



Badger Poll™ #10, Release #5  
University of Wisconsin Survey Center  
University of Wisconsin Madison  
September 11, 2003

NOTE: When using material from this release please cite the Badger Poll™ conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, paid for by private funds at the University. The Capital Times (Madison) and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel are the poll's media sponsors.

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".

The overall GNS in late August 2003 stood at 1358, some 15% higher than it would be if all six components were evenly split between the most positive and most negative responses. Compared to earlier readings, it is down 100 points from last May, in the heady days right after the relatively bloodless US military victories in Iraq. But it is up almost as much compared to January 2003, when the war still lay in the future and the economic news was as troubling to many as it is now. The high point so far reached in the short history of the GNS in Wisconsin was June of 2002. At that point, it stood at 1525, or 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 somewhat more positive than women (1387. compared to 1325 as may be seen in the accompanying table). While both groups are below when they were in May, and

## DIMENSIONS AND OVERALL GNS OVER TIME

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

above January's level, however, the amount of change differs. Specifically men have fallen three times as much as women from May, when the "gap" between the two was much larger than it now is. But each has gained about the same over last January.

Democrats are markedly less positive than Independents now, and Republicans are as much more positive than Independents as that group is compared to Democrats. The overall partisan gap is some 678 points (more than one quarter the total theoretical range from 0, if everyone gave only the most negative answers to 2400 if all answers fell in the most positive category). This difference was roughly the same size in both May and January, but was somewhat smaller in June of last year.

At each point in time, those between the ages of forty-five and fifty-nine have tended to be the least positive, but other patterns have shifted. Thus, in June 2002, the most optimistic were those under thirty, with the oldest group (sixty and older) not far behind. In January, all three groups other than the forty-five to fifty-nine year olds were closely bunched. The range was also relatively small in May of this year, with the order of groups the same as in June 2002, even though the size of the gaps between them changed. Now, it is the thirty to forty-four year olds who score highest on the overall GNS.

## OVERALL GNS FOR KEY GROUPS OVER TIME

	6-02	1-03	5-03	8-03
	----	----	----	----
TOTAL	1525	1284	1458	1358
MALE	1571	1305	1539	1387
FEMALE	1486	1269	1372	1325
DEM	1341	1003	1153	1034
IND	1550	1241	1393	1352
REP	1524	1662	1784	1712
<30 YRS	1613	1316	1498	1405
30-44	1541	1317	1426	1448
45-59	1454	1221	1417	1287
60+ YRS	1578	1332	1485	1312

While each of the six components contributes something to an overall sense of how things are going for the country and its citizens, they can tell their own stories as well. In terms of its theoretical range, the least positive component at present is the expressed satisfaction with how things are going overall for the United States. Across groups, this now stands at 164 (remember that it would be 200 if equal numbers were "very satisfied" and "not at all satisfied").

This component has moved around a fair bit. It was 22 points higher in May than it now is. In January of this year (162) it was almost exactly where it stands at present. The most sanguine measurement so far was the 192 recorded in June of 2002. But even that, it should be noted fell (just) below the midpoint.

All the other components now are above where they would be if opinion split evenly between most positive and least positive responses. Satisfaction with personal finances (212 overall) comes closest to being evenly split, but is still 38 points more positive than satisfaction with the way things are going for the country, which is measured on the identical scale.

This component has moved in a narrow range. Its low (210 in January) 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.

The other measure of satisfaction (with one's life overall), is rather more positive now (244, compared to 212). This difference between the two components was very slightly smaller in May, with neither one having moved much. In January each was a bit lower than now. Finally the "high" so far in June of 2002 is less than twenty points above where this now stands. In any event, both measures of personal satisfaction tend to be relatively stable, with overall satisfaction somewhat higher than financial satisfaction.

The two components related to expected short term change show more variety. At present, overall expectations for the US over the next year are mildly positive (that is to say, among those answering the question, those expecting improvement outnumber those expecting worsening by just under ten points.

This measure is modestly down from May (when the base of satisfaction was also higher, having dropped 18 points. But it is now forty-three points above last January, and almost where it was in June of 2002. (Put another way, short term outlook became a good deal more pessimistic from June 2002 to January 2003, jumped in May to a point even higher than it had been originally, and has since fallen back partway.

The other expected change component (the future of the US economy over the next year) is now, as it has been on each of the previous measurements for the GNS been a bit more sanguine than for the country as a whole. At 255, this is currently the most positive GNS component. (Note that strictly speaking this does NOT mean that the level of satisfaction with the economy would necessarily be better, merely that there is more hope for improvement in the economy than for the US overall).

At present, the economic outlook is very modestly less positive than in May (but the eight point difference corresponds only to a 2% move from most positive to least positive). It has shown an improvement since January (when this was at its lowest), although June of 2002 was the single highest reading.

