Badger Poll™ #3, Release 4
University of Wisconsin Survey Center
University of Wisconsin Madison
October 4, 2002

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE ECONOMY: SEPTEMBER 2002

by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

When Wisconsin residents look forward to "the next year or so", the largest group (41%) believe that the US economy will be about the same as it is now. Among those who expect a change one way or the other optimists (those who think it will be better then) outnumber pessimists by about two to one (37%-18%). But this is muted optimism at best.

Interestingly, men are about ten points more likely to expect an upturn than are women. The most optimistic age groups are those between thirty and forty-four, or sixty and over. Those in the middle are modestly less upbeat in their forecasts for the national economy, while the sense that the economy will be neither up nor down tends to be strongest among the youngest respondents (those under thirty). Income seems to relate relatively strongly to outlook. While around four in ten in each of the groups examined think things will stay the same, the balance among those who do expect a change moves from a narrow pessimism among those with family incomes below thirty thousand, to about two to one optimism among those between thirty and seventy-five thousand dollars, to onesided (five to one) positive outlook among the highest income group. Partisanship also plays a clear role. Over half of Democrats think things will stay the same, while the comparable figure among both Independents and Republicans is about one in three. But while those expecting change are split evenly between optimists and pessimists among Democrats and Independents, Republicans are even more onesidedly upbeat than were upper income residents.

This question has also been on two previous Badger Polls™, in June and March of this year. The trend is shown in the table below for all related questions occurring on two or more polls. There does seem to be a cross-time pattern. In March, a majority (56%) expected an improvement in the economy, while three in ten (31%) foresaw no major change, and one in eight (12%) thought the national economy would worsen.

In June, the proportion expecting no change increased to a plurality of 46%, while the balance among those who did see a change was more positive, so the drop in "typical view" was moderated. By September, those expecting SOME change increased again, although not quite so high as it had been in March, and the balance between improvement and worsening was less sanguine. Thus, sentiment now about what the next year will bring is markedly less positive than was the case in March.

Respondents were also asked to make the same kind of forecast for the Wisconsin economy over the next year. What optimism is found tends to be yet more muted as the focus shifts from the national arena to the state level. Overall, just about half (49%) expect the state economy to remain about the same. Among those who do forecast a change, optimists outnumber pessimists only by about three to two. Thus, the typical resident is somewhat more likely to expect the state economy to be where it is now than to have the same outlook for the US economy.

Previously, this question occurred on the March, but not the June survey. The typical answer now is similar to what it was then, since the number expecting no change has increased, and the extent by which those looking for improvement outnumber those expecting worsening is about the same now as it was then. Thus, the diminution in optimism about the national economy since March is NOT mirrored when it comes to the state economy.

There is less of a clear distinction between men and women than was the case for the US economy. Age reveals a related pattern, however, with the youngest group the only one to voice (slight) pessimism on balance, with those thirty to forty-four or older than sixty more upbeat. Income shows both smaller group to group differences than was the case for the previous question and a more complicated pattern, with optimism highest among the "middle" group earning thirty to seventy-five thousand dollars. But all groups tend to be less sanguine about the Wisconsin economy than they were for the US as a whole. Partisanship also is much more muted. The largest proportion of each expects things to stay the same, but Republicans are the only group among whom those who expect change tilt clearly more to one side or the other (in this case, lower optimism than for the national economy).

Beside looking at the distribution of answers for each group, one can compare the responses individual residents give (explicitly comparing what each person said about the national economy to what he or she said for the state economy). Results (shown in the detailed tables which follow this summary) are depicted in a "constructed item" combining answers to these two questions.

