

Quarterly Profile

OF NEW MEXICO CITIZENS

A UNM INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

FALL 1996—VOL 8/NO 4

FOCUS 1: GAMBLING IN NEW MEXICO

One year ago, the Institute for Public Policy surveyed New Mexicans to learn how they viewed gambling in New Mexico. The issue is as important today as it was then. This *Quarterly Profile* survey repeated some of the same questions to see whether the public had changed its mind.

Gambling As Much As Before

Since September 1995 there has not been a dramatic change in the frequency with which respondents had gambled. Table 1 shows that in 1995, 11% said they had gambled at church fundraisers one or more times during the past twelve months, 25% had visited Indian gaming facilities in New Mexico, and 28% had visited casinos or other facilities outside of the state. In the present survey, the results were similar, though a higher percentage had visited Indian casinos in New Mexico than during the previous year.

Of those who had “visited an Indian gaming facility or casino in New Mexico” during the past twelve months, 28% had made one or two visits, 32% had made three or four visits, 22% had visited five-to-nine times, and 18% had made ten or more visits. Forty-one percent of these casino visitors spent between \$10 and \$24 during each visit. Ten percent spent less than \$10, 30% spent between \$25 and \$99, and 20% spent \$100 or more.

For the present survey, the median number of visits during the past twelve months was four, and the median expenditure was \$20 per visit. In 1995, the median number of visits was one, with \$80 spent per visit. Adding these together, it appears that New Mexicans who gamble are going to Indian gaming facilities more often but spending less per visit.

The clearest demographic differences in gambling behavior were those between Hispanic and Anglo respondents. Forty-two percent of Hispanic respondents said that they had gambled at an Indian casino, compared to only 25% of Anglo respondents. Thirty-six percent of Hispanic respondents had gambled at casinos outside of New Mexico, compared to 24% of Anglos. The median number of visits to an Indian casino during the past twelve months was three for Anglos and four for Hispanic respondents, and the median amount spent per visit was \$20 for Anglos and \$30 for Hispanics. The average number of visits was 5.3 for Anglos and 6.7 for Hispanics, and the average amount spent per visit was \$87 for Anglos and \$70 for Hispanics.

TABLE 1
Comparison of 1995 and 1996 Gambling Behavior

Gambling activity (participated during the past 12 months)	1995	1996
Attended church fundraiser	11%	7%
Visited Indian gaming facility in New Mexico	25%	31%
Visited gaming facility outside of New Mexico	28%	28%
Total Percent	100%	100%

TABLE 2
Comparison of 1995 and 1996 Attitudes Toward Gambling

Statement	Percent Agreement	
	1995	1996
Gambling is morally wrong.	21%	28%
Gambling at Indian facilities is good for the New Mexico economy.	53%	62%
The people who are most likely to lose at gambling are those who can least afford it.	71%	69%
Total Percent	100%	100%

Shifting Attitudes Toward Gambling

Between 1995 and 1996, New Mexicans’ attitudes toward gambling appear to have changed slightly. Between the 1995 and 1996 surveys, the percentage of New Mexicans who say that gambling is morally wrong rose from 21% to 28%. On the other hand, the percentage who argue that gambling is good for the state’s economy rose from 53% to 62%. During both surveys, over two-thirds of respondents agreed that “the people who are most likely to lose at gambling are those who can least afford it” (see Table 2).

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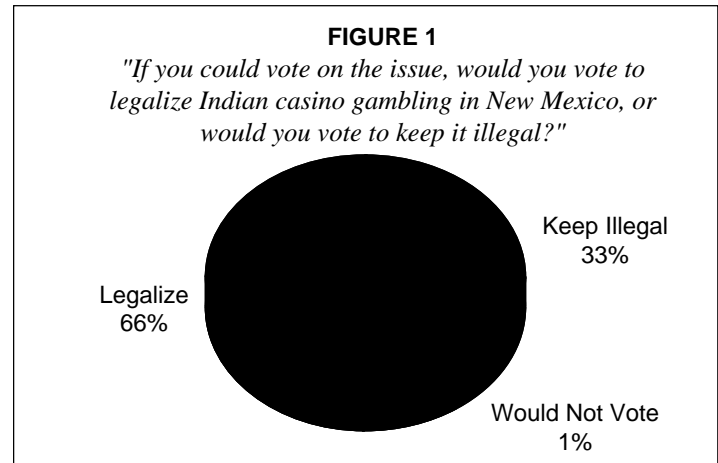
FOCUS 1: GAMBLING IN NEW MEXICO

Shifting Attitudes Toward Gambling

(continued from page 1)

Despite their strong opinions, the New Mexico citizens surveyed were divided on whether the issue merits a special session. Respondents were asked, "If you could advise your state legislators, would you urge them to spend state money to hold a special session on the Indian gaming issue, or would you tell them that they should not hold a special session?" Fifty-four percent favored holding a special session, and 46% opposed it.

