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GROSS NATIONAL SPIRIT

by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

How are things going for the country and its residents? In an attempt to measure this, the Badger Poll™ included a series of questions on its most recent survey which make up the "Gross National Spirit" index. This index combines six perceptions designed to tap various dimensions which could contribute to a national sense of well being. They begin with the assumption that the nation is better off both as residents THINK it is better off and as the individuals who make it up believe that their own personal situation is better.

Three measures have to do with satisfaction (measured on a very satisfied, more or less satisfied, not at all satisfied scale). Respondents are asked to rate the degree of satisfaction with how well things are going for the country, with how things are going for them personally and with their family's finances. Two items ask for whether the next year will see things getting better, worse, or staying about the same. This is asked for the overall situation of the country, and for the US economy in particular. Lastly, respondents are asked whether they approve or disapprove of the way the incumbent (in this case George W. Bush) is handling his job as President. As noted, the central idea is that the more positive about any of these dimensions the typical person feels, the more the country may be said to be well off.

Each of the six dimensions is scored on a 0 to 400 scale, where 0 represents everyone taking the least positive possible answer. A score of 400 represents everyone taking the most positive answer. A score of 200 would mean an even distribution of scores, split evenly between most and least positive. Specifics are described below in "How the GNS is calculated".

In December (roughly one week before the capture of Saddam Hussein) the overall GNS stood at 1463. This is about one fourth again as high as it would be if all six components were evenly split between the most positive and most negative responses. Compared to earlier readings, it is up 100 points from last August, which itself showed (exactly) a one hundred point drop from the heady days right after the relatively bloodless initial conquest of Iraq. The present level is also up substantially from about a year ago (in January of 2003) when the war still lay in the future and the economic news was at least as worrisome to many as it is now. So far, the GNS's high point was in June of 2002 when it was at 1525, some 27% higher than if respondents on average had evenly split between positive and negative answers.

These trends differ for various key groups in the state. Overall, men are forty points higher than women (1481. compared to 1441 as may be seen in the

DIMENSIONS AND OVERALL GNS OVER TIME

	6-02	1-03	5-03	8-03	12-03
US NOW	192	162	186	164	180
US FUT	248	196	257	239	265
EC FUT	269	220	263	255	286
PERSNL	257	235	248	244	261
FINANCE	226	210	220	212	228
APPROVE	333	261	284	244	243
TOTAL	1525	1284	1458	1358	1463

accompanying table). This is a smaller gap than was evident in August (when it was 62 points, and much smaller than May's 167, the single largest male-female difference so far recorded. This also means that, while the overall GNS is quite close to where it was in May, and both groups have moved up since August, men are now not quite so positive as they were right after major military operations ended, while women have gained.

Much has been made of late of the partisan divisions in the country, and the GNS certainly picks this up. Overall, Democrats stand at 1088, clearly under the theoretical midpoint, while Republicans at 1853 are more than halfway between the "neutral" level (1200) and the theoretical maximum of 2400, which would be reached only if every respondent gave the most positive answer on all six dimensions. This gap (765 points overall), is the largest we have so far found -- the smallest in June 2002 was only about half as large. Independent fall between the two partisan groups, but somewhat closer to Democrats. Overall, they are slightly below where they were in August, while Democrats are up slightly, and Republicans substantially.

All four age groups are up since August,with the gain smallest for those between thirty and forty-four, while the other three have have moved up somewhat more than 100 points each. This leaves the youngest group as the most positive at the moment, while the two groups older than forty-five are quite close to one another and lag a bit. Compared to last May, the younger two groups are up (at least some), while the older two are where they were or lower. Roughly one year ago (in January 2003) all four age groups were lower on the GNS than they are now, but each is lower than it was in June of 2002, the first asking of the GNS and At each point in time, those between the ages of forty-five and the single highest reading to date.

Each of the six components tells us something of how things are going overall, but each has its own story as well. In December 2003, the single least positive component (in terms of its theoretical range) is the sense of satisfaction with how things are going for the country overall. At 180, it now stands ten percent lower than it would if equal numbers were "very satisfied" and "not at all satisfied". This makes it the only States. Across groups, this now stands at 164 (remember that it one of the six which falls beneath this theoretical midpoint.

