

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## Wisconsin Senate: Decisions, Decisions

By Jacob Rubashkin

Of all of the Republican senators running for re-election in 2022, perhaps none inspire more enmity from Democrats than Ron Johnson of Wisconsin.

The laundry list of complaints runs long, back to 2010 when Johnson dethroned liberal lion Russ Feingold, derailing the Democrat's presidential ambitions and heralding a rightward turn in the Badger State's politics, and only intensified after Johnson turned back Feingold in a nasty 2016 rematch Democrats thought they had sewed up. Of late, Johnson's comments about the Covid-19 pandemic and the Jan. 6 insurrection have only further inflamed Democrats eager to take him on in 2022.

But Democrats might not get their chance to take on Johnson at all, because the two-term senator still hasn't decided whether he's going to run for re-election. Back in 2010, he pledged to serve only two terms. He has since opened the door to running again, but has blown past several self-imposed deadlines for announcing a decision. In 2016, he did not announce his re-election campaign until May, just a few weeks before the filing deadline.

And it's not obvious that Democrats — despite their professed desire to get another shot at the multi-millionaire businessman — would fare better against him than another potential GOP nominee, given Johnson's track record of defying expectations.

Uncertainty about Johnson's plans and the state's late primary date mean that less attention has been paid here than in other battleground states. But whether or not he runs, the Wisconsin Senate race is shaping up to be one of the most competitive in the nation, and a crucial part of both parties' path to clinching a Senate majority.

### The Lay of the Land

A quintessential swing state, Wisconsin regularly plays host to razor thin elections at all levels.

In 2020, Wisconsin was the "tipping point" state for Joe Biden's Electoral College victory, and the third-closest state in the country; Biden carried it by 0.6 percent, 49.5-48.8 percent. That was a flip from 2016, when Donald Trump won the state in an upset over Hillary Clinton, 47.2-46.5 percent, en route to dismantling the Democrats' midwestern "Blue Wall."

Prior to Trump's win, Wisconsin had voted for every Democratic

*Continued on page 6*

## 2022 Senate Ratings

### BATTLEGROUND

#### Democratic-Held (4)

Cortez Masto (D-Nev.)  
Hassan (D-N.H.)  
Kelly (D-Ariz.)  
Warnock (D-Ga.)

#### Republican-Held (4)

NC Open (Burr, R)  
PA Open (Toomey, R)  
Johnson (R-Wisc.)  
Rubio (R-Fl.)

#### Solid Democratic (10)

VT Open (Leahy, D)  
Bennet (D-Colo.)  
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)  
Duckworth (D-Ill.)  
Murray (D-Wash.)  
Padilla (D-Calif.)  
Schatz (D-Hawaii)  
Schumer (D-N.Y.)  
Van Hollen (D-Md.)  
Wyden (D-Ore.)

#### Solid Republican (16)

AL Open (Shelby, R)  
MO Open (Blunt, R)  
OH Open (Portman, R)  
Boozman (R-Ark.)  
Crapo (R-Idaho)  
Grassley (R-Iowa)  
Hoeven (R-N.D.)  
Kennedy (R-La.)  
Lankford (R-Okla.)  
Lee (R-Utah)  
Moran (R-Kan.)  
Murkowski (R-Alaska)  
Paul (R-Ky.)  
Scott (R-S.C.)  
Thune (R-S.D.)  
Young (R-Ind.)

## CALENDAR

<b>Jan. 7</b>	Kentucky Candidate Filing Deadline
<b>Jan. 11</b>	Florida's 20th District Special General Election
<b>Jan. 28</b>	Alabama Candidate Filing Deadline
<b>Jan. 29</b>	West Virginia Candidate Filing Deadline
<b>Feb. 1</b>	New Mexico Candidate Filing Deadline
<b>Feb. 13</b>	Super Bowl LVI

# Report Shorts

## California's 22nd District

Even before California's new congressional map has been finalized by the state's redistricting commission, GOP Rep. Devin Nunes announced he is resigning at the end of the year to become CEO of the new Trump Media & Technology Group. Nunes was in position to become chairman of the House Ways & Means Committee in 2023, if Republicans win the majority.

Now there will be a yet-to-be-scheduled special election in the 22nd District, located in the Central Valley. President Donald Trump won the district 52-46 percent in the 2020 election, so Republicans will start as the favorite to hold the seat. But Republicans will be down one vote on Capitol Hill until the seat is filled. And the district could change dramatically before the 2022 elections, so both parties will have to decide how much to invest in the special election.

## Georgia Governor

Former Sen. David Perdue is challenging Gov. Brian Kemp in the Republican primary. Perdue was heavily recruited to run by Trump, who remains furious at Kemp for not doing more to overturn Joe Biden's victory in the Peach State in 2020. Kemp finds himself in between a rock and a hard place with Democratic archrival Stacey Abrams announcing her own gubernatorial bid earlier this month.

