



Wisconsin Grid Modernization Survey

Fielded by Cygnal | Wisconsin Statewide | May 4–7, 2026

Methodology: Multilevel Regression with Poststratification (MRP) | N = 1,500 National Sample

MRP Topline Summary of Findings

Note: These findings are derived from Cygnal's national survey of 1,500 likely general election voters conducted May 4–7, 2026. State-level estimates were produced using Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP), a widely used statistical modeling technique that combines national survey responses with state demographic and geographic data to generate reliable state-specific insights.

Executive Summary

Wisconsin voters are feeling acute pressure from rising energy costs and they are ready to act. Eighty-seven percent of Wisconsin likely voters say they are concerned about the affordability of their electricity bills — the highest concern level of the five states surveyed — and 82% report their bill has gone up over the past two years. Against this backdrop, Wisconsin voters express strong support for grid modernization and practical energy solutions, with support levels that closely track, and in several cases exceed, the national average.

The Wisconsin findings reflect a state with a distinct energy profile: a closely divided electorate, significant manufacturing and dairy economy, a position inside the MISO footprint where regional transmission planning directly affects ratepayers, and growing data center investment in the southeastern part of the state. Voters here are not abstract observers of the energy debate, they are living it. Eighty-one percent say a candidate's position on energy affordability will influence their vote in federal elections, and 63% say they would be more likely to support a congressional candidate who backs grid modernization tied to lower long-term costs.

Section 1: Economic Context & Cost-of-Living Pressure

Wisconsin voters are under significant financial strain. More than half (52%) say their household's financial situation has gotten worse over the past year, while only 20% report improvement. The state's political environment reflects this anxiety: 54% say the country is on the wrong track, compared to 37% who say it is heading in the right direction — making Wisconsin's wrong-track number the most moderate of the five states.

When asked which cost-of-living pressures concern them most, grocery and food prices led at 53%, followed by fuel and transportation costs at 45%. Critically, electricity and energy bills ranked third in Wisconsin at 34% — well above the national average of 24% and second only to Ohio among the five states surveyed. Healthcare costs ranked fourth at 29%.

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Country on wrong track (Q3)	54.2%	60.6%
Household finances gotten worse past year (Q4)	51.7%	53.7%
Concerned about electricity bill affordability (Q6)	86.7%	82.2%
Electricity bill gone up in past two years (Q7)	81.7%	72.3%

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Grocery/food prices among top two concerns (Q5)	53.2%	54.4%
Fuel/transportation among top two concerns (Q5)	44.6%	45.2%
Electricity & energy bills among top two concerns (Q5)	34.0%	23.7%

Wisconsin's electricity and energy bills concern (34%) significantly exceeds the national figure (24%), placing energy near the top of the household cost-of-living conversation. Combined with 82% reporting bill increases — the highest of the five states — this signals that energy affordability is already a dominant household concern in Wisconsin.

Section 2: Energy Priorities & Grid Awareness

Wisconsin voters' energy priorities closely mirror the national picture, with one distinction: protecting local community and property owner rights ranks unusually high. Keeping electricity costs affordable for families was the top priority at 61%, followed by ensuring grid reliability and blackout-proofing at 29%, and expanding American energy independence at 26%. Protecting local and landowner rights ranked fourth at 25% — the highest of the five states, reflecting Wisconsin's history of contested transmission siting and the Cardinal-Hickory Creek litigation.

Grid modernization awareness is high: 93% of Wisconsin voters say it is important to modernize and upgrade the U.S. electricity grid — the highest of the five states and slightly above the national figure of 92%. More than half (54%) believe the current grid needs significant upgrades to meet growing demand from AI, manufacturing reshoring, and electrification.

Wisconsin has a particular stake in the AI data center question. The state has attracted recent data center investment, including the Microsoft project in Mount Pleasant. Voters here are alert to the demand implications: 22% of Wisconsin voters identified growing electricity demand from new businesses, data centers, and AI as the biggest driver of rising electricity costs — the single leading response in the state and three points above the national figure.

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Keeping electricity costs affordable — top priority (Q9)	60.7%	62.3%
Grid reliability/blackout-proof — top priority (Q9)	29.1%	33.2%
Expanding American energy independence (Q9)	26.2%	25.7%
Protecting local/landowner rights (Q9)	24.5%	21.7%
Grid modernization is important (Q12)	92.8%	92.4%
Grid needs significant upgrades for demand growth (Q16)	53.8%	53.3%
Data centers/AI cited as top cost driver (Q8)	22.1%	18.5%

Section 3: Grid Investment Attitudes & Tradeoffs

Wisconsin voters arrive with genuine skepticism about whether grid investment will lower their bills — a skepticism that slightly exceeds the national average. Half (51%) believe grid upgrades will raise consumer costs, while only 33% believe upgrades would lower bills over time. This credibility gap is the central communications challenge for grid advocates in the state.

