



Badger Poll™ #1, Release 5
University of Wisconsin Survey Center
University of Wisconsin Madison
April 4, 2002

NOTE: When using material from this release please cite the Badger Poll™ conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, sponsored in part by Wisconsin Public Broadcasting and the Capital Times.

THE SPACE PROGRAM AND OUR PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

Wisconsin residents support a program of space exploration, although they are somewhat less positive than Americans in general. While most doubt that there are humanoids like us on other planets, a substantial minority believe we are not alone in the universe, and a smaller group think we have already been visited from other worlds. These are among the findings of the inaugural Badger Poll™, conducted by the University of Wisconsin (Madison) Survey Center and sponsored in part by Wisconsin Public Broadcasting and the Capital Times. The survey interviewed 597 randomly chosen state residents by telephone between March 5 and 17, inclusive, and has a "margin of error" of plus or minus four percent. National comparisons are based on the UWSC's Continuous National survey, for which 588 persons from around the country were interviewed between October 1 of last year and January 9 of 2002.

The public is favorably disposed toward a national program of space exploration. When asked whether they favor or oppose the US space program (no further definition was offered) seven in ten (70%) state residents say they favor it, just under one in four (23%) were opposed. This means that Wisconsin residents were about ten points less favorable than was a national sample asked exactly the same question: some 81% of them said they were in favor. Wisconsin Men are about ten points more favorable than women as a group. Support increases from two in three to eight in ten as one moves from Democrat to Republican. Age is complicated, with the youngest most in favor, the oldest least so, but those between thirty and forty-five looking pretty much like the oldest group.

Going along with this, just over half (54%) when respondents were asked to choose among three basic descriptions of the space program, said "exciting and worthwhile". Another quarter (27%) said it was "necessary to keep up with other countries", while just under one in six (15%) took the stance that it was "a waste of time and money". Among the national sample, two in three found it exciting and worthwhile, with proportionately fewer choosing one of the other alternatives.

Again there is a difference between men and women in Wisconsin as groups, with six in ten of the former, but under one in two of the latter seeing the space program as exciting and worthwhile. (Women were more likely than men to feel the program was necessary to keep up with other nations). Republicans were more positive than either Democrats or Independents. Interest trails off notably among the oldest group, which splits roughly evenly between those viewing the program as exciting and worthwhile and those who see it as necessary to keep up. Few in any group labeled the program wasteful.

Personalizing the focus, just under four in ten (37%) state residents said that "if you had a chance to go into space" they would do so. Just over six in ten would not. This means that Wisconsin is about ten points less likely than residents of the nation as a whole to want to go into space themselves. But this overall result obscures some rather clear group differences.

Gender makes a big difference: half of men (51%), but only one in four women (23%) would like to go into space themselves. (Nationally the "gender gap" on this question is about the same size, 62% of men, but only 34% of women would go, but this means that both groups nationally are ten points more likely to want to go into space than is the case for Wisconsin).

Within Wisconsin, there is a modest increase (from 32% to 43%) as one moves from Democrat to Republican. There is a substantial dividing line at around age forty-five. Below that point, roughly half would venture into space. Above it only about one in four would.

Of course, the space program involves more than sending humans into space. When respondents were reminded that we have both manned flights and unmanned probes (the shuttle and the Voyager spacecraft were used as examples) two residents in three (68%) would leave the balance about where it is now. Among those favoring a shift in emphasis, slightly more would opt for more unmanned flights (17%) than more manned (12%), but there is no groundswell of sentiment in favor of any real change. Partisanship makes little difference. Beyond the fact that a greater percentage is content as one moves up the age ladder, with the two middle groups falling close to one another, the pattern is roughly similar despite age. This is one question where the national results look very much like those obtained in Wisconsin in March.

Asked to imagine that they "had a son or daughter who wanted to be an astronaut", eight in ten (80%) would encourage such an ambition, although one cannot be sure whether this signifies approval of astronauts as such or backing whatever one's offspring might want to do. In any event, only one in eight (13%) would discourage such a career plan. National figures (83% encourage, 9% discourage) were at least as sympathetic to such a career as are Wisconsin results.

Those with children at home, for whom this is less a hypothetical, are at least as likely to say they would encourage such an ambition as they would be to counsel against it. Men as a group were modestly more positive than women. Partisanship seems to exert little influence. Enthusiasm notably trails off as one moves up the age ladder, from nine in ten among the youngest group to two in three among the oldest. Despite the fact that the question was deliberately framed to make it easy to distinguish between a son and daughter if one wished, only a handful did.

