



Badger Poll™ #6, Release #3  
University of Wisconsin Survey Center  
University of Wisconsin Madison  
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ECONOMIC OUTLOOK IN FEBRUARY  
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

On balance, there are only very mild signs of optimism when it comes to the short term expected future of the national economy among Wisconsin residents. When respondents were asked about the US economy "over the next year or so", the most common view (42%) was that it would then be about the same as it is now. Among those who expected a change, those looking to a better economy modestly outnumbered those thinking it would be worse (by 33%-23%).

There is a sharp gender divide over this. Among both men and women, about four in ten expect no large change, but men are much more likely to expect improvement than women, among whom the outlook is relatively balanced between "optimists" and "pessimists". There is a (partially related) partisan split as well, more than half of all Republicans expecting an upturn while Democrats and Independents are quite similar to one another NOT showing net optimism.

If the focus is the Wisconsin economy, views are modestly even less optimistic than for the national economy. Just under half (47%) expect no real change, while those thinking it will be better are in closer balance with those thinking it will be worse on year from now (28% compared to 23%). Both gender and partisan differences are toned down, with Democrats if anything somewhat more hopeful about the state economy and Republicans rather less so, and a similar pattern obtains among men and women, though with smaller distinctions.

This is brought home if one explicitly compares the views individuals take of the two, which is shown in the numerical tables following this summary as a "constructed item" showing whether individuals rated the national economy more optimistically (e.g. better for that, compared with the same or worse for the state economy, or the same for the national compared with worse for the state, vice versa, or had the same basic outlook for both). Seven in ten did, overall those who expected more positive results for the national economy and those who expected worse for it than the state were in approximate balance (16% and 12% of respondents, respectively).

Among all gender and partisan groups, most rate the two "levels" the same. Against that background, however, men were more likely to be more optimistic (less pessimistic) about the national economy, women closer to balance but at least as rosy about the state economy. Democrats were more likely to be hopeful about the state economy, Independents split, and Republicans were more upbeat about the national economy than state.

When one turns to the local economy almost six in ten (58%) among all respondents expect things next year to be about the same as they are now. And the four in ten who look to change are almost perfectly balanced. On this item, gender distinctions pretty much disappear. There is only a weak partisan tendency, congruent with what was noted above, for Republicans on balance to be a bit more upbeat than Independents or Democrats.

A parallel "constructed item" explicitly grouped individuals into those who were more optimistic about the state than local, those with the same outlook, and those who were more upbeat about the local (or less pessimistic about it). Overall, respondents were more likely to make distinctions -- six in ten had the same outlook (compared to seven in ten for the national/state comparison). Those who distinguished were a bit more likely to be relatively hopeful about the local economy. Thus, overall, as the economic "circle" shrinks closer to where one lives, views tend to be somewhat LESS positive for the typical Wisconsinite. Age and partisan distinctions are muted.

These three questions have occurred on earlier Badger Polls™ as well, and the national economic outlook has so far been included on five of the six polls done to date -- the exception being the immediately pre-election survey last October. An accompanying table assembles these results.

The basic US outlook now is almost precisely where it was on January of this year. But poll surveys show a population among whom national economic optimism seems to have declined when one compares the results from March, June and September 2002. Last March, over half expected an improvement over the (then) next year. This dropped some in June, although the number expecting a downturn did not increase. Optimism was further reduced in September, but those figures show modestly more upbeat expectations than is now the case.

Last March, views of the state economy were more tempered than those for the country as a whole. This was also true in June, but the drop in optimism for the national economy was more marked over those months than was the corresponding lessening of hope for the Wisconsin economy. Cross-time distinctions in perceptions of the local outlook are much more muted, but the same general tendency seems to apply.

Earlier we had reported that President Bush receives lower ratings for his handling of the economy than for other aspects of his performance. This seems to relate to the outlook for the national economy. (Because so few called Bush's handling of the economy excellent, we combine those respondents with those who said it was good). Those calling him good or better were quite optimistic (48% better, 34% same, 17% worse). Among those who found Bush only doing a fair job by contrast, the national economic outlook was much closer to being in balance (28% better, 49% same, 19% worse). Lastly, among those who rated the President poor in this regard, mild pessimism was evident on balance (25% better, 39% same, 35% worse).