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 244, corresponding to 61% of those stating a view reporting that the approve of Bush's handling of his job. This is down some forty points (ten points moving from approve to disapprove) since May, and is about half that amount below the figure in January, during the leadup to war. This makes this component unique in that it is the only one to be lower now than last January, although two -- overall satisfaction and financial satisfaction -- were essentially identical to what they are now.

The big drop, however, is form June of 2002. Then, this component stood at 333 out of a possible 400, meaning that just under 83% of those stating an opinion at that point approved of Bush's performance in office. Against that, todays level of just over six in ten seems less impressive than it might in the absolute sense.

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: 8-03". 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: 8-03

	US NOW	US FUT	EC FUT	PERSNL	FINANCE	APPROVE	TOTAL
TOTAL	164	239	255	244	212	244	1358
MALE	170	251	275	234	204	253	1387
FEMALE	156	227	239	253	216	234	1325
DEM	130	190	208	214	174	118	1034
IND	154	252	254	242	210	240	1352
REP	208	283	315	285	253	368	1712
<30 YRS	164	256	286	238	204	257	1405
30-44	184	254	263	250	224	273	1448
45-59	150	218	233	255	208	223	1287
60+ YRS	149	235	264	227	210	227	1312

Republicans are notably more upbeat than Democrats overall (by 678 points). A good deal of this (250) relates to presidential approval, not surprisingly. But even if this difference -- corresponding to almost two thirds of what it would be if every Republican approved and every Democrat disapproved -- is great, partisans would differ very substantially on the GNS even if it were not included. There is roughly a one hundred point difference in outlook (just below that for the US overall, just above it for the economy. And on the three components related to expressed levels of satisfaction, Republicans are more positive than Democrats by amounts between seventy and eighty points.

Democrats are the most negative of all the groups examined on every single one of the six components. They are the only group to fall below the midpoint on overall outlook (with those expecting things to be worse outnumbering those

who expect they will be better). They are the least positive on economic outlook as well, but there fall just above the theoretical midpoint meaning an exact balance between those expecting things to get worse and those expecting them to improve on this front.

#### 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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	39%	60%	48%	38%	54%	45%	51%
FEMALE	51	--	100	62	40	52	62	46	55	49

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	6%	9%	3%	1%	6%	12%	7%	8%	4%	5%
MORE OR LESS SATISFIED	70	67	72	63	64	80	68	76	67	64
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	24	24	25	36	29	8	25	16	29	30
DON'T KNOW	*	--	*	1	--	--	--	--	--	1
REFUSED	*	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	36%	42%	30%	23%	38%	50%	37%	39%	29%	39%
WORSE	17	17	17	28	13	10	10	13	20	22
SAME	44	39	50	47	46	36	49	45	50	37
DON'T KNOW	2	2	2	2	3	2	4	2	1	1
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	44%	52%	37%	29%	44%	64%	47%	45%	36%	50%
WORSE	17	15	18	25	17	8	5	14	20	19
SAME	37	32	42	44	39	25	46	39	42	28
DON'T KNOW	2	1	4	2	--	3	2	3	2	3
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?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
VERY SATISFIED	33%	30%	36%	22%	33%	45%	34%	35%	32%	30%
MORE OR LESS SATISFIED	56	56	56	62	55	51	51	56	62	51
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	11	13	9	15	12	3	15	10	5	17
DON'T KNOW	*	1	*	1	--	1	--	--	1	1
REFUSED	*	1	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	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	24%	22%	25%	16%	24%	33%	28%	27%	21%	21%
MORE OR LESS SATISFIED	57	58	57	54	57	59	46	58	61	61
NOT AT ALL SATISFIED	18	20	17	29	19	7	26	15	17	16
DON'T KNOW	1	*	1	*	*	1	--	--	1	*
REFUSED	*	--	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	58%	62%	55%	28%	57%	91%	61%	67%	53%	54%
DISAPPROVE	37	36	39	67	38	8	34	31	42	41
DON'T KNOW	4	1	6	5	4	1	4	1	4	6
REFUSED	1	2	*	--	1	--	1	1	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	29%	23%	35%	100%	--%	--%	25%	20%	36%	33%
REPUBLICAN	30	30	30	--	--	100	23	31	26	35
INDEPENDENT	29	35	23	--	100	--	34	30	27	26
OTHER	9	12	7	--	--	--	16	16	6	4
NONE	2	1	2	--	--	--	3	2	2	1
DON'T KNOW	1	*	2	--	--	--	--	1	2	1
REFUSED	*	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	1	--

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	12%	9%	14%	10%	14%	9%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	29	32	26	21	31	30	--	100	--	--
45-59	31	29	33	39	30	27	--	--	100	--
60 and over	24	25	23	27	22	28	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	4	5	4	3	4	7	--	--	--	--

\* 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 511 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between August 18 and 27, 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".