

Quarterly Profile

OF NEW MEXICO CITIZENS

A UNM INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

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FOCUS: LEGISLATIVE ETHICS

Two years ago the Institute for Public Policy's Winter/Spring 1991 survey of New Mexico citizens focused on people's perceptions of the ethical standards and conduct of the New Mexico legislature. This Winter/Spring 1993 profile of New Mexico's residents revisited the questions asked earlier for the purpose of finding out how views have changed in the intervening two years. In addition, respondents were asked new questions which dealt with issues such as election campaign spending and legislators' compensation that

have been prominent in the recent debate surrounding the issue of legislative ethics. In addition, the analysis of time serial data continues on the approval ratings for the Governor, State Legislature, and Police, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), and Quality of Life in New Mexico. This *Quarterly* takes the response categories we have used in the past regarding the biggest problem facing people in New Mexico, and breaks them down into more specific ones in order to allow a more precise description of New Mexicans' concerns.

Legislative Ethics Revisited: What Is Acceptable Behavior For Legislators?

During the recently concluded legislative session the topic of Legislative Ethics received renewed attention. Our survey investigated public opinion regarding specific legislative behaviors. Respondents were read a list of possible actions then asked whether in their opinions such actions by members of the Legislature should be allowed or prohibited. Table 1 shows the results of the 1993 survey in comparison to those of 1991. With the sole exception of **requesting gifts of money from lobbyists or interest groups** people surveyed in 1993 reflected more prohibitive attitudes toward behaviors by legislators than did respondents in 1991. **Accepting campaign support from lobbyists or interest groups** was the behavior that displayed the greatest change in respondents' opinions. Fully 75% of those asked thought that acceptance of campaign support from such sources should be prohibited. This reflected an increase of 11 percentage points from 1991. More than nine out of ten people surveyed said that legislators should be prohibited from **accepting trips or vacations from lobbyists or interest groups**.

TABLE 1

"Should the following behaviors be prohibited or allowed . . . ?"
(A Two-year Comparison)

	Prohibit		Allow		Don't know	
	1991	1993	1991	1993	1991	1993
Requesting gifts of money	86%	84%	9%	14%	5%	2%
Accepting unrequested gifts of money	80	88	16	10	4	2
Accepting trips or vacations	86	91	10	8	4	1
Accepting discounts on goods or services	80	87	15	11	5	2
Accepting speaker's fees	65	74	29	24	6	2
Accepting campaign support	64	75	30	23	6	2
Keeping excess campaign funds as income	NA	90	NA	8	NA	2
Representing clients to state agencies	NA	82	NA	15	NA	3

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Questions also were included in this survey that were not asked in 1991 but are pertinent to the current ethics debate. These inquiries dealt with whether legislative candidates should be permitted to **keep excess campaign contributions as personal income**, and whether or not legislators should be **allowed to represent clients in a private capacity before state agencies** that the Legislature oversees. Overwhelming majorities of people polled (90% and 82% respectively) favored prohibiting both of these actions.

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Acceptable Behavior

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Perceptions of Unethical Behavior

