



Badger Poll™ #2, Release 5
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HOW ARE WE DOING IN WISCONSIN?
INTRODUCING THE GROSS NATIONAL SPIRIT INDEX

by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

How are things going, in the views of Wisconsin residents? The most recent Badger Poll™ asked a series of questions designed to find out. The Badger Poll™ was supported by private funds made available from the UW-Madison Chancellor's Office and University Communications. The Capital Times was the media sponsor.

The poll tapped a number of dimensions adding up to an overall sense of societal well being. Specifically, explicit queries addressed six interrelated "dimensions" all of which may well relate to such an overall sense. Several deal with the public sphere: how people feel things are going for the country, how they are expected to go in the near future, how the economy is expected to do. Two deal with the more personal: expressed satisfaction with one's personal situation; how satisfied one is one's family's financial situation. This proceeds from the assumption that a nation or state of individuals who are individually satisfied is "happier" than one where this aspect brings less satisfaction. A final area is presidential approval, crystallizing as it does views of the national leader and how he or she is dealing with whatever is deemed important.

When asked to rate "how satisfied are you with the way things are going in the United States today" on a three point scale, the vast bulk of respondents (75%) declared themselves "more or less satisfied", the middle point. Only one in ten (10%) chose the term "very satisfied", while one in seven thought "not at all satisfied" came closest.

The profile of opinion for men and women was similar, although the latter were more willing to take the middle choice, and among men those who choose either extreme were a bit more likely NOT to be satisfied. Partisan groups differ modestly, with Democrats more likely to say they were not at all satisfied than to be very satisfied, Republicans (a bit more evenly) were more likely to be more positive, and Independents split evenly. The largest proportion (ranging from seven in ten to eight in ten), however, was in the middle for all three. When it comes to age, the proportion putting themselves in the middle tends to decline as age increases, while the balance is similar for all except the youngest, who are least likely to choose the most negative option.

Relatively short term projections display a modest optimism. "Over the next year or so", half of all respondents (51%) expect things to "stay about the

same" for the country as a whole. But among those expecting a change, those who think things will go better (34%) outnumber those who expect them to go worse (11%) by about three to one.

Men are more optimistic than women, with a four to one margin among those expecting a shift, compared to about two to one among women as a group. All three partisan groups are similar in showing more positive hope than negative fear, but the balance grows more positive as one moves from Democrat to Republican. The latter group shows almost ten times as many optimists as pessimists, and is the one of only two groups examined where the largest proportion looks for improvement rather than expecting things to stay the same. Turning to age, those sixty and older are most likely to see some change, and onesidedly (almost five to one) look to improvement. Optimism is also high among the very youngest. From there, sentiment becomes less positive until one reaches the oldest respondents.

If attention is focused on the economy per se, however, optimism is rather more evident. Overall, while just under half (46%) think the national economy will stay the same, almost as many (43%) think it will get better. Men are a good deal more hopeful than women, fully half look to economic improvement, compared to only about one in three women. Fewer than one in ten of either group thinks things will get worse.

All three partisan groups are, on balance, hopeful, but Republicans and Independents have pluralities believing the economy will get better. Optimism is evident among all four age groups, though -- on balance -- the oldest group is most hopeful, and joins men and Republicans as those for whom those looking for improvement outnumber those feeling the economy will stay the same. But it should be emphasized that in all groups, few think things will get worse, and the distinction among them is just how much "optimism" is voiced.

This question was also included in the inaugural Badger Poll™ last March. That survey also found optimism in balance that the economy a year hence would be better than it was then.

Expectation of US economy
Results from two Badger Polls™

	JUNE	MARCH
Change in US economy over next year		
BETTER	43%	56%
WORSE	9	12
SAME	46	31
DON'T KNOW	2	1
REFUSED	--	*

Overall, the number expecting the economy next June to be where it is now is somewhat higher than the number who felt three months ago that March 2003 would be similar to March 2002. The size of both groups expecting change has gone down, but the overall balance is very similar to what it was, for example taking the "average", the typical answer now is less than one ten of a point less optimistic for (further) change.

