

# Quarterly Profile

## OF NEW MEXICO CITIZENS

A UNM INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

SUMMER 1992—VOL 4/NO 3

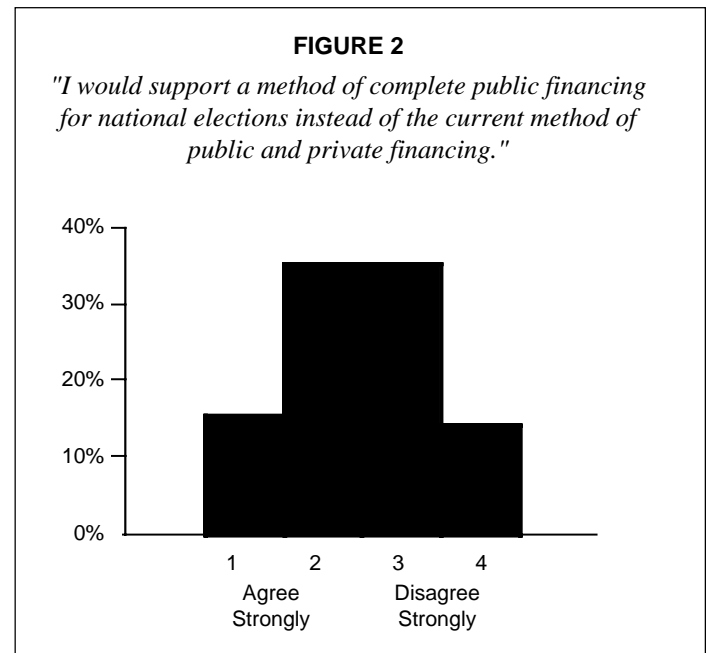
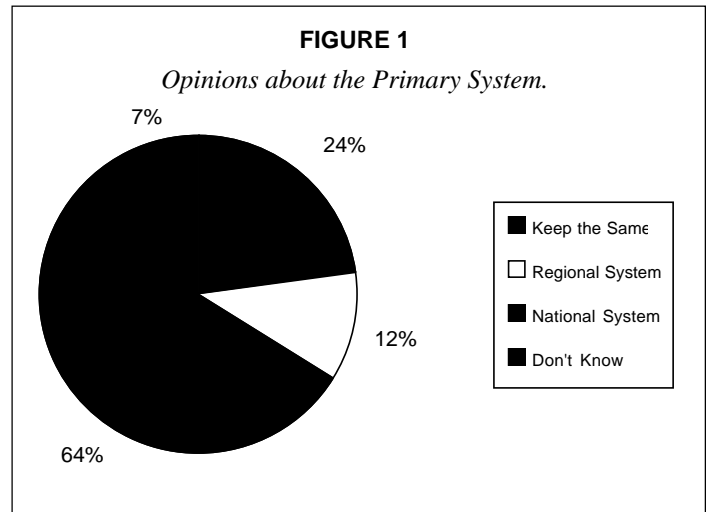
### FOCUS: OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM

This edition of the *Quarterly Profile of New Mexico Citizens* focuses on New Mexicans' attitudes toward our political system. This issue has been divided into four parts. The first part looks at New Mexicans' attitudes toward our electoral system. Second, we look at New Mexicans' evaluation of the institutions and leaders of our representative democracy (the President, Congress, and political parties). Third, we look at another essential part of our political system, the media. Finally, we look at what choices New Mexicans make when given the opportunity to reallocate governmental spending. The rest of this report profiles a number of issues which we have been tracking since November of 1988.

### The Electoral System

The recent presidential primaries and the media debate over the importance of New Mexico's primary prompted us to ask our respondents for their opinions about the primary election system and methods of financing political campaigns. (New Mexico is one of the last states to hold the Presidential Primary election, and there has been some debate over the relative importance of the New Mexico vote to the candidates.) We asked New Mexicans, "... would you prefer to keep the current presidential primary system, change to a regional primary system where many states in a region have primary elections on the same day, or would you prefer a single national primary where all of the states vote on the same day?" Almost two-thirds (64%) of New Mexican respondents chose the national primary system. About 24% of respondents wanted to keep the present system while 12% wanted a regional primary. About 7% responded "don't know" to the question. See Figure 1.