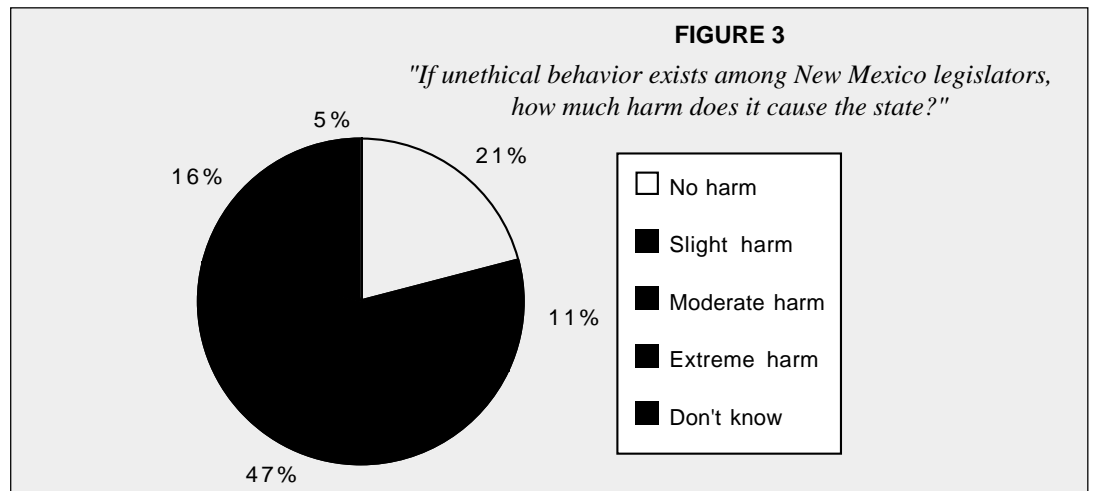
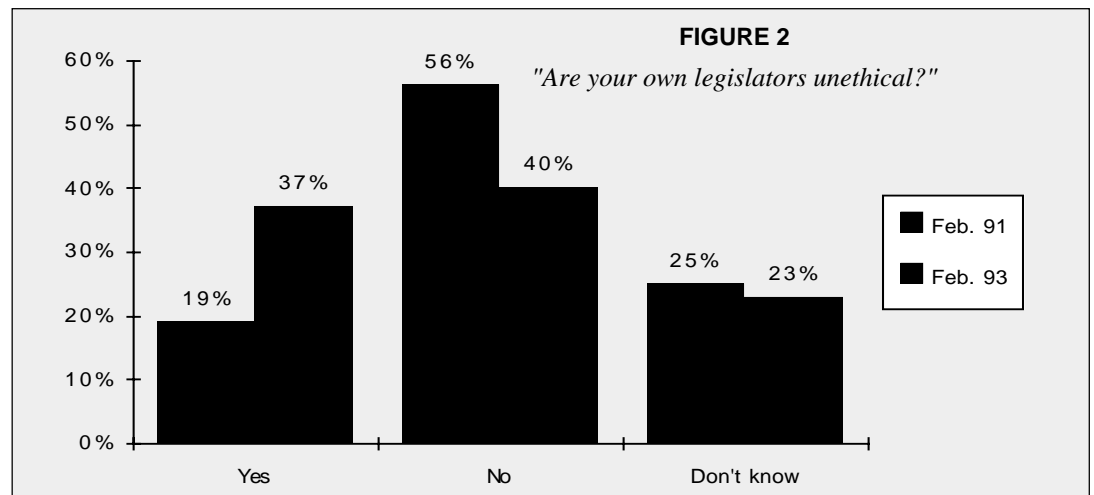
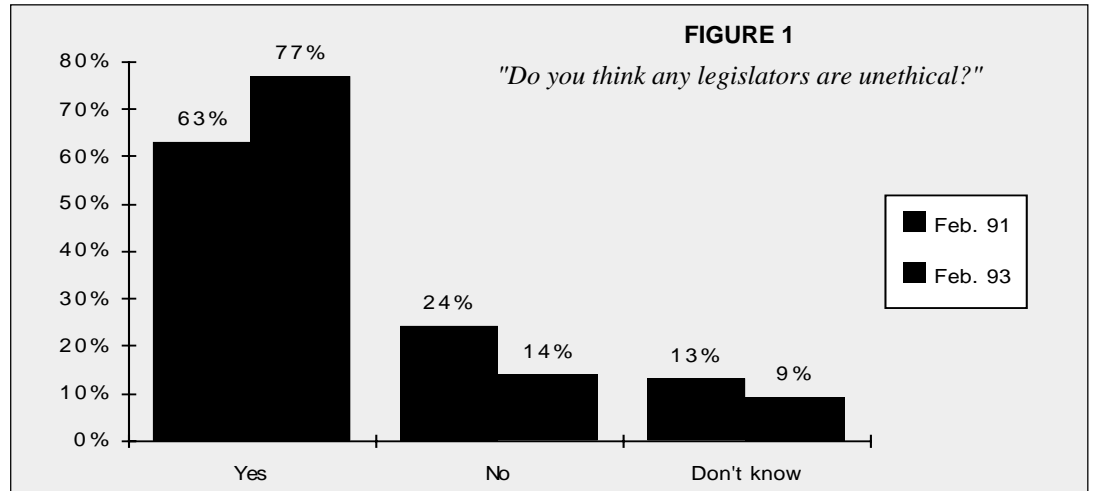
Another set of questions asked of respondents investigated their opinions about, first, whether or not **any** state legislators performed unethically while in office, and second, if **their own** delegation to the legislature did so. These responses were compared to those given to the same questions two years ago (Figures 1 and 2). In both areas respondents' opinions of legislators' ethics showed a marked decline. In answer to the first question 77% (+14 points from 1991) said "yes" they thought **some** members of the state House and Senate behaved unethically, and 37% (+18 points from 1991) said they thought **their own** members engaged in unethical activities.

