

# Quarterly Profile

## OF NEW MEXICO CITIZENS

A UNM INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

SPRING1994—VOL 6/NO 2

### FOCUS 1: GUN CONTROL

## Gun Laws and Public Policy

The November 1993 New Mexico *Quarterly Profile* reported that a plurality of New Mexicans (35%) perceived crime as the “single biggest problem” facing the state. In light of that concern with crime, our February 1994 quarterly survey explored how receptive New Mexicans would be toward stricter gun laws. Responses to our February survey demonstrate that while New Mexicans strongly believe in their constitutional right to own a gun, opinions are mixed when it comes to supporting increased levels of legislative regulation on the sale of handguns.

The issue of gun control has generated considerable debate at the national and local level, and provoked extreme divisiveness on the subject of constitutional and individual rights. At the national level, the United States Congress recently enacted “the Brady Bill,” which requires a five-day waiting period for the purchase of handguns. The federal gun control bill is named for former presidential press secretary James Brady who was wounded in a 1981 assassination attempt on President Reagan. During the 1994 New Mexico State Legislative session, the twenty-second bill that Governor Bruce King signed into law prohibited people under the age of nineteen from possessing a handgun unless hunting, trapping, taking part in training or competition, or target shooting in unpopulated areas.

We hypothesized that Democrats who identified themselves ideologically as liberals would be more supportive of stricter gun control measures than conservative Republicans and members of the National Rifle Association (NRA). During our survey, we asked people to tell us whether and how strongly they agreed with this statement: “The government should not interfere in the sale of handguns.” Of the 564 statewide respondents who had an opinion, 68% disagreed with this statement.

Men and women tended to respond differently to this question. Seventy-three percent of our female respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that government should not interfere in the sale of handguns. Men, on the other hand, showed less disagreement, 63%. When we examined gender differences by age, we found that the older the respondents, the more likely they were to be opposed to government interference. Men over the age of 50 were significantly less likely to support government interference than were women under the age of 50.

We then compared the views of Albuquerque and Las Cruces residents with those of citizens from the rest of the state. We hypothesized that, due to larger populations and the perception of a higher incidence of crime associated with urban areas, respondents in these urban areas would be more likely to support stronger gun control measures. Seventy-four percent of residents in the urban areas disagreed with the statement that the government should *not* interfere in the sale of handguns. However, we found that 63% of New Mexicans who reside in rural areas also disagreed with this statement.

On the basis of our original hypothesis that ideology and party identification influenced attitudes toward gun control, we asked our respondents to identify their political ideology and party. Not surprisingly, we found that more “conservative” respondents tended to oppose gun control legislation or government intervention in the sale of guns. Those who identified themselves as more “liberal” tended to favor such governmental involvement. Interestingly, majorities of both Democrats (74%) and Republicans (62%) disagreed with the statement that government should not interfere in the sale of handguns.

TABLE 1

*“The government should not interfere in the sale of handguns.”*

	Agree strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
TOTAL SAMPLE	9.4%	21.3%	48.7%	19.0%
IDEOLOGY				
Liberal	5.5%	14.1%	54.3%	25.9%
Moderate	7.7%	24.1%	46.5%	21.5%
Conservative	12.7%	23.5%	49.0%	14.6%
INCOME				
Less than \$30,000	8.2%	20.8%	51.5%	19.2%
Greater than \$30,000	11.0%	21.1%	48.0%	19.7%
PARTY				
Democrat	8.0%	17.7%	52.3%	21.9%
Republican	13.5%	24.6%	48.2%	13.5%
No Party	6.7%	23.3%	45.6%	24.2%
GENDER				
Male	14.2%	23.4%	46.1%	17.2%
Female	5.4%	20.0%	52.1%	21.3%
REGION				
Urban*	7.1%	18.2%	50.3%	23.4%
Rural	11.2%	24.3%	48.2%	16.4%

\* Urban represents residents of Bernalillo and Dona Ana Counties.

