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GROSS NATIONAL SPIRIT  
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

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 they 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.

The first dimension asks how satisfied people are "with the way things are going in the United States today", without defining just what is meant by "things". Two thirds (33%) pick the middle position, of being more or less satisfied, while the one in four (24%) who are very dissatisfied dwarf the relative handful (7%) who are very satisfied. Gender makes scarcely any difference overall. There is a distinction between those below forty-five and those at or above that level, with the latter less upbeat. Partisanship clearly makes a distinction. About five in six Republicans are choose one of the two higher responses, contrasted with seven in ten Independents, and six in ten Democrats. Still, this means that the largest proportion by far in any of the groups examined falls in the middle of the scale.

This was true the last time this question was asked, in June of 2002, when (75%) declared themselves "more or less satisfied". At that point, though, one in ten (10%) chose the term "very satisfied", while only one in seven were "not at all satisfied". Thus, there has been some darkening of the mood since that point.

What about the short term ("over the next year or so") outlook. Overall, state residents expect little or no net change. The largest single proportion (41%) feels things will be about the same for the country as a whole. This means that most residents expect a change, but they are quite closely divided on whether the near future will bring an improvement (26%) or a worsening (28%).

Here there is a modest difference between men and women as groups. For each, more clearly for women, the most common view is that things will stay the same. But men show a rough balance with just barely about three in then expecting an

improvement while just under that expect that things will get worse. The gap is about ten points less positive for women. Among age groups, the oldest are the most likely to look for improvement, the youngest -- who are evenly split -- come next, with "pessimism" somewhat more evident in the middle groups. Republicans are markedly more upbeat than Independents, while Democrats are markedly less so than this middle group (the single most common view among Democrats is that things will go worse, the opposite is true for GOP adherents.

Since June, the picture is less positive on this dimension as well. Then half of all respondents (51%) expected things to "stay the same", but those who thought things would go better (34%) outnumbered those who expected them to go worse (11%) by about three to one.

Interestingly, while there has been much talk of the economy as an especially sore point, optimism for this sector is easier to find. Specifically, while once again four in ten (42%) thought the economy would stay about the same, those looking to a change were optimistic by about a three to two margin.

Men were somewhat more upbeat than women, though both were at least marginally more likely to be hopeful than pessimistic. Optimism (in a measured way) is most evident for the oldest group, with the youngest quite similar. Opinion comes closest to an even divide for the middle groups. Assuming a change, Democrats are pessimistic by about two to one. Independents are optimistic about the economy by three to two, again among those who think things will either improve or worsen. Republicans are five times more likely to think the economy will get better as to think it will get worse.

Last June, about the same proportion as now (46%) felt the national economy will stay the same. The proportion expecting an improvement has slipped about ten points. Back then, fewer than one in ten looked to a worsening of the economy, compared to about one in four as the New Year begins. In ten of either group thinks things will get worse.

Expectation of US economy  
Results from four Badger Polls™

	JAN	SEPT	JUNE	MARCH
Change in economy				
BETTER	33%	37%	43%	56%
WORSE	23	18	9	12
SAME	42	41	46	31
DON'T KNOW	2	4	2	1
REFUSED	1	--	--	*

This question, although not all the items included in the GNS, was also on the Badger Poll™ of March and September. As the accompanying chart makes clear, economic optimism has been lower on each successive poll.

Respondents were asked to use the same satisfaction scale for "the way things are going for you PERSONALLY". In principle, there is no reason this should get the same answers as when the focus is how things are going for the country, and it does not. Overall, almost six in ten (57%) declare themselves more or less satisfied. A substantial three in ten (30%) is very satisfied, and only one in eight expresses no satisfaction at all.

Group patterns are similar to what was found for the earlier item asking about the country as a whole. Men and women are very similar. Age forty-five divides residents between the more positive outlook of the younger and the less positive view of the older. Partisan differences, while present, are more muted than was the case for the earlier query. Each group, in an absolute sense is more upbeat about their own situation than is the case for national perceptions. In June of 2002, the view on this dimension was somewhat rosier than now. The most common view then (51%) was more or less satisfied, but this time, but four in ten (37%) called themselves "very satisfied" and fewer than one in ten (9%) "not at all satisfied".

Another component of the GNS is the satisfaction respondents voice with their family financial situations. Overall, the opinion profile is similar to what it was for more general satisfaction. Just under one in four (23%) is very satisfied. Almost six in ten (58%) are more or less satisfied and one in six (18%) are not at all satisfied. This means that the two dimensions are parallel to each other, but there is some lesser happiness over finances.