The issue of campaign financing has been raised by some of the Presidential contenders, Democrats Jerry Brown and Paul Tsongas in particular. When New Mexicans were asked about their attitudes towards total public financing of political campaigns as opposed to the current system which is a mixture of both public and private sources, about 50% of respondents supported a method of complete public financing while about 50% did not. While neither side of the issue had a majority, the fact that 50% of New Mexicans would support change shows a significant level of dissatisfaction with current campaign financing methods. See Figure 2. Democrats were much more likely to *agree* with the idea of public financing while those in Southeastern New Mexico were much more likely to *disagree*. The attitude of those in Southeastern New Mexico is perhaps due to its ideologically conservative base.



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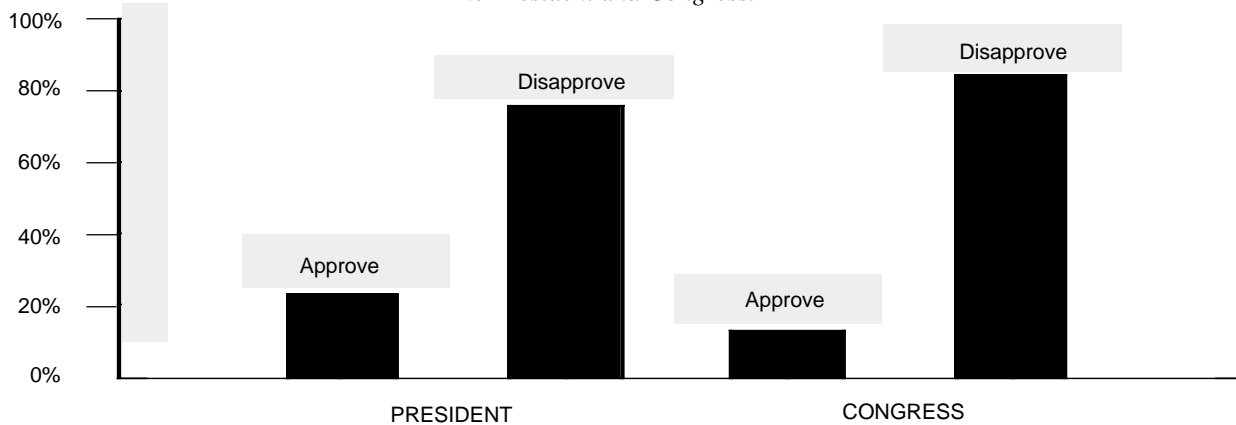
## The Leaders

The campaign has thus far been characterized by an attitude of discontent regarding conventional politicians and incumbents. Many analysts believe that this has accounted for the popularity of H. Ross Perot, a candidate with no previous political record who campaigned for President as an independent. We were curious to find out how dissatisfied are New Mexican citizens. Consequently, we asked our respondents to assess the President, Congress, and the political parties.

When asked to rate the performance of Congress and George Bush, New Mexicans did not respond favorably. Only 23% of respondents felt that the President does an "Excellent" (3%) or "Good" (20%) job while 76% felt that his performance was "Fair" (38%) or "Poor" (38%). One percent of respondents did not answer the question. Only 13% of respondents felt that the performance of Congress was either "Excellent" (1%) or "Good" (12%) while 84% felt it was "Fair" (35%) or "Poor" (49%). About 3% of respondents did not answer the question. See Figure 3. Those most likely to approve of the President's performance are older, have a higher income, or live in Northeastern New Mexico. Those most likely to disapprove are self-identified whites, Democrats, and/or have a higher level of education. Those most likely to approve of Congress' performance are Democrats and/or females while those most likely to disapprove are self-identified whites and/or have a higher level of education.