The first accompanying table shows each of the components along with the overall GNS for each of the five readings. This first component is up modestly from August, very slightly lower than it was in May, but more positive than last January. The single highest reading so far was the 192 recorded in June of 2002. Even then, however, it was just below the theoretical midpoint of 200.

OVERALL GNS FOR KEY GROUPS OVER TIME

	6-02	1-03	5-03	8-03	12-03
TOTAL	1525	1284	1458	1358	1463
MALE	1571	1305	1539	1387	1481
FEMALE	1486	1269	1372	1325	1441
DEM	1341	1003	1153	1034	1088
IND	1550	1241	1393	1352	1310
REP	1724	1662	1784	1712	1853
<30 YRS	1613	1316	1498	1405	1521
30-44	1541	1317	1426	1448	1498
45-59	1454	1221	1417	1287	1411
60+ YRS	1578	1332	1485	1312	1422

As noted, each of the other components is higher than it would be if opinion was balanced between the most positive and most negative responses. The lowest (satisfaction with personal finances at 228) is least clearly in "positive territory" but still is one fourth again as high as overall satisfaction with the way things are going for the country, which is measured on the identical scale.

This component is literally the highest measured, but only two points above June 2002. For that matter, since it has tended to move in a very narrow range (never lower than 210, never higher than now), the key finding here is the stability of the measure, rather than the survey to survey fluctuations, which are small enough that one should not rely on their being real shifts in the population.

The other is only two points lower than present reading. But its high (226 in June 2002) is only fourteen points higher, while May fell almost exactly between the two.

Satisfaction with one's life overall seems rather higher. The present reading (261) is almost as much higher than financial satisfaction as that measure is compared to the sense of how things are going in the country. Since May they have moved up in tandem, and indeed, the relative gap has tended to be about the same size as it is now on all five occasions when the GNS has been measured. This also means that the general pattern among the three "satisfaction" components has been stable. Residents are more pleased with their lives overall than their finances, and more pleased with that than with how the country is seen as tending.

There has been more variation in the two components related to short term change. variety. At present, overall expectations for the US over the next year are quite positive. That is, it is one third higher than it would be if those expecting improvement were equally balanced with those expecting things to go worse. Indeed, the present measure (265) is the highest so far measured, with last May the closest. One year ago, in January, was the first and so far only time that respondents failed to look for an improvement, with the then

current reading falling just below the "neutral" midpoint.

The other expected change component taps the foreseen course of the US economy over the next year, At 286 (some 43% above "neutral"), it is the single most positive component. Looking back across time, expectation for short term economic improvement has never been higher than it was at the start of December. The previous high was June of 2002, followed closely by May of this year. The lowest was almost one year ago in January 2003. One should not confuse this with a direct measure of how the economy IS doing, but of what direction and how large the short term CHANGE will be. Much research, however, has shown this to be a potent component of "consumer confidence" and thus often to be a "leading indicator".

The last of six components is Presidential approval which is also the only "dichotomy" (two choice question) among the six components. At present, this stands at 243, corresponding to 61% of those stating a view reporting that the approve of Bush's handling of his job. The overall figure was almost exactly identical in August,which in turn represented a drop of some forty points in the component (corresponding to ten percent fewer approving) from May. The highest measured so far was in June of 2002, following which it fell more than seventy points to January 2003.

This comparison of components can also be done at the group level. Results are shown in the table labeled "Dimensions and Overall GNS for Groups: 12-03". These comparisons allow one to "decompose" the overall group to group distinctions into their sources. For instance, overall men and women differ by sixty-two points (with the former being more positive). But men are modestly more positive (by amounts ranging from fourteen to twenty four points) on all the measures tied to the country overall. This is counterbalance by their being lower by nineteen and twelve points respectively, on both more personal dimensions.