Once again, men and women are quite similar as groups. Here, however, age makes little difference, with each of the four groups within a couple of percentage points of the others for all responses. Partisan lines are rather blurred as well. Other dimensions have shown last June, this question found 28% very satisfied, 57% more or less so, and 15% not at all satisfied. The difference between the two readings is small enough that we may have only limited confidence that the distinction between the two samples reflects a real shift in the population.

The final factor in the overall index is presidential approval, which uses a dichotomy (approve/disapprove) without an explicit middle point. Overall, by roughly two to one (60%-32%), Wisconsin residents approve of the President's handling of his job. Men and women are, as they have been on many of the dimensions, remarkably similar. Age follows a pattern where the youngest are only a bit less positive than respondents overall. Approval modestly "spikes" among thirty to forty-five year olds, and then drops somewhat for each of the two older groups, finally ending up lower among those sixty and older than it was for those under thirty. Party is clearest. Republicans almost unanimously (95%-2%) approve. Independents are more critical, but still approve on balance by a bit over five to four. Democrats DISapprove by just under two to one.

This was the strongest group distinction back last June as well. But for respondents overall, approval has fallen from 80%-16% at that point. On that survey, literally every single Republican polled expressed approval of the President, but the proportion approving has fallen almost thirty points (from 80%-15%) among Independents, while the change is most clear among Democrats, who approved by two to one (63%-32%) in June, contrasted with their present 59%-34% disapproval. This means that views of the Chief Executive have acquired an even more evident partisan tinge over the past half year.

The real purpose in asking these six items is to construct the overall index of Gross National Spirit, tapping different dimensions, but able to be summarized like such things as various stock market indices are.

The GNS treats each dimension equally, calculating how it stands compared to its theoretical range from everyone taking the most positive response (e.g., very satisfied, next year will be better, approval of the President) for all six items to everyone taking the least positive possible response (not at all satisfied, next year will be worse, disapproval). This allows one to 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 extreme answer, that dimension would be at its high or low. If responses split evenly between the most positive and least positive, 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.

Combining these six items from this survey, and doing the same for the June results 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, all groups except Republicans have an excess of "less positive" (not at all satisfied) over "more positive" (very positive) answers. Satisfied than very satisfied. Independents at 200, are in exact balance.

The overall GNS in January 2003 stands at 1283, close to its theoretical midpoint (1200 if all dimensions averaged in the middle of their range). The single most negative dimension is present evaluation (162). This is true for each of the individual groups as well, which differ in levels for each dimension, but for each the present assessment of the country as a whole contributes less to the GNS score than any other dimension. Republicans, as the only group above the midpoint are of course most positive. Democrats are clearly least so.

For each group (and thus necessarily for the sample overall), respondents are more positive about their personal lives than about the country. Not only does the latter dimension contribute more to the total than the former, but since the scales are identical one can directly say that more satisfaction is voiced about personal lives. Democrats show an especially strong discrepancy. Their GNS score on the personal dimension is 106 points higher than it was for the country as a whole. This compares to 57 for Independents, and 43 for Republicans.

Personal financial satisfaction is lower overall and for each group than general life satisfaction, but the two tend to be quite close. For respondents taken together, the financial dimension is only 25 points lower, and now group exceeds this by much, although the magnitude of the distinction is as small as six points (for Independents).

This table also brings out the distinction between the overall and specifically economic dimension when it comes to what the next year or so hold, compared to the present situation. Except for Democrats who expect the economy on balance to worsen, and those thirty to forty-five, who expect virtually no change on balance, every group contains more optimists about the US economy than pessimists. For the country overall, some groups are (slightly) optimistic, some pessimistic, with the party groups being the outliers. But for each group, however, they feel about the country, they are more optimistic (or less pessimistic) about change in the economy, probably reflecting uncertainty about what awaits in questions of war and peace, which tend to "trump" economic concerns.

GNS Components and Overall Score for Full Sample and Selected Groups  
January 2003

	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
US NOW	162	164	164	124	157	220	168	178	151	163
US FUT	196	204	185	138	206	260	200	188	177	230
ECON FUT	220	233	212	165	227	291	245	198	210	254
PERS	235	232	236	230	214	263	246	236	224	237
FINANCE	210	214	208	200	208	236	212	206	208	218
PRES	261	258	264	146	229	392	245	311	251	230
GNS	1283	1305	1269	1004	1242	1662	1316	1317	1222	1333

