

Quarterly Profile

OF NEW MEXICO CITIZENS

A UNM INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SURVEY RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

WINTER 1997—VOL 9/NO 1

FOCUS 1: VOTING, IDEOLOGY, AND INCUMBENCY

On November 5th, New Mexicans voted to re-elect Democratic President Bill Clinton and Republican Senator Pete Domenici. Like many other states, New Mexico continued its tradition of voting Democratic for some statewide offices and Republican for others. Is New Mexico schizophrenic, do voters just like incumbents, or is there another explanation?

Voting and Ideology

One potential explanation for these results is that New Mexicans chose the candidates whose views were closest to their own. To test this hypothesis, interviewers asked respondents, "On a scale of political ideology, individuals can be arranged from strongly liberal to strongly conservative. Which of the following categories best describes your views?" Interviewers then read seven different ideological labels ranging from "strongly liberal" to "strongly conservative." Earlier, interviewers had asked respondents the same question, except that respondents were asked to assign the same ideological labels to candidates.

Table 1 shows the answers respondents gave to these questions. Twenty-eight percent of those surveyed said they were "strongly liberal," "liberal," or "slightly liberal." Twenty-six percent said they were "middle of the road," and 46% said they were "slightly conservative," "conservative," or "strongly conservative." Therefore, the median view in New Mexico is "middle of the road," and if New Mexicans voted for candidates closest to their median view, one would expect candidates perceived as moderates to win all statewide elections that include only two major candidates.

Following this logic, one can see how the median candidate ideology rating falls relative to New Mexicans' own median view. Figure 1 shows that the public's rating of Clinton ("slightly liberal") is closer to the New Mexico median than their rating of Dole as "conservative."

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A Methodological Note

This *Quarterly Profile* is unusual in that the survey period straddled the 1996 election. This was done to permit pre- and post-election comparisons of public attitudes. Sometimes this method required changing question wording (i.e., switching from "whom would you vote for?" to "whom *did* you vote for?"). Any significant pre- and post-election differences are noted below.

TABLE 1

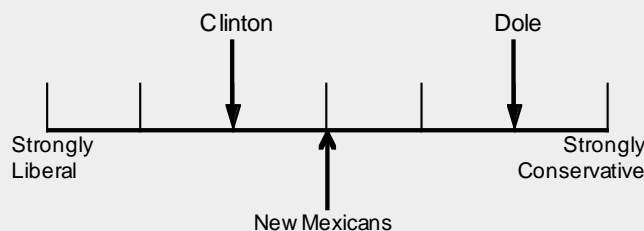
New Mexicans' Ideological Ratings of Themselves and Selected Candidates

Ideological Label	Self-Rating	Presidential Candidates		U.S. Senate Candidates	
		Clinton	Dole	Trujillo	Domenici
Strongly liberal	5%	17%	3%	6%	4%
Liberal	11%	25%	6%	23%	7%
Slightly liberal	12%	19%	3%	18%	5%
Middle of the road	26%	25%	15%	33%	25%
Slightly conservative	15%	5%	15%	10%	23%
Conservative	22%	5%	38%	7%	27%
Strongly conservative	9%	4%	19%	2%	8%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note. The table excludes "don't know" responses, which were infrequent for all questions except the one regarding Trujillo: 35% of respondents did not know where to place him.

FIGURE 1

Median Ideology Ratings for New Mexico Citizens and the Two Presidential Candidates with the Most Votes



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FOCUS 1: VOTING, IDEOLOGY, AND INCUMBENCY

Voting and Ideology

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Figure 2 shows that Domenici's "slightly conservative" rating is close to the statewide median, but Trujillo's has the *same* median as New Mexicans. Trujillo, though, is a special case since 35% of New Mexicans were unable to rate him on the ideology scale; some voters may have chosen Domenici because they *did* know where he fell on the ideological spectrum.

Incumbency Over Ideology

A simpler explanation for New Mexico's election results is that the electorate chose to return incumbents to federal offices. All four members of the state's Congressional delegation were re-elected, and New Mexicans supported incumbent President Bill Clinton.

Table 2 shows that in the 1st and 2nd Congressional Districts, New Mexicans voted against their partisan leanings toward the Democratic Party. In the U.S. Senate race, New Mexicans also re-elected a Republican despite the fact that in all three Congressional districts, most registered voters are Democrats.

Incumbency alone is not a sufficient explanation given the recent losses of former governor Bruce King and ex-President George Bush.