**FIGURE 3**

*The President and Congress.*

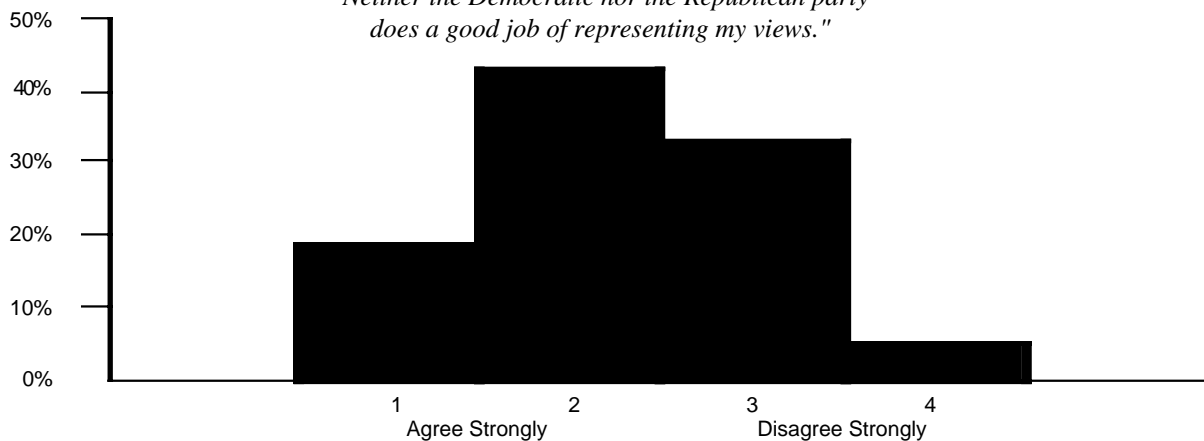


When asked about political parties, a majority of respondents seemed to feel alienated from these organizations. About 61% of respondents felt that the political parties *did not* do a good job of representing their views while

only 39% felt that they *did* do a good job of representing their views. See Figure 4. Democrats are more likely to disagree with the statement while those with a higher level of education are more likely to agree.

**FIGURE 4**

*"Neither the Democratic nor the Republican party does a good job of representing my views."*



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**FOCUS: OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM**

## The Media

The public's main sources of information about political candidates are the news media. We asked the respondents to agree or disagree with the following statement: "The news media provide me with enough information about candidates to make an informed decision about who to vote for." About 39% of respondents agreed with that statement while about 61% disagreed. This indicates that New Mexicans are dissatisfied with the information provided by the media. See Figure 5. Those who are self-identified whites and/or have a higher level of education are more likely to disagree with the statement while Democrats and/or those who are older are more likely to agree.

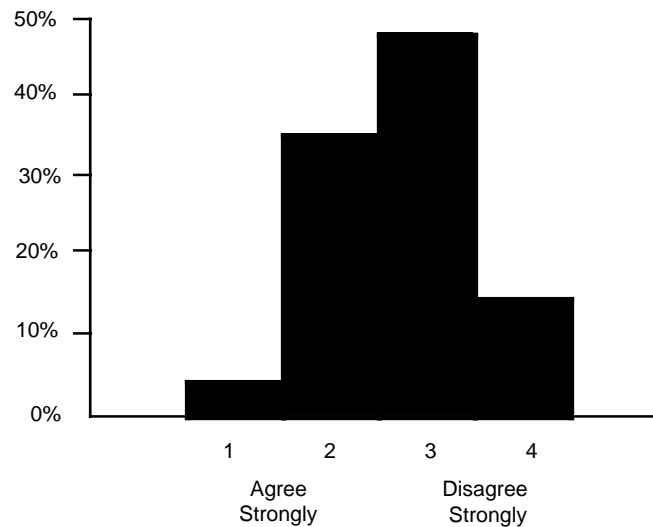
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*The news media have done a fair and accurate job of covering the presidential campaign.*

However, New Mexicans *do* feel that the news media are providing fair and accurate information about the presidential campaign. When respondents were given the following statement, "The news media have done a fair and accurate job of covering the presidential campaign so far," 54% of respondents agreed while 46% disagreed. This indicates that although respondents feel that the news media do not provide them with *enough information* to make an informed judgement about election campaigns in general, they feel that the media have done a fair and accurate job of covering the presidential campaign so far. See Figure 6.

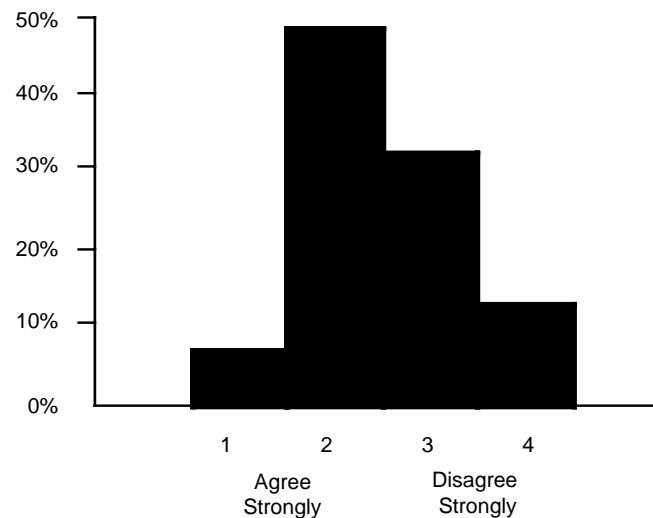
**FIGURE 5**

*"The news media provide me with enough information about candidates to make an informed decision about who to vote for."*



