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Hard Times in America's Laboratory for Democracy Wisconsin Legislative Politics 1966 and 2006

Jacob Stampen
University of Wisconsin–Madison



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WISCAPE

University of Wisconsin–Madison
409 Education Building
1000 Bascom Mall
Madison, WI 53706-1398

Telephone: 608-265-6342
Fax: 608-262-4881
Email: wiscape-info@education.wisc.edu
Website: www.wiscape.wisc.edu

Hard Times in America's Laboratory for Democracy: Wisconsin Legislative Politics 1966 and 2006

Jacob Stampen¹

University of Wisconsin–Madison

Abstract

This paper compares the personal background characteristics and voting behavior of Wisconsin state legislators in two legislative sessions separated by 40 years (1965-1966 and 2005-2006). The study uses cluster analysis to graphically display the differences in the voting patterns of the two sessions, an indicator that can be used in this and other legislative settings to signal the need for investigation and reform.

Findings of the analysis indicate little change in the personal characteristics of the legislators but major differences in voting behavior. This suggests a dramatic and arguably harmful shift in the operation of the state's political system, which could impact policymaking in higher education and other areas. Speculation on how the political shift occurred and possible directions for the future are included.

¹ Jacob Stampen is professor emeritus of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and a former policy analyst for the National Center for Higher Education in Washington D.C. The author wishes to acknowledge James K. Conant, former Wisconsin State Assembly Speaker Tom Loftus, and Jeff Mayers, president WisPolitics.com, for insight into the evolution of Wisconsin politics; Dan Bolt for methodological assistance; W. Lee Hansen and Fred Fosdal for reading and criticism; Mike Buelow of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign and the staff of the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau for assistance in developing the data; and Nik Hawkins for editorial input. Responsibility for errors and omissions remain with the author.

“We shape our dwellings and afterwards our dwellings
shape us.”

— Winston Churchill on rebuilding the Houses of
Parliament in 1944.

Preface

Early in my career, as a higher education policy analyst at the National Center for Higher Education in Washington, D.C., I learned that the health of our political systems greatly influences the quality of higher education and every other important enterprise. Later, as a teacher of the continuous improvement approach to educational planning and program evaluation, I learned that something important was missing from the literature; namely, ways to graphically display differences between healthy and unhealthy systems.

The following paper, while scarcely mentioning higher education, graphically displays changes in the behavior of a political system of vital importance to that enterprise. Specifically, the paper illustrates seldom-noticed differences in the voting behavior of two Wisconsin legislatures, one of which, I argue, was healthy (an open system characterized by high quality debates and respect for research-based evidence) and the other unhealthy (a closed system characterized by little debate and special interest driven ideology). Hopefully, what follows will stimulate thinking about implications for higher education and what it can do to help improve the health of Wisconsin’s political system.

Introduction

This paper compares the composition and behavior of the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 Wisconsin legislatures² to better understand how Wisconsin, a state that in 1965 was widely thought of as the “Nation’s Laboratory for Democracy,” had by 2005 deteriorated to a level where leaders of both political parties were either in jail or on their way there.³ As former Wisconsin Governor and U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson observed several years ago: “When I was in the Senate, it was very common for someone who knew politics to say to me ‘You come from a clean state’... We had a

² Legislative sessions last for two years. Accordingly, the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 sessions began in January and ended in December of the following year.

³ See Appendix A for a brief summary of Wisconsin’s legislative accomplishments since 1846.

tradition in Wisconsin. Now we've become like every other state. It's disgusting. It's a damned disgrace" (Rosenbaum, as cited in Conant, 2006).

Incidents of state employees working on public time for political campaigns and pay-for-play relationships between lobbyists and legislators led to felony convictions for leaders of the two major political parties. Since then, attention has focused mainly on individuals' actions rather than on how changes in the political process affected their behavior and the political system as a whole. For example, news reports have given little indication of what a system whose members fail to produce good government looks like, what drives it, and ultimately, how it affects citizens.

How did the Wisconsin Legislature change between 1965-1966 and 2005-2006? How can we know whether current legislators behave differently than their predecessors? This paper analyzes roll-call votes and legislators' background characteristics to identify and assess recent changes in the behavior of the Wisconsin Legislature. In doing so, it develops an indicator of legislative behavior that can be used in other legislative settings to signal the need for investigation and reform. While roll-call analysis is limited in that it is unable to observe behind-the-scenes developments, it does enable us to see "which groups form coalitions, resolve whether parties are unified or factionalized, and determine the issues on which groups divide" (Morgenstern, 2004, pp. 20-22).

The paper establishes an analytical context by employing a conceptual framework based on research in a variety of legislative settings. Cluster analysis is applied to final floor votes on all bills contested by at least 5% of the members in both houses of the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 Wisconsin legislatures in order to identify basic voting patterns. Next, the background characteristics of cluster-group members (e.g., personal, financial, and political characteristics) are analyzed to reveal similarities and differences in the composition of the Legislature. The findings of this study are then compared with the findings of other studies on related topics to assess the importance of recent changes. The paper ends with thoughts on why the political system changed and how Wisconsin might regain its former status as a producer of high-quality, trailblazing legislation.

Context for Comparing Legislatures

How can we compare one legislative body with another? In his book *Patterns in Legislative Politics: Roll-Call Voting in the United States and Latin America*, Scott Morgenstern develops a framework based on the behavior of legislatures in many different settings. His framework centers on legislative *agents*, a term he uses to describe the most active and important units of analysis in a legislative body (i.e., depending on the situation, political parties, sub-parties, factions, or coalitions). Morgenstern argues that "the patterns of legislative politics can be described by

considering the internal unity of legislative agents and the interactions among these agents.” Specifically, he concludes that legislative bodies can be usefully classified according to their agents’ high or low *flexibility* and *identifiability* (Morgenstern, 2004, pp.18-19). Morgenstern finds three common combinations of legislator flexibility and identifiability: a) *Coalition Partners*; b) *Legislators for Sale to the Highest Bidder*; and c) *Exclusivist Rulers* (see Figure 1).

		Identifiability	
		Low	High
Flexibility	Low	Impossible combination	Exclusivist (Exclusive ruler / Oppositionist)
	High	Legislators for Sale to the Highest Bidder	Coalition Partner

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Morgenstern's typology of legislatures (Morgenstern, 2004, p. 18).

The Coalition Partner pattern is often found in European multiparty parliamentary systems in which political parties and subparties advance their causes by negotiating issues with one another, and, when mutually agreeable, forming larger coalitions. These agents are both easy to identify and flexible in their willingness to join with others to influence public policy.

The second type, Legislators for Sale to the Highest Bidder, often trade votes to benefit either themselves or their constituents, but mostly in secret. Members of this kind of legislature are highly flexible in their voting, but it is difficult for voters to know who is influencing their votes.

Morgenstern identifies a third kind of legislature as high in identifiability and low in flexibility. He refers to this type of organization as an Exclusive Ruler system, hereafter referred to as *Exclusivist*. Here, members are typically “highly disciplined and cohesive” in their voting behavior (i.e., easy to identify) but “unwilling to compromise their ideals during policy debates” (i.e., inflexible). When in the majority, members see themselves as exclusive rulers, and when in the minority, persistent oppositionists. Morgenstern observes that in recent years the U.S. Congress

has increasingly functioned as an Exclusivist body, and that similar “periods of polarization (e.g., divisions leading to the U.S. Civil War, the Progressive Movement, the New Deal, and the Great Society) have signaled important partisan realignments, if not social upheaval” (Morgenstern, 2004, p.20).

Do any of the above descriptions apply to Wisconsin politics? The following analysis argues that between 1965-1966 and 2005-2006, the Wisconsin Legislature transitioned from an essentially Coalition Partner system to an Exclusivist system based on what can be learned from comparing two Wisconsin legislatures separated by 40 years. Describing what happened during the interim (i.e., what factors drove the transition) is beyond the scope of this study. Fortunately, there are several accounts by direct observers of developments during the transition years. According to James K. Conant in *Wisconsin Politics and Government: America’s Laboratory of Democracy*, Wisconsin politics began to change during the 1970s as consequence of an effort to “modernize” state legislatures by establishing and strengthening party caucus staffs in both legislative houses. This was followed in the 1980s by increased partisan competition, an increase in gubernatorial influence relative to the Legislature, and, throughout the 1990s, increased courting of lobbyists by leaders of both political parties (Conant, 2006, p. 84).

Tom Loftus, former four-term speaker of the Wisconsin State Assembly, provides another perspective in *The Art of Legislative Politics*. He observes complex interplay among intended and unanticipated state and national developments. Republican control of the Legislature weakened after many progressive Republicans shifted to the Democratic Party during the 1960s. Aided by the Nixon Era Watergate scandal, Democrats gained majority party status during most of the 1970s and, despite internal strife and scandal, remained in power throughout the 1980s. The election of Governor Tommy Thompson in 1987, nation-wide movement to the right on social issues during the Reagan Era, and the decline of private sector labor unions helped state Republicans regain control of the Assembly after 1995 and the Senate during the first two Legislatures of the twenty-first century (Loftus, 1994).

Jeff Mayers, president of WisPolitics.com, reports hearing the recent political transformation described as the “Washingtonization” of Wisconsin politics. According to this view, party caucuses and their campaign committees were aided by political campaign committees. This, in turn, caused special interest money to flow to places mainly in control of partisan legislative leaders who then helped the candidates of their choice; if elected, those candidates became loyal to the leaders and helped them stay in power. The power of the governor’s office increased relative to the Legislature after 1986 as Governor Tommy Thompson combined personal popularity and policy innovations with successful political fundraising. During this period, political parties

became pass-through mechanisms for money flowing to coordinated election plans that bolstered legislative campaigns. This contributed to a shift of influence from the state to the national level, e.g., the “Washingtonization,” of Wisconsin’s political process. All of the above, in turn, elevated legislative leaders like former Republican Speaker Scott Jensen and former Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Chvala, who knew how to funnel money from Washington groups to Wisconsin (J. Mayers, personal communication, May 26, 2007).