An *Insider Advantage*/Fox5 Atlanta poll of 500 likely voters taken Dec. 6 found Kemp ahead of Perdue, 41-22 percent, though Fox5 itself initially reported the poll's informed ballot result (after respondents were informed Trump had endorsed Perdue) and not the initial ballot test. A Dec. 7-9 poll conducted by Fabrizio Lee and Associates for the Perdue campaign found a more favorable result: in an initial head-to-head matchup, Perdue led Kemp 47-44 percent. That's not entirely reflective of the primary either, because there are several other candidates including former Democratic state Rep. Vernon Jones, who has rebranded as a Trump conservative. There's a lot of game to be played before voters head to the polls in this top 2022 contest, which is rated as a Battleground.

## New York Governor

Recently ascended Gov. Kathy Hochul's path to a full term of her own became clearer when state Attorney General Letitia James made a surprise announcement that she would drop her campaign for governor and instead run for re-election. James was by far the strongest of Hochul's rivals, with a fundraising network and statewide base of

# 2022 Governor Ratings

## Battleground

### Democratic-held (6)

PA Open (Wolf, D)  
Kelly (D-Kan.)  
Mills (D-Maine)  
Whitmer (D-Mich.)  
Sisolak (D-Nev.)  
Evers (D-Wisc.)

### Republican-held (6)

AZ Open (Ducey, R)  
MA Open (Baker, R)  
MD Open (Hogan, R)  
DeSantis (R-Fl.)  
Kemp (R-Ga.)  
Sununu (R-N.H.)

### Solid Democratic (10)

HI Open (Ige, D)  
OR Open (Brown, D)  
Newsom (D-Calif.)  
Polis (D-Colo.)  
Lamont (D-Conn.)  
Pritzker (D-Ill.)  
Walz (D-Minn.)  
Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)  
Hochul (D-N.Y.)  
McKee (D-R.I.)

### Solid Republican (14)

AR Open (Hutchinson, R)  
NE Open (Ricketts, R)  
Ivey (R-Ala.)  
Dunleavy (R-Alaska)  
Little (R-Idaho)  
Reynolds (R-Iowa)  
Noem (R-S.D.)  
DeWine (R-Ohio)  
Stitt (R-Okla.)  
McMaster (R-S.C.)  
Lee (R-Tenn.)  
Abbott (R-Texas)  
Scott (R-Vt.)  
Gordon (R-Wyo.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, \* moved benefiting Republicans*

support that rivals or even exceeds the governor's.

Hochul still faces New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, who's running an unabashedly progressive campaign, as well as 3rd District Rep. Tom Suozzi, who is running as a moderate. Outgoing NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio looks ready to run too, but with James out of the race, Hochul can sleep a little easier. Overall, the race is still rated Solid Democratic.

## North Carolina Senate

State Sen. Jeff Jackson dropped out of the race Thursday, paving the way for former state supreme court chief justice Cheri Beasley to win the Democratic nomination. Republicans are still sorting out their competitive primary ahead of one of the most important general election races this cycle.

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# Ohio Redistricting: Process Serves GOP

By Jacob Rubashkin

A new process led to the same old result as Republicans maximized their control of redistricting in Ohio.

In 2018, Ohio voters approved a ballot initiative that overhauled the state's redistricting process with the ostensible goal of producing fairer congressional and state legislative maps. The new scheme incentivized cooperation between the parties by requiring bipartisan majorities to pass a map through the state legislature. And if the state legislature failed to come up with a compromise, responsibility would fall to a backup commission of officeholders that also had to marshal a bipartisan majority to approve a map.

The new law also provided a backup to the backup. If the commission deadlocked, then the state legislature could step in again and pass a map with a simple majority, with a catch: such a map would only be good for four years, rather than the usual decade.

And that's exactly what happened. After making superficial at best efforts to pass a map with bipartisan support in the legislature and the backup commission, Republicans passed a congressional map with no Democratic votes. Under the new lines, the GOP could win up to 13 of the state's 15 districts (they currently hold 12 of 16, but Ohio lost one district due to reapportionment) despite Democrats regularly winning 45 percent or more of the vote in statewide races.

After 2024, the whole redistricting process will start again. If Republicans continue to control the state legislature and all of Ohio's constitutional offices, they will once again be able to draw maps with no Democratic support, likely adjusting for any political shifts that take place over the next four years.

The map is facing several legal challenges. In federal court, several Black Ohioans have argued that the map violates the Voting Rights Act. But it's the state court challenges — which focus on a state constitutional provision that precludes a map that “unduly favors or disfavors a political party” — that may be more potent, given the GOP's narrow 4-3 edge on the state Supreme Court, and Republican Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor's history of opposing gerrymandering.

The filing deadline for partisan candidates is scheduled for Feb. 2.

## 1st District

The new 1st District retains all of Warren County, but now includes slightly different pieces of Hamilton County, ceding some territory to the neighboring 2nd and 8th districts but now encompassing all of the city of Cincinnati.