Incumbents *can* lose statewide races in New Mexico, but the victories of Domenici, Schiff, and Skeen make it clear that incum-

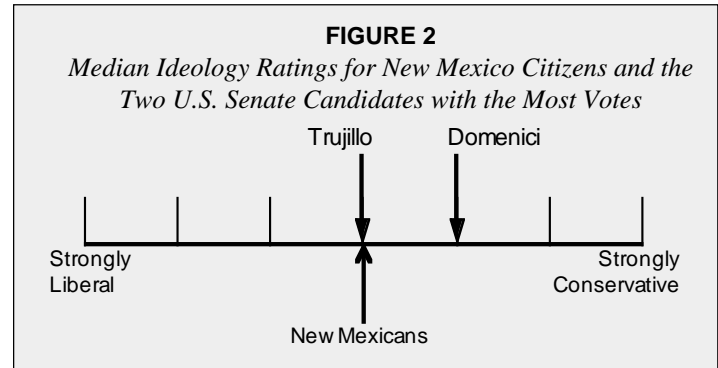


TABLE 2
Statewide and Congressional Candidates' Vote Percentages Compared to the Party Identities of Registered Voters in their Congressional Districts

Victorious Candidate & Office	% of Vote	District Partisanship		
		Dem	Rep	Indep/Other
Steve Schiff (Republican, Dist. 1)	57%	50%	37%	12%
Joe Skeen (Republican, Dist. 2)	56%	48%	36%	16%
Bill Richardson (Democrat, Dist. 3)	67%	53%	32%	16%

Note. Congressional District partisanship figures are from the May-July *Quarterly Profile* (Vol. 8, No. 3).

bency is sometimes more powerful a predictor of electoral outcomes than are partisanship and ideology.

FOCUS 2: WHAT WE KNEW AND HOW WE KNEW IT

Introduction

The first section of the *Quarterly Profile* examined how New Mexicans use different pieces of information—about incumbency and ideology—to make voting decisions. In reality, citizens often have less-than-complete information. For example, over one-fifth (22%) of those surveyed were unable to identify their Representative from a list of three names (Schiff, Skeen, and Richardson). After the election, 17% were not sure who won the U.S. Senate election in New Mexico. What exactly *did* New Mexicans know going into the November 5th election, and how did they know it?

Watching a Dull Horse Race

One set of facts that the media widely discussed was the near-certainty of Clinton's re-election. In the end, Clinton won the Presidential election, but how many New Mexicans already expected that outcome? When asked whom they expected to win the election, 79% said that Clinton was going to win, 11% expected Dole to win, and 10% were unsure. New Mexicans were even more certain of the outcome of the U.S. Senate election: 86% said that Domenici would win, 8% said that Trujillo would win, and 5% were not sure.

Many New Mexicans even had a good idea of the range of Clinton's likely vote percentage nationwide. Forty-five percent of respondents who said Clinton would win expected him to win between 45 and 54 percent of the popular vote on November 5th. Only 4% thought he could win with a lower percentage, 33% expected him to win even more votes, and 18% did not know what percentage to expect.

It was much harder for respondents to guess what percentage of the vote Clinton would win in New Mexico: 40% were not sure, 23% correctly guessed he would win between 45 and 54 percent, 4% guessed he would win less, and 32% guessed he would win with a larger percentage of the vote. (Clinton won 49% of the vote both in New Mexico and nationwide.)

Many New Mexico voters were also unsure what percentage of the vote Domenici would win. Among those who expected the Senator to be re-elected, 33% did not guess what percentage he would win, 26% said he would get less than 60% of the vote, and 41% said he would get more than 60%. (Domenici won 65% of the vote.)

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FOCUS 2: WHAT WE KNEW AND HOW WE KNEW IT

Watching a Dull Horse Race

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In sum, most New Mexicans already knew the likely outcomes of the two races at the top of the ballot, and many even had a good idea of the *percent* of the vote that would go to the winner. Whether this knowledge dampened turnout is uncertain, but these data show that the public *did* expect that the races for U.S. President and U.S. Senate were not going to be close.

Knowledge of Campaign Contributions

If the public has access to information of this kind, does it also know more pertinent information about campaign contributions to candidates running for state office? Interviewers asked respondents the following question: "New Mexico state law requires candidates to report who contributed money to their campaigns. Are you very aware, somewhat aware or not at all aware of who contributed money to the candidates who ran for state office in your community?" Over two-thirds (68%) of respondents said they were not aware of contributions to candidates, and only 4% were *very* aware of them.

Only 20% of respondents said that it was "not at all important" that they know "who contributed money to the candidates running for state office" in their community. Forty-three percent said such information was "somewhat important," and 37% said it was "very important."

Information Sources

Those voters who *did* know about campaign contributions could have obtained the information from many different sources. Table 3 shows that a plurality (42%) of respondents said that TV news was their "primary source of information about the candidates running for U.S. President," whereas a plurality (37%) primarily relied on newspapers to inform them about state legislative races. For the U.S. Congressional election, many respondents turned to both of these sources, as well as television advertisements.