When asked how they would vote on a referendum to "legalize Indian casino gambling in New Mexico," 66% of respondents said that they would vote in favor of the referendum (see Figure 1). Although we did not ask the same question in 1995, this result appears to signal an increase in support for Indian gaming. In 1995, 49% of New Mexicans supported Indian gaming, 37% opposed it, and 14% were undecided.



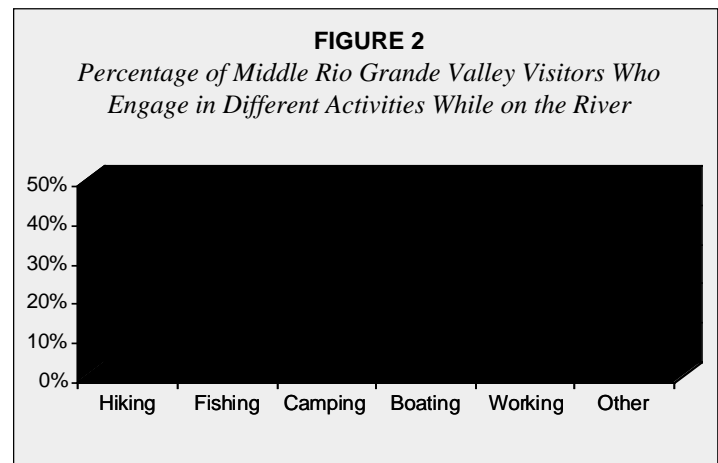
FOCUS 2: WATER IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Introduction

Given the state's ongoing concern about the availability of water, the *Quarterly Profile* asked New Mexicans a series of questions about how they use and view water in the middle Rio Grande Valley. Interviewers defined the valley as "the 170 mile stretch of river that runs from Cochiti Dam down to Elephant Butte Reservoir."

How People Use the River

Thirty-percent of those surveyed said that they had spent some time along that stretch of river during the past year. Ten percent of all New Mexicans surveyed had visited the river once or twice, 9% had visited between three and five times, and 11% had visited it more than five times. We then asked those who had visited the river how they spent their time there. Figure 2 shows that the highest percentage (42%) said that they were hiking along the river. Between thirty and forty percent also said that they spent time fishing, camping, boating, or engaging in other activities.



How People Think the River Should Be Used

We asked all respondents how they thought the river from Cochiti Dam down to Elephant Butte Reservoir should be used. From a list of uses, Table 3 (on the following page) shows that a plurality of respondents (42%) believed the river's agricultural uses to be most

important. Environmental and home-uses were the second most frequently cited important uses of the river, followed by recreation, cultural, and industrial applications of river water.

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Subscriptions: \$30.00/year
Subscription requests and other inquiries:

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

Director: Hank C. Jenkins-Smith
Associate Director: Carol L. Silva
Administrator: Carol Brown
Quarterly Profile
Project Managers: John Gastil and Carol Silva
Survey Manager: Hank Jenkins-Smith
Contributors: John Gastil
Production/Layout: Carol Brown

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 1,011 adult New Mexicans August-September 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.

FOCUS 2: WATER IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

How People Think the River Should be Used

(continued from page 2)

For both users and non-users, recreation was cited as the most important use by only 8% of respondents; however, these two groups of New Mexicans differed in their emphasis on environmental applications of river water. Whereas 24% of non-users rated environmental uses as most important, 35% of those who had used the river said that its most important uses are environmental. In other words, those using the river place greater emphasis on preserving the riparian ecosystem, rather than simply stressing the recreational uses of the river, per se.

