

Quarterly Profile

OF NEW MEXICO CITIZENS

A UNM INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

SUMMER 1996—VOL 8/NO 3

FOCUS 1: NEW MEXICANS AND THE "DELIBERATIVE PUBLIC"

This January over 450 U.S. citizens came together in Austin, Texas, for the first National Issues Convention (NIC). The NIC was unlike any convention in U.S. history because the assembled citizens were just that—a randomly selected and representative group of people from across the country. Once together, this assembly of citizens deliberated for three days on important national issues, including U.S. foreign policy, the economy, and the American family.

NIC attendees spent most of their time talking together in small groups of fifteen or twenty people each. These groups were microcosms of the national population, with residents of opposite coasts sitting beside one another and wealthy business-owners talking face-to-face with welfare recipients. In addition to these small group deliberations, participants also had the opportunity to join together in a large auditorium to ask questions of liberal and conservative policy experts on each of the three issues under discussion. After hearing from these experts, participants then addressed their questions to Republican presidential candidates (Richard Lugar, Phil Gramm, Lamar Alexander, and Steve Forbes) and Vice President Al Gore.

The purpose of the NIC was to learn whether American citizens would change their minds if they had the chance to think and talk with each other. Before-and-after questionnaires made it possible to measure how participants' attitudes changed as a result of participating in small group discussions and engaging in question-and-answer sessions with policy analysts and presidential candidates.

On many questions, this small "deliberative public" did not change its mind, but this *Quarterly Profile* focuses on those issues where attendees *did* change their minds as a result of participating in the NIC. We compare those national results with how New Mexicans answered the same questions during our May-July statewide survey. Are New Mexican views similar to those of the initial random sample of Americans or closer to those of the "deliberative public" that emerged from the three-day Austin conference?

U.S. Foreign Policy

The first question NIC participants addressed was how the U.S. should handle international conflicts. Before the convention, attendees supported a multilateral foreign policy, wherein the U.S.

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TABLE 1

"The United States should continue to engage in military cooperation with other nations to address trouble spots in the world."

Response*	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Strongly agree	17%	21%	38%
Agree	53%	51%	44%
Disagree	20%	17%	13%
Strongly disagree	8%	8%	4%
Don't know	2%	3%	2%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

*In the NIC questionnaire, response options for this and similar questions were "agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly." The response options shown are those used in the Quarterly Profile survey.

TABLE 2

"This country would be better off if we just stayed at home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other parts of the world."

Response	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Strongly agree	8%	9%	4%
Agree	19%	18%	17%
Disagree	46%	38%	30%
Strongly disagree	26%	34%	48%
Don't know	1%	2%	1%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 3

Is this country spending too much or too little on foreign aid?

	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Too little	5%	5%	7%
About the right amount	23%	26%	41%
Too much	69%	59%	48%
Don't know	3%	10%	5%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

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U. S. Foreign Policy

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joined with other nations to resolve international disputes; at the same time, however, a majority of participants believed the U.S. government was spending too much money on foreign aid. After the convention, participants became even *more* enamored of an activist policy involving international cooperation, but 41%, rather than only 26%, saw U.S. foreign aid spending as being "about right" (see Tables 1-3 on the previous page).

New Mexicans expressed views paralleling the pre-convention responses. An even larger percentage of New Mexico respondents (69%) thought the U.S. was spending too much on foreign aid, despite the fact that New Mexicans rejected the isolationist conception of foreign policy.

U.S. Economy

After discussing foreign policy, NIC participants reflected upon the U.S. economy. Before their discussion, most attendees believed that workers don't get paid fair wages for the work they do, and 72% thought the U.S. was spending too little on education and training. Two-thirds supported reduced taxes on savings, and participants were divided on the virtues of a "flat" tax system. After the convention, even *more* participants thought workers were underpaid, and 86% thought the U.S. spent too little on education and training. An overwhelming majority supported lower taxes on savings, and the tide turned against the flat tax, with 30% supporting it, 50% opposing it, and 21% undecided (see Tables 4-7).