To determine the relationship between our respondents’ perceptions of individual rights and gun policy, we asked whether or not they believed that an individual’s right to own a handgun was guaranteed by the United States Constitution. Three-fourths of our respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. We found that one’s belief in the constitutional right to own a handgun was significant in determining how one views the gun control issue. Those respondents who strongly believe in the constitutional provision of the “right to bear arms” oppose local and federal attempts of governmental handgun regulation. *(continued on page 2)*

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**FOCUS 1: GUN CONTROL****Gun Laws and Public Policy***(continued from page 1)*

We also asked our respondents if they were willing to give up individual liberties in exchange for a more orderly society. Interestingly, 62% of New Mexicans would exchange individual liberties for a more orderly society. This question was also statistically significant in explaining our respondents' attitudes toward gun laws. Many New Mexicans believe in the constitutional right to own a handgun without necessarily endorsing it.

*Forty percent of our respondents have a handgun in their home, while 72% of our respondents stated that when they were growing up a member of their family owned a gun.*

In our analysis we attempted to determine the relationship between gun law attitudes and familiarity with the use of handguns. Forty percent of our respondents have a handgun in their home, while 72% of our respondents stated that when they were growing up, a member of their family owned a gun. Only 18% of our representative sample of adult New Mexicans had purchased a gun in the last five years. Unexpectedly, proximity to firearms did not significantly determine an individual's attitude toward gun control. Two hundred and thirty-eight of our respondents had previously taken a course on the use of firearms, with men outnumbering women by three to one. The respondents' previous experiences with a handgun did not correlate with their ideological perception of the right to possess a gun, or whether they believed guns should be regulated.

Membership in the NRA did predict attitudes toward gun laws, but not by the percentage that might have been expected. Fourteen percent of our respondents claimed that either they or a member of their household were members of the NRA. Sixty percent of the NRA members surveyed agreed that government should not interfere with the sale of handguns. Surprisingly, 40% of NRA members surveyed believed that government should interfere in the sale of handguns.

Our respondents varied in their opinions about the effectiveness of federal and state gun control legislation. We asked our respondents: "What effect do you think the Brady Bill will have on crime?" Fifty-eight percent of our respondents believed that the Brady Bill would not reduce crime. When asked about their views regarding the New Mexico state law that would prohibit people under the age of nineteen from possessing a handgun unless it were used for trapping, hunting, competition, or target shooting, 86% of our respondents supported the application of the law. When respondents were asked: "What kind of legislation would you support?" 68% of respondents from New Mexico favored legislation that would make the purchase of handguns more difficult.

**TABLE 2**

*"What kind of new handgun legislation would you most likely support? Legislation which makes the purchase of handguns..."*

Much more difficult	52.4%
Slightly more difficult	15.6%
The same as it is now	23.3%
Slightly easier	3.5%
Much easier	2.4%
Don't know/No answer	2.8%

**TABLE 3**

*The New Mexico State Legislature's passage of a law which would prohibit handgun possession by minors:  
"How do you feel about such a law?"*

Strongly agree	55.1%
Agree	31.2%
Disagree	8.2%
Strongly disagree	4.9%
Don't know/No answer	.6%

**TABLE 4**

*"I believe that an individual's right to own a handgun is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution."*

Strongly agree	29.0%
Agree	45.6%
Disagree	16.1%
Strongly disagree	7.0%
Don't know/No answer	2.3%

**Quarterly Profile**

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Subscriptions: \$30.00/year

Director: Hank C. Jenkins-Smith  
Administrator: Carol Brown

Subscription requests and other inquiries:

*Quarterly Profile*

Project Leaders: Mark Peterson  
and Daniel Gutierrez

Carol Brown (505/277-1099)  
The University of New Mexico  
Institute for Public Policy  
Department of Political Science  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131-1121

Production/Layout: Carol Brown  
Survey Manager: Pat Baca  
Contributing staff: Darryl Dieter,  
Kristin Kenyon and Laura Stevens

**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 577 adult New Mexicans in February and March of 1994. 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.