As a result, the new district is more Democratic than its predecessor, which President Donald Trump carried by 3 points, 51-48 percent. Joe Biden would have won the new district by 1.7 points in 2020 while losing statewide by 8 points, and Hillary Clinton would have lost it by 2 points in 2016 while losing statewide by 8 points, a sign the area is moving in Democrats' direction.

Rep. Steve Chabot is the only Republican in Ohio seeking re-election in a district Biden carried, but while the partisan lean of the district is worse for him than in the last two elections, the national environment will likely be far better. Chabot won highly contested elections in 2018 (51-47 percent) and 2020 (52-45 percent), but neither of the opponents he faced in those races are running again. In a midterm with an unpopular president of the opposite party, that means Chabot starts

out with an edge, especially because Democrats will have to locate credible candidates and sort through a primary. Chabot may have to get through a primary first: Franklin Mayor Brent Centers says he's running but also that he believes Chabot will retire. Initial rating: Lean Republican.

## 2nd District

The 2nd District now spans the entire bottom of the state from the eastern Cincinnati suburbs to the West Virginia border, and up to Chillicothe. The new district would have voted for Trump by 36 points, 67-31 percent, in 2020. Republican Rep. Brad Wenstrup should have no issues winning re-election. Solid Republican.

## 3rd District

Democratic Rep. Joyce Beatty's 3rd District becomes more compactly centered on Columbus, the state capital. The new district will contain



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Joyce Beatty

slightly fewer Black residents — down to 28 percent from 34 percent — but becomes slightly more Democratic. Biden would have carried it by 46 points, 72-26 percent, compared to 70-28 percent under the old lines.

Beatty faces a primary challenge from progressive restaurant worker Matthew Meade, who is running on his support for Medicare for All, the Green New Deal, and Defund the Police but has raised hardly any money. In 2020, Beatty defeated well-funded primary challenger Morgan Harper, who was backed by Justice Democrats, 68-32 percent. This cycle, Harper is running for the Senate. Solid Democratic.

## 4th District

Republican Jim Jordan's district loses its distinctive hook shape, and is much more compact in its new iteration. It also sheds its share of Greater Cleveland (Elyria and Oberlin) to the new 5th District, and picks up Mansfield. In terms of partisanship, the 4th remains deeply Republican; under the new lines it would have voted for Trump, 66-32 percent. Jordan is a top GOP fundraiser and is in line to be chairman of the House Judiciary Committee — that is, if he doesn't make a run for Speaker of the House. Democrat Jeff Sites will raise a lot of money running against one of Republicans' highest-profile agitators but won't come close to winning. Solid Republican.

## 5th District

The 5th District is transformed from a square nestled in the state's northwest corner into a rectangle that stretches from the Indiana border to the Cleveland suburb of Elyria, curving around Lima and picking up Bowling Green but losing its share of the Toledo suburbs. It would have

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voted for Trump, 62-37 percent. Republican Bob Latta is in fine shape. Solid Republican.

6th District

The 6th District is still a stretch of eastern Ohio, but the lines are shifted upward from its previous position, taking in much of what once was Ohio’s 13th. Instead of starting at the southern tip of Ohio, right across the border from Huntington, W.Va., the 6th begins right across the border from Parkersburg, W.Va.. And rather than stopping just short of Youngstown, the new 6th now extends past Youngstown through Trumbull County.

Technically, both Republican Bill Johnson, who currently represents the 6th, and Democrat Tim Ryan, the Youngstown congressman who holds the 13th District, are the incumbents here. But the district resembles Johnson’s old constituency far more than it does Ryan’s, which also included parts of Akron and voted for Biden by 3 points. Likely anticipating that his district would disappear, Ryan made the decision earlier this year to run for Senate instead.

That means Johnson has a clear shot to another term. The new 6th would have voted for Trump by 23 points, 61-38 percent. Solid Republican.

7th District

The new 7th no longer resembles a horseshoe with points in Greater Cleveland, central Ohio, and Canton. Instead, it is a rectangle that

stretches from Ashland through Canton, with an arm extending north that takes in the eastern Akron suburbs. The new district is a fair bit more Democratic than its previous iteration and Trump would have carried it by 18 points, 58-40 percent. He won the old district by 32 points, 65-33 percent. But that’s not a big enough shift to endanger GOP Rep. Bob Gibbs. Solid Republican.

8th District

The 8th District still sits along the western border north of Cincinnati, though it no longer extends eastward to Springfield. It also now includes some of the northern Cincinnati suburbs in Hamilton County. Trump would have carried it in 2020 by 23 points, 61-38 percent. Republican Rep. Warren Davidson shouldn’t have any trouble holding this seat. Solid Republican.