As with the foreign policy questions, New Mexico respondents gave answers similar to those written on the pre-NIC questionnaires. The only difference was that New Mexicans expressed support for the flat tax (53% supporting, 42% opposed, 4% unsure), whereas the pre-NIC responses were evenly divided on the issue.

The American Family

The last topic that NIC participants discussed was the American family. Before the convention, a near-majority (45%) of NIC attendees thought it would be "very useful" for the government to strengthen families by helping to cover child care and preschool expenses. A large majority (70%) thought it would be "very useful" to increase the legal pressure on fathers who fail to pay child support. Only 37% thought it would be "very" or "somewhat useful" to make divorces harder to obtain. After the convention, a majority (56%)

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TABLE 4

"Today the average worker does not receive a fair day's pay for a fair day's work."

Response	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Strongly agree	21%	27%	41%
Agree	37%	33%	35%
Disagree	33%	30%	19%
Strongly disagree	6%	7%	4%
Don't know	2%	4%	2%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 5

Is this country spending too much or too little on education and training?

The U.S. is spending:	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Too little	74%	72%	86%
About the right amount	17%	22%	11%
Too much	7%	4%	2%
Don't know	1%	3%	1%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 6

*Do you favor or oppose "giving a tax reduction for income that is saved, rather than spent?"**

Position	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Support	67%	66%	83%
Oppose	26%	17%	8%
Don't know	7%	17%	10%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

*In the NIC questionnaire, the phrasing was simply "give a tax reduction for savings."

TABLE 7

Do you favor or oppose "replacing the current graduated income tax with a flat tax that would tax everyone's income at the same rate?"

Position	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Support	53%	43%	30%
Oppose	42%	43%	50%
Don't know	4%	14%	21%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

Quarterly Profile

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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 944 adult New Mexicans May-July of 1996. The telephone numbers were selected randomly by computer. The results of the poll have a three 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 three percentage 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.

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The American Family

(continued from page 2)

strongly favored government help with preschool and child care and an even larger proportion (85%) were convinced of the need for legal pressure on fathers who fell behind on their child support. After the NIC, attendees were inclined to make divorces harder to get, with 57% saying this was at least a "somewhat useful" approach to strengthening the American family (see Tables 8-10).

New Mexicans' views on these subjects were similar to the answers NIC participants gave before the convention, though New Mexicans had a different view on divorce. Fifty-one percent of New Mexicans thought it would be at least "somewhat useful" to make divorces harder to get—a figure between the pre- and post-NIC responses.

Conclusion

It is worth pondering how the New Mexico public might view issues such as these after deliberating. Imagine a group of four hundred New Mexicans from all corners of the state coming to Albuquerque for a three-day weekend to discuss pressing state issues, such as economic development, crime, and public education. Like some of the NIC participants, the New Mexicans invited to such a convention might do some informal research beforehand by talking to their friends and visiting the public library. Once they arrived, the participants could educate one another about their diverse experiences and perspectives. They could also formulate questions to ask panels of state policy analysts, legislators, and citizen activists.

If such a convention were held, how might New Mexican public opinion shift? Would participants change their understanding of New Mexico's economic and social problems? If the post-convention opinions of participants differed significantly from their prior views, which would we give more weight? Should we be concerned about such discussions *distorting* public opinion rather than *informing* it? Answers to these questions will not come easy, but the National Issues Convention may change the way we view the "public" and its opinions.

TABLE 8

Would "changing the law to make a divorce harder to get" help strengthen the family in this country?

Making it harder to get a divorce would be:	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Very useful	23%	13%	17%
Somewhat useful	28%	24%	40%
Not at all useful	46%	59%	41%
Don't know	3%	5%	2%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 9

Would "increasing legal pressure on fathers for child support" help strengthen the family in this country?

Increased legal pressure on fathers would be:	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Very useful	69%	70%	85%
Somewhat useful	24%	23%	14%
Not at all useful	6%	5%	1%
Don't know	1%	2%	1%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 10

Would "government help with child care and preschool" help strengthen the family in this country?