If the decision had to be made all over again about whether to send Americans to the moon, seven in eight (86%) state residents would do so all over again. One in eight (12%) would not. These figures are virtually the same as the identical question found among the national sample. Gender and partisan groups are broadly similar. There is a modest decline with age, but all groups have a large majority in favor.

A hypothetical mission to Mars generates less backing. Overall, six in ten residents (61%) would favor this, while one in three (34%) would oppose it. This level of approval is about ten points lower than was found among the national sample for the same mission.

Men are a bit more positive than women as a group. There is a somewhat higher backing among Republicans than among the other two groups. But it is age where differences are most clearly noted. Eight in ten among the youngest group favor a Mars mission by the US. Comparable figures fall to two thirds and six in ten respectively for the middle groups, and a majority of those over sixty stand against it.

An "international manned mission to Mars" fares about the same. Overall, some two thirds (65%) back this idea, while three in ten (31%) oppose it. Enthusiasm was modestly higher among the national sample, but only about five points difference was observed. Partisan results are quite mixed, there is again a falloff with age, with support falling from more than eight in ten to just about half. Few seem to place much emphasis on whether or not the US goes it alone. Only about one resident in eight favors one mission and opposes the other.

There have been a number of "spinoffs" from the space program ranging from "Tang" to computer and telecommunication innovation. Granted this, it may not be surprising that just under six in ten (57%) believe the space program has made life on earth better because of technological advances. This group outweighs those who think that life would have been better if the resources consumed by space had been otherwise employed by almost five to one. A sizable minority (three in ten) when asked this question, saw no real difference.

Men, who as a group often take a more "pro-technology" stance than women, conform to that pattern here. Two thirds of men, but just under half of women, believe that technological advances from the space program have improved life here on earth. Those who grew up in the heyday of the "space race" (the forty-five to sixty year olds) are most likely to see improvement. The next older group is least likely so to do. National figures are slightly less likely to see improvement, but still the largest group clearly thinks tech offshoots have improved more mundane earthly situations.

Science fiction deals with some of the same matters as science fact, and the relationship between the two can be complex (many of those who saw or re-saw "2001 a Space Odyssey" around the time its theoretical temporal setting arrived were struck at the way a number of its predictions had failed to come true, while in other respects, notably computers and telecommunications, the actual world of 2001 was markedly ahead of what the fictional 2001 had depicted some three decades earlier). In any event, the sample is split whether the sort of thing depicted in Star Trek and such offerings ("humans exploring distant solar systems and so on") would really come to pass. Just under half (45%) of Wisconsin residents felt they would, about the same-sized group (47%) felt it was "all just fantasy". These results are not strongly different from what the same question obtained in the national sample (although there a small plurality felt such visions would eventually come true). Men and women do not differ much. Those in the space-race generation currently between forty-five and sixty were most "optimistic".

A small proportion believes that we are now being visited than thinks we shall ultimately explore space beyond the immediate confines of the solar system. One in three (34%) believe that "unidentified flying objects" are "really from outer space". Just over half (54%) thinks there is some other explanation for this phenomena. Belief in the extraterrestrial explanation for UFO's is roughly as prevalent in Wisconsin as it is nationally, and is lowest (about one in four) among the oldest group.

If UFO's are truly extraterrestrial visitors, that of course implies that "we are not alone", but the converse is not necessarily true (that is, there could be humanoids out there who have not yet come calling -- after all there is "intelligent" life on earth, but save for a handful of unmanned probes and television and radio signals, we have provided scant evidence of our own existence to anyone who might be out there. In any event, just over four in ten (42%) do believe that there are "people more or less like us on other planets". Just over half (51%) do not think there are. As on a number of questions, the oldest age group distinguishes itself in the relatively low number of those who think extraterrestrial intelligence "more or less" similar to us might exist. Wisconsin residents are more willing to venture an opinion on this topic than were their counterparts in the national study, but the proportion who believe there are others out there is roughly comparable.