Keeping Water in the Rio Grande

Questions such as these are important because fluctuations in the flow of the Rio Grande can force water policymakers to make tough choices about the use of river water. Most New Mexicans, however, are not aware of the fluctuations in the flow of the river. When respondents were asked whether they recalled “seeing, reading, or hearing anything” about the flow of the river in the “past few weeks” before the survey, only 17% of those surveyed had heard that the flow of the river had been lower than usual, which it had been. Only 12% of those who had *not* visited the river in the past year had heard about the reduced flow, compared to 27% of those who had spent some time along the river.

Given the public’s low awareness of fluctuations in the river’s flow, would New Mexico citizens express any concern about very low levels in the Rio Grande? We chose to ask New Mexicans about this issue, but only after providing some background information that we presumed many citizens might lack. Before asking the next question, interviewers read the following statement:

Use of the water from the Rio Grande for agricultural, industrial, and residential purposes takes some of the water out of the river channel. When the water is taken for these uses, the flow of water within the river channel is reduced.

In dry years, taking water from the river channel can reduce the flow in the river to very low levels. Very low water levels may severely reduce populations of some kinds of fish in the river, including the silvery minnow. The low water levels could also reduce the stream-side wetlands and woodlands, reducing the habitat for birds and animals. In addition, low water levels in the river can reduce the recreational and cultural uses of the river.

Interviewers then posed the following question:

In your view, how important is it to keep more of the available water in the river in dry years? On a scale from zero to ten, where zero means not at all important and ten means ex-

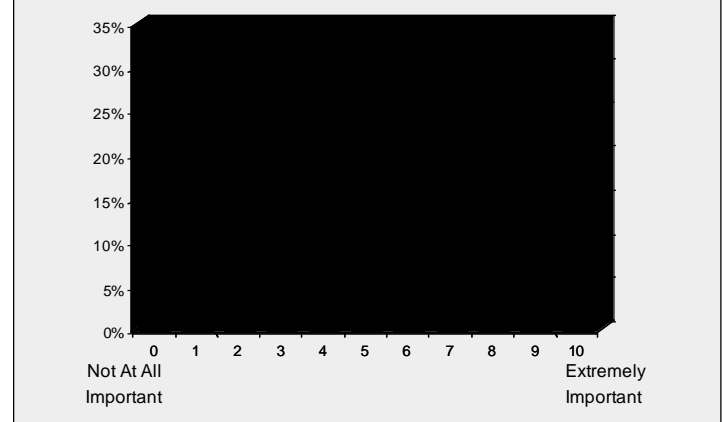
TABLE 3

‘Which is the most important use of the river in the middle Rio Grande Valley?’

The most important use of the river is:	All New Mexicans	River Users	Non-Users
Irrigation for farming	42%	44%	37%
Providing water for use in homes and yards	19%	21%	17%
Providing food and refuge for fish, birds and other animals	18%	17%	22%
Creating wetlands and woods along the banks	9%	7%	13%
Recreation, such as fishing, boating and hiking	8%	8%	8%
Cultural and religious uses in some villages and pueblos	2%	2%	2%
Industrial use, such as manufacturing processes	1%	1%	1%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

FIGURE 3

‘How important do you think it is to keep more of the available water in the Rio Grande in dry years?’



tremely important, how important do you think it is to keep more of the available water in the Rio Grande in dry years?

Figure 3 shows that in response, 33% of respondents said that it was “extremely important” to keep water in the Rio Grande during dry years. On the ten-point scale, 75% of respondents rated flow maintenance above the scale midpoint. Only 2% said it was “not at all important,” and a total of 13% rated its importance below the midpoint.

After recording respondents’ answers to this question, interviewers then read the following statement: “In some states, non-profit trust foundations can buy water from those who own the rights and who are willing to sell them. Then the foundation can leave the water in the rivers to maintain the flow in the river in dry years.” Interviewers asked, “If a vote was held in New Mexico on this issue, would you vote yes or no to allow a non-profit trust foundation to buy water rights from those who are willing to sell them in order to maintain flows of water in the Rio Grande?”

In response, nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents said that they would vote to allow foundations to buy water rights. Twenty-six percent said they would vote against the measure, and 1% said they would not vote.

TRENDS

Most Pressing Policy Concerns

For many years, the *Quarterly Profile* has asked New Mexicans the question, "What would you say is the single, biggest problem facing people in New Mexico today?" In answering, respondents choose one issue from a list that includes crime, drug abuse, jobs and the economy, education, public health care, and the environment.