9th District

One of the most aggressive moves Ohio Republicans made in redistricting was to turn longtime Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur’s district — known as “the Snake on the Lake” for its coast-hugging, vanishingly narrow profile that connects Toledo to Cleveland — from a district Biden carried by 19 points, 58-39 percent, to one that Trump would have won by 4 points, 51-47 percent.

The GOP legislature accomplished this by removing the Greater Cleveland portions of Kaptur’s district and tacking on the heavily Republican northwest corner of the state.

The longest-serving woman in U.S. House history, Kaptur is running again in what will be her toughest re-election fight since at least 1984 and possibly ever. Two Republicans are already running against Kaptur: one, J.R. Majewski, is an Army veteran who received a shoutout from then-President Trump on Twitter after painting his lawn as a giant Trump 2020 sign and has expressed support for the Q-Anon conspiracy theory. The other is state Sen. Theresa Gavarone, a state legislator from Bowling Green.

Kaptur has a reputation as a low-key politician and regularly overperforms the top of the ticket. In 2020, she won by 26 points, 63-37 percent, compared to Biden’s 19-point victory, outpacing him everywhere but especially in white working class areas in between Toledo and Cleveland.

Kaptur is unassuming but has a populist streak that shouldn’t be discounted, even as she faces down a district with an unfavorable partisan lean and a poor national environment for Democrats. Republicans have to sort through a primary first and could end up with a less-than-stellar candidate. This race begins as a Toss-up.

10th District

The Dayton-anchored 10th District sheds its portion of Fayette County but picks up Springfield from the 8th District. The 10th’s partisan lean is barely affected by redistricting: under the old lines Trump won by 4.4 points, 51-47 percent, and under the new lines he would have won by 3.5 points, 51-47 percent. GOP Rep. Mike Turner regularly overperforms the top of the ticket, beating back challengers Desiree Tims 58-42 percent in 2020, and Theresa Gasper 56-42 percent in 2018, even as GOP Senate nominee Jim Renacci lost the district, 53-47 percent, and gubernatorial nominee Mike DeWine won it by just 52-45 percent. In a better cycle for Democrats this race could be interesting. Solid Republican.

## 2022 House Ratings

Due to delays in the redistricting process, ratings are incomplete. New ratings and states will be added on a rolling basis as final maps are approved in each state.

Toss-Up (4D)	
CO 8 (Open, New)	NC 2 (Open; Butterfield, D)
IA 3 (Axne, D)	OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)	
Tilt Democratic	Tilt Republican (1D, 1R)
	OH 13 (Open; A. Gonzalez, R)
	TX 15 (Open; V. Gonzalez, D)
Lean Democratic (1D)	Lean Republican (2R)
NV 3 (Lee, D)	NE 2 (Bacon, R)
	OH 1 (Chabot, R)
Likely Democratic (6D)	Likely Republican (4R, 1D)
CO 7 (Perlmutter, D)	CO 3 (Boebert, R)
NV 1 (Titus, D)	IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)	IA 2 (Hinson, R)
OR 4 (Open; DeFazio, D)	MT 1 (Open, New)
OR 5 (Schrader, D)	NC 11 (Manning, D/Fox, R)
OR 6 (Open, New)	NC 4 (Open, New)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)	TX 23 (Gonzales, R)

# moved benefiting Democrats, \* moved benefiting Republicans Takeovers in Italics

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## 11th District

For the past decade, the 11th has consisted of most of Cleveland connected by a strip of land to most of Akron. In the new map, the 11th is all of Cleveland plus the surrounding suburbs from Fairview Park to Euclid and down to Bedford Heights. But Akron has been decoupled. The district remains a Democratic stronghold, and would have voted for Biden, 79-20 percent.

The only danger newly-elected Rep. Shontel Brown may face would be a Democratic primary challenge. Former state Sen. Nina Turner, the progressive firebrand who lost to Brown in the special election primary for this seat last August, 50-45 percent, may run again. She filed paperwork for a 2022 bid with the FEC in September but says she hasn't made a final decision yet. Either way, this race is rated Solid Democratic.

## 12th District

Troy Balderson had to go through two tough elections in 2018 to solidify his hold on this central Ohio district: a special election to replace retiring Rep. Pat Tiberi and a general election just a few months later. He beat Franklin County Recorder Danny O'Connor both times, by 1 percent and 4 percent respectively, in a district that voted for Trump by just 6 points in 2020, 52-46 percent.

But Balderson is one of the biggest beneficiaries of redistricting: the new 12th would have voted for Trump by 32 points, 65-33 percent, as it no longer includes Democratic areas around Columbus or Delaware County and instead takes up much more rural territory. O'Connor is running again but doesn't have much of a shot under the new lines. Solid Republican.

## 13th District

The old 13th District, a hardscrapple Youngstown-anchored constituency represented by Democrat Tim Ryan, no longer exists, its territory divided between the new 6th, 7th, and 14th.

