



**WISCONSIN FAMILY COUNCIL**  
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## HEY! WHAT ARE THESE BALLOT QUESTIONS/REFERENDA DOING ON MY BALLOT?

Wisconsin Family Council has heard from many people who are getting their absentee ballots or are checking their sample ballot at [www.myvote.wi.gov](http://www.myvote.wi.gov). The top question right now is, “What in the world are these ballot questions or referenda I see?” We want to do our best to help voters sort through this so everyone can vote in a knowledgeable and responsible way. Hence, this Q&A.

**Q:** What is a ballot question or a referendum?

**A:** *These are two terms for the same thing, at least for how these are commonly used. Referenda or ballot questions are put on ballots for one of three reasons:*

- 1) A unit of government (local, state or federal) is required by law to get a majority vote on a matter before whatever the issue is becomes law or any action is taken.*
- 2) A unit of government is attempting to get a sense of where the people are on an issue to gauge whether or not they should take a certain action.*
- 3) A unit of government wants to send a message to another unit of government on a certain issue so that unit of government will do something.*

**Q:** So, what’s the difference in these types of ballot questions/referenda?

**A:** *The basic difference is numbers 2) and 3) above are what we call **non-binding or advisory** referenda/ballot questions. That means that no matter how the people vote on the measure, **no unit of government, no elected official must do or not do something as a result of the vote**. In other words, elected officials and units of government are **not “bound”** to an action no matter the outcome. An advisory (non-binding) is just that; it gives “advice” to the elected officials regarding what the will of the people is (really, it’s just the will of the people who voted on that question).*

*Number 1) above is what is known as a **binding** referendum/ballot question. These types of referenda/ballot questions require that the unit of government that put the question/referendum on the ballot must do or not do whatever the people say by their vote. If they pass the referendum, then the unit of government and elected officials must respect that, just as they must respect the expressed will of the people if the measure fails. They are **“bound”** to do whatever the will of the people was as reflected by their vote.*

**Q:** Okay. Let’s get specific. What about the ballot questions/referenda that are showing up right now on my fall 2020 general election ballot? Are they advisory/non-binding or binding?

**A:** *Great question! To start, please know that for the 2020 Fall General Election, there is **NO** statewide referendum of any kind on the ballot. However, there are about 180 ballot questions/referenda on ballots in various communities around the state.*

*Some of these referenda/ballot questions are **non-binding/advisory** and some are **binding**. The ones we know for sure are **non-binding/advisory** deal with one of the following issues:*

*Note a couple of things:*

- 1) Some communities may not have any advisory/non-binding referenda at all. These are put on by local units of government; some municipalities and some counties may not have approved any for the ballot.*

2) *Other advisory/non-binding ballot questions/referenda may be on ballots. We don't claim to know what's on everyone's ballot. The state Election Commission has a spreadsheet that shows about 180 referenda of both sorts but doesn't designate whether they are advisory or binding, which would be very helpful.*

Q: Do I have to vote on these ballot questions/referenda?

A: *You don't have to vote on anything on a ballot. Ever. However, we believe it is certainly appropriate to not vote on a non-binding/advisory referendum if you choose to not do so. Nothing good or bad will happen as a result of this ballot question/referendum.*

*We would advise a careful, knowledgeable vote on binding ballot questions/referenda because the outcome of that vote will result in something being done or not done that will actually impact you.*

Q: Why are **advisory/non-binding ballot questions/referenda** becoming so popular and numerous?

A: *Another great question! Short answer—primarily because liberal progressives have figured out most people don't know the difference between a **binding** ballot question/referendum and a **non-binding/advisory** ballot question/referendum. And because of that they make people think these questions/referenda matter and will force some elected official to do or not do something. The liberal progressives use this to push their people to the polls—and when they vote on the ballot question/referendum, they know these folks will also vote for liberal candidates. And this, sadly, works. To us, this is utterly deceitful.*

*To see a perfect example, check out the referenda collage we've provided and note the handwritten postcard in particular. These are being mailed to voters in every county where there is a **non-binding/advisory** ballot question/referendum dealing with this redistricting issue. Note that the handwritten message makes it sound as if a vote on this issue will really do something. No, it will not! This is just another example of liberals trying to capitalize on the ignorance of people regarding elections and such measures and doing so by sleight of hand, so to speak.*

Q: How do I know for sure if the ballot questions/referenda I see on my ballot are advisory/non-binding or binding?

A: *The only sure way is to call your municipal clerk and ask. We **STRONGLY** encourage you to do that. You can find the name and contact information for your clerk [HERE](#).*

*In the collage picture, there is only one **binding** referendum shown—and that is a very, very common one—for a school district appropriations issue. Note that specific state statutes are included in the wording, which is a very helpful clue. When specific state statutes or local ordinances are included, the referendum is likely a **binding** referendum.*

We hope the above is helpful to you. Many people ask what our position is on **non-binding/advisory** ballot questions/referenda. The answer is, we don't have a position on the issues in these ballot questions/referenda. Frankly, in general we don't think these measures should be used to try to lure people to the polls to increase the likelihood of certain candidates winning. We think that's wrong. But communities and counties across the state where there are liberal majorities keep letting these measures get on ballots; so the best we can do is to educate people on what's really going on.