Evidence of Political Change

In 1965-1966, Republican Governor Warren Knowles presided over a state Senate with a 20-13 Republican majority and an Assembly with a narrow 53-47 Democratic majority. In 2005-2006 Democratic Governor James Doyle faced a Senate with a 19-14 Republican majority and an Assembly with a 60-39 Republican majority. But, these comparisons tell us little. Figure 2 provides a statistical portrait of differences in voting behavior between 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 Senates, and Figure 3 provides the same for the Assemblies. Legislators’ individual and collective voting behavior is summarized within each of the four component charts. Each column, above the “Observations” headings and to the right of the “Similarity” headings, summarizes a single legislator’s voting on all contested bills.⁴ For example, Senator Carr’s votes on 100 contested bills in the 1965-1966 Senate are summarized by the column shown in the far-left side of the top chart in Figure 2.

The length of a given legislator’s voting column is determined after each legislator’s voting record is compared with the voting records of all other legislators.⁵ Adjoining columns, within the boundaries of the color-identified clusters shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, identify similarly voting legislators—the shorter the lines, the more similar the voting.⁶ Voting clusters are connected by horizontal lines, with the shortest lines appearing at the bottom of each component chart.

⁴ Numbers at the left of each component chart in Figure 2 and Figure 3 constitute a mathematical index of cohesion in which the ranges vary from one legislative body to another, depending on horizontal distances between clusters and degrees of similarity in voting. The fact that there appears to be different metrics for each component chart is significant because the variation in numbers at which groups come in the 2005-2006 Senate and Assembly are much less than in the same two houses 40 years earlier. Also note that the distance between the final two clusters is much larger in both houses of the 2005-2006 Legislature than in 1965-1966.

⁵ The numbers of analyzed contested bills are as follows: 1965-1966 Senate = 100, Assembly = 99, 2005-2006 Senate = 129, Assembly = 183. Votes are recorded as follows: 1 = Yes; 2 = Absence or Abstention; and 3 = No. All recorded votes were standardized during analysis.

⁶ The four portraits in Figure 2 and Figure 3 were produced by applying cluster analysis (specifically Cluster Observations with Ward Linkage and Euclidean Distance) to a statistically standardized matrix of all legislators and all bills contested by at least 5% of all final passage votes. Six groups were highlighted to illustrate consistency across solutions. Ward Linkage was selected because of its descriptive rigor and the face validity of resulting clusters. The method differs from other hierarchical clustering methods in that it uses an analysis of variance approach to evaluate the distances between clusters. In short, this method attempts to minimize the Sum of Squares (SS) of any two (hypothetical) clusters that can be formed at each step. The criterion for fusion is that it should produce the smallest possible increase in the error sum of squares. In general, this method is regarded as very efficient and performs well in cases when the objects actually form naturally distinct clumps (in this case similarly voting legislators).

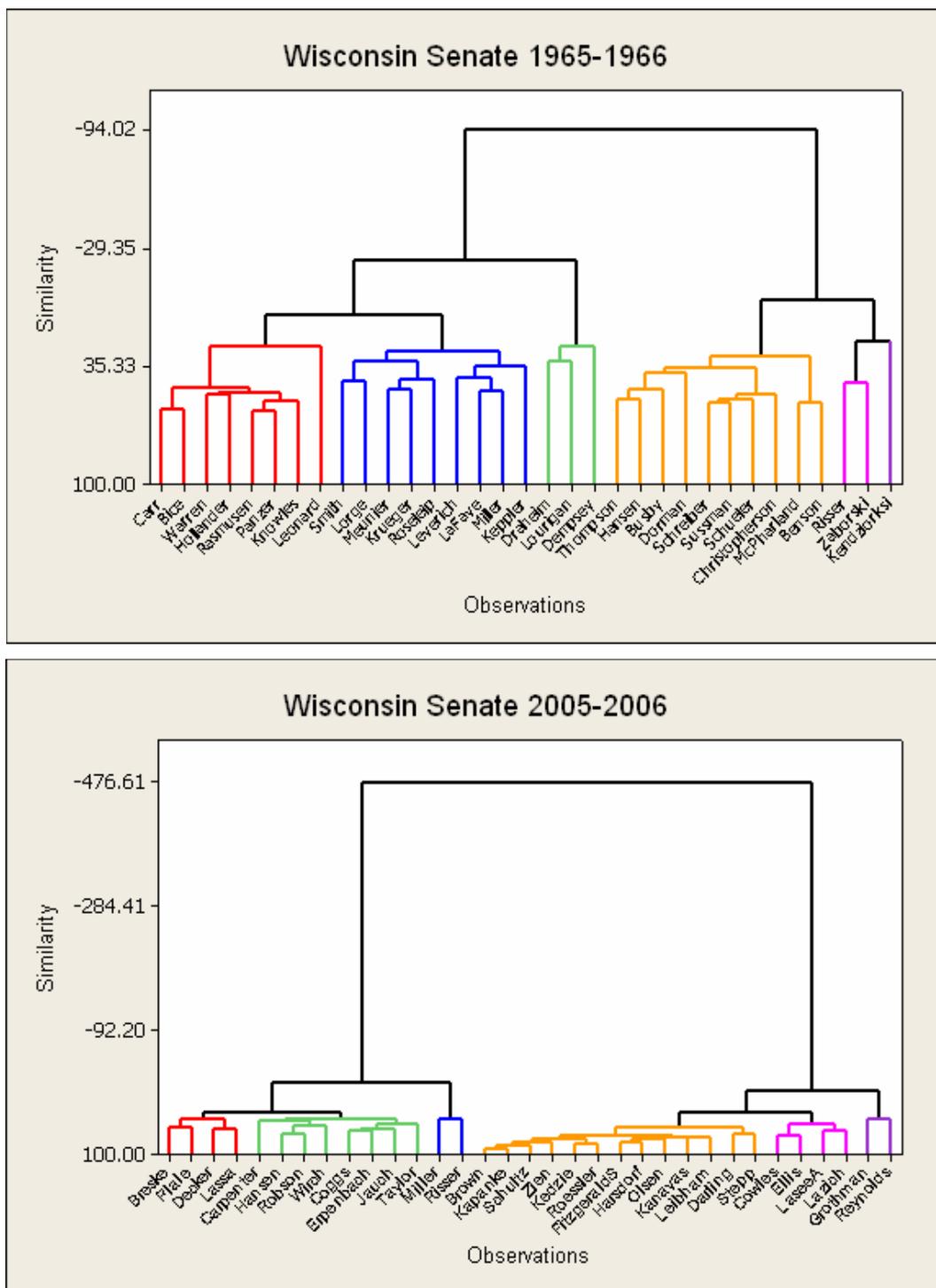


Figure 2. Wisconsin State Senate voting structures, 1965-1966 and 2005-2006, shown in dendrograms with Ward Linkage and Euclidean Distance. Each observation along the bottom row represents a state legislator.

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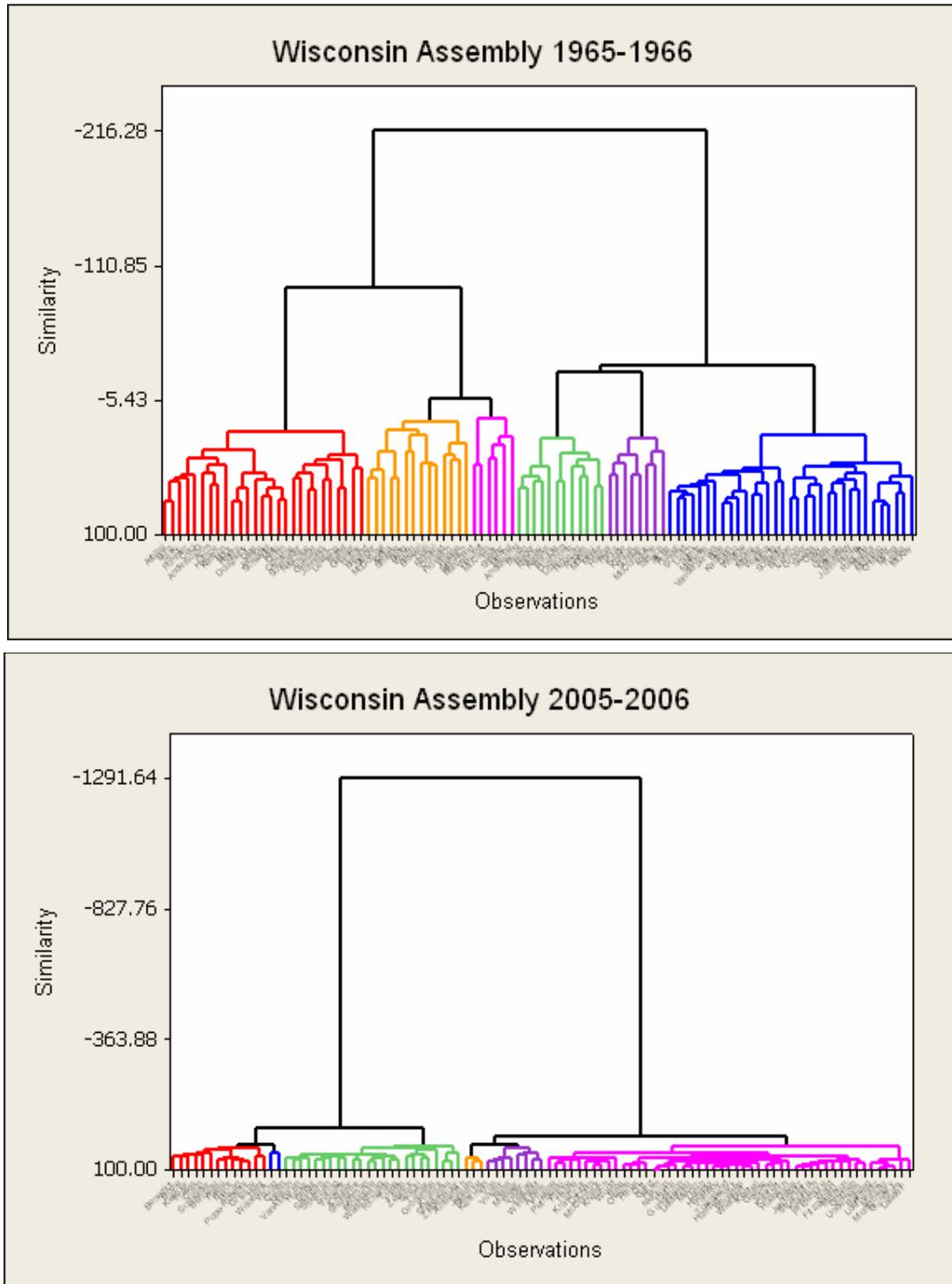


Figure 3. Wisconsin State Assembly voting structures, 1965-1966 and 2005-2006, shown in dendrograms with Ward Linkage and Euclidean Distance. Each observation along the bottom row represents a state legislator.