DIMENSIONS AND OVERALL GNS FOR GROUPS: 12-03

	US NOW	US FUT	EC FUT	PERSNL	FINANCE	APPROVE	TOTAL
TOTAL	180	265	286	261	228	243	1463
MALE	184	268	298	253	220	258	1481
FEMALE	178	259	275	267	232	230	1441
DEM	127	221	229	220	202	89	1088
IND	166	227	263	249	218	187	1310
REP	236	325	349	298	257	388	1853
<30 YRS	180	294	293	279	214	261	1521
30-44	196	261	282	265	232	262	1498
45-59	166	261	290	250	220	224	1411
60+ YRS	180	243	280	252	232	235	1422

As noted above, Republicans are notably more upbeat than Democrats (by 765 points). Somewhat less than half of this 299 points) is due to the strikingly different assessment the two groups have in presidential approval. But the larger share comes from the other components. On every single one, Republicans outscore their partisan opposites. The differences tend to be greater on the

less personal dimensions, but they are clear enough there as well. Thus, there is a 109 point difference in overall assessment of the country's course, a 104 point gap in short term expectations for the country, 120 on the economic future, 78 on personal satisfaction, and 55 points on satisfaction with one's family finances. Independents fell between the two other groups, but were closer to Democrats. Still, it should be pointed that all three partisan groups fall above the midpoint on both personal satisfaction measures, and on both measures of short term expected change.

Men and women differed overall by much less than the party groups. The former (at 1481) and between three and four percent higher than the latter (at 1441). They also tend to be close on each of the individual dimensions as well. Thus, men are six points more positive about the way things are going overall compared to women. They are nine points more positive in terms of overall change in the situation of the country. Men exceed women by larger amounts on expectation of economic change (17 points) and presidential approval (28 points). On the other hand, women are somewhat more positive than men on the two personal dimensions (by 14 points overall, and by 12 when it comes to personal financial satisfaction.

How the GNS is Calculated

The Gross National Spirit Index represents the sum of the individual scores for each of the six dimensions. The first step is to calculate the proportion taking the most positive position for each dimension (i.e., very satisfied, better, approve), least positive (not at all satisfied, worse, disapprove), and middle position if applicable (more or less satisfied, same). This calculation ignores anyone who chose not to answer the question.

For example, suppose 45% of the people declared themselves very satisfied with the way things are going for the US, 27% said they were more or less satisfied, and 18% said they were not satisfied at all (leaving 10% who did not answer the question). The proportion of all answers falling in the most positive category is .5 (45% of 90%). The proportion falling in the middle category is .3 (30% of 90%). The proportion falling in the least positive category is .2 (15% of 90%).

The next step gives multiplies these proportions by 400 for the most positive, 200 for the middle (if present) and 0 for the least positive. In our example, the "US NOW" dimension would be 260, 200 for the .5 at the top, 60 for the .3 in the middle, and 0 for the .2 at the bottom. If 10% of those answering the question moved from the middle category to the highest category, the score for that dimension would increase 20 points. If 20% of the total answering moved DOWN from "very satisfied" to "not at all satisfied", the score would drop by 80 points.

The final GNS is simply the sum of the six dimensions equally weighted. It thus ranges between a theoretical high of 2400 (400 times six) and a theoretical low of 0 (most pessimistic on each of the six dimensions). This means that a move in one dimension could be offset by the opposite move in another, or one twice as far by half as many people. It also allows one to say how much of the difference between two groups, or between two points in time is due to particular dimensions. Of course, there is no guarantee that all six dimensions will move in the same direction, and some of the more interesting findings occur when they are quite different.

Statewide Marginals and Percentages for Key Groups

What follows is the exact question wording for each of the items referred to in the release. All results shown are for the basic sample of state residents. The first column is the percentage of the entire sample giving each response. The second and third reports the percentages for men and women separately. The fourth, fifth, and sixth columns show self-described Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Columns seven through ten group respondents by age.