Perceptions of how things are going include one's sense of how matters stand in the less "public" sphere as well. Using the same scale of satisfaction

employed for the earlier questions respondents were asked to rate "the way things are going for you PERSONALLY". Again, the largest single proportion was for more or less satisfied, but this time, almost four in ten (37%) called themselves "very satisfied" and fewer than one in ten (9%) "not at all satisfied".

As a group, men voiced somewhat greater satisfaction than women, and as was the case for the country as a whole, were more likely NOT to opt for the middle category. Democrats were less positive than either Republicans or Independents, but the differences were relatively modest. Positive evaluations dropped with age up to the oldest group among whom it rebounded. For every single group examined, the level of satisfaction with how things are going personally was markedly higher than it was for the country as a whole.

Just as a parallel question was put concerning the US economy's future and overall movement in the fortunes of the country, this satisfaction dimension was pursued with regard to "your family's financial situation". Overall, just shy of six in ten (57%) called themselves more or less satisfied. Those who chose either the more positive or less positive alternative broke about two to one (28%-15%) in favor of being very satisfied. Still this means that the typical state resident puts his or her family financial satisfaction somewhat between where they feel about their lives overall and how the country is doing overall.

Men and women displayed only small differences, with the former, however, at least as positive as the latter. Moving from Democrat to Republican involves a fall off of satisfaction to a moderate extent, as does moving up the age ladder until a rebound among those sixty and older. Further, the pattern noted overall earlier, where every group declared higher satisfaction with their personal lives than in how things were going in the public sphere finds a refinement here. Each group lowers in expressed satisfaction when one singles out the family's financial well being.

If each of these five items explores one dimension of residents perceptions of how things are going, another may be approval of the President's job handling. Granted the centrality of the President to our political process, and the fact that (historically only) his ratings have a complex relationship to how things are going generally, it makes sense to look at this.

Going along with the earlier reported "grade" the President gets, respondents were also asked whether they approved or disapproved "of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as President". Overall, eight in ten (80%) approve, five times as many as disapprove (16%). Only partisanship shows a clear pattern, with approval of just over six in ten among Democrats, almost exactly eight in ten among Independents, and literally every self-described Republican claiming to approve of Mr. Bush's performance.

These six items have sometimes been used on various state or national surveys to create a single score, the "Gross National Spirit" index, which could summarize overall societal satisfaction in the same way stock market indices summarize how things are going in the market overall rather than individually reporting separate stocks.

The basic principle is to treat each of the six dimensions equally, calculate a measure of the "typical response" for a sample overall or for groups within the population, and sum them. If everyone in a group gave the most positive answer, the value for that dimension would be at its maximum. If they gave the least positive answer, it would be at its minimum. If responses split evenly among the three alternatives, or if everyone chose the middle position, it would

be at its midpoint. The numbers themselves are arbitrary (as are the units of the DOW, for instance), but one can compare them to the theoretical range, and also compare among the dimensions.

More specifically, ignoring any "don't know" or "refused" responses, the arithmetic average ("mean") is computed for each item where the most positive response is 400, the middle response is 200, and the least positive is 0. If, for instance, among those giving a substantive answer, 40% chose the most positive answer, 30% the middle, and 30% the least positive, that component would contribute 220 points to the GNS. If the pattern were reversed (40% LEAST positive, 30% most), the score would be 180. Any pattern where equal numbers took the most positive and least positive (e.g. 25% very satisfied, 50% more or less satisfied, and 25% not at all satisfied), or an even split between the extremes with no one in the middle) would be 200.