## FOCUS 2: HEALTH CARE

### Is There A Health Care Crisis?

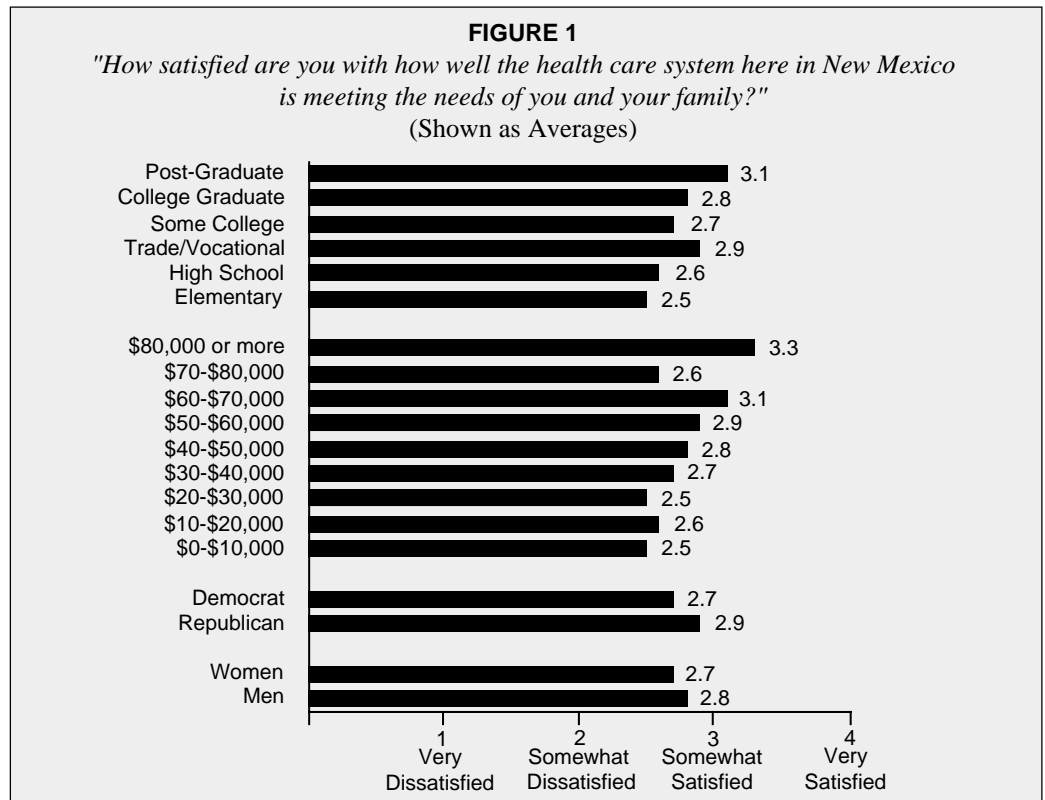
With discussion of a national health care plan intensifying, and national public opinion polls showing flagging support for the president's plan, New Mexicans' attitudes toward the establishment of health care reforms are a timely topic. In this quarterly survey, we asked a number of questions bearing on various aspects of health care reform.

At the national level President and Mrs. Clinton initiated the debate during his election campaign by asserting that there is a health care crisis in this country. Congressional Republicans and the health insurance industry have since responded that there is no crisis, and that Americans are by-and-large satisfied with their health care. We asked respondents, "How satisfied are you with how well the health care system here in New Mexico is meeting the needs of you and your family?" In our statewide sample, 62.4% of respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with their health care. Men and women were not significantly different in their responses.

Because the reform of health care has become an intense political issue, we investigated whether party affiliation affects how satisfied one is with the current health care policy. We hypothesized that Democrats, being sensitized to the Clinton Administration's public relations efforts, would tend to view current health care coverage less favorably than Republicans. We found that Democrats do tend to have a somewhat less positive level of satisfaction concerning their health care coverage than Republicans; however, the difference was not large enough to be statistically significant.