Overall, two thirds (68%) gave the same answer to the two (e.g., expected both to be the same as they are, both to improve, or both to worsen). One in four answered both questions but differently. One in six had higher expectation for the US economy than state (e.g., better for the former, same or worse for the latter, or the same for the former, worse for the latter). Just under one in ten had lower expectations for the national economy. The remainder failed to answer one or both questions. In each group, around one in four distinguish between the two, they differ some in the balance between those who are more sanguine about the US and those who are more upbeat (or less downbeat) about the state. The

The final question in this series looked at forecasts of the economy "in your town and the surrounding region". Once again, the largest group (58%) expected no real change. The balance among the four in ten who did expect a change was quite close to even, with just over one in five (22%) expecting an improvement and just under one in five (18%) expecting a worsening. The patterns

The patterns among groups were reminiscent of those found for the related questions at the national and state level, against the backdrop of fewer expecting change overall, and group differences somewhat muted. Men were (very) slightly more "optimistic" on balance than women. The most positive age groups were again the thirty to forty-four year olds and those over sixty. The balance tended (slowly) to grow more upbeat as one moved up the income ladder.

Partisanship once again showed Republicans as most positive. But these differences tend to be small.

A parallel "constructed item" examines individual's answers about the state and local economies. Six in ten (61%) answered the same for both levels. One in three (a bit higher than was the case for national and state) answered differently, with those showing more optimism about the state outnumbering those who displayed the opposite pattern by around three to two (20%-21%), but these are modest distinctions.

As was the case for perceptions of the state economy, this question was included in our March survey, but not June. There is little change. The proportion expecting no change has increased slightly and both the group expecting improvement and those expecting worsening are (very slightly) smaller now than then, so the"typical" opinion is quite similar, net little or no change.

When it came to groups, the middle income group was most likely to be more optimistic about the state (there being a rough balance among the others). The familiar age pattern reasserts itself in a modest way. Republicans are the most likely to expect more from the state economy than from the local. But as was the case for the previous comparison, the group to group differences were modest.

A related kind of rating was sought in a question asking respondents to compare Wisconsin to "other places to live and work in this country". If there is less optimism about the state economy than the national, this does not seem to drag down overall assessments of the state very much. Three in ten (30%) say Wisconsin is "one of the very best" including any who volunteered that it was the single best place to live. Just above one in three (35%) called it "better than most". Another one in three (32%) said it was "about average". Only a handful, 1% for each, said it was either "worse than most" or "one of the very worst". Thus two residents in every three think of Wisconsin as a relatively good place to live.

Earlier we noted that, since March, there has been some worsening in the national economic outlook, and stability (more or less) when it comes to the direction of change in the state and local economies. On this more general dimension, results from all three surveys (in March, June, and September) show a quite positive assessment of Wisconsin overall. But, if anything, the view now is modestly more positive, since the proportion opting for "one of the very best" is up.

There are some group differences. While one in three among both men and women see the state as about average, women are more likely to say it is one of the very best, while men are more likely to say it is better than most. The parties differ mostly in terms of likelihood of saying that the state is average (highest among Independents, lowest among Republicans), and the typical view is most positive for Republicans, followed by Democrats, followed by Independents. Almost half of the youngest respondents see the state as about average, which figure is around three in ten in the two middle groups defined by age, and lowest among those sixty and older. The typical response overall grows more positive with age (which is also related to time in the state, since the typical state resident has been hear much or all of their lives. The proportion thinking the state about average declines as one moves up the income ladder, but -- because of a different balance between "one of the very best" and "better than average" the typical response in both of the two higher income groups is very similar, with each clearly more positive than the lowest group. But all

Cross-Time Comparison

	SEPT	JUNE	MARCH
Expectation of US economy			
BETTER	37%	43%	56%
WORSE	18	9	12
SAME	41	46	31
DON'T KNOW	4	2	1
REFUSED	--	--	*
Expectation of WI economy			
BETTER	28%	..	33%
WORSE	18	..	24
SAME	49	..	41
DON'T KNOW	5	..	2
REFUSED	--	..	*
Expectation of local economy			
BETTER	22%	..	25%
WORSE	18	..	20
SAME	58	..	52
DON'T KNOW	2	..	2
REFUSED	--	..	*
WI as place to live/work			
ONE OF VERY BEST	30%	24%	24%
BETTER THAN MOST	35	38	43
ABOUT AVERAGE	32	33	29
WORSE THAN MOST	1	2	2
ONE OF VERY WORST	1	1	*
DON'T KNOW	*	1	2
REFUSED		*	*

these must be seen in the context that in all groups only a handful sees the state as below average and that, except for the youngest group, a majority (and often a large one) sees it as above average.

