

## Democrats Poised to Pick Up Seats in Wisconsin State Legislature

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Democrats appear poised to pick up seats in the Republican-controlled Wisconsin legislature. Republicans are defending a large number of seats in the Assembly and Senate that are competitive and open because the incumbent is not running.

Voter turnout may be boosted by the high profile, competitive statewide gubernatorial race between Democratic incumbent Jim Doyle and GOP challenger Mark Green. The higher turnout will add an unpredictable element to the state legislative races.

### **Wisconsin State Senate: Every Seat Counts**

The Republicans' current 19-14 advantage in the Wisconsin Senate is threatened. Because only odd-numbered Senate districts are up for election in 2006, there are just 17 districts on the ballot, magnifying the importance of each race.

Republicans are more vulnerable than Democrats to lose seats for two reasons.

**First, all four competitive districts are in districts currently held by the GOP.** 'Competitive districts' are classified as those decided by ten points or less in the previous election (for this chamber, 2002). Districts 9, 21, and 31 are 'very competitive' – decided by 5 points or less in 2002. District 5 is 'moderately competitive' – decided by between 5 and 10 points in 2002.

**Second, Republicans will have to defend more seats than Democrats.** Republicans are facing elections in 11 of the 17 races in 2006. One slight reprieve for the GOP is that two of its seats are uncontested – its candidate faces no Democratic opponent. Likewise, Democratic incumbents face no Republican opposition in two races.

**Measures of Competitiveness and Party Vulnerability in 2006 Wisconsin State Senate Elections**

Measure	Democrat-held districts		Republican-held districts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Competitive districts	0	0%	4	24%
Open districts	0	0%	1	6%
Incumbents on ballot	6	35%	10	59%
Unchallenged by major party	2	12%	2	12%

**Wisconsin State Assembly: GOP Braces for Losses**

Republicans hold a 59-39 advantage over the Democrats in the Wisconsin Assembly coming into the 2006 election, with all 99 seats on the ballot (the Assembly currently has one vacant seat – District 98). A 20-seat deficit is a large margin for the Democrats to overcome.

But the Republicans face three vulnerabilities.

**First, Republicans must defend 13 of the 15 competitive districts, based on the 2004 election results.** Six of these districts are very competitive, while seven are moderately competitive.

**Second, the GOP must defend 9 of the 10 open district races on the ballot.**

**Third, the Democrats will run in uncontested races in nearly twice as many districts (25) as the Republicans (13).**

**Measures of Competitiveness and Party Vulnerability in 2006 Wisconsin State Assembly Elections**

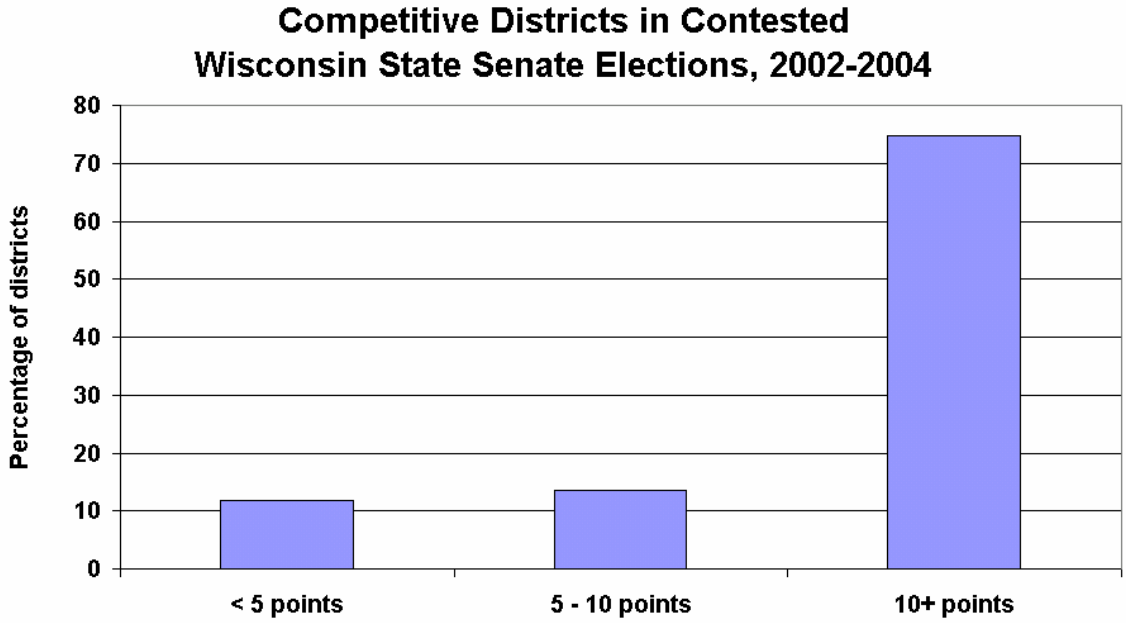
Measure	Democrat-held districts		Republican-held districts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Competitive districts	2	2%	13	13%
Open districts	1	1%	9	9%
Incumbents on ballot	38	38%	50	51%
Unchallenged by major party	25	25%	13	13%