In this *Quarterly Profile* we asked the same question, but before we asked respondents to choose from a list of issues, we let them give whatever answer they chose. Those answers were then categorized and are displayed in the first two columns of Table 4. The first column breaks down issues like crime and the economy into subcategories corresponding to the verbatim answers respondents gave. The second column collapses the subcategories into larger categories. The third column compares these responses with those obtained by using the traditional *Quarterly Profile* question format.

More than one-in-five of the open-ended responses fell into a "miscellaneous" category that included issues such as Indian gaming, immigration, government, and water. None of these miscellaneous issues was mentioned by more than 4% of respondents.

Collapsing the open-ended responses into the traditional categories, 34% said that jobs and the economy were the state's most pressing concern, 20% said it was crime, and 9% said it was education. By contrast, 33% ranked crime first when asked the closed-ended question, and 28% said jobs and the economy were the biggest problem. In all other respects, the rankings obtained by the open-ended and closed-ended questions were identical.

Why would respondents rank crime above the economy only in response to the closed-ended question? If crime stories on the evening news can heighten people's fear of crime, so might mentioning crime in a survey question trigger some respondents' concerns about the problem. The open-ended question does not mention crime, so it elicits broader concerns about the economy and many other issues.

This hypothesis, however, was not supported when the same open-ended question was asked in the Spring 1993 *Quarterly Profile* (Vol. 5, No. 2). In that survey, 44% named jobs and the economy as the most pressing issues, and 18% identified crime as the state's biggest problem; the closest *Quarterly Profile* (Vol. 4,

TABLE 4

"What would you say is the single, biggest problem facing people in New Mexico today?"

The biggest problem is...	Open-ended		Closed-ended
	By sub-category	By major category	
Crime	--	20%	33%
crime/violence	17%	--	--
gangs	3%	--	--
Drug Abuse	6%	6%	15%
Jobs & Economy	--	34%	28%
economy	8%	--	--
poverty	3%	--	--
taxes	1%	--	--
unemployment/low wages	19%	--	--
welfare	3%	--	--
Education	9%	9%	17%
Environment	1%	1%	2%
Health Care	2%	2%	4%
Miscellaneous	--	21%	--
government/politics	4%	--	--
immigration/race issues	2%	--	--
Indian gaming	2%	--	--
morals/religion/family	3%	--	--
teen pregnancy	1%	--	--
water issues	4%	--	--
other	4%	--	--
youth/children	1%	--	--
Don't Know	8%	8%	<1%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

No. 4) using the standard closed-ended question obtained roughly the same results—48% naming the economy and 18% naming crime as the state's biggest problems.

Policy Concerns Over Time

What should catch the reader's eye from the 1993-1996 comparison is the difference in the perceived importance of crime and the economy. Figure 4 (on the following page) shows that New Mexicans' concerns about these and other problems have shifted considerably since the *Quarterly Profile* began in 1988.

When this question was first asked in 1988, jobs and the economy were by far the most frequently cited problem facing New Mexico. Education, drug abuse, and crime were secondary concerns, with public health care and environment receiving relatively few mentions as the state's biggest problem.

Since that time, public health care and drug abuse have risen and fallen as top citizen priorities. Drug abuse rose in 1989 then fell in importance until 1993, when it rose again. The percentage of New Mexicans viewing health care as the state's primary concern took the opposite path, rising until 1993, then dropping the next year. These two issues are related because drug abuse is often viewed as