Where the differences in attitudes regarding care satisfaction show most starkly are with regard to income and education. Here the survey results provide clear evidence of the economic characteristics of the health care issue. (See Figure 1.) The higher household income a respondent reported, the more satisfied with the current health care system the respondent was. Similarly, the greater the respondent's level of educational achievement, the more likely he or she was to report satisfaction. Clearly, the income and education analyses confirm the realities of a private market model, i.e., those who have income and knowledge of the market place seem to obtain a more satisfactory level of care than those who lack resources or knowledge about their options. At the same time, the relatively greater dissatisfaction expressed by persons with less income and less education provides support for those who argue that there are private market failures associated with health care which warrant public provision of health care.

We asked our respondents whether or not they had health insurance; 82% responded that they did. Of those who said they have



**TABLE 5**

"Do you have some type of health care coverage such as insurance, Medicare or Medicaid?"

INCOME LEVEL	YES	NO
Above \$80,000	100%	0%
\$70-\$80,000	100%	0%
\$60-\$70,000	100%	0%
\$50-\$60,000	94.4%	5.6%
\$40-\$50,000	86.8%	13.2%
\$30-\$40,000	91.3%	8.7%
\$20-\$30,000	74.7%	25.3%
\$10-\$20,000	73.5%	26.5%
Under \$10,000	52.8%	47.2%

insurance, 75% stated that coverage was provided by major medical insurance (47%) or an HMO (27%). The balance of coverage was provided by Medicare or Medicaid with roughly 8% of respondents having "other" or unknown coverage.

A striking bit of evidence regarding the private good/public good aspects of health care is provided by the analysis of the distribution of health care according to income level as shown in Table 5. While the 73 respondents in the three uppermost income categories (households with annual incomes greater than \$60,000) reported that they had medical coverage, substantial portions of the bottom three income categories (households with annual incomes ranging from \$0 to \$30,000) indicated they did not have medical coverage. Of those who have medical coverage, 11.9% reported that they have a health problem which their current insurance does not cover. Slightly more than one-third of our respondents reported that

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## FOCUS 2: HEALTH CARE

### Is There A Health Care Crisis?

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someone in their family had put off medical treatment during the past year because the cost might be too much. Twenty-five percent of respondents affirmed that concerns over losing health coverage had prevented them, or their spouse, from taking or looking for another job.

It seems reasonable to assume that those who are not satisfied with the current state of their health care are likely to have no medical insurance, to have postponed needed health care during the past year, or both. The following tables illustrate the results from testing these assumptions. Not surprisingly two-thirds of those respondents reporting that they had no medical insurance coverage also reported that they had postponed medical care during the past year because "it might cost too much." What may be more surprising was the discovery that 28% of the respondents who reported having health care coverage and responded to the care postponement question, reported that they also had delayed medical care for themselves or their family members due to cost concerns.

Is the respondents' satisfaction with their health care related to whether or not health care had been postponed in the last year? Of those respondents who reported postponing medical care, well over half (58%) were *dissatisfied* with the current health care system. Among those who *had not* postponed medical care, only 26% were dissatisfied with the current health care system.

To summarize to this point, "crisis" may be an apt characterization of the current state of health care in New Mexico. Clearly, some segments of the population are not well served by the current health care system. About 18% of respondents reported no medical coverage for their households. The bulk of those households are in the lowest household income ranges, unlike the national statistics which include substantial numbers of relatively well-off middle-class individuals or households.

### What New Mexicans Want Done About Health Care

When our respondents were asked whether everyone in the state should have basic health insurance coverage, even if they can't afford to pay for it, nearly 77% indicated agreement or strong agreement. Support diminished somewhat when respondents were asked their level of agreement with the statement, "Our tax dollars should be used to provide basic medical care for all citizens, even if this means that my taxes will increase." Slightly less than 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Recalling that the level of satisfaction with health care showed a statistically significant relationship to income and education, we hypothesized similar relationships between the universal coverage and tax support questions, and income and education. Our analysis (Figures 2 and 3 on page 5) showed that individuals at the lower levels of education were in slightly stronger agreement with universal coverage and tax support than were those with higher levels; however in neither case was the difference statistically significant. However, significant differences in support for universal coverage were evident across income levels. In general, the lower a respondent's household income, the stronger the agreement that basic medical insurance should be available to everyone.