It is interesting to note that the proportion of respondents who said they did not have an opinion (**Don't know**) about prohibiting versus allowing controversial activities, or about the ethical conduct of legislators declined somewhat from 1991. This may indicate a greater public awareness of such issues today.

Degree of Harm

Respondents who said they thought at least some legislators performed unethical acts were then asked **what percentage** of legislators they estimated behaved unethically. The average response given to the question asking **what percentage of legislators were unethical** was 37%. This reflects an increase from an average of 32% given two years ago. The same group of respondents were also asked their opinions about **what degree of harm** unethical actions caused the state (Figure 3).

(continued on page 2)



FOCUS: LEGISLATIVE ETHICS**Acceptable Behavior***(continued from page 2)*

While New Mexicans today are more apt to think unethical behavior exists among legislators, and to estimate that a larger percentage of legislators engage in such activity, nearly 80% of those who think some unethical behavior is practiced feel that the harm New Mexico suffers due to its presence is no more than moderate.

Compensation and Campaign Spending

Respondents to this survey were also asked their preferences about methods of compensating legislators and about putting limits on campaign spending. A slight majority of those polled (55%) favored compensating legislators with salaries rather than expense allotments, and 83% said that expenditure for legislative campaigns should be legally limited.

Demographic and Regional Comparisons

Table 2 displays the distribution of opinions about legislative ethics according to various demographic groups' perceptions. Residents of the state's Eastern

regions are somewhat less likely to think their own delegation performs unethically than are residents of the Western regions or Bernalillo County. A much greater proportion of Whites than Hispanics (82% vs. 66%) said that some legislators are unethical, but Whites displayed a much wider variation than did Hispanics in their opinions of the ethics of their own delegation versus those of the Legislature in general.

Higher levels of education and of annual income were both associated with a greater propensity to believe some legislators to be unethical and less inclination to think the respondents' own

TABLE 2

*Perceptions of Legislators' Unethical Behavior
(A Demographic Comparison)*

	No. of Cases	Are any legislators unethical? YES	Are your legislators unethical? YES	Are any legislators unethical? NO	Are your legislators unethical? NO	Are any legislators unethical? Don't know	Are your legislators unethical? Don't know
Education							
Some HS	47	53%	40%	21%	34%	26%	26%
HS Grad	144	61	36	29	51	10	13
Trade/Vocational	34	74	44	15	41	12	15
Some College	182	85	40	6	36	9	24
College Grad	118	83	32	9	40	8	28
Grad School	79	92	30	8	33	0	37
Region *							
Northwest	144	83%	40%	11%	38%	6%	22%
Southwest	87	71	39	18	43	10	18
Northeast	50	74	28	12	52	14	20
Southeast	122	62	24.5	23	47.5	15	28
Bernalillo	199	86	43	8	32	6	25
Race							
White	406	82%	32%	10%	41%	8%	27%
Hispanic	146	66	54	24.5	36	9.5	10
Income (annual)							
<\$30,000	290	69%	42%	17%	38%	14%	20%
\$30-60,000	214	83	37	10	40	7	23
>\$60,000	60	90	25	7	43	3	32
All New Mexico	606	77	37	14	40	9	23

representative or senator acts unethically. Groups with higher levels of income and people with a higher educational achievement were also more likely than other groups to answer "don't know" to the question that pertained to the ethics of respondents' own legislators. Almost one-third of those with incomes of \$60,000 or more answered in this manner.