The new 13th is the successor district to the old 16th. It is anchored by Akron, and includes all of Medina County and the western side of Cuyahoga County, including Cleveland suburbs such as North Olmstead, Westlake, and Strongsville. The new 13th would have voted narrowly for Biden, 49.7-49 percent, in 2020, while the old 16th voted for Trump, 56-42 percent.

The incumbent is Westlake Republican Anthony Gonzalez, a former Ohio State and NFL football player who was once tagged as a rising star in the GOP but who became persona non grata after voting to impeach then-President Trump following the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol.

Though he is just in his second term, Gonzalez is not seeking re-election. Former Trump White House aide Max Miller, the scion of a wealthy Cleveland family, was already running against Gonzalez in the GOP primary and has Trump's endorsement. Shay Hawkins, a former aide to former Ohio Rep. Jim Renacci and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott is also running on the GOP side.

For Democrats, the most exciting option is state House minority leader Emilia Sykes, whose recent announcement that she would step down from her leadership post by year's end only fueled speculation that she'll run for Congress. Sykes, 35, comes from a prominent Akron political family and has long been seen as having her eye on higher office — her name was previously in the mix for 2022's Senate and gubernatorial contests as well.

If Sykes does run, she's a credible candidate for Democrats in a

## Rating Ohio's New Congressional Districts

DISTRICT	INCUMBENT	INITIAL RATING
1st	Steve Chabot, R	Lean Republican
2nd	Brad Wenstrup, R	Solid Republican
3rd	Joyce Beatty, D	Solid Democratic
4th	Jim Jordan, R	Solid Republican
5th	Bob Latta, R	Solid Republican
6th	Bill Johnson, R	Solid Republican
7th	Bob Gibbs, R	Solid Republican
8th	Warren Davidson, R	Solid Republican
9th	Marcy Kaptur, D	Toss-Up
10th	Mike Turner, R	Solid Republican
11th	Shontel Brown, D	Solid Democratic
12th	Troy Balderson, R	Solid Republican
13th	OPEN (Anthony Gonzalez, R)	Tilt Republican
14th	David Joyce, R	Solid Republican
15th	Mike Carey, R	Solid Republican

district Biden carried, albeit narrowly. And if Miller is the nominee for the GOP, he has some serious vulnerabilities due to allegations of domestic violence and other malfeasance. At a time when pickup opportunities are few and far between for Democrats, not just in Ohio but nationwide, this race will get some attention. But the national environment doesn't look great for Democrats right now and that makes marginal seats such as this one a difficult proposition. Tilt Republican.

## 14th District

The 14th District remains situated in Ohio's northeast corner. It is made up of all of Ashtabula, Lake, Geauga, and Portage counties, and the eastern and southern edges of Cuyahoga County, from Mayfield down to Solon, and across to Parma Heights.

The new 14th would have voted for Trump by 11 points, 55-44 percent, nearly equivalent to the old district's results. Republican David Joyce shouldn't have much trouble holding this seat, especially in what's shaping up to be a good year for Republicans. Solid Republican.

## 15th District

GOP Rep. Mike Carey is the newest member of the U.S. House, having just won a special election in November. As a swearing-in present, Ohio Republicans redrew his central Ohio district to make it much less Republican, shifting its center of gravity west and removing its rural eastern counties while extending the district around Columbus to include its northern as well as southern suburbs.

While the district Carey won over Democratic state Rep. Allison Russo last month voted for Trump by 14 points, 56-42 percent in 2020, his new district would have gone for Trump by just 6 points, 52-46 percent.

That means the district could be competitive for Democrats in a good year. But given that next year should be a good one for Republicans, Carey will still enjoy enough of a partisan advantage to ease his path to re-election. Russo hinted in her concession speech that she'd run again in 2022, but hasn't made any commitments. Solid Republican. **IE**

*Continued from page 1*

presidential nominee going back to Michael Dukakis in 1988, including for Barack Obama by 7 points over Mitt Romney in 2012, 53-46 percent.

Republicans have had more success in Senate and gubernatorial races. Scott Walker won three gubernatorial elections in four years, 52-47 percent in 2010, 53-46 percent in a 2012 recall (both against Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett), and 52-47 percent in 2014, before he was finally ousted in 2018 by state Superintendent of Education Tony Evers, 49.5-48.4 percent.

In the Senate, Johnson defeated Feingold in 2010, 52-47 percent, in a contest in which Johnson was slightly favored. In 2016, Johnson faced Feingold in a rematch and was triaged by national Republicans who felt he could not win, but he surprised them (and Democrats) by winning again, 50-47 percent.



**Ron Johnson**

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Wisconsin Democrats have not had a competitive Senate primary since 1992.

But the 2018 Democratic gubernatorial primary, in which Evers beat out six other candidates with 42 percent of the vote, offers some insights about the Democratic primary electorate.

In that race, 40 percent of all votes were cast in just two of Wisconsin's 72 counties: Milwaukee and Dane (Madison). That's enough to make them the primary focus of any Democratic candidate, especially in a divided field in which a candidate could win with significantly less than a majority.