STATEWIDE MARGINALS AND PERCENTAGES FOR KEY GROUPS

What follows is the exact question wording for each of the items referred to in the release. 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 their age group (calculated from year of birth: 18-29; 30-44; 45-59; sixty and older.) Finally, those with a child or children at home (including cases of shared custody) are shown in column eleven, while those without children at home are shown in column twelve. For the "substantive questions" on the space program, a final column shows the marginals from 558 interviews conducted across the country as part of the University of Wisconsin's Continuous National Survey between October 1, 2001 and January 9, 2002.

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

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
MALE	49%	100%	--%	43%	52%	53%	51%	51%	50%	43%	47%	50%
FEMALE	51	--	100	57	48	47	49	49	50	58	53	50

SPA01: Changing the subject... In general, do you favor or oppose the US space program?

	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		NAT	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES		NO
FAVOR	70%	75%	66%	64%	68%	79%	78%	67%	72%	66%	74%	68%	81%
OPPOSE	23	21	24	28	28	14	16	24	25	23	18	26	12
DON'T KNOW	6	4	9	7	3	6	6	8	3	10	7	6	7
REFUSED	1	--	2	1	*	1	--	1	1	*	1	*	*

SPA02: Which of the following comes closest to how you think of the space program, is it...

- * a waste of time and money
- * only necessary to keep up with other countries
- or
- * exciting and worthwhile?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
WASTE TIME/MONEY	15%	13%	16%	18%	17%	10%	9%	17%	15%	17%	11%	17%	10%
NECESSARY KEEP UP	27	22	32	27	28	22	27	23	22	41	22	31	19
EXCITING/WORTH	54	61	47	52	51	63	60	55	60	39	61	50	68
DON'T KNOW	3	3	4	3	1	5	2	5	3	3	5	2	3
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	2	1	2	1	1	--	1	*	*

SPA03: If you had a chance to go into space, do you think you'd take it?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
YES	37%	51%	23%	32%	38%	43%	53%	49%	27%	21%	47%	30%	47%
NO NAT	62	48	76	68	61	57	46	50	73	78	53	69	52
DON'T KNOW	1	1	*	--	*	*	1	1	*	*	1	1	*
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	1	--	1	--	--	*	--	--

SPA04: Up to now, the U.S. space program has involved both manned flights -- such as the shuttle -- and unmanned probes such as the Voyager spacecraft. For the future, do you think we should put more emphasis on manned flights than we have, more on unmanned missions, or keep it about the same?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
MORE ON MANNED	12%	12%	11%	12%	11%	11%	18%	12%	9%	10%	12%	12%	13%
MORE ON UNMANNED	17	20	14	16	20	21	16	18	18	16	12	20	16
ABOUT SAME	68	66	70	68	68	67	62	69	67	72	73	65	66
DON'T KNOW	3	2	4	5	1	2	3	2	5	2	3	3	4
REFUSED	1	*	1	--	1	1	--	1	1	--	*	1	1

SPA05: If you had a son or daughter who wanted to be an astronaut, would you encourage them to do this or discourage them?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
ENCOURAGE	80%	84%	76%	82%	79%	84%	91%	86%	77%	64%	87%	74%	83%
DISCOURAGE	13	11	15	14	15	10	8	9	12	25	7	17	9
ENC. SON (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	*
ENC. DAUGHTER (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DISC. SON (VOL.)	*	--	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	--	*	--	--
DISC. DAUGHTER (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
WHATEVER WANT (VOL.)	7	5	8	3	7	6	--	5	10	10	5	8	6
DON'T KNOW	*	--	1	1	--	1	--	--	1	1	--	1	2
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	1	--	1	--	--	*	--	*

SPA06: Some thirty years ago, American astronauts landed on the moon for the first time. If we were making the decision all over again, do you think we should have gone to the moon?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
YES	86%	89%	84%	84%	86%	90%	95%	86%	85%	82%	89%	84%	86%
NO	12	10	14	16	14	9	5	11	13	17	8	15	10
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	*	*	1	--	2	2	1	2	1	4
REFUSED	*	--	1	--	--	1	--	1	--	--	1	--	1

SPA07: And would you favor or oppose sending a U.S. manned mission to Mars?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
FAVOR	61%	68%	55%	58%	59%	66%	80%	67%	60%	39%	71%	54%	71%
OPPOSE	34	31	38	37	39	29	15	29	38	54	25	41	25
ONLY W/OTH (VOL)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	4	1	6	3	2	4	5	3	2	6	3	4	4
REFUSED	1	--	2	1	--	1	--	1	1	1	1	*	*