**FIGURE 6**

*"The news media have done a fair and accurate job of covering the presidential campaign so far."*



## FOCUS: OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM

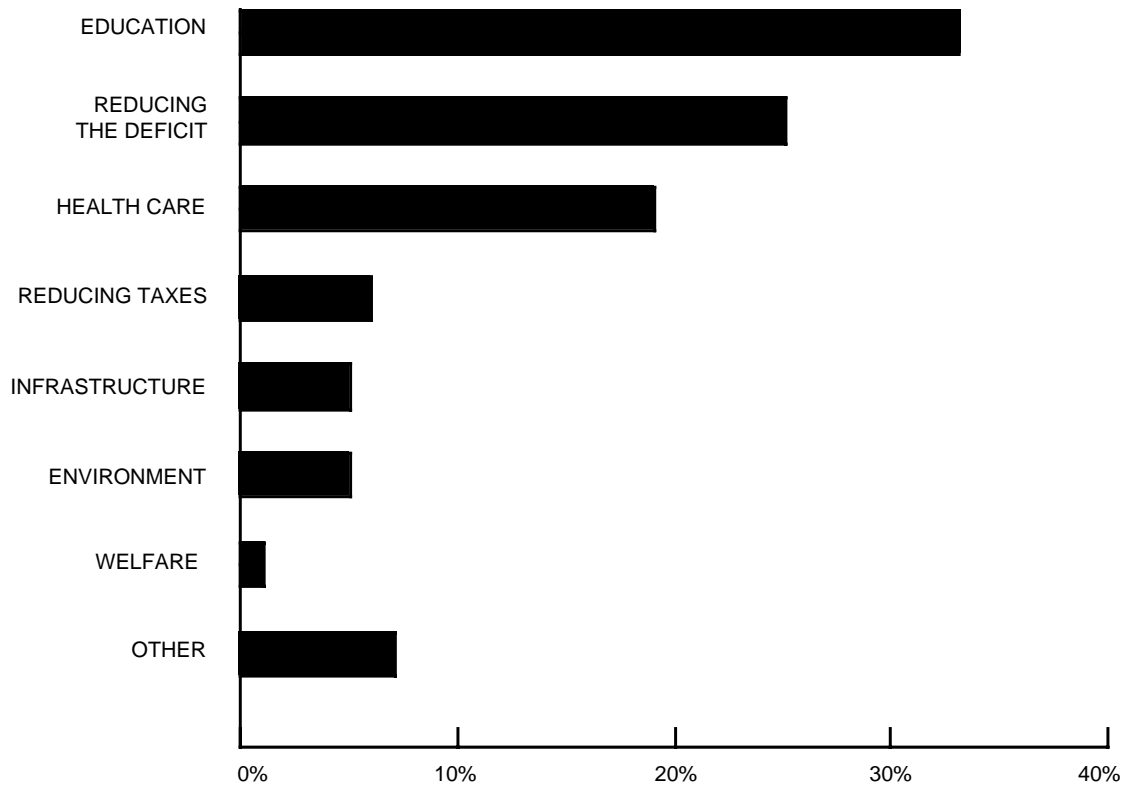
### Public Assessment of Policy Options

When provided an opportunity to alter the distribution of public expenditures through the "peace dividend," New Mexicans gave us some interesting results. Asked how they would spend the "peace dividend," 33% of respondents wanted the money spent on education. A quarter of respondents (25%) wanted the money spent on

reducing the deficit while another 19% chose "health care". About 6% wanted to reduce taxes while 5% wanted it spent on infrastructure and 5% wanted it spent on the environment. Only 1% of respondents wanted the money spent on welfare and 7% indicated something other than the categories listed. See Figure 7.

**FIGURE 7**

*"With the breakup of the Soviet Union, the President and Congress have decided to decrease the size of our military defense budget. What should we do with the money we save? Should we spend it on ..."*



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## UNM INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

The Institute for Public Policy serves New Mexicans as a non-partisan forum for research, analysis, data collection and training. The Institute's Survey Research Center conducts surveys and research on the policy preferences and political attitudes of New Mexico citizens. The *Quarterly Profile* is distributed to federal, state, and local New Mexico policy makers, corporate and civic leaders, private organizations, the media and interested citizens.