But it's not so much that any candidate can ignore the rest of the state, which still has enough votes to present a path to victory. In 2018, Evers came in second in Milwaukee County, a strong first in Dane, and then dominated almost everywhere else in the state, enough to put himself well ahead.

Voters also broke down on regional and racial lines. While Evers won almost every county, he lost Milwaukee to 2012 lieutenant governor nominee/president of the Professional Firefighters of Wisconsin Mahlon Mitchell. Milwaukee is home to more than half of the state's Black population; Mitchell was the only Black candidate in the race. And even though Milwaukee was the only county he won, and by just a few points, that powered him to a second-place finish behind Evers.

The only other counties Evers lost were in western Wisconsin and were won by local state Sen. Kathleen Vinehout, who placed fourth overall but won or placed second in nearly all of western Wisconsin. In Dane County, the second-place finisher was local state Rep. Kelda Roys (third overall), while in all of the surrounding counties the second-place finisher was longtime Madison Mayor Paul Soglin (seventh overall).

This race is shaping up to be another competitive and crowded contest.

## The Democrats

Twelve Democrats are running for Senate in Wisconsin, but Democratic sources give only four of them a real possibility of winning

the nomination: Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, state Treasurer Sarah Godlewski, Milwaukee Bucks executive Alex Lasry, and Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson.

Barnes, 35, was elected lieutenant governor in 2018 as Evers' running mate. The two defeated the GOP ticket of Gov. Scott Walker and Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, 49.5-48.4 percent, in one of the marquee contests of the 2018 midterm elections.

A native of Milwaukee, Barnes attended Alabama A&M from 2003 to 2008 but did not officially receive his degree until 2020. After leaving Alabama, Barnes worked as an activist and community organizer in Milwaukee. In 2012, he challenged an incumbent state representative in the Democratic primary from the left, and won 68-32 percent. After winning that general election and the next one unopposed, Barnes again attempted a primary challenge against an incumbent from the left. This time, though, state Sen. Lena Taylor soundly defeated him, 61-39 percent.

Following Wisconsin Democrat's disastrous 2016, Barnes was elected second vice chair of the state party, and in 2018 he won the primary for lieutenant governor, 68-32 percent, over businessman Kurt Kober (in Wisconsin, the lieutenant governor nominee is elected in its own primary but runs as a ticket with the gubernatorial nominee in the general election).

Barnes has been cited as a rising star in the Democratic Party, and was given a prominent role representing Wisconsin at the 2020 Democratic National Convention, which was broadcast virtually from Milwaukee. He also has endorsements from Rep. Jim Clyburn, the influential South Carolina legislator, and Rep. Gwen Moore, who represents Milwaukee



**Mandela Barnes**

Courtesy, Mandela Barnes Campaign

in Congress, as well as Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren. Clyburn is an important moderate validator for Barnes, as the lieutenant governor's opponents often paint as him as too far-left to win a general election.

Barnes would be the first Black senator from Wisconsin and just the eighth Black person elected to the U.S. Senate ever. His campaign hopes that history — plus Barnes' youth and energy, both ever-present elements of his lieutenant governor campaign and his Senate bid — will help power him to victory.

The Barnes campaign team includes campaign manager Kory Kozloski, polling firm Clarity Campaign Labs, and media consulting firm Left Hook.

Lasry, 34, is a vice president in the Milwaukee Bucks organization, the NBA team owned by his father, billionaire Marc Lasry. He is a 2009 graduate of University of Pennsylvania and also has an MBA from New York University (2014). Lasry worked as a staffer in the Obama White House from 2010 to 2012, and moved to Wisconsin in 2014 when his father bought the Bucks from former U.S. Sen. Herb Kohl for \$550 million.

Alex Lasry, who was born in New York City, has lived in Milwaukee and worked for the reigning champion Bucks since 2014.

The Lasry campaign team includes general consultant Mike Tate of

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Wavecrest Analytics, media consultants David Dixon and Rich Davis of Dixon Davis Media, and pollster Jill Normington of Normington Petts.

Godlewski, 40, has been Wisconsin's state treasurer since winning election in 2018. A 2004 graduate of George Mason University, Godlewski was born in Eau Claire and worked as a consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton, which included projects for the Department of Defense. In 2012, she moved to Colorado to work for Arapahoe County. Four years later, she moved back to Madison to work for Hillary Clinton's Wisconsin campaign, and also founded a socially conscious investment firm with her husband.

In 2018, she ran for state treasurer, a position that has been stripped of nearly all of its authority over the past three decades. She faced former state treasurer Dawn Sass in the Democratic primary, which she won 44-32 percent. In the general election, Godlewski faced Republican Travis Hartwig, whom she defeated, 51-47 percent.