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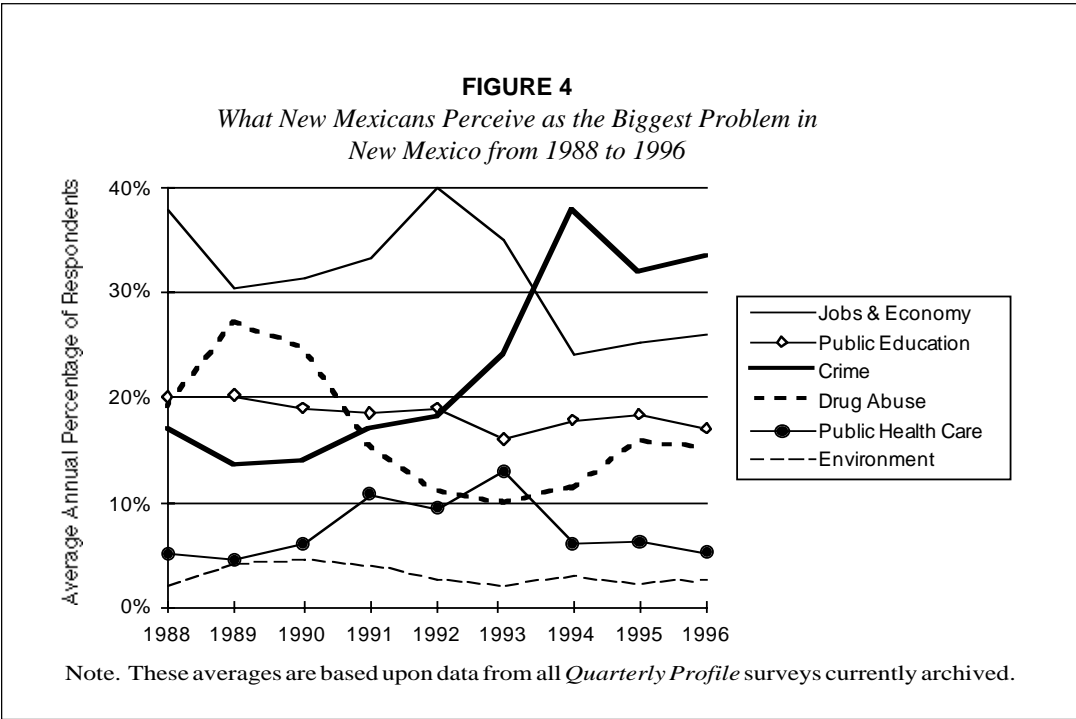
TRENDS

Most Pressing Policy Concerns

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a public health problem, so it may be the same group of citizens who stress these two issues. If so, then one could expect that increased concern about one issue would take away from the priority given to the other.

Crime and the economy also appear to have moved in relation to one another. One or the other has always been most frequently cited as the state's biggest problem, and since 1993 they have been the two most commonly named problems. From 1988 to 1992, the two moved in tandem, dropping in importance in 1989 then rising steadily until 1992. In 1993, though, increasing concern about crime came with decreasing emphasis on the economy until crime replaced the economy as the public's primary concern in 1994.



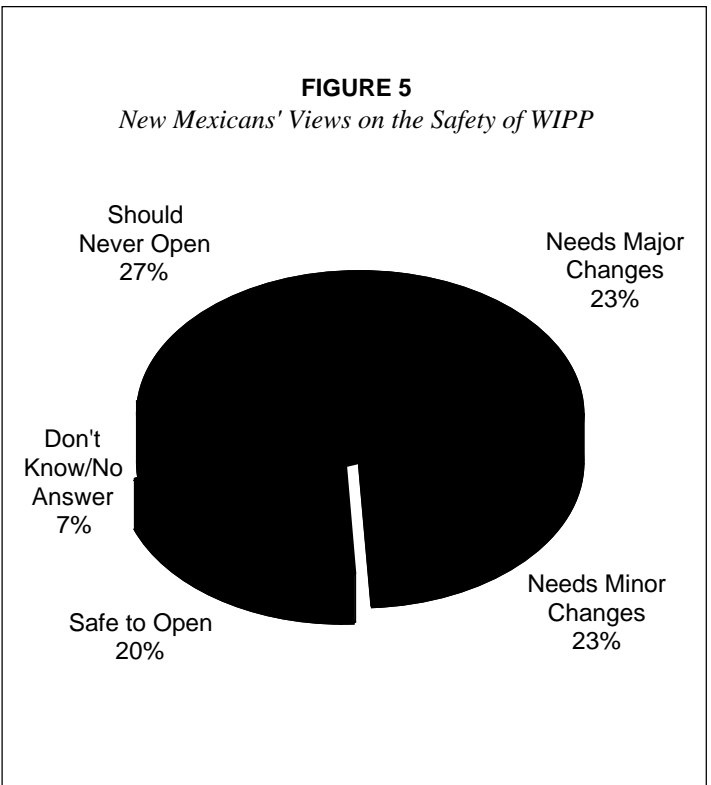
TRENDS

Attitudes Toward WIPP

Since August 1990, the *Quarterly Profile* has consistently asked New Mexicans about their attitudes toward the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP). In this survey, we asked respondents the following question: "There has been much controversy over WIPP, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico, which is to serve as a permanent storage facility for low and medium level radioactive waste. Which of the following best represents your view? WIPP is (a) unsafe and should never be opened, (b) unsafe but may be made safe with MAJOR changes, (c) only slightly unsafe and can be made safe with MINOR changes; or (d) WIPP is safe to use as it is."