**TABLE 6**

*"How satisfied are you with ... the health care system ... ?"*  
*"Do you have ... health care coverage ... ?"*

	No Coverage (N=98)	Coverage (N=457)
Satisfied With Care	33.7%	68.5%
Not Satisfied With Care	66.3%	31.5%

**TABLE 7**

*"Do you have ... health care coverage ... ?"*  
*"Have you or a member of your family postponed getting medical care because you thought it might cost too much?"*

	No Coverage (N=102)	Coverage (N=467)
No Postponement	35.3%	71.7%
Postponement	64.7%	28.3%

**TABLE 8**

*"How satisfied are you with ... the health care system ... ?"*  
*"Have you or a member of your family postponed getting medical care because you thought it might cost too much?"*

	Not Postponed (N=351)	Postponed (N=196)
Satisfied With Care	74.0%	41.3%
Not Satisfied With Care	26.0%	58.7%

Levels of income were also associated with willingness to support tax expenditures for medical coverage. The level of support is relatively high among those with the lowest incomes, falls for those in the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range, but tends to regain support in the remaining higher income categories.

We also examined the relationship between responses to the tax support question and political party identification and ethnic background. Democrats were significantly more supportive of tax support for medical care costs than were Republicans. Hispanics were significantly more likely to support increased taxes for coverage of medical costs than were non-Hispanic Whites.

Given that satisfaction with one's health care is related to whether or not one has either the income to make it affordable, insurance coverage to make it accessible, or education enough to be able to discriminate, we theorized that those with the highest levels of health care satisfaction might be least supportive towards universal coverage and public tax support for medical care. The data appear to support the theory. Those respondents who strongly agreed with the notion of universal health coverage were ambivalent about the

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**FOCUS 2: HEALTH CARE**

**What New Mexicans Want Done About Health Care**

*(continued from page 4)*

current health care system, with an average placement about midway toward dissatisfaction with current health care. On the other hand, those who strongly disagreed with provision of universal health care were the most satisfied with the current health care system.