Godlewski has been endorsed by EMILY's List for this race. Her campaign team includes general consultant Scott Spector, who also worked with Wisconsin Sen. Tammy Baldwin, media consultant Mandy Grunwald, pollster Matt Canter of Global Strategy Group, and direct mail consultant Ed Peavy of Mission Control.

Nelson, 45, was born in St. Paul, Minn., and moved to Fox Valley, Wisconsin as a child. A 1998 graduate of Carleton College who also received a masters in public affairs from Princeton in 2004, Nelson entered elected office later that year when he won a close Appleton-area state assembly race against GOP state Rep. Becky Weber, 51-49 percent.

He won his next two races by wider margins with 62 and 64 percent, and was selected as state Assembly majority leader for the 2009-2010 legislative session. In 2010, he won the Democratic primary for lieutenant governor with 52 percent of the vote. He and Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett lost the general election to Scott Walker, 52-47 percent.

In 2011, Nelson won his first term as Outagamie County Executive, 52-48 percent, over former state Treasurer Jack Vought, and won successive terms uncontested in 2015 and 2019. Outagamie County tends to vote for Republicans at the national level, and voted for Romney 50-48 percent in 2012 and for Trump 53-41 percent in 2016.

That year, Nelson was the Democratic nominee for the 8th Congressional District; he lost to Republican Mike Gallagher 63-37 percent, as Trump was winning 56-39 percent.

Nelson's campaign team includes media consultant Bill Hyers of the Win Company, pollster Steven Clermont of Change Research, and direct mail consultant Joe Hansen of AMHC. Hansen also worked with Nelson on the 2016 congressional race.

Also running are Milwaukee city Alderwoman Chantia Lewis, physician Gillian Battino, nonprofit leader Steven Olikara, Wisconsin Emergency Management Division administrator Darrell Williams, attorney Peter Peckarsky and disability rights advocate Jeff Rumbaugh.

None of them have raised the kind of money usually necessary to win a competitive primary. Battino, who raised \$127,000 from January



Sarah Godlewski

Godlewski for State Treasurer

to the end of September and has chipped in \$125,000 in personal money, has a compelling life story and is the top fundraiser of the lower tier, but had just \$35,000 in the bank on Sept. 30. Lewis received some early, positive chatter and is the only Black woman in the field at a time when Democrats are hoping to elevate Black women running for office, but any momentum she may have had was derailed by a four-charge felony indictment for campaign finance crimes in October (she has pleaded not guilty).

## The Democratic Primary

With a late filing deadline (June 1) and election date (Aug. 9), the primary is still in an earlier stage than the party's other top-tier nominating contests in Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

The late date means the field will likely decrease in size. One early candidate, state Sen. Chris Larson, has already dropped out and endorsed Barnes.

## The Polling

The limited early public polling shows Barnes with a substantial lead. None of the campaigns dispute that he is the frontrunner and would win if the election were held today, but Barnes' opponents maintain that his advantage is purely based on name recognition as the most prominent statewide elected official in the race.

A Clarity Campaigns poll of 698 likely voters conducted Aug. 28-30 for the Barnes Campaign found Barnes ahead with 37 percent of the vote, followed by Nelson (8 percent), Godlewski (7 percent), Lasry (5 percent) and Battino, Olikara, and Lewis with 1 percent.

A Data for Progress poll of 524 likely voters conducted Nov. 11-15 (right after Lasry concluded a statewide TV ad campaign) for a group supporting Barnes found a similar result except for a bounce in Lasry's support: Barnes out in front with 39 percent, Lasry with 16 percent, Nelson with 6 percent and Godlewski with 5 percent.

The late primary date means that Lasry, Godlewski, and Nelson will have time to increase their name ID and move voters into their camp. The question will be if they have the resources to do so and if voters are receptive.

## The Geography

When it comes to the two voter-rich areas, both Barnes and Lasry are from Milwaukee while Godlewski lives in Madison (though she was born about 175 miles north in Eau Claire).

Of the major candidates only Nelson, in Outagamie, is from outside the two major cities, which his campaign sees as key to his path to victory. Nelson's campaign emphasizes his outstate roots and his Lutheran minister father and he talks often (and wrote a book) about his successful efforts to save a local papermill.

Godlewski also hopes her Eau Claire upbringing will help her connect with outstate voters, but she also has not lived there since high school, and only moved back to the state (to Madison) in 2016 to work on the Hillary Clinton campaign. She'll also look to press an advantage in the WOW Counties (Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington) that surround Milwaukee and shifted toward Democrats as the party grew stronger in the college-educated suburbs over the past five years. But while they're integral to general election success for a Democrat, those three counties cast just 8 percent of votes in the 2018 Democratic primary.

As a native Milwaukeean and the only Black major candidate in

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the race, Barnes should expect to do well in Milwaukee, and his liberal policies could play well in Madison as well. He also begins the race with a substantial name recognition advantage.