Clusters with the greatest voting behavior differences are connected by horizontal lines at the top of each session chart, the next greatest by the next highest horizontal line, and so on down. In the 2005-2006 Senate (bottom chart of Figure 2), for example, the two senators with the closest overall voting records, as indicated by the shortest lines, are Senators Kapanke and Brown, and the two senators whose voting records differed the most from each other and all other Republican Senators (i.e., the longest lines), compared to each other and all other Senators, are Grothman and Reynolds.

Note the compression on the right (Republican) and left (Democratic) sides of the 2005-2006 Senate and Assembly. All but 11 of the 60 Republican Party members in the Assembly (bottom chart of Figure 3) fell into a single, tightly cohesive cluster, as indicated by the shortness of the columns within the Republican cluster that begins six levels below the top horizontal line. Even then the eight seemingly independent (purple) Republicans voted with the rest on over 90% of the contested votes. Assembly Democrats appear in two single, slightly less cohesive clusters. Three others (yellow) appear as a group because of being absent for a large number of votes. Similar divisions appear in the Republican controlled Senate (bottom chart of Figure 2). Except for two outlier Senators, all the Republicans are tightly clustered. All but two Democratic Senators also fall into a single group that is only very slightly less cohesive than the main Republican group.

In the 1965-1966 Legislature the columns of both parties were longer, and there were more clusters, indicating greater variation in voting behavior patterns within and across political parties. Also, the top horizontal line in the houses of the 2005-2006 legislature separates all Republicans and Democrats; but in both houses of the 1965-1966 legislature cluster, the branches are more numerous, and individual Republicans and Democrats appear in clusters ranging from left to right across the charts, suggesting greater tolerance for independent thought and action. Overall, we see much less variation in voting behavior in 2005-2006 than in 1965-1966. In the 1965-1966 Assembly (top chart of Figure 3), Republicans divided into three groups (red, orange, and pink on the left side of the chart). All except two members of the red and orange groups (one in each group) were Republicans; the pink group was the most fiscally and culturally conservative in that Assembly. The six members of the red group represented mid-sized towns and suburbs in the southeast corner of Wisconsin and, in all but one case, degrees from the University of Wisconsin—Madison or Marquette University. The 14 members of the purple group were from mid-sized cities in the eastern half of Wisconsin and elsewhere across the state, but at some distance from the urban southeast corner of the state.

The red group, composed of 26 Republicans and one Democrat, mainly represented the moderate wing of the Republican Party (e.g., libertarian-leaning fiscal conservatives). Members of this group appeared able to reconcile their differences, with the Democratic leadership group (containing the

speaker, speaker pro tem, and the chairs of most of the important committees) on all but a few of the final floor votes. Both groups voted similarly on all but 9 of 100 contested bills.

The green group, which included 11 Democrats and one Republican, mainly represents the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Members of this group, like the pink group, were mainly educated at either UW–Madison or Marquette University, and most were lawyers. Members of this group voted for and against other groups on a variety of issues.⁷ Liberal Democrats voted with the conservative Republicans against other Democrats and moderate Republicans against revoking minors' operating licenses, school hours, and religious education release time. They voted with other Democrats against conservative Republicans on establishing a trout hatchery, homeowner tax refunds, and election commissioners, and they voted with other Democrats and the largest group of Republicans against the conservative Republicans on felon probation.⁸

During the 1960s and 1970s, Wisconsin Democrats were often referred to in the press as liberals—of a type often found in Midwestern and New England states—as opposed to the more populist Democrats in Southern and Western states.⁹ Flexibility in voting characterized both houses of the 1965-1966 Legislature, but much less so in the 2005-2006 Legislature, as is shown in Table 1. In 1965-1966, the main focus was on how much to expand state services, such as K-12 cooperative education, educational television, and state teachers' pensions. Higher education issues included revising state university tenure policies, establishing two University of Wisconsin two-year campuses, and funding two new public four-year campuses. On these issues, Democrats were generally supportive, while Republican groups were sometimes divided.

Table 1 shows the sharp differences in voting behavior between the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 legislatures where partisan block voting was the rule. In the 2005-2006 Legislature, at least 8 out of 10 Senate and Assembly Republicans voted “yes” on 95% of contested bills. In contrast, in 1965-1966, Republicans displayed less cohesion than Democrats whether in the majority or the

⁷ The subjects of contested bills provide only rough indications the issues underlying coalition formation.

⁸ A previous study (Stampen, 1969) examined similarly treated bills on all topics to discover whether legislators considered bills on the basis of their topics, the committees they were assigned to, or other ways in which they were perceived. It found that topics and committee assignment mattered little compared to how legislators interpreted bill content. Similarly voting legislators filtered bill content through shared philosophies or world views in ways that often tied seemingly dissimilar groups of bills together. More than anything else, shared world view determined what they read into individual bills and how they voted on them.

⁹ Characterizations of coalitions in the 1965-1966 session of the Wisconsin Legislature derive from coordinated studies by the author and a colleague: Stampen (1969) and Craven (1969). For a discussion of linkages between state and national sub-parties, see Stampen and Reeves (1986). This study identified four recurring national subparties, here identified with original and current labels. The two sub-parties most often found in Midwestern and New England states were *Honey Bee Democrats* (now called *Liberals* or *Progressives*) and *Gypsy Moth Republicans* (moderately fiscal conservative and libertarian, now often derisively referred to by social conservative Republicans as *RINOs*, or *Republicans in Name Only*). Two other sub-parties, often found in Southern and Western states, were *Boll Weevil Democrats* (populists now commonly called *Blue Dogs*) and *Yellow Jacket Republicans* (now called *Social Conservatives*). A plausible explanation for Wisconsin's political transformation that began in the 1990s is that the Yellow Jacket Republicans drove out or converted the formerly dominant Gypsy Moth Republicans, while Democrats remained ideologically similar to the Honey Bees.

minority. Also, note that more than 80% “no” votes were very rare in either house in 1965-1966, but accounted for roughly half the votes of the Democrats in 2005-2006.

Table 1
Voting Patterns in the Wisconsin State Legislature by Political Party

	1965-1966				2005-2006			
	Senate (n=98)		Assembly (n=100)		Senate (n=120)		Assembly (n=183)	
	Dems	Reps*	Dems*	Reps	Dems	Reps*	Dems	Reps*
Percentage of time 80% or more of members vote "yes"	52	33	67	45	24	95	26	95
Percentage of time 80% or more of members vote "no"	8	2	4	1	53	0	47	0

Note. * = majority party; n = number of bills contested by at least 5% of the final vote.

In 2005-2006, at least 80% of Senate Democrats voted “no” 53% of the time, as did Assembly Democrats 47% of the time. In both houses of the 1965-1966 Legislature, both parties displayed more variation in their voting behavior: over 80% of Democrats voted “yes” on 52% of contested bills in the Senate and 67% of bills in the Assembly. Comparable percentages for Senate and Assembly Republicans were 33 and 45, respectively.

The 2005-2006 Legislature was remarkable in the extent to which lobby ratings mirrored block voting. Senate and Assembly Republicans averaged agreement ratings of 73% and 97%, respectively, from The Right to Life (RTL) and 72% and 99% from Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC). Assembly Republicans also scored 98% approval from the National Rifle Association (NRA). Comparable Senate and Assembly Democratic scores were 49% and 20% for RTL and 33% and 15% for WMC. Assembly Democrats scored 26% approval from the NRA.

Senate and Assembly Democrats received agreement ratings of 93% and 90% from the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC); 85% and 90% from the NARAL-Pro Choice (NARAL); and 79% and 78% from the Sierra Club. Comparable Senate and Assembly Republican scores for WEAC were 17% and 17%; 3% and 5% for NARAL; and 6% and 14% for the Sierra Club.

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In sum, the overall correlation of Republican and Democratic lobby ratings in the Assembly was -0.979, a near-perfect negative correlation. The Republican versus Democratic voting correlation in the Senate was only slightly less negative (-0.878).¹⁰

Two themes characterized much of the 2005-2006 legislation. The first theme was business-related issues, such as leans liability, lead paint manufacturers liability, relief from various kinds of private and corporate regulation, and various tax exemptions, including property tax exemptions and corporate tax credits. A second and much more publicized theme was social conservative issues, including bills requiring voters to have identification cards, health savings accounts, defining a living wage, licensing individuals to carry concealed weapons, bans on gay marriage and certain kinds of stem cell research, establishing a death penalty and K-12 education vouchers (Milwaukee Parent Choice).

Issues during the 1965-1966 Legislature emerged largely from inside Wisconsin, whereas the bills proposed during the 2005-2006 session were often drafted by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), headquartered in Washington, D.C. This national organization, founded by Paul M. Weyrich, “an important strategist for the social and religious conservative movements,” brings together legislators and lobbyists to draft model legislation for dissemination to the U.S. Congress and states’ legislatures (Paul Weyrich, 2007). According to Common Cause, ALEC “brings state lawmakers and their private sector counterparts to the table as equals. Corporate lawyers (paying fees ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000) then assist in drafting model legislation that ALEC works to get passed in state legislatures...ALEC is nothing less than a tax-exempt façade for the country’s largest corporations” (Common Cause, 2007).