Q01. INTERVIEWER: (DO NOT ASK) Enter respondent's gender

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	47%	50%	50%	48%	48%	49%	48%
FEMALE	51	--	100	53	50	50	52	52	51	52

GNS01. In general, how satisfied are you with the way things are going in the United States today? Are you very satisfied, more or less satisfied, or not at all satisfied?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY SATISFIED	10%	12%	8%	2%	4%	23%	10%	12%	6%	14%
MORE-LESS SATISFIED	69	67	71	59	75	72	71	73	70	61
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	20	20	19	38	21	5	20	14	23	24
DON'T KNOW	1	*	1	*	--	--	--	1	1	--
REFUSED	*	*	1	1	--	--	--	1	--	1

GNS02. Over the next year or so, do you think things will go better for the United States, go worse, or stay about the same?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BETTER	43%	47%	39%	24%	32%	66%	57%	43%	40%	34%
WORSE	12	14	11	14	19	4	10	13	12	14
SAME	41	36	45	56	45	29	33	43	40	46
DON'T KNOW	4	3	5	6	4	1	--	1	7	6
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	*	--	--

GNS03. Over the next year or so, do you think the United States economy will get better, get worse, or stay about the same?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BETTER	54%	60%	49%	32%	46%	78%	54%	54%	57%	51%
WORSE	12	12	12	18	15	4	8	13	13	12
SAME	32	26	38	47	38	17	37	33	28	35
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	3	*	1	--	--	2	2
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	*	--	--	*	*	--

GNS04. How satisfied are you with the way things are going for you PERSONALLY? Are you very satisfied, more or less satisfied, or not at all satisfied?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY SATISFIED	37%	34%	40%	24%	33%	51%	42%	40%	34%	33%
MORE-LESS SATISFIED	54	57	52	61	56	47	54	51	57	56
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	7	8	7	14	9	2	3	8	9	8
DON'T KNOW	1	1	*	1	2	--	--	1	--	2
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

GNS05. How satisfied are you with your family's financial situation? Are you very satisfied, more or less satisfied, or not at all satisfied?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY SATISFIED	28%	23%	32%	17%	27%	37%	23%	28%	25%	31%
MORE-LESS SATISFIED	57	64	51	67	54	53	61	59	59	53
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	14	13	16	16	18	9	16	12	15	15
DON'T KNOW	*	--	*	--	--	*	--	--	*	--
REFUSED	*	--	1	*	1	--	--	1	--	1

GNS06. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as President?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
APPROVE	56%	60%	53%	20%	43%	93%	62%	61%	52%	54%
DISAPPROVE	36	33	39	70	49	3	33	32	41	38
DON'T KNOW	6	6	6	9	5	4	4	6	5	6
REFUSED	2	1	2	1	3	1	1	2	2	2

QD05. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
DEMOCRAT	26%	25%	27%	100%	--%	--%	23%	22%	30%	30%
REPUBLICAN	34	34	33	--	--	100	38	36	27	35
INDEPENDENT	25	25	24	--	100	--	25	25	25	26
OTHER	10	11	9	--	--	--	10	13	10	5
NONE	3	2	4	--	--	--	4	2	5	1
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	*	2	2
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	1	1	1

QD11. In what year were you born? (ENTER FOUR-DIGIT YEAR) (Calculated and grouped as below)

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
18-29	14%	14%	15%	13%	14%	16%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	30	30	31	25	30	32	--	100	--	--
45-59	32	32	32	37	32	26	--	--	100	--
60 and over	22	22	22	25	23	23	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	1	2	*	--	--	3	--	--	--	--

* denotes less than .5%
-- denotes 0%

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

This BADGER POLL™ was conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center as part of its ongoing program of research designed to benefit the research community and the people of Wisconsin, under the direction of G. Donald Ferree, Jr., Associate Director for Public Opinion Research of the Center. The media sponsors of the survey are the (Madison) Capital Times, and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel. The BADGER POLL™ is intended to be a "poll of record" for the state, investigating matters of concern to Wisconsinites including politics, culture, and their daily lives, adhering to the highest standards of polling methodology and rigorous independence.

A total of 510 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between December 2 and 9, inclusive. Telephone numbers were generated by computer in proportion to the number of adults living in each area of the state. Theoretically, results from this survey have a "margin of error" of a little over +/- 4%. This means that, had we asked every eligible resident in Wisconsin, exactly these questions at the time the survey was conducted, there is only a one in twenty chance that the answers would differ by more than that in either direction from what we report here. There could be differences because of changes in question wording, events occurring in the meantime, or any of the practical difficulties involved in taking a scientific survey. Results based on subgroups are subject to a larger "margin of error".

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