Govt. help with child care and preschool would be:	NM	NIC Sample	
		Before	After
Very useful	49%	45%	56%
Somewhat useful	36%	35%	36%
Not at all useful	15%	17%	6%
Don't know	1%	3%	1%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

Unregistered New Mexicans

The second half of this *Quarterly Profile* looks at the political views of registered voters in New Mexico's three congressional districts. The reason for excluding unregistered New Mexicans is that these citizens cannot vote in congressional elections until they register to vote. But if unregistered citizens' views differ from those of registered voters, even high-turnout elections may not reflect the true balance of public opinion in New Mexico. To examine this issue, we compared the answers registered and unregistered respondents gave to many of the political questions in this survey.

Forty-three percent of unregistered citizens surveyed did not identify with any political party, compared to only 10% of registered voters. A higher percentage of unregistered respondents identified themselves as Democrat than Republican (27% versus 23%, with 2% Green and 6% "other"), but the Democratic identity advantage is much larger for registered voters (51% to 35%, with <1% Green and 3% "other").

Registered and unregistered respondents agreed more often than not on the issues addressed in the first half of this *Quarterly Profile*, but the two groups did differ on some questions. Thirty-four percent of unregistered respondents wanted to focus on domestic problems rather than international ones, whereas only 25% of registered voters shared this view. Unregistered respondents also were more likely to support public assistance for child care (57% versus 47%), more favorable toward increased spending on education (84% versus 72%), and more likely to say that people don't get fair pay for their work (66% versus 57%).

A final note may please media critics. On three of these four issues, unregistered respondents were closer than their registered counterparts to the *post-convention* views of National Issues Convention participants (see Focus 1 in this *Quarterly Profile*), yet unregistered New Mexicans watched 25% *less* TV news each week than did registered voters.

FOCUS 2: VOTERS IN NEW MEXICO'S CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

Introduction

There will be no convention like the NIC in New Mexico this year, but citizens will have the opportunity to express their views in a more traditional manner when they elect three representatives to U.S. Congress on November 5th. In District 1, residents of Albuquerque and surrounding areas will choose among Rep. Steven H. Schiff (Republican), John Wertheim (Democrat), John A. Uhrich (Green), and Betty Turrietta-Koury (Independent). In District 2, voters in the southern half of the state will choose between incumbent Rep. Joe Skeen (Republican) and E. Shirley Baca (Democrat), and in New Mexico's 3rd District, mostly northern New Mexicans will choose between incumbent Rep. Bill Richardson (Democrat) and Bill Redmond (Republican).

The *Quarterly Profile* has never before broken down its results by congressional district (CD), but with an unusually large sample of the New Mexico public at hand and the 1996 Congressional elections on the horizon, we chose to do so. Because congressional districts are based upon voter registration, we analyzed only those responses given by respondents who identified themselves as registered voters.¹

Partisanship and Ideology

Table 11 shows how the three districts differ both in terms of current registration and party identity. In the 2nd and 3rd CDs, Democratic party identification is lower than Democratic registration by 7-8%. In other words, respondents in these districts described themselves as less Democratic than their voter rolls would suggest.

A plurality of respondents in each CD identifies itself as conservative, with percentages ranging from 44% in the 1st CD to 48% in the 2nd. Self-described liberals account for only 24% of respondents in the 2nd CD but as many as 33% in the 3rd CD.

A more subtle difference is the ideological gender gap in the three CDs. In the 1st CD, the gap is wide, with 22% of men calling themselves liberal versus 36% of women; in the 3rd CD the figures are similar, with 25% of men being liberal compared to 39% of women. In the 2nd CD, however, there is no gap: 24% of both men and women call themselves liberal. Another gap appears widest in the 3rd CD, where 58% of men are self-identified conservatives compared to only 37% of women; in the other CDs, relatively equal percentages of men and women call themselves conservative.

¹ Because *Quarterly Profile 31* drew a large sample of the state population, there are adequate sample sizes for each district (N = 228 for CD1, N = 231 for CD2, and N = 212 for CD3). Respondents were placed within districts based upon their county and zip code. The margin of error for each sample was roughly +/- 6%.