Despite this skepticism, support for grid investment rebounds strongly when it is framed around long-term savings and reliability. Seventy-nine percent support transmission infrastructure investment under those terms

(Q15), slightly above the national figure of 78% and the highest of the five states. Initial uninformed support for grid investment was 72% (Q27), and held at 72% even after respondents received additional information (Q31), suggesting Wisconsin voters arrive engaged and informed on this issue.

On energy strategy, Wisconsin voters lean toward comprehensive approaches: 34% favor an all-of-the-above strategy, while 30% prefer grid investment now to bring bills down long-term. Only 14% would prioritize lower bills now even at the risk of slower grid upgrades — a notably low figure suggesting Wisconsin voters are willing to invest for the long term.

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Support grid investment — long-term savings framing (Q15)	79.0%	78.2%
Support grid investment — initial uninformed (Q27)	72.2%	72.4%
Support grid investment — after information (Q31)	71.7%	70.8%
Grid upgrades will raise consumer costs (Q10)	50.7%	49.8%
Grid upgrades will lower bills over time (Q10)	32.8%	33.4%
All-of-the-above energy strategy (Q14)	33.7%	35.2%
Prioritize grid investment to lower bills (Q14)	30.3%	30.4%
Prioritize reliability over short-term bill savings (Q33)	54.2%	54.8%

Section 4: Messages That Move Wisconsin Voters

Three key messages were tested for their ability to increase support for grid investment. All three performed strongly with Wisconsin voters, each moving roughly two-thirds toward support — slightly above the national figures across all three messages:

- **Affordability:** Modernizing the grid lowers electricity bills by moving power more efficiently — 68.4% of Wisconsin voters said this made them more likely to support grid upgrades (vs. 68.6% nationally).
- **Manufacturing & Jobs:** Modernizing the grid powers American manufacturing and keeps the economy competitive — 64.6% said this increased their support (vs. 63.2% nationally).
- **Energy Security:** A more modern grid builds a more reliable and secure system, reducing foreign interference — 64.8% said this increased their support (vs. 62.9% nationally).

Affordability is the strongest message mover in Wisconsin, as it is nationally. The manufacturing & jobs message performs particularly well in Wisconsin, reflecting the central role of manufacturing in the state's economy and identity.

Additionally, 72.1% of Wisconsin voters agreed with the comprehensive CEN narrative framing an all-of-the-above energy policy using every available energy source, modernizing the grid to move power efficiently, and letting competition drive down costs for families and businesses — slightly above the national figure of 71.6%.

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Affordability message — more likely to support (Q28)	68.4%	68.6%
Energy Security message — more likely to support (Q29)	64.8%	62.9%
Manufacturing & Jobs message — more likely to support (Q30)	64.6%	63.2%

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Agree with CEN master narrative (Q32)	72.1%	71.6%

Section 5: Permitting Reform, Competition & Technology

Wisconsin voters signal strong support for market-based and efficiency-focused solutions. Streamlining federal permitting for transmission infrastructure earned 73% support when paired with landowner rights protections – matching the national figure. Generation permitting reform earned 75% support with environmental and safety standards maintained.

On data centers and large industrial users — a particularly salient issue in Wisconsin given the state's recent data center investments — 87% of voters support requiring these facilities to demonstrate how they will power their operations before receiving permits. This is the highest-polling finding in the Wisconsin survey, the highest among all five states, and exceeds the national average of 83.5%.

Grid-enhancing technologies (GETs) remain largely unknown in Wisconsin: 59% have never heard of them. But once explained, 79% say it is important for policymakers to require their consideration before approving expensive new line construction — above the national figure of 77%.

On cost allocation, Wisconsin voters are clear about who should pay for grid upgrades driven by large new electricity users: 59% say the companies creating the demand should bear the infrastructure costs — a finding with direct policy implications for Wisconsin's data center permitting and Public Service Commission ratemaking debates.