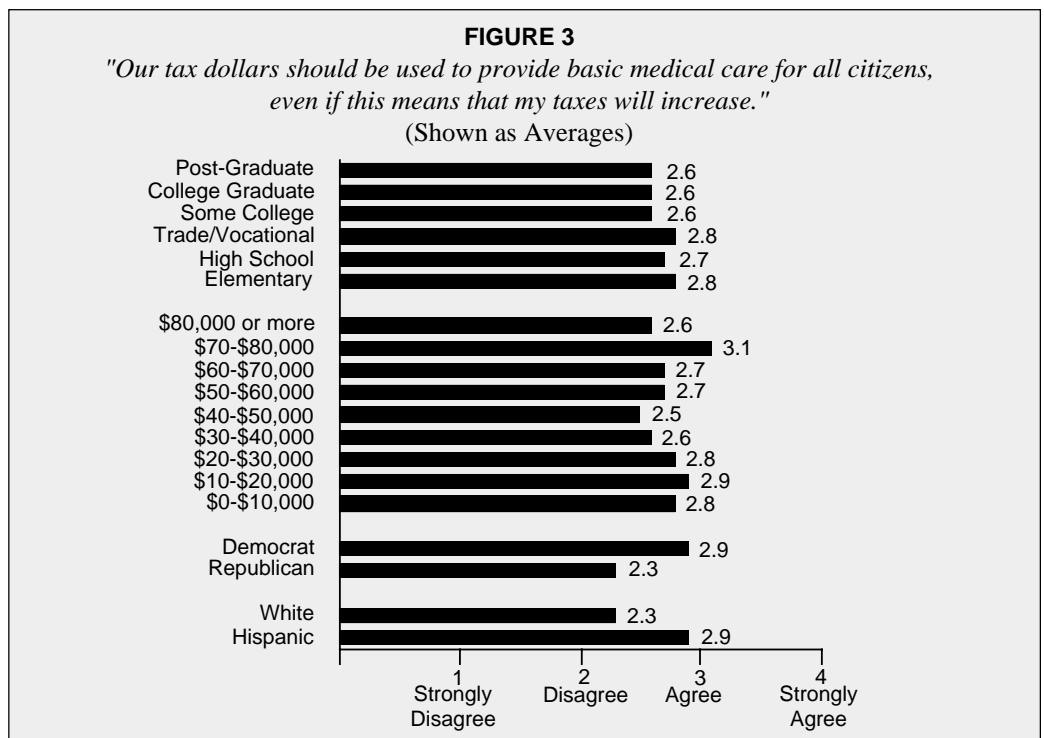
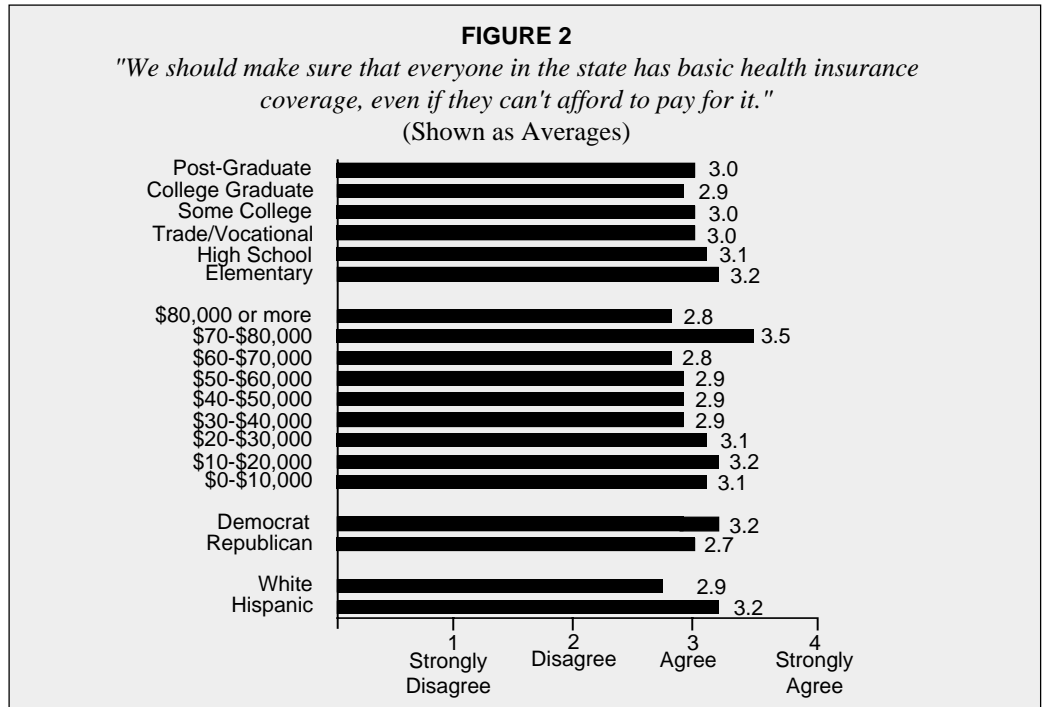
Health care satisfaction was also related to willingness to pay for universal, basic medical care with tax dollars. Health care satisfaction among the 63% of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with the use of taxes to pay for basic care was mixed—once again about midway towards dissatisfaction. Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with using tax dollars for universal health care were fairly solidly on the satisfied side of the question.