In Wisconsin’s 2005-2006 political system, block voting was the rule: legislation was commonly paid for by players, ideology trumped evidence in deliberations over policy, and running for public office became increasingly expensive. This became particularly difficult for public non-profit organizations to handle. Public higher education, for example, was often viewed by politicians as just another special interest to tap. Contributing to political candidates became a requirement and gridlocked voting delayed decisions about tuition levels and student financial aid. During the 2007-2008 budget process, examples of ideology-driven legislation sought to eliminate state support for the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Law School and School of Social Work, public radio, and bonding for new dormitories.

¹⁰ Lobby ratings were obtained from organizational websites. Ratings scores were available for 64% of Assembly Democrats, 70% of Assembly Republicans, 86% of Senate Democrats, and 84% of Senate Republicans.

Changes in Legislators' Background and Behavior Characteristics

Figure 1 and Table 1 both show that voting behavior in the most recent session of the Wisconsin Legislature differed substantially from the session 40 years earlier. But why? Was it because of changes in the state's population leading to the election of legislators with different world views, or was it because direct descendants of the earlier legislators were, for whatever other reasons, converted to new views? Changes in the background characteristics and behaviors of the members of the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 legislatures are detailed in Appendix B and Appendix C.¹¹

Findings from the Data

The background characteristics of members of the 2005-2006 Legislature differed somewhat from 1965-1966 members, but not enough to explain the sharp differences in behavior. In 2005-2006, Republicans held majorities in both houses, but not by overwhelming margins, while in 1965-1966 they only held a majority in the Senate. Members of the 2005-2006 Legislature won their elections by slightly larger margins than in 1965-1966, possibly because the boundaries of the newly redrawn electoral districts were less likely to be based on county or community boundaries. Critics charged that the new boundaries were often gerrymandered—redesigned in order to safeguard incumbents.

The average ages of members were similar in both legislatures: mid-50s in the Senate and late 40s in the Assembly.

Participation by women and members of ethnic minority groups increased, but neither appeared to form or join distinctive coalitions. In 1965-1966, there were no women in the Senate and only two women in the Assembly. In the 2005-2006 Senate, 26% of Republicans and 21% of Democrats were women. In the Assembly, 23% of Republicans and 26% of Democrats were women. The 1965-1966 Legislature had only one African-American Assembly member, who was a Democrat. There were no other members of any racial minority group. In the 2005-2006 Legislature, there were four African Americans and one Hispanic member in the Assembly and two African Americans in the Senate, all Democrats.

In 2005-2006, higher proportions of legislators in both parties were educated beyond high school and obtained four-year college degrees, most often from University of Wisconsin System institutions. Legislators without education beyond high school declined from 26% to 12% between

¹¹ Except where otherwise noted, information about the background characteristics, voting, and election records of individual legislators were obtained from biographies and other information posted on the official website of the Wisconsin Legislature (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/>) and the 1965-1966 editions of the *Wisconsin Blue Book* and the *Legislative Journal*.

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1965-1966 and 2005-2006. The percentage of Legislators achieving bachelors degrees increased from 45% to 72 %. Nevertheless, increases in educational attainment by members of both parties did not appear to influence behavior in any readily apparent way.

Changes also occurred in the types of colleges legislators attended. In 1965-1966, members of the Senate and Assembly collectively earned 43 academic degrees from UW-Madison, 48% of a total of 92 academic degrees. By 2005-2006, the numbers had dropped to 34 UW-Madison degrees out of 132 total academic degrees (24%). The decline was particularly steep among Assembly Republicans, from 21 degrees among 47 party members in 1965-1966 (45%) to only four degrees among 60 party members in 2005-2006 (7%). There was a sharp increase in the number of degrees from UW System member institutions other than UW-Madison, from 11 (12%) in 1965-1966 to 47 (36%) in 2005-2006, while degrees from both public and private colleges and universities in other states increased from 16 (9%) to 37 (28%). Degrees from private colleges and universities in Wisconsin declined from 22 (24%) to 14 (11%).

The occupational backgrounds of legislators changed in several interesting ways. Fewer Democrats had previous experience in agriculture and business, and military experience was less prevalent overall.¹² Except for declining numbers of attorneys and increasing numbers of career legislators in occupational backgrounds, legislators in 2005-2006 were similar to those in 1965-1966, except that many now refer to themselves as Full Time Legislators (FTL), something unheard of earlier.¹³

Despite several interesting changes in members' background characteristics the people of Wisconsin elect legislators who were born and grew up close to the districts they represent. In fact, except for Senate Republicans, the proximity of legislators' service to where they were born changed very little. More than 75% of Assembly Republicans and Democrats in both sessions were born in Wisconsin in or near the districts they represented. Also, similar percentages of Democrats and Republicans in the two senates were born in Wisconsin, but the percentage of Republicans in the 2005-2006 Senate born in or near their districts fell from three-fourths to slightly over half.

Voting behavior changed much more than legislator background characteristics between 1965-1966 and 2005-06, suggesting that major actors in Wisconsin politics converted to world views that differed substantially from those of their predecessors. Figure 2, Figure 3, and Table 1 show a dramatic shift from Coalition Partner politics to Exclusivist block voting. The previously

¹² The first occupation listed by legislators in their official biographies was used for tabulating occupational characteristics in instances when more than one occupation was listed.

¹³ This category does not include many members of both the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 legislatures with past service on public boards (e.g., school, municipality, and county) or public executive positions.

mentioned near-perfect negative correlation of Republican and Democratic ratings by special interest groups reflects this. Similarly, campaign finance data compiled by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign for the fall 2004 election shows that of the \$5.4 million invested in the election, roughly two out of every three dollars came from outside of the districts legislators represented. Republicans benefited more from changes in political financing than Democrats. Amounts raised by Assembly Republican legislators averaged \$33,331, compared to \$8,269 for Democrats. Republican candidates for the Senate received larger amounts: \$141,874 compared to \$61,660 for Democrats.

In plain language, in 1965-1966, Governor Knowles and legislators in both parties were oriented to state issues, tolerant of diverse opinions within and across parties, and when in the majority, much more willing to allow issues raised by members of the opposite party to be openly debated and voted upon. Republicans were much like their peers in other Midwestern and New England states at that time—mainly Libertarian leaning and fiscally conservative, but by today’s standards less ideological and more moderate. By 2005-2006, Republicans had been transformed from moderately conservative Midwesterners to Western-style social conservatives uniting the values and interests of large corporations and conservative religious groups. The latter were oriented to national issues, intolerant of diverse opinions, and often unwilling to allow issues raised by members of the opposite party to be debated at length and voted upon.

Democrats appeared to be defending policies similar to those they championed 40 years earlier, but in an atmosphere of block voting rather than negotiation and compromise. During the 2005-2006 session, Democrats continued the liberal tradition of their party by opposing Republican efforts to limit aid to education and other public services, alter policies affecting the environment, and regulate people and institutions. The reelection prospects of incumbents were also enhanced by gerrymandered voting districts.¹⁴

Extreme polarization of the parties and tight control by Republican leaders over their fellow legislators were also highlighted by the legislature’s failure to pass Senate Bill 1 before the 2005-2006 session ended. The bill sought to merge the state’s Ethics and Elections Boards to better enforce political ethics. Following the caucus scandals, this bill passed in the Senate with bipartisan support and was widely projected to also pass the Assembly. But Republican legislators quickly and quietly fell into line behind their party leaders. As a result, the session expired

¹⁴ Both parties share responsibility for making it difficult to unseat incumbents. Because they controlled the Legislature at the time of the most recent redistricting, Republicans were entitled to redraw them. Redistricting was a hard fought issue during the 2001-2002 Legislature. Republicans in the Democrat-controlled Senate lost their version of Senate Bill 463 by a margin of 17 ayes to 16 nays. In the Assembly, which Republicans controlled, the vote on Assembly Bill 842 was 54 ayes and 45 nays. Concurrence was reached via Assembly Bill 711 on March 12, 2002, by a vote in the Senate of 26 ayes and 7 nays.

without a vote on an issue that acknowledged political corruption and signaled a willingness to do something about it.

Tight party control was further evidenced during the 2006 Republican State Convention when delegates passed, with acclaim, Resolution 25, which urged Republican Party members “to withhold all promotional and financial support of those candidates that do not consistently subscribe to its overall conservative agenda, be they incumbent or new candidates” (Weier, 2006).

Findings from Related Studies

Several recent and well-researched studies shed light on Wisconsin’s recent political transformation. James Conant explains recent changes in Wisconsin politics in terms reminiscent of the nineteenth century Robber Baron Era, during which major decisions were made by political elites outside of the legislature and even the state. Lobbyists collaborated with members of the Legislature to turn decisions made by railroad owners, bankers, and lumber barons into laws enacted by malleable legislators (Conant, 2006, pp. xvi-xvii).¹⁵ Conant observed that during the late 1980s and 1990s, Wisconsin legislators became similarly allied with special interests as political campaigns became more caucus-driven and expensive¹⁶ and then-Governor Tommy Thompson came to rely more heavily than earlier governors on interest groups, such as Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, the National Rifle Association, and others.¹⁷ Democrats allied themselves with different groups for similar reasons which, in turn, led to greater influence by interest groups over legislators and erosions in behavioral standards that led ultimately to the caucus scandals (Conant, 2006, pp. 110-111). In short, the close correlation between the partisan voting and lobby ratings in the 2005-2006 Legislature and the growing role of money in politics help explain why legislators behaved differently than their peers in 1965-1966.