**Strengthening Our Democracy Requires More Competitive Elections**

Wisconsin State Senate races have not been competitive in recent years. In 2006, nearly a quarter of all races (4 of 17) will not have candidates representing both major parties on the ballot – a departure from a core democratic principle that voters have a choice and an opportunity to remove the incumbent.

Another disturbing departure from a healthy democratic process is that three quarters of state Senate races have been safe seats during the last two election cycles (2002 and 2004). This

means that the incumbents faces little prospect of losing. During the past two elections only 12% of the races have been decided by 5 points or less, while 14% have been decided by between 5 and 10 points.

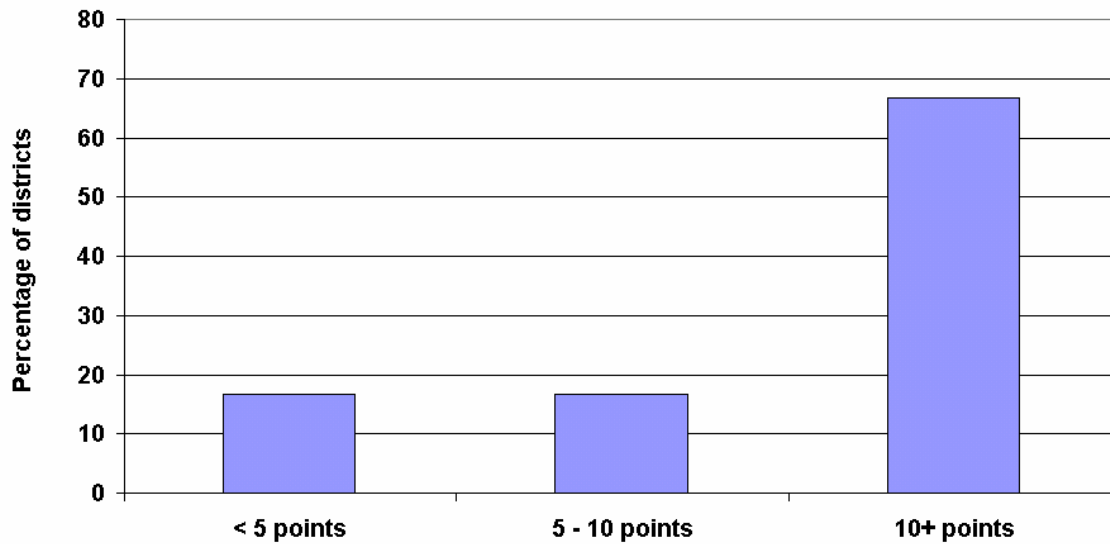


Note: "Contested races" defined as districts in which both Republican and Democratic candidates are on the general election ballot. Figure denotes the percentage of contested districts decided by less than five points, between 5 and 10 points, and more than 10 points based on 2002 and 2004 election results.