For instance, those rating Bush good or better had a view of the state economic short-run future (31% better, 49% same, 20% worse), that is almost the same as those calling Bush's performance fair (27% better, 51% same, 17% worse). To be sure, those calling Bush poor were somewhat less upbeat yet (27% better, 40% same, 32% worse), but the distinction is less marked than at the national.

#### Cross-Time Comparison on Economy-Related Questions

The poll contained several other measures bearing on the economy, which have not been previously asked on the Badger Poll™. One asked respondents whether "now is a good time or a bad time to make major purchases such as furniture, a

|                               | FEB03 | JAN03 | SPT02 | JUN02 | MAR02 |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Bush handling of economy      |       |       |       |       |       |
| EXCELLENT                     | 4%    | 4%    | 6%    |       |       |
| GOOD                          | 26    | 23    | 30    |       |       |
| FAIR                          | 38    | 38    | 36    |       |       |
| POOR                          | 31    | 31    | 25    |       |       |
| DON'T KNOW                    | 1     | 3     | 3     |       |       |
| REFUSED                       | 1     | 1     | *     |       |       |
| Expectation for US economy    |       |       |       |       |       |
| BETTER                        | 33%   | 33%   | 37%   | 43%   | 56%   |
| WORSE                         | 23    | 23    | 18    | 9     | 12    |
| SAME                          | 42    | 42    | 41    | 46    | 31    |
| DON'T KNOW                    | 2     | 2     | 4     | 2     | 1     |
| REFUSED                       | *     | 1     | --    | --    | *     |
| Expectation for WI economy    |       |       |       |       |       |
| GET BETTER                    | 28%   |       | 28%   |       | 33%   |
| GET WORSE                     | 23    |       | 18    |       | 24    |
| STAY ABOUT THE SAME           | 47    |       | 49    |       | 41    |
| DON'T KNOW                    | 2     |       | 5     |       | 2     |
| REFUSED                       | *     |       | --    |       | *     |
| Expectation for local economy |       |       |       |       |       |
| GET BETTER                    | 20%   |       | 22%   |       | 25%   |
| GET WORSE                     | 21    |       | 18    |       | 20    |
| STAY ABOUT THE SAME           | 58    |       | 58    |       | 52    |
| DON'T KNOW                    | 1     |       | 2     |       | 2     |
| REFUSED                       | --    |       | --    |       | *     |

refrigerator, stove, television, and things like that". Overall half (50%) called it a good time, while just under four in ten (38%) said it was a bad time. Similar items are often taken as an indication of confidence, since people tend all things being equal to put off purchases when they are worried, and accelerate them when they are not. And such purchases tend also to stimulate the economy. Of course, there can be reasons why other "things may not be equal". High inflation can be one, when people fear that putting off purchases may mean they just have to pay substantially more later. Another can be as at present when there are huge incentives ("no interest payment until 2004", and so on). Either can cause people to buy more (and hence help the economy) without necessarily reflecting optimism.

In any event, men (53%-36%) are somewhat more likely to call the current climate a good time to buy than are women. Republicans (58%-29%) see this as good time more clearly than Democrats (51%-39%) while Independents are the most unsure (43% good time, 45% bad time). Age, to which we have not paid much attention because differences have tended to be weak, follows an interesting pattern. The most likely to buy (or more properly the most likely to label this as a good time to buy) are those below thirty (61%-33%), followed by those sixty and over (54%-31%). Those in the middle age groups are more closely divided.

Another measure is how secure one feels in a job. Overall, reminded that "some people worry about losing their jobs because of layoffs or bad economic

times, others feel pretty secure", four in ten (41%) said they were very secure in their present job, while one in four (27%) said they were somewhat secure. Only one in seven called themselves either somewhat (8%) or very insecure (6%). One in five (18%) that they did not have a job at present (some who were not working themselves answered in terms of the job of someone else in their family).

At the same time, while respondents feel individually relatively confident about their employment, looking for work is not alien to the experience of many. Specifically, one in three (36%) said that there was someone "in your immediate family or among your close friends who does not have a job right now and is actively trying to get one." This proportion is quite similar across all demographic groups examined, and is NOT related to perceptions of President Bush's job performance on the economy.