Members of every demographic group were more likely to believe that some members of the Legislature engage in unethical behavior than they were to believe that their own members did so.

* Regions of the state are defined as follows: Northwest: Cibola, Los Alamos, McKinley, Rio Arriba, Sandoval, San Juan, Santa Fe and Valencia Counties; Northeast: Colfax, Curry, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, Taos, Tarrant and Union Counties; Southwest: Catron, Dona Ana, Grant, Hidalgo, Luna, Sierra and Socorro Counties; Southeast: Chaves, De Baca, Eddy, Lea, Lincoln, Otero and Roosevelt Counties; and Bernalillo County.

TRENDS

Most Pressing Policy Concerns

Traditionally the IPP's quarterly surveys have asked New Mexicans to express their opinions as to **what is the biggest problem currently facing the state.** In the past respondents have been asked to choose from six response categories. Because this question was not asked in the Winter 1992-1993 edition, we took the opportunity in this survey to allow respondents to answer the question as they chose, without offering pre-determined choices for responses. Where possible the verbatim responses of those polled in February 1993 were then classified according to the traditionally specified categories (Figure 4).

Almost half (44%) of respondents cited problems relating to employment and the economy. Historically this category has almost always received the largest proportion of answers. Eighteen percent said that criminal activity was the state's biggest problem. This was unchanged from August 1992 (Figure 4). Because of the open-ended structure of the question in this poll, we were able to examine with greater specificity responses which in the past would have been aggregated into a single category (Table 3).

Unemployment was the most frequently cited problem, accounting for 20% of all answers given as well as almost half of those answers that are categorized as "jobs and economy" issues. **DWI** was specifically offered by 6% of respondents, and accounted for one-third of the problems classed as "crime." This may reflect the large amount of attention recently focused on the issue.

One-fifth of those surveyed gave responses that did not readily fit any of our previously presented classifications (**Miscellaneous**). Of these respondents, half thought the government or declining moral standards were the biggest problem New Mexico is confronting.

There was a notable decline from 15% in August of 1992 to only 5% in this poll in the proportion of people who saw **public education** as the state's biggest current problem. Somewhat sur-

FIGURE 4

"What is the biggest problem facing New Mexico?"

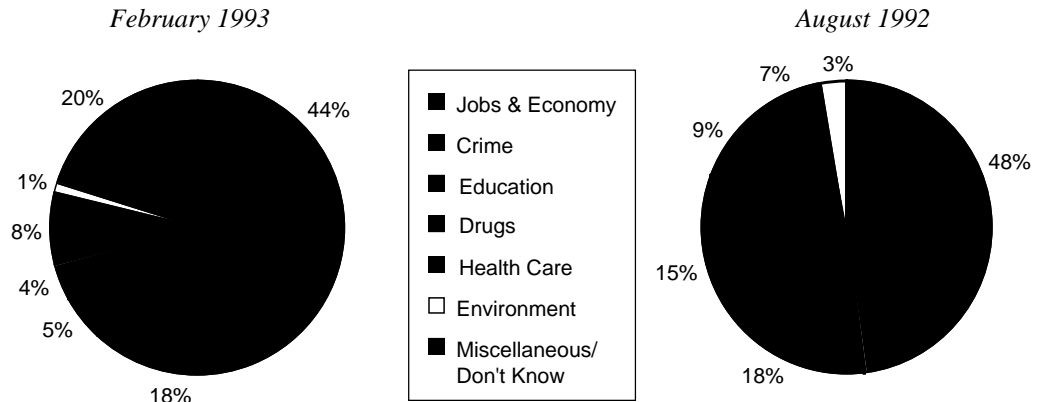


TABLE 3

Most Pressing Issue Facing New Mexico

Jobs/Economy	Unemployment	20%
	Taxes	4
	Other Economic Issues	20
Crime	DWI	6
	Gangs	5
	Other Crime	7
Drugs	Drugs	4
Education	Education	5
Health Care	Health Care	8
Environment	Environment	1
Miscellaneous	Politics	8
	Morality	2
	Other Miscellaneous	10

prising from the perspective of national politics is the fact that only 8% of New Mexicans said **health care** was the most pressing issue, and a mere 1% were primarily concerned about the **environment**.