### SURVEY DATA

The UNM Institute for Public Policy conducted its survey of New Mexico citizens through telephone interviews with 568 adult New Mexicans in May of 1992. The telephone numbers were selected randomly by computer. The results of the poll have a five percentage point margin of error at a 95 percent level of confidence, which means that 19 out of 20 times the findings should be within 5 points of the results that would be obtained if all New Mexico households were surveyed. The margin of error is larger for subgroups of the sample because of the smaller number of observations. As with any survey a potential source of error is the possibility that variation in the wording of questions or the order in which questions are asked could produce different results.

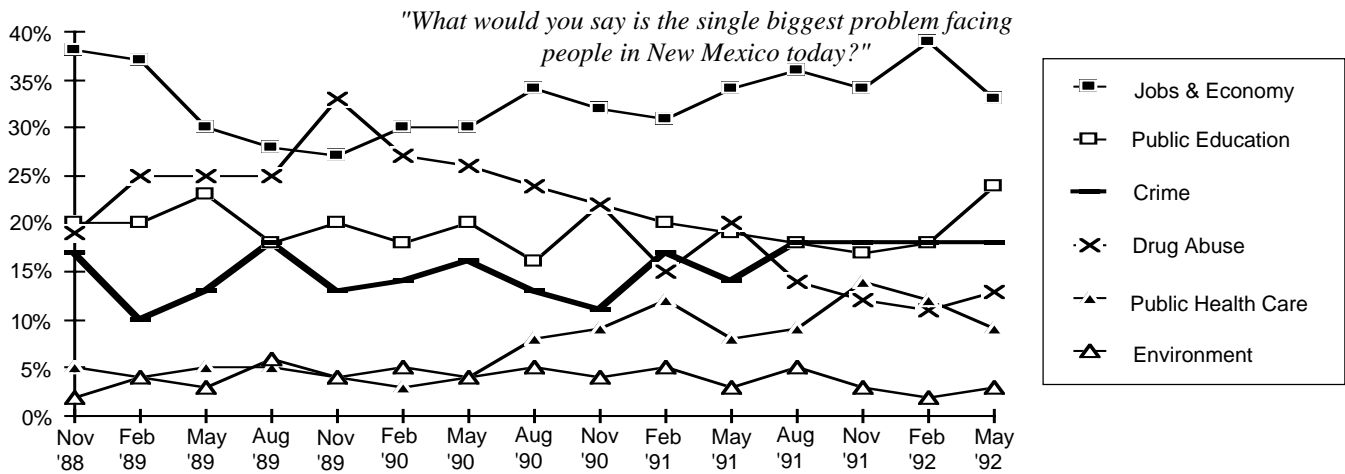
TRENDS

### Most Pressing Policy Concerns

Jobs and the economy remained the number one public policy problem most frequently chosen by New Mexicans in May. After an all time high of 39% last February, jobs and the economy dropped to 33% in the May survey. The second-largest problem facing New Mexicans was public education, which rose from about 18% in February to 24%. Concerns about crime have stayed at the same level (18%) since August of 1991. The importance of drug abuse (13%) has taken its first upturn with respondents since August of 1991 and now has a larger

percentage than public health care (9%). The environment was once again the least selected problem at 3%. See Figure 8. For this question in the May 1992 survey, we used a randomized ordering of the problems read to the respondents. After analysis, we found a *statistically significant* difference in problem selection based on problem order. Some of the change in problem selection from our previous survey may be attributed to the change in methodology.