Similar trends at the national level have been described by Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute, two of the nation’s most widely respected Congressional scholars. In their book, *The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track*, the authors are particularly critical of lobbyists who are working directly with members of Congress to draft laws; demanding that everyone seeking assistance from Republican legislators be Republicans; and redrawing federal and state voting district boundaries. Most of all, Mann and Ornstein are alarmed at how Congress changed from being an independent defender of checks and balances to a non-deliberative and politically

¹⁵ See also Current (1950, p. 236) for a detailed account of lobbyist-legislator relations in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁶ See also Chartock and Berking (1970).

¹⁷ Hamburger and Wallsten (2006, pp. 178-186) identify, major national and international corporations, and their umbrella lobby groups, such as the National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Industry Political Action Committee (BIFAC), as major sources of funding for allied state organizations and political action committees.

corrupt body passing poorly crafted laws in the service of the Executive branch. The principal mechanisms Mann and Ornstein observed included gerrymandering district boundaries to aid the reelection of loyal members; incorporating lobbyists into the legislative process nationally and in the states; and using systems such as the American Legislative Exchange Council to bring lobbyists and legislators together to draft model legislation for both the Congress and state legislatures (Mann & Ornstein, 2006).

Tom Hamburger and Peter Wallsten, investigative reporters for the Los Angeles Times, in their recent book, *One Party Country: The Republican Plan for Dominance in the 21st Century*, interviewed members and supporters of the federal administration about their goals and procedures and were told in great detail about the mechanisms for gaining control of the Congress and other legislative bodies. Their findings shed further light on changes observed by Mann and Ornstein in the U.S. Congress and Conant in Wisconsin.

Hamburger and Wallsten describe a long developing plan brought to fruition with the aid of presidential assistant Karl Rove, and others, and with support from the president. The overall aim was to establish the Republican Party as America's dominant party for the early decades of the twenty-first century. Earlier administrations often sought to develop inter- and intra-party alliances for advancing important public policies. The Bush administration focused instead on retaining and mobilizing existing supporters, attracting previously unclaimed constituencies, such as Arab Americans, and separating Hispanic and African-American voters from the Democratic Party. These initiatives included authorizing faith-based programs; extending the Republican Southern Strategy to minorities; providing tax and liability reductions for corporations; establishing health savings accounts; implementing No Child Left Behind educational reforms; promoting prescription drug plans; creating voter lists, identifications, and machines; maintaining a go-it-alone-foreign policy; and staying the course in Iraq and Afghanistan (Hamburger & Wallsten, 2006).

According to Hamburger and Wallsten, how this was achieved depended on a network of interacting groups. Rove's office topped a not-always-harmonious but mostly united support structure that included Wednesday Club meetings—convened by Grover Norquist and attended by representatives of Republican interest groups—to fashion new political goals and alliances. The American Legislative Exchange Council convened state and federal legislators and corporate lobbyists to draft and disseminate model legislation. The Republican National Committee, headed by Kenneth Mehlman, maintained the party's state-of-the-art political database and recruited and supported Republican candidates for state and national offices. And, conservative talk radio and television commentators such as Rush Limbaugh, the Fox News channel, and many other like-minded groups and individuals, worked to convert the electorate to the party's worldview.

Many observers argue that the methods mentioned above are legitimate ways to win popular support. The question of where unethical behavior begins is not always easy to discern. Defenders argued that social conservatives should be applauded for being well organized and for generating new solutions to public problems. They criticized Democrats for failing to propose positive alternatives to their proposals. When Scott Jensen, Wisconsin's former Assembly Speaker, was on trial for using public employees for political campaigning, his defenders in effect argued, "Don't outlaw politics!" Similar sentiments were voiced at the national level by House Speaker Tom Delay, Rush Limbaugh, Fox News, and many others. According to them, major changes were needed in management of the economy and prevailing social values and behaviors, and new ideas were available with which to bring it about.

According to Mann and Ornstein (2006), the line was crossed when the majority party in the Congress sought to undermine the nation's system of checks and balances. These included the earlier mentioned gerrymandering; allowing special interests to play prominent roles in drafting, disseminating, and implementing party sponsored legislation; coercing private companies, nonprofit private organizations, and public institutions into becoming arms of political parties (Hamburger & Wallsten, 2006, pp. 176-180); and enforcing party loyalty and preventing minority party-initiated bills and amendments from being extensively debated and voted upon. By these and other means, majority party leaders eroded checks and balances.

Alluding to Churchill's quote at the beginning of this paper, political leaders in the nation's capital, as well as in Wisconsin, reshaped political dwellings so that afterwards those dwellings could reshape us. In their relationship with Democrats, Republicans behaved much like Morgenstern's description of Exclusive Rulers, easily identified by their shunning of the other party and by the overall inflexibility of their voting behavior. Democrats, in turn, behaved much like Morgenstern's description of oppositionists in Exclusivist systems.

There appears to be a good fit between the voting behavior of Wisconsin's 2005-2006 Legislature and Morgenstern's description of an Exclusivist system. However, it is not equally clear how to categorize the 1965-1966 Legislature. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the other choices are Legislators for Sale to the Highest Bidder (low identifiability and high flexibility) or Coalition Partner (high identifiability and high flexibility). High flexibility qualifies the 1965-1966 Legislature for either designation. In comparison to 2005-2006, Figure 2 and Figure 3 show more groupings of legislators, and Table 1 shows much less polarized voting, in 1965-1966.

Morgenstern's identifiability criterion is where the difficulty arises. While the 1965-1966 legislative groupings hint at geographical and cultural political divisions, they do not clearly

identify coalitions or subparties with unique worldviews and organizational structures, much like political parties in multi-party systems. Given only the statistical evidence presented in this study, it is difficult to identify subdivisions of the Wisconsin parties that plausibly correspond with Morgenstern's Coalition Partners. For example, all that can be shown is that, in the 1965-1966 Senate, majority Republicans were divided into three groups and Democrats were mostly clustered into one group. In the majority Democrat Assembly, each party appeared to have three groups. This might support classification of the 1965-1966 Legislature as Legislators for Sale to the Highest Bidder system, rather than a Coalition Partner system. On the other hand, between the 1960s and 1980s, Wisconsin was a Legislature characterized by high quality political debates, "squeaky clean" political processes, and overall a credible claim to being the "Nation's Laboratory for Democracy," as described by both Conant and Loftus¹⁸ and others both inside and outside of the state.

How can we decide which best characterizes Wisconsin in the mid-1960s? One way is to look for defining voting patterns in several successive legislatures. These kinds of groupings can only be discerned longitudinally.¹⁹ This will be demonstrated in a forthcoming analysis covering the Wisconsin Legislature from 1965 to 1970, which shows that Democrats at the time were divided into three identifiable groups with somewhat independent world views (Liberals, Metropolitans, and Outstater). Republicans were divided into two similarly independent groups (Conservatives and Moderates). Behaviors influenced by current issues, majority or minority party status, and other factors can cause some groups to remain intact while individual members temporarily join other groups. Individual groups blend with or pull apart from other groups depending on current circumstances and negotiating among groups. In these ways, coalitions in the Wisconsin Legislature in the 1960s and 1970s behaved much like the legislative agents Morgenstern describes as belonging to Coalition Partner systems. That is:

"Members of the group are disciplined and/or cohesive, but as a whole, they are interested in negotiating with other legislative agents. Such agents may lose some identifiability in that voters may have difficulty in distinguishing among coalition members, but willingness to cooperate does not necessarily imply lack of identifiability and such willingness may also be an identifiable (and desirable) trait" (Morgenstern, 2004, p. 19).

¹⁸ Former Assembly Speaker Tom Loftus recalls the following: "When I started as a staff person (1973 and into the 80s) it was certainly a coalition building process. A seamlessly shifting collection of legislators would realign based on the issue. Milwaukee alone never coalesced as a group behind anything but shared revenue" (T. Loftus, personal communication, July 23, 2007).

¹⁹ For example, Stampen and Davis (1988, pp. 152-166) found that although the number of clusters changes in a given legislature over time, they always represent combinations of the same core subparties, all of which are sometimes unified and other times splintered. In the Senate of the 86th U.S. Congress, members of the Yellow Jacket and Gypsy Moth Republicans and the Honey Bee Democrats were individually cohesive while the Boll Weevil Democrats were splintered. In the 87th Senate, following the Kennedy-Johnson election, all the groups were splintered except for the Yellow Jackets.

Conclusion

Overall, I conclude that in the 1980s and 1990s, Wisconsin's political system became increasingly polarized, dependent on financial support from lobbyists, and corrupt. After 2000, competition between Republicans and Democrats at the national level became more heated, and social conservative Republicans came to dominate politics at the national level and in many states. Consequently, special interests became increasingly driven by national structures that in effect incorporated people and organizations seeking assistance from government into partisan fundraising and control efforts. Independently thinking party members were increasingly reigned in. Policy choices became more dependent on political ideology than on the needs of constituents.

In recent years, Wisconsin politics have evolved from a collaborative, state constituencies-oriented Coalition Partner system into a highly adversarial special interest-driven Excluvivist system. Under the Coalition Partner system, Wisconsin was known for high-quality policy debates and trend-setting legislation. Excluvivist politics has squelched debate, made policymaking dependent on special interests, and led leaders of both political parties to prison. Characteristic behaviors of Excluvivist systems include block voting, expensive elections, pay-for-play politics, ideological meddling, and little respect for research-based evidence. Public higher education has had, and will continue to have, difficulty thriving under an Excluvivist system.

Both political parties participated in the developments described above, but their policy responses differed. The rising importance of money in politics culminated in transforming Wisconsin's Republican Party from a coalition of libertarian leaning and fiscally conservative groups (but moderate by recent standards) into a tightly controlled party, functioning as part of a national political machine. These new Republicans reflected a tight alliance between corporate interests seeking low taxes and less risk of liability and social conservatives wishing to preserve what they deemed to be traditional morality through civil law and regulation. By contrast, Wisconsin Democrats remained somewhat like earlier Midwestern liberals who viewed advocacy of economic opportunity, education, the environment, and health care as integral to individual liberty. However, like Republicans, they became heavily dependent on funding from special interests, although a different set of special interests than those supporting the Republicans. Democrats also became ever more like-minded and militant in opposing Republican initiatives.