TABLE 11

Current Party Identity versus Actual Party Registration

Response Category	Cong. District 1		Cong. District 2		Cong. District 3	
	Identity	Rgstrtn.	Identity	Rgstrtn.	Identity	Rgstrtn.
Democrat	50%	50%	48%	55%	53%	61%
Republican	37%	38%	36%	35%	32%	28%
Green	0%	1%	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
Other party	1%	1%	5%	1%	4%	2%
No party	11%	10%	10%	9%	10%	8%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Party identity was determined by asking, "With what political party do you identify?" Registration figures are from the New Mexico Secretary of State, August 22, 1996.

Candidate Preferences

Differences in partisanship carried over into voters' Presidential candidate preferences. Statewide, the present *Quarterly Profile* found that Clinton held a 43% to 29% edge over Dole, with 16% undecided, 8% voting for other candidates, and 4% saying they would not vote. In the 2nd CD, however, Clinton held only a 38% to 31% lead over Dole. When voters were asked whom they would support if Clinton and Dole were the only choices, Clinton's statewide edge was 55% to 40% (with 5% not voting). This held in the 1st and 3rd CDs, but in the 2nd, Dole trailed only 51% to 45%.

Political Opinions

Beyond parties and candidates, it also appears that there are differences in how New Mexico's three CDs view current political issues. When asked to name the biggest problem facing New Mexicans, respondents in the 1st CD said that crime (37%) was their overwhelming concern, followed by education (23%), jobs and the economy (22%), and drug abuse (9%). In the 2nd and 3rd CDs, though, the rankings were jobs and the economy (28-29%), crime (25%), public education (17-18%), and drug abuse (16-17%). In other words, the Albuquerque-based district placed greater emphasis on crime and education than did its counterparts, which were more likely to see the economy and drug abuse among the state's most pressing concerns (see Figure 1 on the next page).

If the CDs have different primary concerns, do they also differ in their *views* on current political issues? To answer that question, we compared answers to the policy questions addressed in the first half of this *Quarterly Profile*. For the most part, respondents in each CD gave similar answers, and we found only three significant differences. Eighty-two percent of respondents in the 1st CD thought the U.S. should continue to cooperate with other nations "to address trouble spots in the world," whereas 72% in the 2nd CD and 65% in the 3rd CD agreed. The respondents in the 1st CD also expressed more solid opposition to the notion that the U.S. should avoid international entanglements: 85% rejected a "stay at home" foreign

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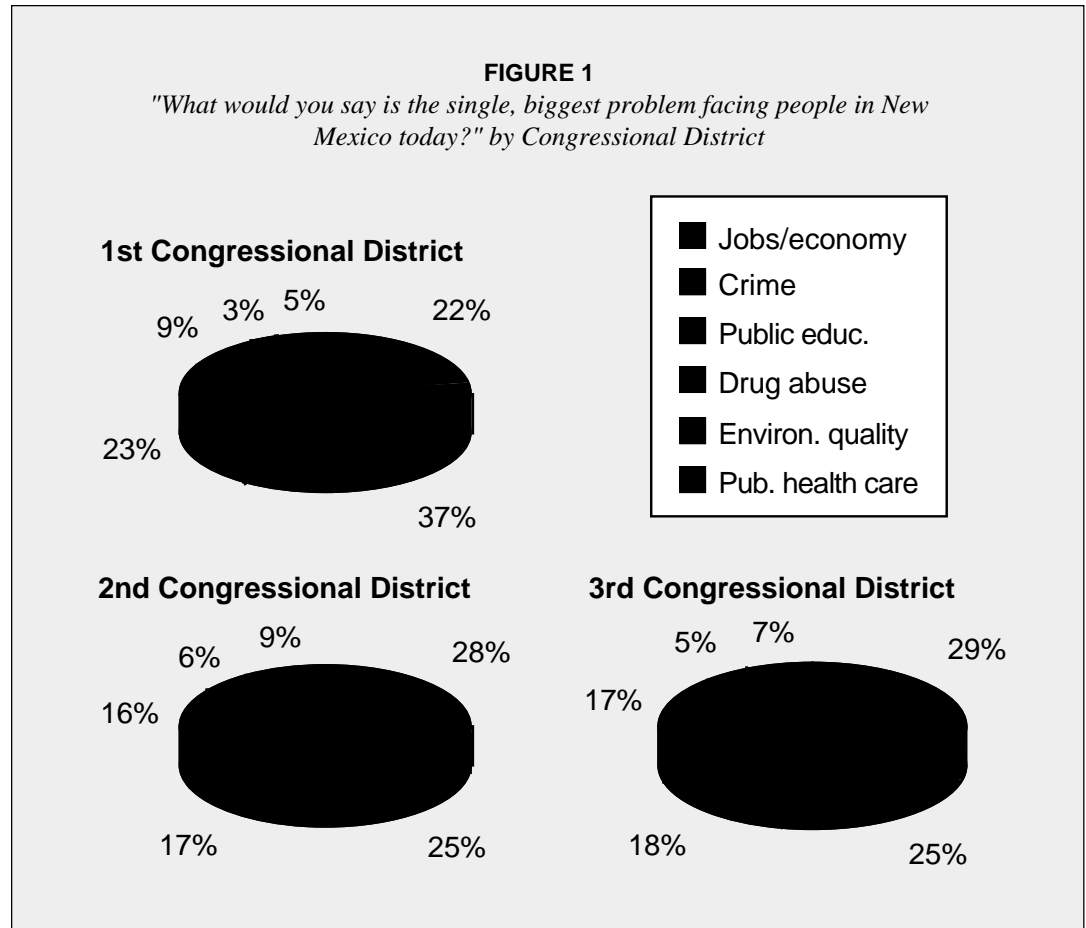
FOCUS 2: VOTERS IN NEW MEXICO'S CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS

Political Opinions

(continued from page 4)
 policy, compared to 71% in the 2nd CD and 69% in the 3rd CD. The third difference was relatively specific. Sixty-two percent of respondents in the 1st CD favored the "flat tax," compared to 52% in the 1st CD and 55% in the 3rd CD.

Conclusion

Although these data show some differences in the partisanship and opinions of New Mexico's three congressional districts, perhaps the more noteworthy finding is their similarity. A plurality of all three CDs identify themselves as Democratic and ideologically conservative. Voters in all three districts lean toward Clinton, and on most issues we studied, the districts agree. Each district stood apart from the others on different issues, but these contrasts were subtle and not always consistent. New Mexico certainly has regional variations in its politics, but the regions delineated by the CD boundaries do not appear to create entirely distinct communities.

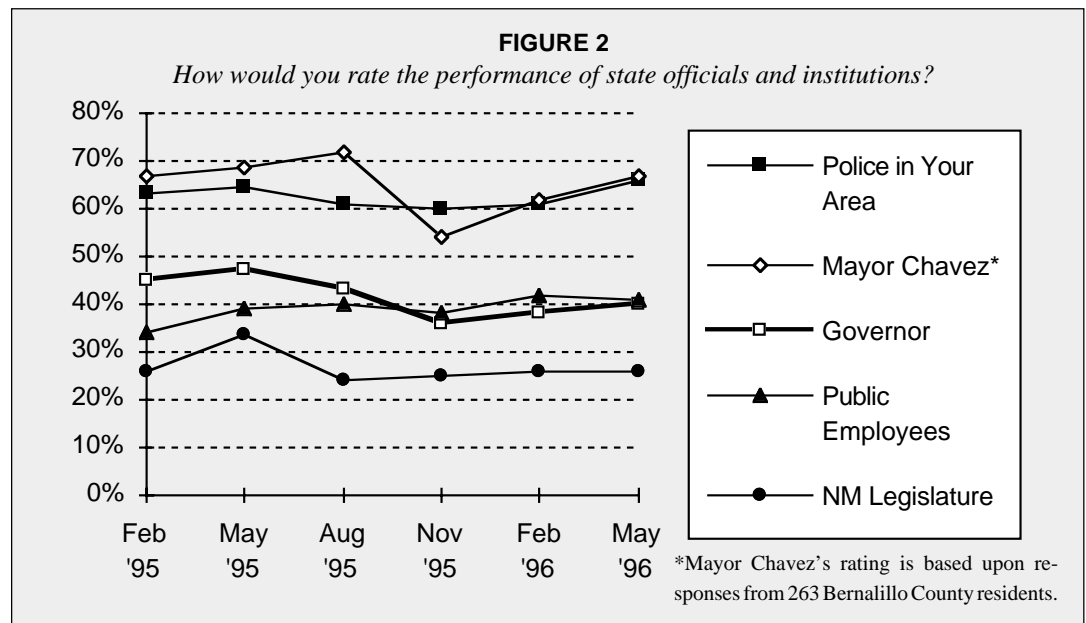


TRENDS

Citizen Approval Ratings

For this survey period, Figure 2 shows that approval ratings remained relatively stable for Governor Johnson, public employees, and the New Mexico legislature. Statewide, the approval rating given police rose from 61% to 66%, the highest it has been since February 1993. Mayor Martin Chavez's approval among Bernalillo County respondents rose to 67%, compared to 62% in February 1996. This was the second quarter in a row that Mayor Chavez's approval rating has climbed since the November 1995 drop in the Mayor's approval rating.