FIGURE 8

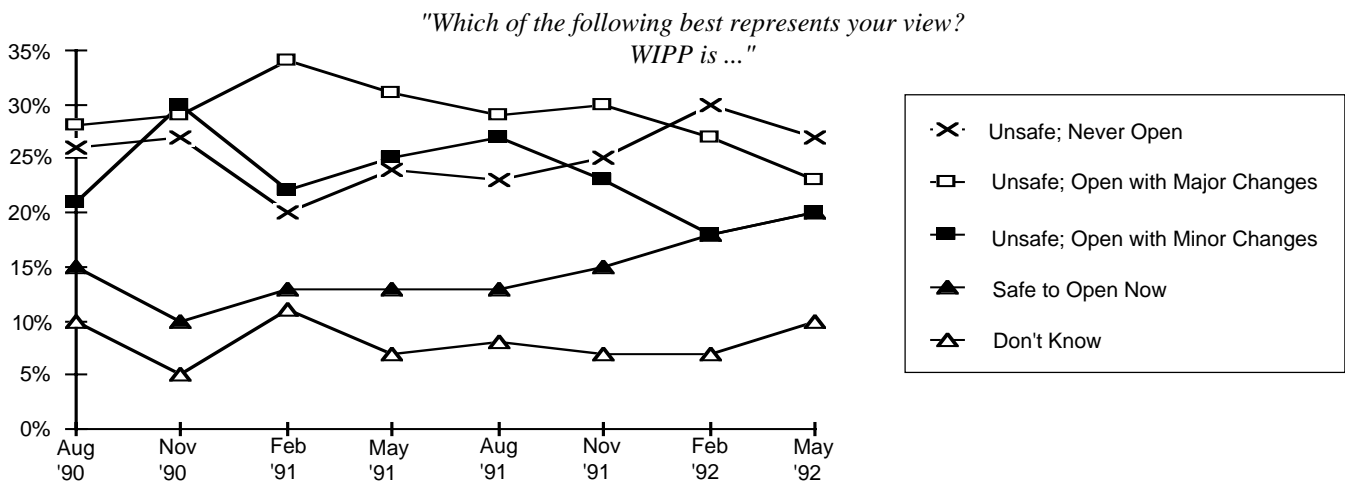


### Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

Perceptions about the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Southeastern New Mexico appear to be much more positive this May than they were in February, 1992. The percentage of those who feel that WIPP is “safe to use as it is” (20%) has continued a rising trend since February of 1991. The number of respondents who feel that WIPP is “Unsafe and should never be

opened” has declined from a peak of 29% in February of 1992 to 27%. The number of respondents who feel that WIPP is “unsafe but may be made safe with major changes” has also declined to 23% while the number of those who feel that WIPP is “only slightly unsafe and can be made safe with minor changes” has risen from February, 1992 to 20%. See Figure 9.

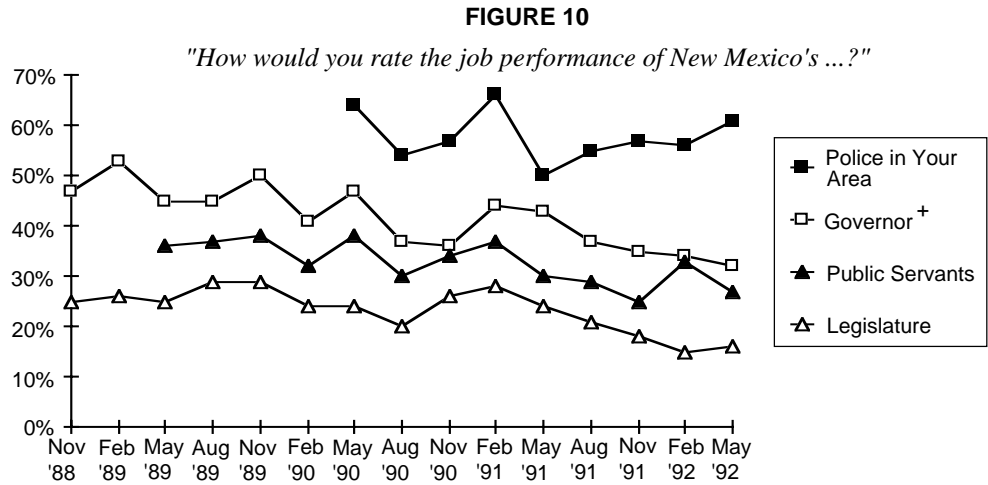
FIGURE 9



## TRENDS

## Citizen Approval Ratings\*

New Mexicans' approval of the job performance of the "Police in your area" has continued its gradual increase from August of 1991 to 61% with 48% responding "good" and 13% responding "excellent". Approval for the job performance of the Governor of New Mexico has continued its gradual decline from May, 1991 with 29% saying "good" and 3% saying "excellent". Those who approve of the job public servants are doing decreased to 27% while approval for the Legislature increased slightly to 16% from 15% in February of 1992. See Figure 10.



<sup>+</sup> Gov. Carruthers: Nov '88 to Nov '90; Gov. King: Feb '91 to May '92

\* Approval ratings are calculated as a percentage of the total of all respondents, regardless of whether they provided an answer to the question. Those responding "excellent" or "good" are assumed to "approve" of job performance while those responding "fair" or "poor" are assumed to "disapprove."

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