

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

## With Implications for Higher Education

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*"We shape our dwellings and afterwards our dwellings shape us."*  
Winston Churchill on rebuilding the Houses of Parliament in 1944.

This paper argues that

In recent years Wisconsin politics has evolved from a collaborative and state constituencies oriented Coalition Partner system into a highly adversarial special interest driven Exclusivist system.

Under the Coalition Partner system Wisconsin was known for high quality policy debates and trend setting legislation. Exclusivist politics have squelched debate, made policy making dependent on special interests, and led leaders of both political parties to prison.

Characteristic behaviors of exclusivist systems include block voting, expensive elections, pay for play politics, ideology based meddling, and little respect for research based evidence. Higher education has had, and will continue to have, difficulty thriving under an Exclusivist system.

The question is, will the Exclusivist political system long continue or soon end in some kind of political collapse or realignment? Or, will legislators of both parties agree to return to the compromising spirit of the 1965-66 Legislature and see where that leads.

## Research Strategy

Use Multivariate statistics to find core units of analysis in legislative roll call data

Data: Wisconsin Senate and Assembly final floor votes on bills contested by five or more percent of voting members

Methods: Cluster Analysis with Ward Linkage and tabulation of raw data.

Conceptual framework: Morgenstern's Typology of Legislative Agents

Earlier applications of research strategy less Morgenstern's typology:  
Dissertation: Voting Behavior in the Wisconsin State Legislature 1945-1967. UW-Madison (1969)  
J. Stampen & J.R. Davis (1989). "Multi-issue coalitions in the Congress." In J.L. Martin & S. Lundstrom (eds.), *Supercomputing Science and Applications*. Washington, DC: The Computer Society Press.  
J. Stampen & J.R. Davis, "Multi-issue coalitions in six U.S. Senates: The appropriate units in roll-call studies." *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (1988).  
J. Stampen & R.W. Reeves, "Coalitions in the senates of the 96th and 97th Congresses," *Congress and the Presidency* (1986) 13 2, 47-65.

Other appliers of research strategy: Aage Clausen and Richard Cheney

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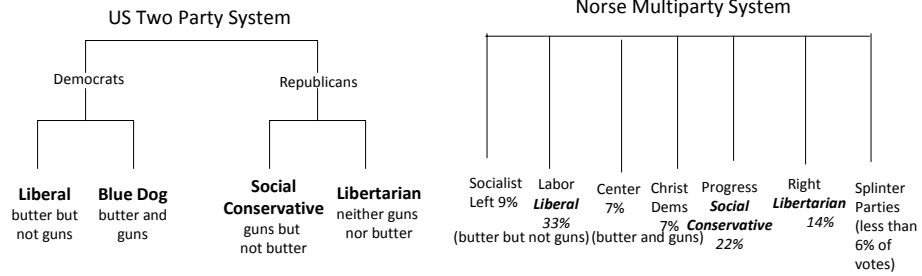
## Conceptual Framework Morgenstern's Typology of Legislatures

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

Scott Morgenstern, *Patterns in Legislative Politics: Roll-Call Voting in Latin America and the United States*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 18.  
Also see, Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press. 1976.

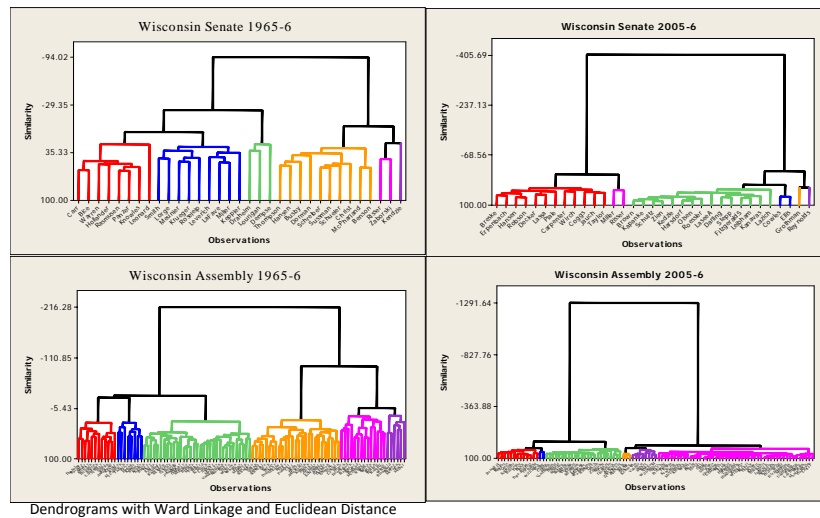
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## Two Party and Multiparty Coalition Partner Systems



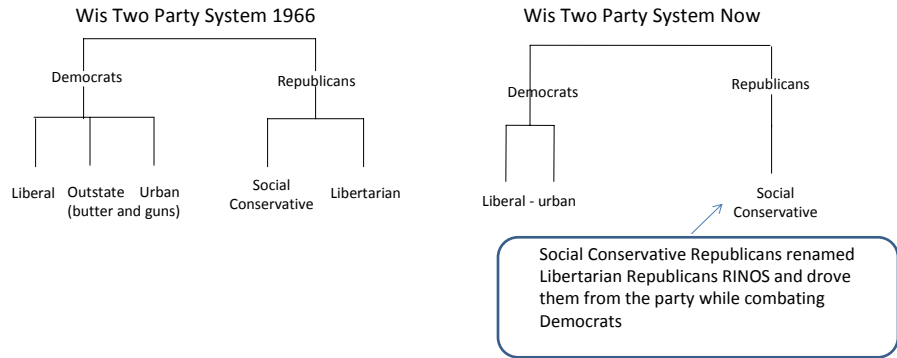
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## Wisconsin Legislature Voting Behavior: 1965-6 and 2005-6