## The Money

Compared to other high-profile Senate races in states such as Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania, candidate fundraising in Wisconsin has been far from robust. The cash-on-hand leader is Lasry, who reported \$1.5 million in the bank on Sept. 30 and who has raised \$2.3 million since February, plus \$800,000 in personal money. He's followed by Godlewski, who reported \$786,000 in the bank at the end of September; the state treasurer has raised just \$840,000 since jumping into the race in April — low for a top-tier candidate — and has also chipped in more than \$1 million of her own money.



Alex Lasry

Courtesy Lasry Campaign

Barnes ranks third on the cash-on-hand leaderboard, with \$711,000 in the bank. The last of the major candidates to file, Barnes raised \$1.1 million in the three months from July through September. He and Lasry are the only candidates to raise more than \$1 million in a quarter; Lasry did so in the first two quarters of 2021 before seeing a drop-off in the third quarter.

Nelson has the least cash on hand of the major candidates, with \$418,000 in the bank on Sept. 30. He's also been in the race the longest, having announced in December of 2020, and has raised \$944,000 between then and Sept. 30.

Lasry flexed his financial muscle early, with a \$1.3 million statewide TV ad buy in October and November that highlighted his work with the Bucks in building basketball arena Fiserv Forum and paying a \$15 minimum wage for arena workers. In a state with a long history of labor activism, Lasry intends to make organized labor a central component of his effort, and has been heavily courting unions for endorsements.

That's been frustrating to the other candidates, especially Nelson, which has also focused on organized labor but has not seen the same level of institutional support.

Lasry's early ad campaign has been effective in raising his name ID, according to several Democratic sources, and the limited public and private polling indicates the push has helped him separate slightly from Godlewski and Nelson. But bumps in support from TV ads can be temporary, especially with 10 months to go before the primary. Lasry has been off the air since early November and none of the other candidates have been on TV yet.

## The Messaging

Because the primary is later in the year than most other Senate contests, the candidates have not gone negative against each other yet. That will likely change as more voters tune into the contest next spring.

And what negative campaigning there will be will likely occur in the larger context of electability. Thus far, all of the major campaigns have been focusing on why their candidate has the best shot at

defeating Johnson.

Each contender has their angle: for Barnes, it's tapping into grassroots progressive and activist energy. For Lasry, it's running a businessman outsider against a businessman senator, and the ability to go dollar for dollar against the wealthy Johnson. For Godlewski, it's a kitchen table pitch tailored to the suburban voters that drove the party to victory in 2018, plus a dose of folksy charm. For Nelson, it's a wonkish, populist energy and a track record of winning a Republican constituency, and an ability, as an unassuming white man, to sidestep some of the thornier racial questions that have dominated Wisconsin Democratic politics since the shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha last summer.

But they all have obvious weaknesses in a general election, weaknesses their primary opponents will use to argue they won't be able to beat Johnson (rather than arguing that they wouldn't be a good senator, which is a secondary concern to taking back the seat).

For Barnes, it's his stances on hot-button issues such as cash bail and Israel-Palestine, and fears — at least in part racially motivated — that Republicans will successfully paint him as a far-left radical. For Lasry, it's that he's a billionaire who only moved to Wisconsin a few years ago because his father bought the Bucks and is on record saying he was surprised Milwaukee "has all the same things as any city." For Godlewski, it's that she only just moved back to Wisconsin after several decades, didn't vote in Wisconsin in 2016 despite being Clinton's deputy state political director, and hasn't been able to raise much money in her campaign so far. For Nelson, it's his lack of a foothold in Dane and Milwaukee and inability to make a splash in the race despite being the first one in, and that his claim of crossover appeal among rural and GOP-trending voters is belied by his defeats on the gubernatorial ticket in 2010 and as a congressional candidate in 2016, both under conditions closer to a statewide Senate race than his one contested county executive election.

At the moment, only Barnes and Lasry are on track to have the resources necessary to go negative while also continuing to push a positive message. Godlewski may see support from EMILY's List, which can provide its candidates outside air cover with television ads. Nelson, however, will probably have to rely on the other candidates to tear each other down and hope he can win the nomination unscathed and largely ignored.

## The Bottom Line

Whichever Democrat emerges from the primary will face a tough task in the general election, given that the national environment looks favorable for Republicans. Despite Johnson's sagging approval ratings, the two-term Republican shouldn't be underestimated; Democrats did that in 2010 and 2016 and were burned both times when Johnson defeated Feingold.

If Johnson does not seek re-election, then Republicans will likely see a competitive, messy primary. And if he wants until the last minute to announce he isn't running, that could leave potential GOP contenders — such as Reps. Mike Gallagher and Bryan Steil and former Rep. Sean Duffy — scrambling to put together statewide campaign operations. Though the late primary date gives the GOP some breathing room if that happens.

Even with questions surrounding the Democratic primary and Johnson's future plans, there's one certainty: this will be one of the most competitive races in the country in a fight for the Senate that hinges on every single seat.

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