Combining these six items from this survey produces the results shown in the table below. For each entry, numbers between 0 and 400 indicate the degree to which answers deviate from an even balance among the categories (200) towards either more positive (400) or less positive (0) extremes. So, for instance, in terms of satisfaction with how the US is doing, groups hover close to the midpoint, but overall, as for those except Republicans, and those under thirty, where positive answers pull the balance above the midpoint, a greater proportion is not at all satisfied than very satisfied. Independents at 200, are in exact balance. All groups on balance expect the next year to be somewhat better, but Republicans, and those below thirty or above sixty are more onesided than others. Optimism on the economy is more pointed, with the value of the GNS component higher than it was for the previous one in every case.

GNS Components and Overall Score for Full Sample and Selected Groups

	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
US Present	192	188	196	166	200	220	218	188	190	186
US Future	248	262	234	223	229	290	272	251	219	275
US Econ	269	287	256	249	282	293	267	270	258	291
Personal	257	262	248	232	268	275	290	267	234	257
Finances	226	234	220	206	234	246	228	232	212	245
Approval	333	338	332	265	337	400	338	333	341	324
GNS	1525	1571	1487	1342	1550	1724	1613	1541	1454	1578

The pattern noted earlier, with personal satisfaction higher than overall satisfaction, and financial satisfaction hovering between them is true overall and for each group. Finally, the balance of views for presidential approval is markedly more positive than is the case for other components. One group (Republicans) attains the theoretical maximum, since every person said they approved of Bush's handling of his job.

Overall, the GNS for Wisconsin in June of 2002 stands at 1525, or more than one fourth of the way between the midpoint and the theoretical maximum. One can also track the impact of any particular component or components. Thus, if presidential approval had the same typical value as the other five, the index would have dropped to 1430. If overall satisfaction had been the same as the others on average, it would have increased to 1600. Had both been "typical" (analogous to throwing out the high and low score among athletic judges), the GNS would have been at 1500.

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?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY SATISFIED	37%	42%	32%	28%	43%	42%	50%	40%	29%	38%
MORE/LESS SATISFIED	53	47	59	60	48	52	45	52	59	51
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	9	11	8	12	9	5	5	7	12	10
DON'T KNOW	1	--	2	1	--	1	--	1	1	1
REFUSED	*	*	*	--	1	--	--	*	*	--

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY SATISFIED	28%	31%	25%	21%	30%	35%	32%	30%	21%	34%
MORE/LESS SATISFIED	57	54	59	60	57	52	50	56	63	52
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	15	14	15	18	13	12	18	14	15	12
DON'T KNOW	*	*	--	--	--	*	--	--	--	1
REFUSED	1	*	1	1	--	1	--	--	1	1

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
APPROVE	80%	82%	78%	63%	80%	100%	81%	80%	81%	77%
DISAPPROVE	16	15	16	32	15	--	15	16	14	18
DON'T KNOW	4	3	5	4	3	--	4	3	3	5
REFUSED	1	1	1	1	2	--	--	*	2	1

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
DEMOCRAT	31%	26%	37%	100%	--%	--%	39%	29%	30%	32%
REPUBLICAN	31	34	28	--	--	100	22	36	29	35
INDEPENDENT	20	24	15	--	100	--	16	16	24	20
OTHER	10	8	11	--	--	--	12	13	9	5
NONE	6	5	6	--	--	--	10	4	5	6
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	--	--	--	1	2	1	1
REFUSED	2	2	2	--	--	--	--	*	3	2

QD11: In what year were you born? (ENTER FOUR-DIGIT YEAR)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
18-29	14%	13%	15%	18%	12%	10%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	26	29	22	24	21	30	--	100	--	--
45-59	35	31	39	33	43	32	--	--	100	--
60 and over	24	26	23	24	24	27	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	1	1	1	1	--	1	--	--	--	--

* 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. This Badger Poll™ was funded with private funds made available through the UW-Madison Chancellor's Office and University Communications. The media sponsor of the survey was the Capital Times newspaper of Madison. 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 524 randomly selected adult residents of Wisconsin were interviewed over the telephone from June 8-17, 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 adult 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".