Along the way, governors of both parties expanded the line-item veto and oversaw unofficial but well-known deficit spending despite the state's official mandate of a balanced budget. Running for public office became ever more expensive and dependent on funding from party-aligned interests, often headquartered far from Wisconsin. Debate diminished and block voting became the norm.

Rather than continuing as the “Nation’s Laboratory for Democracy,” the Wisconsin Legislature had, around the turn of the twenty-first century, become part of an Exclusivist political system.

The charts in Figure 2 and Figure 3 for the 2005-2006 Senate and Assembly show what a remotely controlled political system looks like. Between now and 2008, we will see whether Wisconsin politics stays the same or changes. It is possible that the current system will not change. The corporate–social conservative machine could conceivably generate a new and more popular list of positions on issues and thereby retain its leadership position. Another possibility that would also retain the existing system would be if Democrats take over after building their own social conservative-styled political machine. Either way would preserve the current Exclusivist system.

Two possibilities that would effectively remove the Exclusivist system include: a) lobbyists keep spending and Wisconsin becomes a Legislators for Sale to the Highest Bidder system, or b) Republicans or Democrats or both could reorganize in ways similar a century ago when Robert Lafollette’s faction of the Republican Party dismantled Wisconsin’s Robber Baron-controlled government. If something like the latter happens, Wisconsin would return to Coalition Partner politics in which political parties or sub-party coalitions generate their own ideas about how to respond to important problems facing their constituents and then debate and compromise on their merits rather than on the basis of simplistic ideology.

The fall 2006 national and state midterm elections appeared to signal at least the beginning of the end of Exclusivist politics in Wisconsin—and across the nation. Popular discontent with existing policies contributed to the surprise overturn of Republican control in both houses of the U.S. Congress and the Wisconsin Senate, and a narrowing of the Republican majority in the State Assembly. A special session of the 2007-2008 Legislature merged Wisconsin’s Ethics and Election boards and charged the new board with policing legislator ethics. In addition, new campaign finance and lobbying reform bills were passed in the Senate.

However, there is little evidence that there has been significant change in legislative behavior during the first year of the 2007-2008 Legislature. Each party continues to develop legislation behind closed doors. Open, lengthy, and substantive policy debate before voting is almost unheard of. Special interests continue to shovel money into the political system, and block voting continues to be the norm.

What can the people of Wisconsin expect if the system doesn't change? Will the Exclusivist political system end, as Morgenstern predicts, in some kind of political collapse or realignment²⁰, or will legislators of both parties agree to compromise, and then see where that leads?

Postscript: Speculation About the Rise of Exclusivist Politics

American politics have always been messy, and working procedures often deviate from textbook ideals. But, as Mann and Ornstein argue, what happened recently—the weakening of checks and balances and the emergence of a block voting pay-for-play system—will, if continued, undermine the long-term viability of the nation's system of government. What was it that the corporate-social conservative machine strove to accomplish that made them unstoppable? Was this somehow the result of a popular loss of faith in government? Can it be explained by the rise of a new kind of corporate aristocracy with money to buy elected officials? Was it some new kind of fervor aimed at uniting religious faith with mercantile ideals?

What James Conant saw when he reviewed Wisconsin's recent political history reminded him of the machine politics of the Robber Barron Era. What was happening then that might be similar to what is happening now? In terms of magnitude, globalization of the world economy is arguably even bigger than opening the American West, which mobilized the Robber Barons toward the end of the nineteenth century. In both instances, political leaders and leaders of American industry saw great opportunity for progress or peril depending on the nation's response to the relatively stable world that emerged after the fall of Communism, Iraq War notwithstanding. The promise of vast new wealth from globalizing the world economy induced a marriage of convenience between major corporations and the religious right. This was indeed a marriage that had worked for many years in Southern and Western states.²¹ This was a possible way for corporations to generate enough public support for tax incentives and relief from liability constraints needed to expand international operations, among other things, and thereby play a leading role in globalizing the world economy.

Businesses wanted to go global, and the Republican and Democratic parties both helped them do so on a massive scale. In his book, *The Earth is Flat*, Thomas Friedman (2005) argues that the current globalization effort, like the earlier Robber Baron Era, represents a time when an old economic order is being replaced by a new one. Political corruption accompanied the actions of the

²⁰ In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion, especially since the mid-1960s, about whether and when political realignments occur. Realignments are thought to occur at roughly 30-year intervals with mid-point corrections half-way in between. If President Johnson's mid-1960s Great Society was a realignment, then the Reagan Era that began in 1980 could represent a mid-point correction and the Social Conservative Contract with America another realignment. If so, we could be due for another mid-point correction around 2008. For the most recent full discussion of political realignment, see Shafer (1991).

²¹ For a report on problems with the Bush administration's faith-based initiatives, see Kuo (2006).

Robber Barons, but they also vastly increased the nation's wealth by opening the American West for development. Then, as now, changes were strongly resisted by those hurt or otherwise unable to appreciate the advantages of expanding. On the positive side, Friedman argues that globalization is not only reshaping the nation's and the world's economies, but also vastly increasing wealth and opportunity in this country and many other countries. For example, people here are benefiting from low prices and new jobs resulting from the participation of American workers in global supply chains. Also, people in many previously underdeveloped countries are, for the first time, gaining wealth from industrializing.

While acknowledging that the Robber Barons did many of the self-serving things many historians accused them of doing, historian Stephen Ambrose (2000) also challenges the popular view that the era was mainly characterized by political corruption. In his account of the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, he explains how policymakers cut many corners to raise enough money from private investors, the only source of enough capital to build railroads and thereby open up North America for economic development and all the riches and opportunities that followed for millions of people. Friedman argues that something similar is now underway that requires economic and political adjustments, and that once again, the private sector is the only source rich enough to finance the transition. Generating new wealth might be justification enough for those who either benefit financially from the transition or who believe that imposing machine politics is justified, at least until the new economy is established.

Wisconsin's lesson of history may be that we need not fear terrible consequences from dismantling political machines, especially after their work is essentially completed. The Robber Baron Era ended sooner in Wisconsin than in the rest of the nation because leaders of the state's Progressive Movement restored good government while, at the same time, exploiting economic gains brought on by opening the West for development. This was possible because new territories were opened for development and the Robber Baron's were no longer needed. Model legislation from Wisconsin aimed at reforming the system included the Civil Service Law (1905), regulation of railroads (1905), Workmen's Compensation (1911), the Unemployment Compensation Act (1932), and many other initiatives shown in Appendix A that helped to broaden economic prosperity and increase productivity.

Friedman (2005) echoes Wisconsin's earlier reformers when he points to the need for new legislation, such as a new education-centered workmen's compensation aimed at retraining people who have lost their jobs to workers in other countries by helping them qualify for new jobs brought on by the new economy. Related new initiatives might include revitalizing K-12 schools

in ways that cause higher percentages of students to master what they are expected to learn and making postsecondary education more widely accessible and affordable.

Joel Rogers, a University of Wisconsin–Madison professor and co-founder of the Apollo Alliance—a national coalition of business, labor, environment, community, and social justice groups—sees increased global competition, dependence on ever more costly fossil fuels, and even global warming as opportunities to overcome these difficulties while at the same time raising worker incomes, reducing environmental damage, and strengthening democracy. This, according to Rogers, can be accomplished by vigorously pursuing continuous improvement and invention, preparing better trained and equipped workers, and producing more varied and abundant public goods. He contrasts this with the current course, which he characterizes as competing based on price, which, he argues, results in economic insecurity, rising inequality, poisonous labor relations, environmental damage, and little commitment from firms to communities (Rogers, 2007).

Reforms specific to the legislative process might include establishing strict non-partisan oversight of the political process, recently brought about in Wisconsin by the merging of the state’s Elections and Ethics Boards by the 2007-2008 Legislature on January 30, 2007. Additional improvements could result from separating legislative districting from partisan politics; requiring media to provide free broadcast time to political candidates before elections; ending political fundraising during legislative sessions; ending partisan practices requiring individuals and organizations to fund lawmakers of either party; forbidding lobbying of state and local government agencies; barring anonymous contributions to political parties or political action committees; and forbidding legislators from becoming lobbyists immediately after leaving the legislature.

In sum, if Wisconsin begins to lead the nation in crafting timely political reforms and legislation that strengthen the national workforce while raising the level of discourse about other important public issues, the state could regain its status as a true “Laboratory of Democracy.”

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Appendix A

Wisconsin's Legislative Accomplishments

1846 – 1848: Progressive Democrats and the Wisconsin Constitution

This era is characterized by conflict between Progressive Democrats and Retrograde Democrats.

Accomplishments:

- Young Yankee farmers formulate a progressive, first state constitution, modeled on New York's (1847)
- Gambling prohibited
- Protections against corruption of the state by large economic interests
- Election of judges
- Economic protections for citizens
- Married women's property clause (later rescinded in second state constitution)
- State prohibited from borrowing for infrastructure improvements
- Banks cannot incorporate without approval from the Legislature
- No extension of state credit to private organizations

1870 – 1899: The Machine Era

This era saw the rise of Stalwart Republicans and the intertwining of railroads, lumber, and the Republican Party.

Accomplishments:

- Era of corruption of democratic institutions and processes
- New land opened for development

1900 – 1915: Early Progressive Republican Era

The era of Robert M. LaFollette, Sr., etc.

Accomplishments:

- Legislative Reference Bureau (1901)
- Civil Service Law (1905)
- Open Primary Law (1905)
- Nonpartisan election of local government officials (1905)
- Regulation of railroads (1905)
- Reviser of Statutes Law (1905)
- Workmen's Compensation (1911)

1930 – 1946: The Great Depression

The New Deal Era in which the Wisconsin Progressive Party ascended.