Wisconsin's elections to the state Assembly have veered from basic principles of a vibrant democracy. Its elections have a sobering track record of failing to field both Democratic and Republican candidates. **There are 38 uncontested races in 2006. There were 48 uncontested elections in 2002 and a staggering 57 in 2004 (nearly 60 percent of all legislative races). Voters in these districts lacked the basic opportunity to choose among viable candidates.**

In addition, **the great majority of elections to the State Assembly have not been competitive.** Incumbents securely held two-thirds (67%) of contested races in 2002 and 2004 by winning by more than 10 points. Seventeen percent of Assembly races were decided by 5 points or less, while another 17% were decided by between 5 and 10 points.

### Competitive Districts in Contested Wisconsin State Assembly Elections, 2002-2004



Note: "Contested races" defined as districts in which both Republican and Democratic candidates are on the general election ballot. Figure denotes the percentage of contested districts decided by less than five points, between 5 and 10 points, and more than 10 points based on 2002 and 2004 election results.

**Competitive and Open Wisconsin State Senate Districts**

<b>District</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Party</b>	<b>District characteristics</b>
<b>5 (GOP)</b>	Jim Sullivan	Tom Reynolds (I)		Competitive
<b>9 (GOP)</b>	Jamie John Aulik	Joseph Leibham (I)		Very competitive
<b>21 (GOP)</b>	John W. Lehman	William L. McReynolds		Open, Very competitive
<b>31 (GOP)</b>	Kathleen Vinehout	Ron Brown (I)		Very competitive

**Competitive and Open Wisconsin State Assembly Districts**

<b>District</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Party</b>	<b>District Characteristics</b>
<b>5 (DEM)</b>	Tom Nelson (I)	Jim Reigel		Very competitive
<b>6 (GOP)</b>	Richard Lieffring	Gary Tauchen		Open
<b>23 (GOP)</b>	Stanley F. Teplin	Jim Ott		Open
<b>28 (GOP)</b>	Ann Hraychuck	Mark L. Pettis (I)		Competitive
<b>29 (GOP)</b>	Kerry Kittel	John Murtha		Open, Very competitive
<b>32 (GOP)</b>	Ryan J. Schroeder	Thomas A. Lothian (I)		Competitive
<b>37 (GOP)</b>	Andy Jorgensen	Greg Gasper	Ivan J. Davis (Independent)	Open
<b>40 (GOP)</b>	Dan Naylor	Kevin David Petersen		Open
<b>42 (GOP)</b>	Tim Henney	J.A. Hines (I)		Very competitive
<b>47 (GOP)</b>	Meagan Yost	Eugene Hahn (I)		Very competitive
<b>54 (GOP)</b>	Gordon Hintz	Julie Pung Leschke		Open, Competitive
<b>56 (GOP)</b>	Susan Garcia Franz	Roger J. Roth, Jr.		Open
<b>62 (DEM)</b>	Cory Mason	Van H. Wanggaard		Open
<b>68 (GOP)</b>	Michael A. Turner	Terry Moulton (I)		Competitive
<b>74 (DEM)</b>	Gary E. Sherman (I)	Shirl A. La Barre		Competitive
<b>80 (GOP)</b>	Janis Ringhand	Brett H. Davis (I)		Very competitive
<b>87 (GOP)</b>	Dewey Floberg	Mary Williams (I)		Competitive
<b>88 (GOP)</b>	Jim Soletski	Judy Krawczyk (I)		Competitive
<b>89 (GOP)</b>	Randy Koehn	John Nygren		Open
<b>90 (GOP)</b>	Gary Froseth	Karl Van Roy (I)		Very competitive
<b>93 (GOP)</b>	Jeff Smith	Rob Kreibich (I)		Very competitive
<b>96 (GOP)</b>	Gail A. Frie	Lee A. Nerison (I)		Competitive
<b>97 (GOP)</b>	Steven D. Schmuki	Bill Kramer		Open
<b>98 (VAC)</b>	Sterling Lynk	Rich Zipperer		Vacant