SPA08: How about an international manned mission to Mars? Would you favor or oppose that?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
FAVOR	65%	69%	61%	64%	65%	67%	83%	69%	62%	49%	73%	60%	70%
OPPOSE	31	28	34	33	32	27	15	26	35	46	23	37	25
DON'T KNOW	4	3	4	2	3	5	2	4	3	5	4	4	4
REFUSED	*	--	1	1	--	1	--	1	--	--	1	--	*

SPA09: Overall, do you think the space program has made life on earth better because of technological advances, made it worse because money was spent there instead of other ways, or not really made that much difference one way or the other?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
MADE LIFE BETTER	57%	67%	47%	58%	59%	62%	58%	54%	65%	44%	59%	55%	52%
WORSE BY DIVERSION	12	9	15	14	16	8	4	15	12	16	9	14	10
NOT DIFFERENCE	30	23	36	28	25	29	37	30	22	39	29	30	34
DON'T KNOW	1	1	2	1	*	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
REFUSED	*	*	*	*	--	1	1	1	--	--	*	*	1

SPA10: Do you think the sort of things seen on things like Star Trek -- humans exploring distant solar systems and so on -- will ever really happen, or is it all just fantasy?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	NAT
WILL HAPPEN	45%	47%	44%	47%	49%	42%	37%	40%	56%	39%	46%	44%	47%
JUST FANTASY	47	45	48	44	46	50	61	52	35	49	48	46	41
ONLY PARTIAL (VOL)	5	5	4	5	3	5	1	4	7	3	4	6	7
DON'T KNOW	4	2	5	4	2	3	1	4	2	8	2	4	5
REFUSED	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	*	*

SPA11: Some people believe unidentified flying objects -- so-called UFO's--come from outer space; other people think they have some other explanation. What about you, do you think UFO's are really from outer space, or not?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		NAT
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	
YES, OUTER SPACE	34%	36%	32%	36%	35%	27%	33%	35%	36%	26%	34%	34%	35%
NO	54	52	56	52	54	63	62	51	50	61	52	55	52
DON'T KNOW	11	12	11	11	10	9	5	11	13	13	12	11	12
REFUSED	1	1	1	1	1	1	--	2	1	--	2	1	1

SPA12: Do you think there are people more or less like us on other planets?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		NAT
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	
YES	42%	46%	38%	42%	43%	39%	46%	47%	42%	27%	41%	42%	38%
NO	51	47	54	48	49	56	52	48	46	63	54	49	48
DON'T KNOW	7	6	9	9	8	5	2	4	11	10	5	9	13
REFUSED	1	1	1	--	*	1	--	1	1	--	*	1	1

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

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME	
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
Democrat	32%	28%	35%	100%	--%	--%	26%	28%	36%	36%	28%	35%
Republican	28	31	26	--	--	100	32	33	23	31	30	27
Independent	22	23	21	--	100	--	22	18	27	20	21	23
Other	11	14	8	--	--	--	8	16	10	5	14	8
None	4	2	6	--	--	--	10	4	3	3	4	4
DON'T KNOW	1	*	2	--	--	--	2	1	1	*	1	1
REFUSED	2	1	3	--	--	--	1	2	2	3	2	2

QD07: Are there any children, younger than eighteen years of age, living in your household at the present time?

	GENDER			PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME		NAT
	TOT	M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO	
Yes	42%	41%	44%	38%	40%	44%	44%	75%	37%	1%	99%	--%	
No	57	59	56	62	60	55	56	24	63	99	--	100	
Sometime/shared (Vol)	*	*	*	--	--	1	--	1	*	--	1	--	
DON'T KNOW	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	
REFUSED	*	--	*	--	--	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	

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

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS				KID HOME	
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+	YES	NO
18-29	15%	16%	15%	12%	15%	17%	100%	--%	--%	--%	16%	15%
30-44	31	32	29	27	25	35	--	100	--	--	54	13
45-59	32	33	32	37	39	26	--	--	100	--	28	36
60 and over	20	17	22	23	18	22	--	--	--	100	1	34
DON'T KNOW	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
REFUSED	2	1	2	2	4	--	--	--	--	--	1	2

* denotes less than .5%
 -- denotes 0%

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

This inaugural 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 poll was sponsored in part by Wisconsin Public Broadcasting and 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 597 randomly selected adult residents of Wisconsin were interviewed over the telephone from March 5-17, 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 about +/- 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".