Nearly 89% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that, “Health care coverage should be available to everyone regardless of whether or not they already have a serious illness or are frequently ill.” When we asked respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the preceding question if they agreed that, “People who already have a serious illness or are frequently ill should have to pay more for health care coverage than people who are healthy,” 78% disagreed or strongly disagreed. With regard to long-term nursing care for the elderly, 54% of the sample felt that the government should pay for such costs. A bare 50% of the total sample favored or strongly favored the idea of requiring employers to provide insurance for all employees. Finally, 56.6% of the statewide survey respondents expressed a willingness to tolerate the provision of health care through HMO-like provider pools that might limit individual choice.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Respondents to our health care questions are largely supportive of health care reform. It is possible to see elements of support for the notion that health care should be a public good in the levels of support for universal coverage and elder nursing care support, and the lack of support for compelling the poor and the ill to pay more for medical coverage. Support slips, however, when

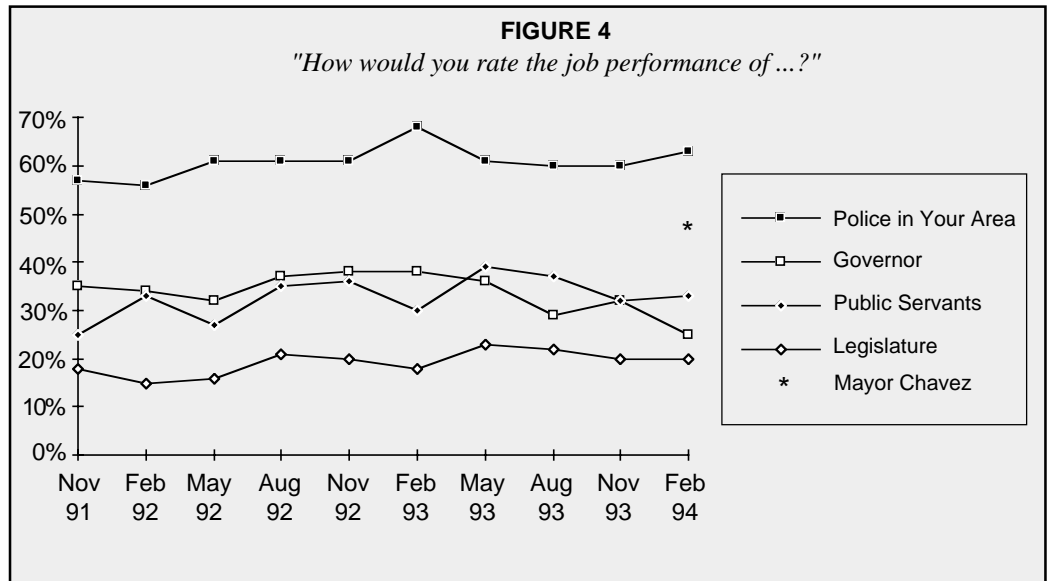
issues of compulsory participation, government operation, and increased taxation are raised. Thus it appears that the political fault-lines in the debate over health care will focus on whether the (broadly supported) goal of universal coverage can be attained efficiently, at reasonable cost, and without undue restrictions on consumer choice.



## TRENDS

## Citizen Approval Ratings\*

Governor King's approval ratings declined slightly from the last *Quarterly Profile of New Mexico Citizens*. Standing currently at 27%, the governor's assessment rating marks a drop of 5 points since November 1993. Since the February 1993 quarterly survey, King has experienced an 11% decrease in favorable approval ratings. The approval rating for public employees stands at 33%. Support for the performance of the police remained strong, with their approval rating showing a slight increase of 3 points to 63%. Approval of the state legislature's performance remains unchanged at 20% from November. Finally, Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez makes his first appearance in the quarterly survey with a performance approval rating of 47%.



\* Approval ratings are calculated as a percentage of those responding "excellent" or "good" by all respondents, regardless of whether they provided an answer to the question.

The University of New Mexico  
Institute for Public Policy  
Department of Political Science  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131-1121

(505) 277-1099