Accomplishments:

- Old age pension system (1931)
- Unemployment Compensation Act (1932)
- Emergency Relief Act (1932) in which Direct Relief supplies cash and food, Public Works programs, and the Forestry Program

1947 – 1986: Rise of Progressive Democrats

In the late 1950s through the 1960s, some Progressive Party members returned to the Republican Party while others gave new life to a state Democratic Party. The national Democratic Party dominated institutional and policy development at the national level.

Accomplishments:

- Sales tax to increase school aids
- Shared tax system modified from point of origin to need based system
- School aids expanded and changed from per capita to need-based system
- State took over non-property tax-related costs for public relief
- Mental health services, etc.
- Voter registration requirements updated
- Campaign Finance Reform including public financing option
- Court system reorganized; move to state court system
- Jobs education and training program established for AFDC recipients
- State budget structural balance restored (1982-1986)

1987 – 2006: Reemergence of Machine Politics

The Reagan administration and conservative Republicans in Congress charged that government is the problem, rather than the solution, and this sentiment was echoed in Wisconsin after 1986.

Achievements:

- Republican Governor Thompson ends traditional public welfare.

Significant changes:

- State budget structural deficit develops in early 1980s under Republican Governor Dreyfus
- Democratic Governor Earl loses reelection for raising taxes to close deficit
- Republican Governor Thompson supports gambling
- Thompson expands use of partial vetoes in order to “create” legislation
- State credit is used to aid private companies
- Thompson and Legislature approve large increases in state spending without increasing taxes, thus creating a structural imbalance in the state budget
- State acquires an ongoing structural imbalance between revenues and expenditures
Legislative caucus scandal involves leaders of both parties, leaders of both parties pledge no tax increases
- Democratic Governor Doyle continues precedents set by Thompson

Appendix B

Changes in Wisconsin Legislators' Background Characteristics

Table 2
Party Membership of Wisconsin State Legislators by House

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Senate	Assembly	Total	Senate	Assembly	Total
Republicans	19	60	79	20	47	67
Democrats	14	39	53	13	53	66
Total	33	99	132	33	100	133

Note. In 1965-1966, Republican Governor Warren Knowles presided over a state Senate with a 20-13 Republican majority and an Assembly with a narrow 53-47 Democratic majority. In 2005-2006, Democratic Governor James Doyle faced a Senate with a 19-14 Republican majority and an Assembly with a 60-39 Republican majority.

Table 3
Average Age of Wisconsin State Legislators by House and Party

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly
Republicans	52	46	60	49
Democrats	58	49	52	45

Note. The average ages of members were similar in both legislatures: mid-50s in the Senate and late 40s in the Assembly. Compared to Democrats, Republicans were slightly older in 1965-1966, but in 2005-2006 were slightly younger.

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Table 4
Birthplace of Wisconsin State Legislators (In or Out of State) by House and Party

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly
Republicans				
Born in Wis.	14	47	16	39
Born out of state	5	13	4	8
% born in Wis.	74%	78%	80%	83%
Democrats				
Born in Wis.	10	30	10	43
Born out of state	4	9	3	10
% born in Wis.	71%	77%	77%	81%

Note. The proximity of legislators' service to where they were born changed very little. More than 75% of Assembly Republicans and Democrats in both sessions were born in Wisconsin. Also, similar percentages of Democrats and Republicans in the two senates were born in Wisconsin.

Table 5
Birthplace of Wisconsin State Legislators (In or Near District) by House and Party

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly
Republicans				
In or near district	10	43	16	38
Not near district	9	17	4	9
% born in or near district	53%	72%	80%	81%
Democrats				
In or near district	10	26	10	41
Not near district	4	13	3	12
% born in or near district	71%	67%	77%	77%

Note. The proximity of legislators' service to where they were born changed very little. More than 75% of Assembly Republicans and Democrats in both sessions were born in or near the districts they represented. The percentage of Republicans in the 2005-2006 Senate born in or near their districts, however, fell from three-quarters to slightly over half.

Table 6
Average Margins of Victory for Wisconsin State Legislators by House and Party

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly
Republicans	63%	63%	63%	59%
Democrats	73%	82%	66%	71%

Note. Members of the 2005-2006 Legislature won their elections by larger margins than in 1965-1966, except for Senate Republicans (63% margin of victory for both years). Assembly Republican margins of election victory increased from 59% in 1965-1966 to 63% in 2005-2006. For Senate Democrats, average victory margins increased from 66% in 1965-1966 to 73% in 2005-2006, while Assembly Democrat margins increased from 71% to 82%.

Table 7
Veteran Status of Wisconsin State Legislators by House and Party

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Senate	Assembly	Total	Senate	Assembly	Total
Republicans						
Veterans	5	15	20	11	18	29
Non-veterans	14	45	59	9	29	38
% veterans	26%	25%	25%	55%	38%	43%
Democrats						
Veterans	5	2	7	7	29	36
Non-veterans	9	37	46	6	24	30
% veterans	36%	5%	13%	54%	55%	55%

Note. Both houses of the Legislature experienced sharp declines in members having served in the military. In the 1965-1966 Senate, slightly more than half of all Senators in both parties were veterans. In the 2005-2006 Senate, 36% of Democrats and 26% of Republicans were veterans. In the 1965-1966 Assembly, slightly over half of all Democrats and 38% of Republicans were veterans. In the 2005-2006 Assembly, 25% of Republicans, but only 5% of Democrats, were veterans.

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Table 8
Gender of Wisconsin State Legislators by House and Party

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly
Republicans				
Male	14	46	20	45
% male	74%	77%	100%	96%
Female	5	14	0	2
% female	26%	23%	0%	4%
Democrats				
Male	11	29	20	53
% male	79%	74%	100%	100%
Female	3	10	0	0
% female	21%	26%	0%	0%
Total				
Male	25	75	33	98
% male	76%	76%	100%	98%
Female	8	24	0	2
% female	24%	24%	0%	2%

Table 9
Race/Ethnicity of Wisconsin State Legislators by House and Party

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly
Republicans				
Caucasian	19	60	20	47
% Caucasian	100%	100%	100%	100%
Afro-American	0	0	0	0
% Afro-American	0%	0%	0%	0%
Hispanic	0	0	0	0
% Hispanic	0%	0%	0%	0%
Democrats				
Caucasian	12	29	13	52
% Caucasian	86%	83%	100%	98%
Afro-American	2	5	0	1
% Afro-American	14%	14%	0%	2%
Hispanic	0	1	0	0
% Hispanic	0%	3%	0%	0%
Total				
Total Caucasian	31	93	33	99
% Caucasian	94%	94%	100%	99%
Total non-Caucasian	2	6	0	1
% non-Caucasian	6%	6%	0%	1%

Table 10
Formal Education of Wisconsin State Legislators by House and Party

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Senate	Assembly	Total	Senate	Assembly	Total
Republicans						
High school only	2	7	9	6	13	19
Some postsecondary	1	15	16	5	10	15
Bachelors degree	16	38	54	9	24	33
% with bachelors	84%	63%	68%	45%	51%	49%
Democrats						
High school only	2	2	4	2	13	15
Some postsecondary	2	6	8	4	15	19
Bachelors degree	10	31	41	7	25	32
% with bachelors	71%	79%	77%	54%	47%	48%
Total (all legislators)						
High school only	4	9	13	8	26	34
Some postsecondary	3	21	24	9	25	34
Bachelors degree	26	69	95	16	49	55
% with bachelors	79%	70%	72%	48%	49%	45%

Note. Legislators without education beyond high school declined from 26% to 12% between 1965-1966 and 2005-2006. Eighty-four percent of Republican Senators had earned at least a bachelors degree by 2005-2006, compared to 63% of Republican Assembly members, up from 45% in 1965-1966. Among 2005-2006 Democrats, Senate and Assembly bachelor's degree holders rose respectively from 54% and 47% in 1965-1966 to 71% and 79% in 2005-2006.

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Table 11

Postsecondary Institutions Attended (No Graduation) by Wisconsin State Legislators

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Senate	Assembly	Total	Senate	Assembly	Total
Republicans						
UW-Madison	0	3	3	1	6	7
Other UW	0	5	5	0	0	0
UW two-year	0	1	1	0	0	0
WI tech college	0	7	7	2	0	2
In-state private 4-year	0	1	1	1	1	2
Out-of-state public	1	0	1	0	2	2
Out-of-state private	0	1	1	0	0	0
Other tech college	0	0	0	2	2	4
Total institutions	1	18	19	6	11	17
Democrats						
UW-Madison	0	1	1	0	3	3
Other UW	2	2	4	1	2	3
UW two-year	0	0	0	0	0	0
WI tech college	0	3	3	1	8	9
In-state private 4-year	0	4	4	2	1	3
Out-of-state public	0	0	0	0	2	2
Out-of-state private	0	0	0	0	2	2
Other tech college	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total institutions	2	10	12	4	20	24
Total (all legislators)						
UW-Madison	0	4	4	1	9	10
Other UW	2	7	9	1	2	3
UW two-year	0	1	1	0	0	0
WI tech college	0	10	10	5	8	13
In-state private 4-year	0	5	5	5	2	7
Out-of-state public	1	0	1	0	4	4
Out-of-state private	0	1	1	0	2	2
Other tech college	0	0	0	2	6	8
Total institutions	3	28	31	14	45	59

Table 12
Bachelors or Higher Degrees Earned by Wisconsin State Legislators, by House and Party

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Senate	Assembly	Total	Senate	Assembly	Total
Republicans						
UW-Madison	5	4	9	4	21	25
Other UW	8	22	30	2	3	5
In-state private 4-year	0	5	5	2	5	7
Out-of-state public	3	7	10	0	4	4
Out-of-state private	0	12	2	1	4	5
Total degrees	16	50	66	9	37	46
Democrats						
UW-Madison	4	19	23	3	15	18
Other UW	5	12	17	0	6	6
In-state private 4-year	1	8	9	3	12	15
Out-of-state public	2	3	5	1	1	2
Out-of-state private	1	9	10	0	5	5
Total degrees	13	51	64	7	39	46
Total (all legislators)						
UW-Madison	9	23	34	7	36	43
Other UW	13	34	47	2	9	11
In-state private 4-year	1	13	14	5	17	22
Out-of-state public	5	10	15	1	5	6
Out-of-state private	1	21	22	1	9	10
Total degrees	29	101	132	16	76	92

Note. Changes occurred in the types of colleges legislators attended. In 1965-1966, members of the Senate and Assembly collectively earned 43 academic degrees from UW–Madison out of a total of 92 academic degrees (48% of total degrees). By 2005-2006, the numbers had dropped to 34 UW–Madison degrees out of 132 total academic degrees (24% of total degrees). The decline was particularly steep among Assembly Republicans, from 21 degrees among 47 party members in 1965-1966 (45%) to only four degrees among 60 party members in 2005-2006 (7%). There was a sharp increase in the number of degrees from UW System member institutions other than UW–Madison, from 11 (12%) in 1965-1966 to 47 (36%) in 2005-2006, while degrees from public and private colleges and universities in other states increased from 16 (9%) to 37 (28%). Degrees from private colleges and universities in Wisconsin declined from 22 (24%) to 14 (11%).