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%   | --% | 40%          | 52% | 55% | 48%          | 53% | 48% | 44% |
| FEMALE | 51  | --     | 100 | 61           | 48  | 45  | 52           | 47  | 52  | 56  |

GWB06. How would you rate the job George W. Bush is doing handling the economy? (PROMPT FOR CATEGORIES AS NECESSARY)

|            | TOT | GENDER |    | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|------------|-----|--------|----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|            |     | M      | F  | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| EXCELLENT  | 4%  | 6%     | 2% | 1%           | 2%  | 8%  | 10%          | 5%  | 2%  | 2%  |
| GOOD       | 26  | 26     | 26 | 16           | 20  | 46  | 19           | 28  | 30  | 24  |
| FAIR       | 38  | 35     | 41 | 28           | 40  | 40  | 45           | 41  | 36  | 32  |
| POOR       | 31  | 32     | 31 | 54           | 37  | 6   | 26           | 25  | 32  | 41  |
| DON'T KNOW | 1   | *      | 1  | --           | 2   | --  | --           | 1   | --  | 1   |
| REFUSED    | 1   | 1      | *  | 2            | --  | --  | --           | 1   | 1   | 1   |

ECON03A. 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% | 40%    | 26% | 23%          | 26% | 53% | 31%          | 28% | 37% | 35% |
| WORSE      | 23  | 16     | 30  | 29           | 27  | 14  | 28           | 23  | 27  | 15  |
| SAME       | 42  | 41     | 42  | 48           | 47  | 32  | 40           | 46  | 34  | 50  |
| DON'T KNOW | 2   | 2      | 2   | 1            | 1   | 1   | 2            | 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?

|                     | TOT | GENDER |     | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|---------------------|-----|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                     |     | M      | F   | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| GET BETTER          | 28% | 30%    | 26% | 28%          | 23% | 36% | 32%          | 24% | 27% | 32% |
| GET WORSE           | 23  | 20     | 25  | 22           | 24  | 20  | 25           | 27  | 26  | 11  |
| STAY ABOUT THE SAME | 47  | 47     | 47  | 48           | 52  | 43  | 43           | 47  | 44  | 56  |
| DON'T KNOW          | 2   | 2      | 3   | 2            | 2   | 1   | --           | 2   | 3   | 2   |
| REFUSED             | *   | *      | --  | --           | --  | *   | --           | *   | --  | --  |

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

|                     | TOT | GENDER |     | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|---------------------|-----|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                     |     | M      | F   | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| US higher than WI   | 16% | 21%    | 11% | 10%          | 14% | 26% | 12%          | 18% | 16% | 17% |
| US same as WI       | 70  | 68     | 71  | 68           | 73  | 66  | 70           | 66  | 74  | 65  |
| US lower than WI    | 12  | 8      | 16  | 21           | 12  | 6   | 16           | 12  | 7   | 17  |
| Either/both missing | 3   | 3      | 3   | 2            | 2   | 2   | 2            | 3   | 3   | 2   |

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?

|                     | TOT | GENDER |     | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|---------------------|-----|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                     |     | M      | F   | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| GET BETTER          | 20% | 23%    | 18% | 17%          | 15% | 29% | 15%          | 21% | 20% | 21% |
| GET WORSE           | 21  | 22     | 20  | 22           | 20  | 20  | 29           | 23  | 24  | 11  |
| STAY ABOUT THE SAME | 58  | 54     | 61  | 60           | 65  | 50  | 56           | 55  | 56  | 67  |
| DON'T KNOW          | 1   | 1      | 1   | 1            | 1   | *   | --           | 2   | 1   | 1   |
| REFUSED             | --  | --     | --  | --           | --  | --  | --           | --  | --  | --  |

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

|                      | TOT | GENDER |     | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|----------------------|-----|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                      |     | M      | F   | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| WI higher than local | 21% | 22%    | 20% | 26%          | 17% | 22% | 31%          | 15% | 21% | 26% |
| WI same as local     | 61  | 61     | 60  | 57           | 69  | 59  | 56           | 67  | 58  | 59  |
| WI lower than local  | 16  | 15     | 17  | 15           | 13  | 17  | 13           | 16  | 18  | 14  |
| Either/both missing  | 3   | 2      | 3   | 2            | 2   | 2   | --           | 3   | 3   | 2   |