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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 606 adult New Mexicans in February 1993. 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.

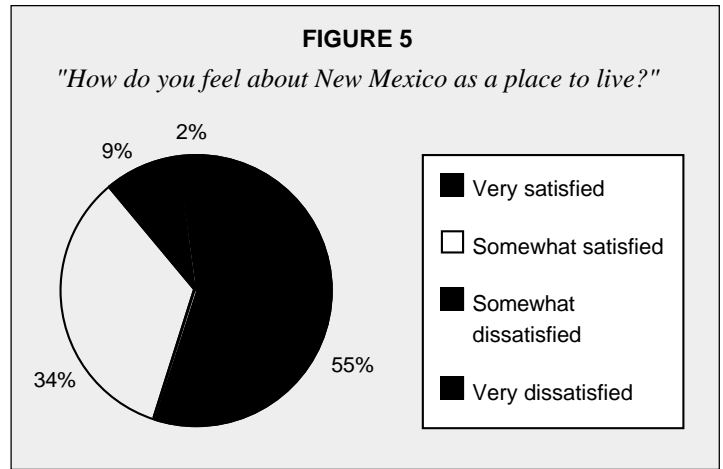
TRENDS

Quality of Life

Figure 5 shows that 89% of New Mexicans polled were satisfied with the state as a place to live.

Respondents were asked the question, "overall, in the past two years has New Mexico become a better place to live, gotten worse, or is it about the same as it used to be?" Thirteen percent of the respondents perceive New Mexico as a better place to live than it was two years ago. Thirty-six percent see it as the same as two years ago. Almost half of those asked perceive New Mexico as being worse now than two years ago.

When asked what they thought New Mexico will be like two years in the future, 21% said New Mexico will be a better place to live in two years. The largest percentage (45%) believe New Mexico will be a worse place to live in two years. Thirty percent believe the quality of life in New Mexico will be about the same then as it is now.



TRENDS

Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP)

Figure 6 illustrates the Spring 1993 responses to the question regarding the safety of the opening of WIPP. The Spring 1993 responses showed little change from the Winter 1992/1993 survey. The percentage of respondents who felt WIPP is **unsafe and should never open** rose by slightly more than one percentage point. On the other end of the spectrum, the percentage of people who believe that **WIPP is safe to open now** fell from 21% to 19%. Between these extremes, the proportions of people who think **WIPP only needs minor changes** to open safely and of people believing **WIPP needs major changes** to open safely increased very slightly.

Attitudes by Region

Table 4 shows the differences among five geographic regions in New Mexico concerning the perceived safety of opening the WIPP facility. The Southeast, the region where WIPP is located, shows the strongest support for opening the facility now (32%). This contrasts markedly with the 12% of respondents in the Northeast who endorse that position. There opposition to opening the facility is strongest and nearly half of those polled thought **WIPP was unsafe and should never open**. Only 19% of the respondents in the Southeast region would like WIPP never to open. Opinion against opening the site is strongest in the Northeast, where 44% of those polled thought the site would never be safe to open.

