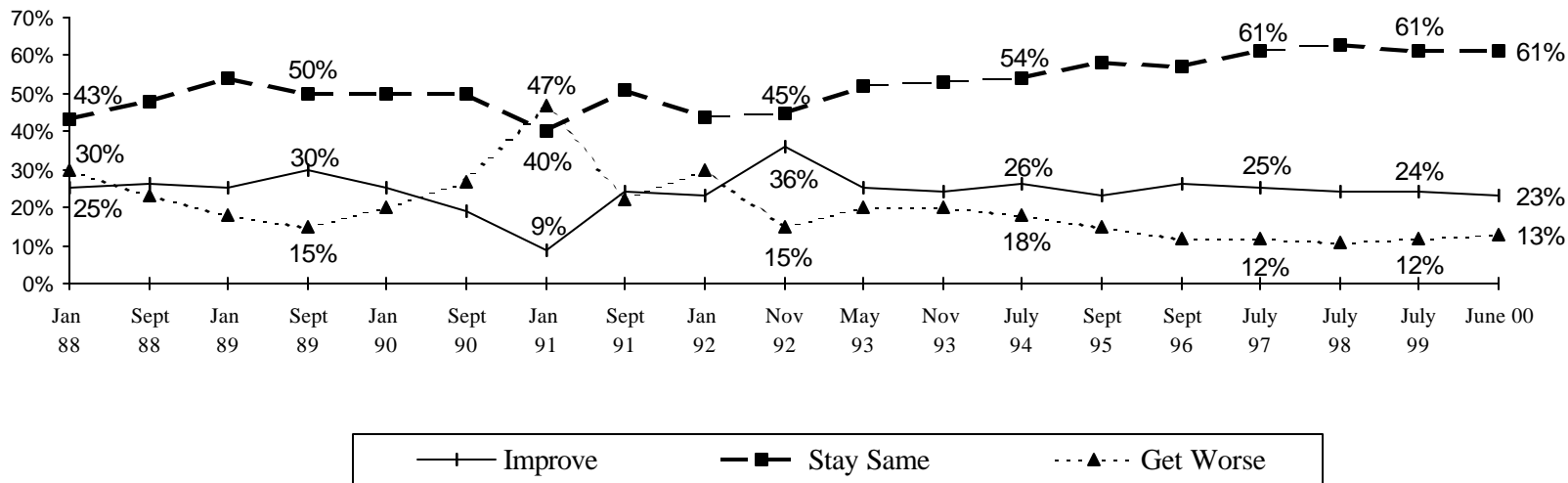
	Total	Milwaukee Area	Green Bay Area	La Crosse/Eau Claire Area	Madison Area	Milwaukee City	Milwaukee Suburbs	Waukesha County	South East Wisconsin	Rest of State
Yes, expect to vote	86%	90%	84%	88%	89%	91%	89%	82%	84%	80%
No, do not expect to vote	11%	8%	15%	12%	8%	6%	10%	17%	12%	13%
Not sure	3%	2%	1%	--	3%	2%	1%	1%	3%	6%
Decline to answer	*	*	--	--	--	1%	--	--	--	1%
Total N	1001	358	213	86	90	106	116	55	105	193

So far as you know now, do you expect to vote in the November 2000 election or not?

\* Less than 1%      -- No responses

### Wisconsin Residents' Attitudes Towards the Economy 1988-2000

~ Expected Trend in State Economy ~



### Wisconsin Residents' Attitudes Towards the Economy 1988-2000

~ Expected Trend in Family Circumstances ~