JOBS01. Do you think now is a good time or a bad time to make major purchases such as furniture, a refrigerator, stove, television and things like that?

|                | TOT | GENDER |     | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|----------------|-----|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                |     | M      | F   | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| GOOD TIME      | 50% | 53%    | 47% | 51%          | 43% | 58% | 61%          | 48% | 46% | 54% |
| BAD TIME       | 38  | 36     | 39  | 39           | 45  | 29  | 33           | 43  | 40  | 31  |
| NEITHER (VOL.) | 8   | 8      | 8   | 6            | 8   | 8   | 2            | 6   | 11  | 9   |
| DON'T KNOW     | 4   | 3      | 6   | 4            | 4   | 5   | 4            | 3   | 4   | 5   |
| REFUSED        | *   | *      | --  | *            | --  | --  | --           | --  | --  | 1   |

JOBS02. Some people worry about losing their jobs because of layoffs or bad economic times. Others feel pretty secure. How would you describe yourself? Are you very secure in your present job, somewhat secure, somewhat insecure, or very insecure?

|                       | TOT | GENDER |     | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|-----------------------|-----|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                       |     | M      | F   | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| VERY SECURE           | 41% | 42%    | 39% | 37%          | 38% | 50% | 51%          | 45% | 46% | 21% |
| SOMEWHAT SECURE       | 27  | 24     | 29  | 27           | 26  | 26  | 19           | 36  | 29  | 13  |
| SOMEWHAT INSECURE     | 8   | 10     | 7   | 8            | 8   | 4   | 10           | 11  | 8   | 2   |
| VERY INSECURE         | 6   | 7      | 4   | 7            | 7   | 3   | 11           | 4   | 8   | 2   |
| DON'T HAVE JOB (VOL.) | 18  | 15     | 21  | 21           | 19  | 15  | 10           | 3   | 9   | 60  |
| DON'T KNOW            | 1   | 1      | --  | --           | --  | 2   | --           | 1   | --  | 1   |
| REFUSED               | *   | 1      | --  | *            | 1   | --  | --           | --  | 1   | 1   |

JOBS03. Is there anyone in your immediate family or among your close friends who who does not have a job right now and is actively trying to get one?

|            | TOT | GENDER |     | PARTISANSHIP |     |     | AGE IN YEARS |     |     |     |
|------------|-----|--------|-----|--------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-----|-----|
|            |     | M      | F   | DEM          | IND | REP | <30          | <45 | <60 | 60+ |
| YES        | 36% | 37%    | 35% | 32%          | 39% | 34% | 37%          | 36% | 42% | 25% |
| NO         | 64  | 63     | 65  | 68           | 61  | 66  | 63           | 64  | 58  | 75  |
| DON'T KNOW | *   | --     | *   | --           | --  | *   | --           | --  | --  | 1   |
| REFUSED    | --  | --     | --  | --           | --  | --  | --           | --  | --  | --  |

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% | 25%    | 36% | 100%         | --% | --% | 30%          | 28% | 28% | 40% |
| REPUBLICAN  | 29  | 33     | 26  | --           | --  | 100 | 33           | 31  | 27  | 28  |
| INDEPENDENT | 25  | 27     | 24  | --           | 100 | --  | 21           | 26  | 28  | 21  |
| OTHER       | 9   | 8      | 9   | --           | --  | --  | 7            | 11  | 10  | 4   |
| NONE        | 5   | 6      | 4   | --           | --  | --  | 5            | 3   | 7   | 5   |
| DON'T KNOW  | 1   | 1      | 1   | --           | --  | --  | 4            | 1   | --  | 1   |
| REFUSED     | 1   | --     | 1   | --           | --  | --  | --           | --  | *   | 2   |

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       | 14% | 14%    | 14% | 13%          | 12% | 15% | 100%         | --% | --% | --% |
| 30-44       | 31  | 33     | 28  | 28           | 32  | 33  | --           | 100 | --  | --  |
| 45-59       | 33  | 33     | 34  | 31           | 36  | 30  | --           | --  | 100 | --  |
| 60 and over | 20  | 18     | 22  | 27           | 17  | 19  | --           | --  | --  | 100 |
| DK/REFUSED  | 3   | 3      | 3   | 2            | 4   | 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 504 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between February 11 and 19, 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".