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. (Earlier electoral results included interviews on political questions only for registered voters from this sample and a special supplement of registered voters). 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. The final columns distinguish among respondents by family income, using $30,000 and $75,000 as the cutpoints.

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

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	41%	55%	51%	51%	50%	50%	48%	28%	57%	62%
FEMALE	51	--	100	59	45	49	49	50	50	52	72	43	38

ECON03A. 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				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
BETTER	37%	41%	33%	23%	32%	57%	30%	41%	36%	41%	24%	39%	45%
WORSE	18	16	20	21	29	6	20	18	16	17	31	17	9
SAME	41	42	41	53	36	33	48	40	44	34	44	41	45
DON'T KNOW	4	1	6	4	3	4	2	1	4	9	2	3	1
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

ECON04. Over the next year or so, do you think the WISCONSIN economy will get better, get worse, or stay about the same?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
GET BETTER	28%	30%	27%	22%	23%	39%	19%	39%	25%	30%	23%	33%	25%
GET WORSE	18	17	19	19	25	11	27	15	18	11	27	16	15
STAY ABOUT THE SAME	49	52	46	55	47	45	52	45	49	51	46	46	57
DON'T KNOW	5	2	8	5	5	6	2	1	8	8	4	5	3
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	–	–	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

ECON04X. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM, ECON03A, ECON04) Comparison of expected change in US economy to expected change in WI economy.

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
US higher than WI	16%	19%	13%	13%	15%	24%	21%	13%	18%	15%	10%	15%	29%
US same as WI	68	69	67	67	69	63	70	74	65	61	72	69	63
US lower than WI	9	9	9	14	9	5	6	12	8	11	14	10	4
Either/both missing	7	3	11	7	8	8	4	1	9	14	4	7	3

ECON05. How about your town and the surrounding region, over the next year or so, do you think the local economy will get better, get worse, or stay about the same?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
GET BETTER	22%	23%	21%	20%	16%	28%	16%	30%	21%	21%	17%	20%	26%
GET WORSE	18	18	19	23	18	11	20	15	23	13	22	18	14
STAY ABOUT THE SAME	58	58	58	55	65	57	63	55	53	66	61	59	60
DON'T KNOW	2	1	2	2	--	4	1	1	3	1	1	2	--
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	–

ECON05X. (CONSTRUCTED ITEM, ECON04, ECON05) Comparison of expected change in state economy to expected change in local economy.

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
WI higher than local	20%	22%	18%	21%	14%	22%	18%	18%	22%	20%	15%	26%	18%
WI same as local	61	61	61	58	67	60	59	69	54	65	68	56	60
WI lower than local	14	14	13	16	14	10	21	12	14	8	13	12	19
Either/both missing	6	3	8	5	5	8	3	1	10	8	4	7	3

WICMP04. Compared to before McCallum became Governor, do you think Wisconsin is now in better shape than it was, worse shape than it was or about as well off as it was?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
BETTER OFF THAN IT WAS	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	6%	8%	3%	3%	3%	6%	3%	4%
WORSE OFF THAN IT WAS	32	34	30	39	37	22	26	31	37	29	27	33	38
ABOUT AS WELL OFF	59	59	59	56	53	67	59	59	57	67	58	61	58
DON'T KNOW	5	3	6	2	8	5	7	7	3	2	8	3	1
REFUSED	*	--	*	1	--	--	--	1	--	--	1	--	--

WICMP05. How much of any change is due to Governor McCallum and his policies? A lot, some, only a little, or none at all?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
A LOT	8%	8%	7%	10%	9%	4%	4%	6%	11%	7%	5%	9%	6%
SOME	43	42	44	39	40	43	53	40	39	42	40	44	42
ONLY A LITTLE	29	30	28	36	27	30	22	32	32	26	30	28	34
NONE AT ALL	11	14	9	9	16	14	10	10	12	14	13	11	13
DON'T KNOW	9	6	13	7	8	9	10	11	6	11	13	8	5
REFUSED	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	*	1	--	--	*	--

QR01. Compared to other places to live and work in this country, would you say Wisconsin is one of the very best, better than most, about average, worst than most, or one of the very worst places to live and work?