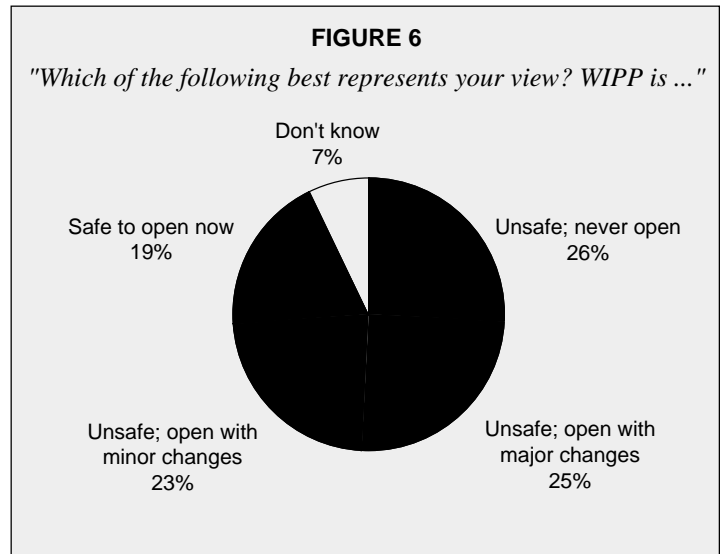


TABLE 4

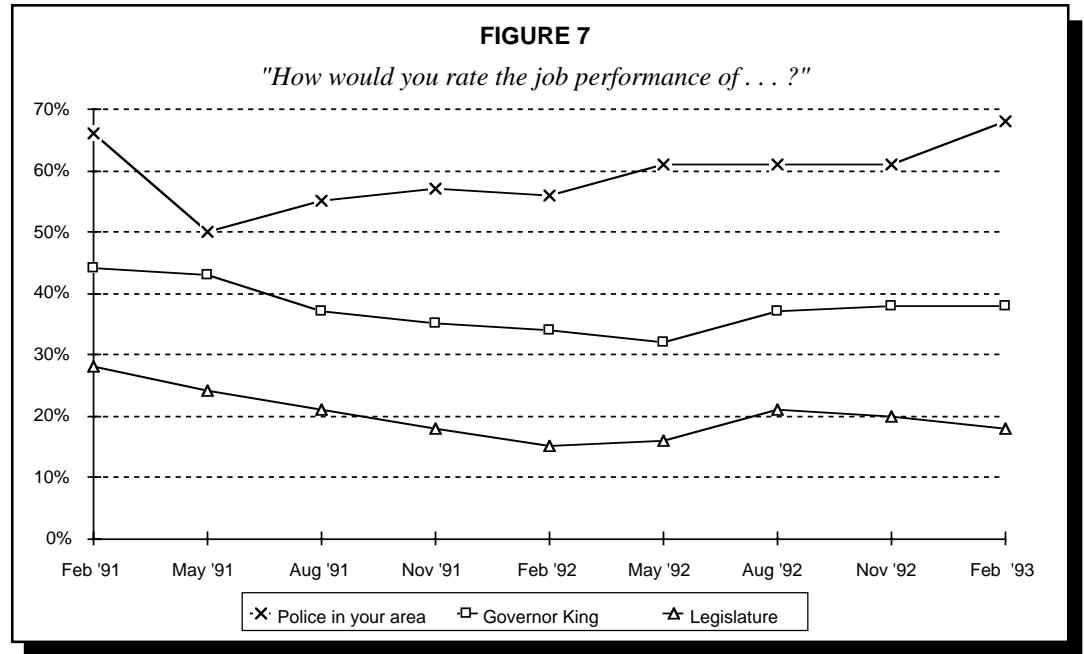
Attitudes Toward the Opening of WIPP by Geographic Region

	Never open	Open with major changes	Open with minor changes	Open now
Northeast	44%	18%	20%	12%
Southeast	19	16	25	32
Northwest	33	22	25	13
Southwest	24	31	22	18
Bernalillo	24	32	21	17
New Mexico	26	25	23	19

TRENDS

Citizen Approval Ratings*

The approval rating for the New Mexico State Legislature fell from 20% in November 1992 to 18% in February 1993. Governor King's approval rating stayed the same at 38%. The approval of police in the respondents' local areas rose seven percentage points in the three months from November 1992 to February 1993. Figure 5 illustrates similar patterns for the Governor's and the Legislature's approval ratings. The Governor's rating maintains a relatively consistent 15-20 percentage points above that of the Legislature.



* Approval ratings are calculated as a percentage of those responding "excellent" or "good" by *all* respondents whether or not they provided an answer to the question.

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