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TRENDS

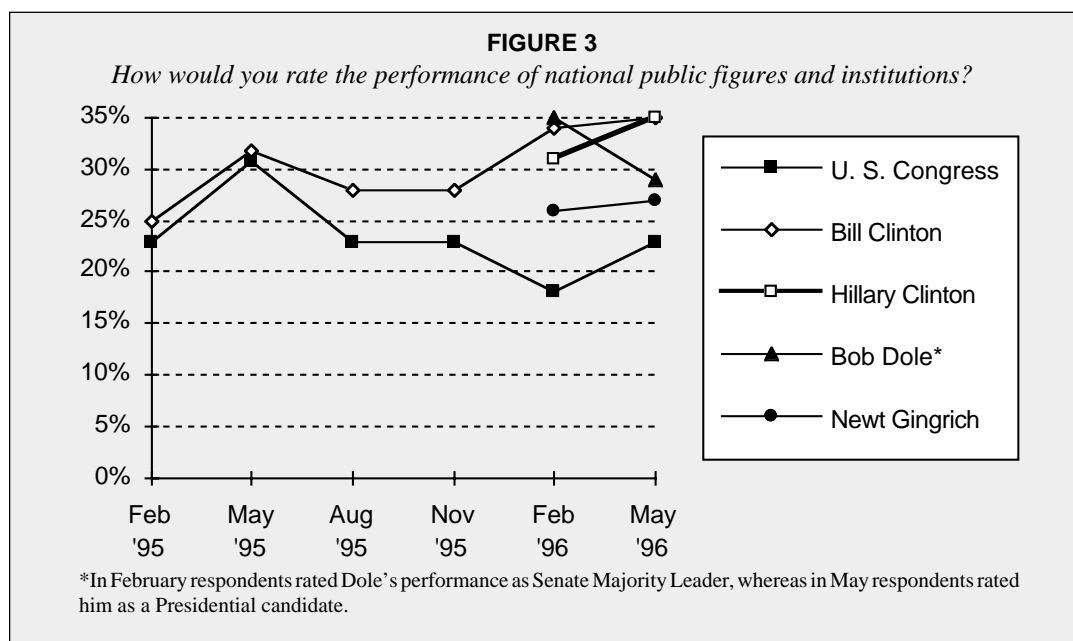
Citizen Approval Ratings

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Nationally, Figure 3 shows that the clearest change in approval ratings was Dole's dip from 35% to 29%. Whereas Dole's approval was essentially even with President Clinton's in February, it dropped six points in this survey. This could be due to a wording change that was necessary in this most recent *Quarterly Profile*. In February respondents had rated Bob Dole's job as "Senate Majority Leader," but in the most recent *Quarterly Profile* (after Dole's retirement from the U.S. Senate), they rated his performance as "likely Republican candidate for President."

Whether or not Dole's declining approval was due to changed question wording, Dole's resignation from the Senate, or other factors, it appears that the decline reflected changes in nonpartisan and Democratic perceptions—not those of Republicans. In the previous quarter, 29% of nonpartisans and 28% of Democrats

approved of Dole, but only 18% of nonpartisans and 21% of Democrats approved of him in this most recent *Quarterly Profile*. Republican approval of Dole's job performance did not change significantly during this period; it rose marginally from 47% to 49%.



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