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
One of very best	30%	24%	37%	33%	28%	35%	28%	27%	29%	39%	23%	36%	27%
Better than most	35	43	27	33	25	41	20	43	35	36	34	30	47
About average	32	31	33	31	40	22	46	29	32	22	40	32	22
Worse than most	1	1	1	*	1	2	1	--	2	1	1	*	2
One of very worst	1	1	1	2	3	--	4	1	*	1	1	1	2
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	1	2	--	--	1	2	2	2	1	--
REFUSED	*	*	--	--	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	-

QR02. How many years have you lived in Wisconsin? (ROUND UP)

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
ONE YEAR OR LESS	1%	2%	1%	--%	2%	2%	1%	3%	1%	--%	--%	1%	--%
TWO TO FOUR YRS	2	1	2	2	4	1	3	3	2	--	3	1	1
FIVE TO NINE	3	3	4	4	4	2	8	3	2	1	5	2	4
10-14	2	3	1	1	7	2	6	2	1	1	2	3	3
15 OR MORE	81	82	80	79	77	85	82	83	85	70	73	86	88
ALL MY LIFE	10	9	11	14	7	9	--	6	9	28	18	6	4
DK/REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	--

QR03. How many years have you lived in your community? (ROUND UP)

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
ONE YEAR OR LESS	7%	9%	5%	4%	5%	6%	13%	9%	4%	3%	7%	6%	10%
TWO TO FOUR YRS	10	12	8	13	10	10	19	13	7	3	11	8	12
FIVE TO NINE	11	11	12	10	10	11	18	17	6	6	12	13	11
10-14	8	6	11	9	9	9	3	13	9	7	9	9	8
15 OR MORE	61	60	61	63	65	63	47	47	73	72	58	64	57
ALL MY LIFE	2	2	3	2	2	2	--	2	1	9	4	1	2
DK/REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	--

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

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
Democrat	33%	28%	38%	100%	--%	--%	21%	34%	36%	42%	43%	33%	30%
Republican	29	30	27	--	--	100	23	35	28	25	16	30	42
Independent	21	24	18	--	100	--	28	15	22	21	19	23	19
Other	10	12	8	--	--	--	18	8	9	6	13	9	8
None	4	5	3	--	--	--	7	5	2	3	3	4	2
DON'T KNOW	2	1	4	--	--	--	3	2	2	2	5	2	--
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	2	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				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
18-29	19%	19%	18%	12%	25%	15%	100%	--%	--%	--%	20%	17%	21%
30-44	27	28	27	28	20	34	--	100	--	--	25	30	30
45-59	33	34	33	36	34	33	--	--	100	--	19	39	38
60 and over	19	19	19	24	19	17	--	--	--	100	32	14	9
DK/REFUSED	2	*	4	1	3	2	--	--	--	--	4	1	2

QD13. About how much was your TOTAL FAMILY INCOME last year before taxes, was it... (READ CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

		GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				INC IN $K		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	<30	<75	75+
Less than $10,000	5%	2%	7%	8%	4%	1%	6%	7%	3%	4%	20%	--%	--%
$10,000-$15,000	3	2	5	4	3	2	6	2	1	8	15	--	--
$15,000-$20,000	4	2	6	7	2	2	2	3	5	6	17	--	--
$20,000-$30,000	11	7	14	10	12	8	11	10	5	20	49	--	--
$30,000-$50,000	22	26	18	24	26	20	24	23	21	23	--	53	--
$50,000-$75,000	19	22	16	17	19	23	14	22	28	7	--	47	--
$75,000-$100,000	12	15	9	11	13	15	16	14	9	8	--	--	52
Over $100,000	11	14	8	9	7	17	9	10	17	3	--	--	48
DON'T KNOW	4	1	8	3	6	3	8	--	4	6	--	--	--
REFUSED	10	10	9	7	11	9	4	11	9	16	--	--	--

* 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 500 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between September 17 to 26, inclusive. (A portion of this sample, along with a special supplemental sample of registered voters asked only election-related questions were the basis of releases earlier on the upcoming election). 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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