Occupational Backgrounds of Wisconsin State Legislators

The occupational backgrounds of legislators changed in several interesting ways. Changes in each occupational category are described below, and shown in Tables 13 - 15.

Business

In 2005-2006, Republicans were much more likely than Democrats to have business backgrounds than in 1965-1966 when such backgrounds were nearly equal in both parties. Small business (e.g., community business owners such as real estate agents, restaurant or store owners, construction company owners, etc.) accounted for 37 members of the 1965-1966 Assembly and 26 members of the 2005-2006 Assembly. Roughly one-third (11 and 9, respectively) of the members of the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 Senates claimed business backgrounds. Roughly equal proportions of Republicans (18 of 47) and Democrats (19 of 53) in the 1965-1966 Assembly claimed business-related occupations, compared to 21 out of 60 Republicans and only 5 out of 39 Democrats in 2005-2006.

Full-Time Legislators

Full-time legislators (FTLs) constituted the second largest occupational group in 2005-2006. Legislators with previous political occupations (staff positions or other legislature related experience) were common in both parties (14 Republicans and 17 Democrats) up from one in each of the two houses of the 1965-1966 Legislature. When members with only political experience are added to members with other professional experience, 59 of 132 members of the 2005-2006 Wisconsin Legislature referred to themselves as FTLs, which illustrates the popularity of the FTL designation among recent members.

Farmers

The third most common occupational group, down from second in 1965-1966, but least changed overall (from 25 to 22 total members), was farming and related agricultural occupations. Legislators with agriculture backgrounds were well represented in both parties in 1965-1966, but in 2005-2006, farmers were overwhelmingly Republican. In 1965-1966, 8 of the 21 members of the Assembly who identified with agriculture were Democrats, compared to only 2 of 17 in 2005-2006; none of the Democratic Senators cited agricultural backgrounds.

Attorneys

The number of attorneys declined from 36 in 1965-1966 to 14 in 2005-2006. In the 1965-1966 Legislature, Republicans and Democrats each had 12 attorneys in the Assembly and, respectively, seven and five attorneys in the Senate. Among Assembly Republicans, there were only three attorneys in 2005-2006; in the Senate there was only one Republican compared to eight Democrats in the Assembly and two in the Senate.

Educators

Between 1965-1966 and 2005-2006, the number of legislators who cited education as their previous occupation increased from 7 to 13 (nearly all Democrats). Members with occupational backgrounds other than those already mentioned in 2005-2006 include former healthcare workers (five), police (four), engineers (three), skilled workers (two), and journalist/public relations (two).

Table 13
Previous Occupation of Wisconsin State Senators by Party

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Reps	Dems	Total	Reps	Dems	Total
Agriculture	5	0	5	4	0	4
Business	6	3	9	8	3	11
Labor	0	1	1	1	3	4
Education	2	1	4	0	1	1
Engineer	0	0	0	0	0	0
Politics	4	5	9	0	0	0
Health Care	0	1	1	0	0	0
Journalism/Pub. Relations	1	1	1	0	1	1
Law	1	2	3	7	5	12
Law enforcement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	19	14	33	20	13	33
FTL	4	3	7	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 14
Previous Occupation of Wisconsin State Assembly Members by Party

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Reps	Dems	Total	Reps	Dems	Total
Agriculture	15	2	17	13	8	21
Business	21	5	26	18	19	37
Labor	0	2	2	0	6	6
Education	3	6	9	2	4	6
Engineer	3	0	3	1	1	2
Politics	10	12	22	1	1	2
Health Care	2	2	4	0	1	1
Journalism/Pub. Relations	1	0	1	0	0	0
Law	3	8	11	12	12	24
Law enforcement	2	2	4	0	1	1
Total	60	39	99	47	53	100
FTL	28	24	52	N/A	N/A	N/A

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Table 15
Previous Occupation of Wisconsin State Senators and Assembly Members by Party

	2005-2006			1965-1966		
	Reps	Dems	Total	Reps	Dems	Total
Agriculture	20	2	22	17	8	25
Business	27	8	35	26	22	48
Labor	0	3	3	1	9	10
Education	5	7	12	2	5	7
Engineer	3	0	3	1	1	2
Politics	14	17	31	1	1	2
Health Care	2	3	5	0	1	1
Journalism/Pub. Relations	2	1	3	0	1	1
Law	4	10	14	19	17	36
Law enforcement	2	2	4	0	1	1
Total	79	53	132	67	66	133
FTL	32	27	59	N/A	N/A	N/A

Appendix C

Changes in Wisconsin Legislators' Behavioral Characteristics

Table 16
Average Lobby Ratings of Wisconsin State Legislators by House, Party, and Lobby

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate	Assembly	Senate	Assembly
Republicans				
WMC	72	99		
Right to Life	73	97		
NRA	N/A	98		
AFL/CIO	22	23	56	47
WEAC	17	17		
NARAL	3	5		
Sierra-Environ	6	14		
Democrats				
WMC	33	15		
Right to Life	49	20		
NRA	N/A	26		
AFL/CIO	97	92	81	80
WEAC	93	90		
NARAL	85	90		
Sierra-Environ	79	78		

Note. The overall correlation of Republican and Democratic lobby ratings in the Assembly, as explained earlier, was -0.979, a near perfect negative correlation. The Republican versus Democratic voting correlation in the Senate was only slightly less negative (-0.878).

Table 17
Voting Patterns in the Wisconsin State Legislature by House and Party

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate (n = 98)	Assembly (n = 100)	Senate (n = 120)	Assembly (n = 183)
Republicans				
80+% vote yes	95%*	95%*	33%*	45%
80+% vote no	0%	0%	2%	1%
Democrats				
80+% vote yes	24%	26%	52%	67%*
80+% vote no	53%	47%	8%	4%

Note. Simple tabulation of voting data in Table 1 in the text show dramatic differences in legislator voting behavior between the 1965-1966 and 2005-2006 sessions.

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Table 18
Voting Patterns in the Wisconsin State Legislature by House and Party (2)

	2005-2006		1965-1966	
	Senate* (n = 98)	Assembly* (n = 100)	Senate* (n = 120)	Assembly** (n = 183)
80+% of both parties vote "yes" on the same bill	23%	22%	14%	34%
80+% of one party vote opposite of 80+% of other party	52%	48%	3%	2%

Table 19
Finances for the Fall 2004 Wisconsin State Legislative Election

	Total dollars	From within district	% from within dist	From outside of district	% from outside of district
Assembly					
All Republicans	\$1,543,169	\$399,266	26%	\$1,146,189	74%
Average per member	\$33,331	\$8,629	26%	\$24,751	74%
All Democrats	\$322,478	\$113,878	35%	\$208,601	65%
Average per member	\$8,269	\$2,920	35%	\$5,349	65%
Senate					
All Republicans	\$2,695,600	\$1,069,805	40%	\$1,624,795	60%
Average per member	\$252,447	\$101,737	40%	\$150,660	60%
All Democrats	\$863,244	\$297,277	34%	\$577,074	67%
Average per member	\$61,660	\$21,234	34%	\$41,220	67%

Note. Comparable data are unavailable on how the political campaigns leading up to the formation of the 1965-1966 Legislature were financed. However, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign has compiled detailed information on amounts and sources of funding for electing members of the 2005-2006 Legislature. According to fall 2004 election data, funding for Republicans and Democrats in both houses totaled slightly over \$5.4 million. Overall, roughly two out of every three dollars invested in legislative campaigns came from outside of the districts legislators represented. A similar ratio held for members of both political parties, but average amounts raised by Republicans greatly exceeded amounts raised by Democrats. In the Assembly, Republicans averaged \$33,331 compared to \$8,269 for Democrats. Republican candidates for the Senate received larger amounts: \$141,874 compared to \$61,660 for Democrats.

Changes in Legislative Districts

In 1965-1966, Wisconsin's 72 counties were divided among 33 Senate districts. The state's 100 Assembly districts had county borders with high population counties divided into several Assembly districts. By 2005-2006, each of the state's 33 Senate districts had been divided into three Assembly districts (for a total of 99 Assembly districts). The boundaries of the new districts were less likely to be based on county or community boundaries. Critics charged that the new boundaries were often gerrymandered, that is, redesigned in order to perpetuate the majority party's control of the Legislature.

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WISCAPE

Wisconsin Center for the Advancement
of Postsecondary Education

University of Wisconsin-Madison
409 Education Building
1000 Bascom Mall
Madison, WI 53706-1398

Telephone: 608-265-6342
Fax: 608-262-4881
Email: wiscape-info@education.wisc.edu
Website: www.wiscape.wisc.edu