

The 2024 Election in Wisconsin: A View from the Grassroots

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I – **[Slide 1] Thanks** to Ambassador Cabañas/ISRI staff for this invitation and organization of this meeting

My intention here is to provide a micro-analysis of the 2024 election by looking at one rural county in the important swing state of Wisconsin.

II - **[Slide 2] Marinette County**

Location: Northeast Wisconsin, starting 50 miles north of the city of Green Bay.

Size: 1,400 square miles (3,625 km²).

Population: 42,000 -- 39,500 of whom are white; largest city is Marinette, with 11,100.

Median household income: \$60,337; Bachelor's degree or higher: 18%.

Voting history:

2024: Harris: 30.4%; Trump: 68.4%

2022 (governor): Evers (Dem): 33.0%; Michels (Rep): 65.6%

2020: Biden 32.1%, Trump 66.6%

2018 (Senate): Tammy Baldwin (D): 43.6%; Leah Vukmir (R) 56.4%.

III - **[Slide 3] Campaign**

1. Worked at Democratic Party Headquarters

a. staffed 2 days/week; gave out lawn signs, called for volunteers, sounding board

b. created Post-it notes for women's bathrooms

c. no help in outreach to community college, unions or churches

d. little help from Wisconsin Dem Party

--Dems nationally raised \$2.5 billion, but not much went to grassroots in Wisconsin

--Marinette received \$150/month from Wisconsin Dems – rent was \$500 month

2. Major event was 45 minute visit by Gwen Walz

--but hardly anyone in the crowd was younger than 60

3. Friday march: organized by Menominee Dems; no one from Wisconsin participated

IV - [Slide 4] Canvassing – Goal was Get Out the Vote, not conversion

1. Sophisticated training
2. [Slide 5] High tech app – MiniVan – targeted Democrats
3. But trainers were young, inexperienced, bureaucratic

V- [Slide 6] Difficulty in Motivating voters

1. Locals ignored the handout on Project 2025 that I produced
2. [Slide 7] It focused on how funds for veterans, schools, health care would be cut, regulations gutted
-- local issue: need to regulate “forever chemicals”
3. Those who were already Dems listened; others refused to hear reality

VI – Analysis: The enemy of my enemy is my friend

I want to highlight three points of analysis about the election from the vantage point of Wisconsin

1. [Slide 8] They/them ad
 - a. Much was made of the “They/Them” ad – pundits claim was that Democrats were too “woke”
 - b. My view is that while the ad may have evoked some anti-gay, anti-trans sentiment, the
MORE IMPORTANT MESSAGE was: Kamala Harris cares about them (not gays but the elites, the establishment); Donald Trump cares about us (working folk)
 - c. In Wisconsin, this was “the politics of resentment” at work (as Katherine Cramer has argued):
antagonism against elites in government who are detached from lives of ordinary people (have good pensions), elites in universities who look down on working people as ignorant (and have secure jobs).
 - d. “They” are the enemy, and “they” see Donald Trump as their enemy, which is why they prosecuted him. Trump being despised by the establishment enhanced his credentials as being for “us”. That is, they reasoned ... **the enemy of my enemy is my friend**. This mantra was effective
-- even though Trump surrounded himself with billionaires who fired workers
-- even though Trump will cut safety nets on which Wisconsin voters rely
 - e. Instead of displaying Kamala Harris always laughing, the Democrats needed an ad showing Trump with his billionaire buddies, which said, “he is for them, she is for you”
The **politics of joy** was a poor campaign motif. They forgot it was the same losing motif Hubert Humphrey used in 1968 when people were angry. It did not work then, either.

2. Wisconsin election results **[Slide 9]**

a. In some ways, Wisconsin mirrored the rest of the country.

--Trump did not receive a majority of the votes and Harris lost by only a small margin

b. But Wisconsin also was different

-- While Harris lost Wisconsin by 0.9% of the vote, Democrats improved their standing further down the ballot:

-- Picked up 10 seats in the State Assembly, ending threat of a Republican supermajority.