The responses to the question were generally similar to those that have been recorded since 1990: only one-in-five New Mexicans said that WIPP was safe to open as-is, 46% said it needs minor or major changes, and 27% said it should never be opened (see Figure 5).

When asked whether they would vote to open WIPP if a referendum were held, 54% said they would vote to keep it closed, 41% would vote to open it, 4% were unsure, and 1% said they would not vote. (Results were similar for both unregistered and registered respondents.) Given that WIPP can not open until it is certified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other regulatory bodies, it may be surprising that as many as 41% would vote to open the plant prior to EPA certification. If WIPP is certified as safe to open, will support for WIPP increase? Future editions of the *Quarterly Profile* will follow this issue carefully.

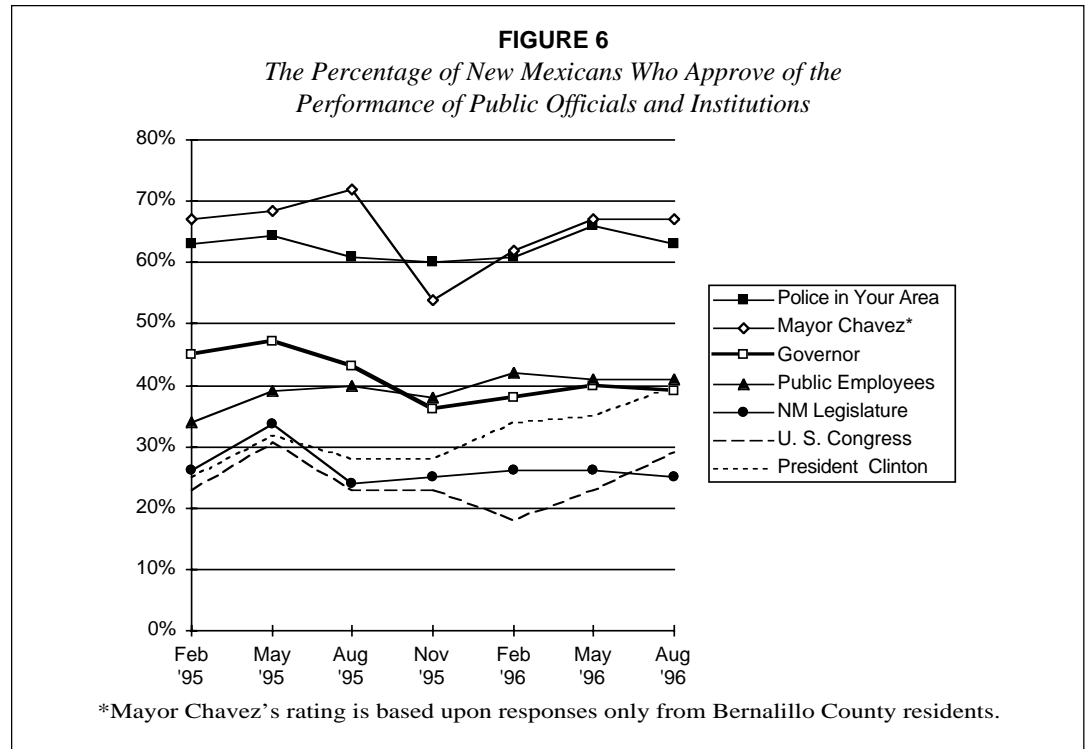


TRENDS

Citizen Approval Ratings

The most common trend observed in this quarter's approval ratings was stability, although two changes were observed. Figure 6 shows that the only public officials or institutions to change in approval by more than three points were the U.S. Congress and President Bill Clinton. Approval of Congress rose to 29%, the highest it has been since the May 1995 rating of 31%. Clinton's approval rating rose from 35% to 40%.

One explanation for the rising national ratings and the stagnant state and local figures is that in the months that led to the Presidential election, national political figures were receiving more attention than local ones. The legislature was not in session, and the President and Congress grabbed more than their usual share of the media spotlight.



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

(505) 277-1099