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## Wisconsin Politics Then and Now



Voting Patterns by Party: Raw Data Tabulation

	1965-6 Senate (n=98 contested bills) Dems Reprs*		1965-6 Assembly (n=100 contested bills) Dems* Reprs		2005-6 Senate (n=120 contested bills) Dems Reprs*		(2005-6 Assembly (n=183 contested bills) Dems Reprs*	
Percent of time 80+percent of members vote yes	52	33	67	45	24	95	26	95
Percent of time 80+percent of members vote no	8	2	4	1	53	0	47	0

\* = majority party

### Lobby Ratings by Party

Wisconsin Assembly 2005-6	Reps	Dems
Right to Life	97	20
WisMfg&Commerce	99	15
NatlRifleAssn 2004	98	26
Sierra Club (Environ)	14	78
NARAL (Pro-choice)	5	90
AFL/CIO	23	92
WisEdAssnCouncil	17	90

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**).

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### What Changed Wisconsin Politics?

**James K. Conant: Wisconsin returning to machine politics reminiscent of Robber Baron era. No longer functioning as nation's laboratory for democracy , Wisconsin Politics and Government: America's Laboratory of Democracy, Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2006**

**Thomas Mann (Brookings )and Norman Ornstein (American Enterprise Institute): Machine like political behavior in Washington, DC threatening checks and balances. Other criticism similar to Conant observations about Wisconsin In The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track, (Oxford University Press, 2006).**

**Tom Hamburger and Peter Wallsten investigative reporters for the Los Angeles Times: Political changes in the Congress and the states driven by White House coordinated political machine, One Party Country: The Republican Plan for Dominance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, ( John Wiley & Sons, 2006)**

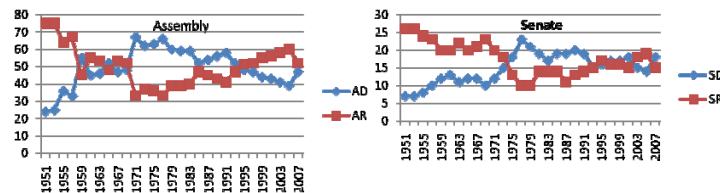
**Machine Elements:**  
National Republican Party Data Base  
Grover Norquist's Wednesday Club  
American Legislative Exchange Council  
Requiring lobbyists to be members of majority party  
Requiring monetary support for majority party candidates  
Gerrymandering  
Rosh Limbaugh , Fox News, etc.

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### How did changes in Wisconsin Politics happen?

James K. Conant 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.

Tom Loftus, former four-term Speaker of the Wisconsin State Assembly and author of The Art of Legislative Politics (Washington, D.C. CQPress. 1994) Natural causes drove change. Aided by the Nixon Era Watergate scandal, Democrats gained majority party status during most of the 1970s and 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.



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### How did Wisconsin Politics Change?

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 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 bolstering legislative campaigns. This contributed to a shift of influence from the state to the national level. All of the above, in turn, elevated legislative leaders like former GOP Speaker Scott Jensen and former Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Chvala who knew how to funnel money from Washington groups and to Wisconsin.

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## Implications for Higher Education

Exclusivist Behaviors	Effects on Higher Education
Expensive elections	Colleges and universities pressured to give viewed as just another special interest to tap
Block voting	Must lobby special interests as well as legislators gridlock: delayed decisions on tuition and student aid high correlation between voting and lobby ratings, only state without a 2007-8 budget
Pay for Play	Colleges and universities can't compete party member lobbyists and candidate contributions required
Ideology trumps evidence	More difficult to contribute new knowledge opposition to stem cell research
Meddle in internal affairs	More difficult to defend unpopular programs eliminate state support for Law School, School for Workers, Public Radio, bonding for new dorms, etc.
Meddle in external relationships	More difficult to support allied enterprises more competition with K-12 and Tech Colleges

Examples in red

Exclusivist systems typically end in realignment or conflict.  
What are some possible new developments?

1. Exclusivist system continues under new leadership. Republicans lose 2008 elections. Democrats emulate Republican's Exclusivist organization and take over.
2. Exclusivist system continues under revamped Republican leadership. Machine elements still intact despite results of 2006 election.
3. Exclusivist system collapses, lobbyists keep spending, and Wisconsin becomes a Legislators for Sale to the Highest Bidder system.
4. Exclusivist system collapses. Democrats and Republicans abandon exclusivist organization and return to a debate and compromise Coalition Partner system.

What can colleges and universities do to improve  
the political system?

Some thoughts:

***Be accountable***

- for satisfying the widely perceived need of affordable access to high quality education.
- use existing faculty activity data base to vastness of the University's linkages with community, state, national, and international activities and enterprizes
- continue disseminating fearless sifting and winnowing research to stakeholders
- avoid giving money to political parties and candidates.

***Help improve Wisconsin politics***

- help find ways to make running for office more affordable
- help find ways to lessen politicians dependence on money from special interests
- help bring high quality policy debate back to the legislature
- help recruit good candidates for public office for both parties