--Targeted four State Senate seats and flipped them ALL to blue

--Sen., Tammy Baldwin won re-election, though narrowly

--125,000 more people voted in Wisconsin in 2024 than in 2020*

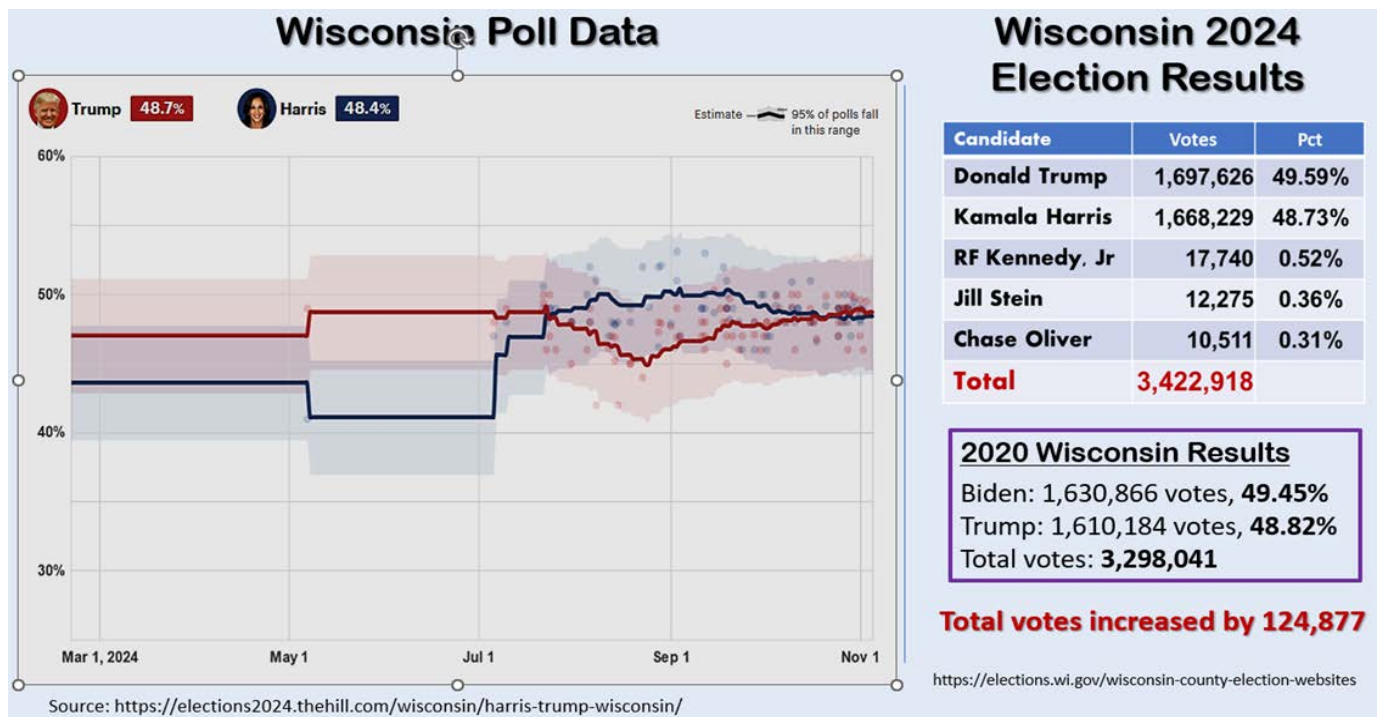
--In Wisconsin, Harris received more votes in 2024 (1,668,229) than Biden did in 2020 (1,630,866)

--Nationally, Harris received about 7 million votes less than Biden while Trump increased his total by 3 million votes

c. Similarly, in Marinette County, Harris received 50 more votes than Biden did in 2020

--But in Wisconsin and Marinette County, Trump received more votes than he did in 2020

--1,300 more votes in Marinette County than in 2020



* Some of the increase came from 18-30 year olds, but not enough to affect outcome. In the 2024 election, 327,160 votes came from Wisconsin's demographic (ages 18-24). In 2020, 323,000 votes came from 18-30 year olds.

3. Foreign Policy was not important

a. Exceptions:

- Ukraine and Gaza, where both Democrats and Republicans opposed Biden policies;
- Migration was a modest concern, but not from Cuba – Venezuelan migration
 - But voters to whom I spoke ignored the fact that the Wisconsin dairy industry will suffer if Trump deports migrants

b. Notably, tariffs were not an issue, even though prices will go up if Trump imposes high tariffs

4. One final point

Democrats in this rural, traditionally Republican area, were fearful

- women were afraid of their husbands
- Democrats refused to post lawn signs for fear of being vandalized
- When Trump spoke about Democrats as enemies of the people whom he wanted to jail, this was not only a threat of future action. It was a license for vigilantes to attack Democrats.
- I departed Wisconsin with a great foreboding about the future