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Support AI/industrial energy permitting requirements (Q19)	86.6%	83.5%
Support transmission permitting reform w/ landowner rights (Q26)	72.5%	72.7%
Support generation permitting streamlining (Q23)	74.7%	74.5%
Never heard of grid-enhancing technologies (Q24)	59.0%	56.9%
GETs should be required before new construction (Q25)	79.4%	77.3%
Companies creating demand should pay for upgrades (Q18)	59.4%	53.8%

Section 6: Energy Security & Supply Chain Concerns

Wisconsin voters connect grid modernization to national security. More than half (52%) believe a more modern domestic grid would make American families more protected from energy price spikes caused by foreign conflicts or supply disruptions — the highest figure among the five states. Seventy percent express concern — either "serious" (30%) or "moderate" (40%) — about U.S. dependence on foreign-sourced critical minerals needed for transmission lines, transformers, and energy storage.

On energy mix, Wisconsin voters show a balanced sensibility: 33% prefer an all-of-the-above approach, with solar/wind and nuclear tied at 23% each — the highest combined preference for non-fossil generation of the five states. Only 6% prefer continued reliance on traditional fuel sources, the lowest of the five states.

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Modern grid would protect families from foreign price shocks (Q20)	51.6%	50.6%

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Concerned about foreign critical mineral dependence (Q21)	70.0%	66.5%
All-of-the-above energy mix preference (Q22)	32.6%	35.1%
Expand nuclear power (Q22)	23.3%	20.5%
Invest in solar and wind (Q22)	23.3%	23.7%

Section 7: Electoral Salience

Energy affordability is a voting issue in Wisconsin. Eighty-one percent of Wisconsin voters say a candidate's position on energy affordability and electricity costs is important to their vote in federal elections — slightly above the national figure of 79.5% — and 63% say they would be more likely to support a congressional candidate who publicly backs grid modernization and expanded domestic energy production to lower long-term costs.

The legislative urgency is meaningful: 71.7% of Wisconsin respondents said they want their representative to "somewhat," "very," or "extremely" strongly support legislation that speeds up permitting, expands production, and modernizes the grid with the potential to lower costs within 10 years. Twenty percent said "extremely strongly."

Finding	Wisconsin	National
Energy affordability important to their vote (Q34)	81.1%	79.5%
More likely to support pro-grid modernization candidate (Q35)	62.6%	63.8%
Want representative to strongly support grid legislation (Q36)	71.7%	75.6%
Extremely strongly want representative support (Q36)	20.1%	20.9%
Very strongly want representative support (Q36)	20.3%	23.0%

Section 8: Key Wisconsin Distinctions from the National Sample

While Wisconsin's results closely track the national survey, several findings stand out as distinctly Wisconsin:

- Energy affordability concern is at the top of the field. At 87%, Wisconsin's electricity bill affordability concern is the highest of the five states surveyed — making the state a high-salience environment for affordability-focused outreach.
- Bill increases are nearly universal. 82% of Wisconsin voters report their bill has gone up — the highest figure among the five states and ten points above the national average — meaning the cost concern in Wisconsin is reactive and current.
- Landowner and local rights are an elevated priority. At 25%, Wisconsin voters rank protecting local community and property owner rights higher than voters in any other tested state — reflecting the state's recent transmission siting battles and creating a clear need for landowner-protective messaging in any transmission expansion campaign.
- Strong all-of-the-above coalition with low fossil preference. Wisconsin voters show the strongest combined preference for nuclear, solar, and wind among the five states, and the lowest preference for continued reliance on traditional fossil fuels (6%) — a notably modern energy mix preference.

- Highest support for state permitting requirements. At 87%, Wisconsin voters lead the field in support for requiring large industrial energy users to demonstrate how they will power operations before receiving permits — a direct policy lever with strong cross-partisan backing.

Conclusion

The Wisconsin MRP data tells a consistent story with the national survey, but at higher intensity: voters are feeling sharp energy cost pressure, understand the grid is aging, and are ready to support investment, but only when it is credibly tied to lower bills, greater reliability, and American energy independence.

For Wisconsin specifically, the combination of the highest energy affordability concern, near-universal bill-increase awareness, elevated landowner-rights sensitivity, and the field-leading 87% support for state-level data center permitting requirements makes Wisconsin a particularly receptive environment for grid modernization messaging — provided that messaging respects local control and property owner rights. The winning message framework — affordability, manufacturing & jobs, and energy security — performs as strongly in Wisconsin as it does nationally, with all three messages slightly outperforming national figures.

The survey was conducted by Cygnal from May 4–7, 2026. Wisconsin estimates were generated using multilevel regression with poststratification (MRP) applied to 1,500 likely general election voters nationwide. Full national results carry a margin of error of $\pm 2.53\%$.