June 2002

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

Change from June to January

	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
US NOW	-30	-24	-32	-42	-43	0	-50	-10	-39	-22
US FUT	-52	-58	-49	-85	-22	-30	-72	-63	-41	-45
ECON FUT	-49	-54	-44	-84	-55	-2	-22	-72	-48	-38
PERS	-22	-30	-12	-2	-54	-11	-44	-31	-10	-19
FINANCE	-16	-20	-12	-6	-26	-10	-16	-26	-4	-27
PRES	-72	-80	-68	-119	-108	-8	-92	-22	-90	-94
GNS	-242	-266	-218	-338	-308	-63	-297	-224	-231	-245

Presidential approval follows its own pattern. For most groups, except for Democrats, it contributes more to GNS than any other dimension. (That means it is higher relative to its theoretical range than others). But it by no means accounts for all intergroup differences in the total GNS. Thus, Republicans as a group are 658 points higher on the overall index than are Democrats, but 246 points are due to differences on approval, leaving 312 for other dimensions (96 for general appraisal, 122 for overall change in the next year, 126 for economic change, and even some differences -- 33 and 36 respectively -- on the two personal dimensions).

Looked at a little differently, men and women are generally close to one another (1305 and 1269 for the overall GNS). The "gap", such as it is, is primarily due to future appraisals, where men are 19 and 21 points higher for overall and economic change. On the other dimensions, men and women tend to be only about five points apart. of Bush's handling of his job.

The final entry in this table shows the difference in GNS from June of last year to January of this one. Not one entry is positive, meaning that for no group did any individual dimension come out higher than had been the case. But the amount of change differs generally. Thus, men dropped more than women

overall, and also on each individual dimension with the exception of the overall assessment. Their drops were largest on approval and short term change (of both sorts). Republicans dropped, but much less than either Independents or Democrats. Approval was the biggest single drop for both of the latter groups, but they differ in other areas, with Democrats more likely to drop on expectations than Independents. The shift for them is roughly equivalent for present assessments, and Independents, but NOT Democrats showed a real shift in the personal dimension.

#### 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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	43%	58%	55%	38%	52%	56%	44%
FEMALE	51	--	100	57	42	45	62	48	44	56

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?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY SATISFIED	7%	8%	7%	2%	6%	17%	4%	8%	8%	10%
MORE/LESS SATISFIED	66	65	67	58	64	76	75	74	58	60
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	26	26	25	40	27	7	20	19	32	28
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	2	1	--	--	2	1
REFUSED	1	1	*	--	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?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BETTER	26%	31%	20%	12%	27%	45%	25%	27%	21%	33%
WORSE	28	29	27	42	24	16	25	33	32	19
SAME	41	37	45	43	42	36	49	36	44	40
DON'T KNOW	4	2	7	4	6	2	2	4	2	7
REFUSED	1	1	*	--	1	--	--	--	1	1

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
BETTER	33%	38%	29%	16%	32%	56%	39%	28%	32%	39%
WORSE	23	22	23	33	19	11	17	29	27	13
SAME	42	38	45	49	44	32	41	43	38	45
DON'T KNOW	2	1	3	1	3	1	4	1	2	1
REFUSED	1	1	*	--	1	--	--	--	1	1

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	29%	30%	29%	29%	23%	38%	31%	28%	29%	31%
MORE/LESS SATISFIED	57	55	59	56	58	53	62	62	52	53
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	12	14	11	14	16	7	8	10	17	13
DON'T KNOW	1	*	1	--	*	1	--	--	*	2
REFUSED	1	2	*	1	2	1	--	--	2	2

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	23%	24%	22%	22%	19%	30%	23%	23%	22%	25%
MORE/LESS SATISFIED	58	57	59	55	64	58	57	56	59	60
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	18	17	18	22	15	12	17	20	18	16
DON'T KNOW	*	*	--	--	*	--	1	--	--	--
REFUSED	1	1	1	1	1	--	2	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	60%	60%	60%	34%	51%	95%	57%	70%	59%	53%
DISAPPROVE	32	33	31	59	38	2	36	20	35	39
DON'T KNOW	6	5	7	6	8	2	5	6	4	6
REFUSED	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	4	2	2

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	30%	26%	34%	100%	--%	--%	34%	26%	35%	26%
Republican	26	29	23	--	--	100	19	28	23	32
Independent	24	29	20	--	100	--	22	24	25	26
Other	13	11	14	--	--	--	23	11	14	5
None	3	3	3	--	--	--	--	7	1	5
DON'T KNOW	2	*	3	--	--	--	1	4	*	1
REFUSED	3	1	4	--	--	--	2	2	2	5

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
18-29	18%	14%	21%	20%	16%	13%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	26	28	25	22	25	28	--	100	--	--
45-59	32	37	28	38	33	29	--	--	100	--
60 and over	23	21	25	20	24	28	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	2	1	2	1	2	2	--	--	--	--

\* 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 514 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between January 7 and 15th, 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".