A Third of Bernalillo County Voters Said that They Read the Voter's Guide

The *Bernalillo County Voter's Guide* is one source of information widely distributed to voters in New Mexico's most populous county. To learn whether the *Guide* was read, interviewers asked 139 county residents the following question after the November 5th election: "Every year the League of Women Voters distributes the *Bernalillo County Voter's Guide*, which provides information on all the elections in Bernalillo County. Did you read a copy of the *Voter's Guide* for the 1996 general election?" Thirty-one percent said they had read it. The *Guide* was reportedly read by 34% of those who said they voted.

TABLE 3

New Mexicans' Primary Information Sources for Three Types of Elections

Victorious Candidate & Office	Election		
	President	Congress	NM Leg
Television news programs	42%	29%	23%
Newspapers	24%	25%	37%
Television ads	16%	21%	19%
The radio	11%	13%	8%
Mail that candidates sent you	1%	4%	4%
Campaign phone calls	<1%	2%	<1%
Personal contact with candidates	2%	2%	1%
Family or friends	4%	6%	6%
Totals	100%	100%	100%
Sample size	185	183	201

Note. Respondents were randomly assigned one of three questions asking them to name the primary information source for one of three elections. Thus, sample sizes for each question are only a third of the size of the whole sample.

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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 611 adult New Mexicans in October-November of 1996. The telephone numbers were selected randomly by computer. The results of the poll have a four 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 four 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.

TRENDS

Political Partisanship

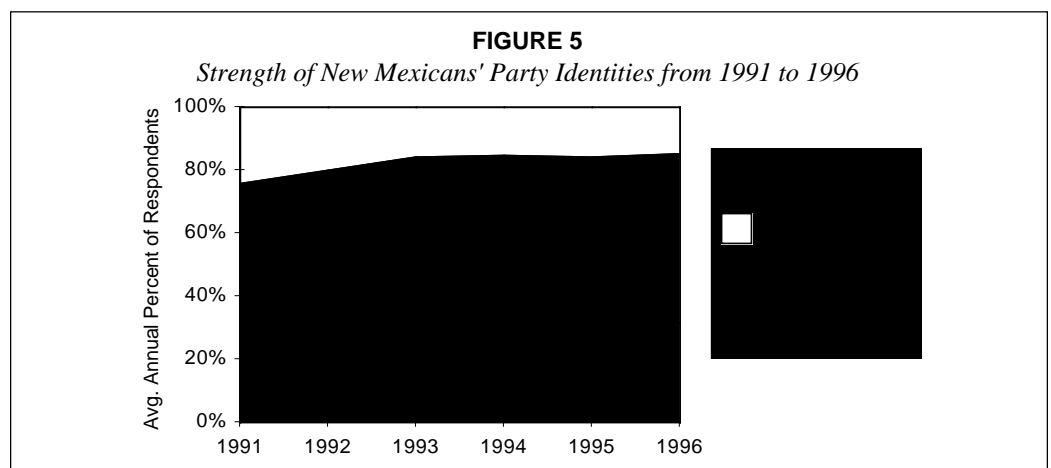
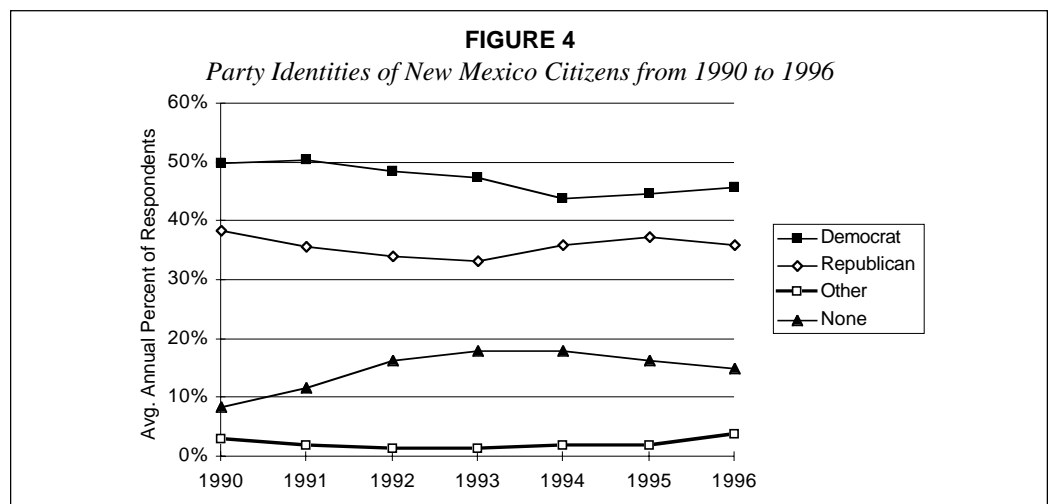
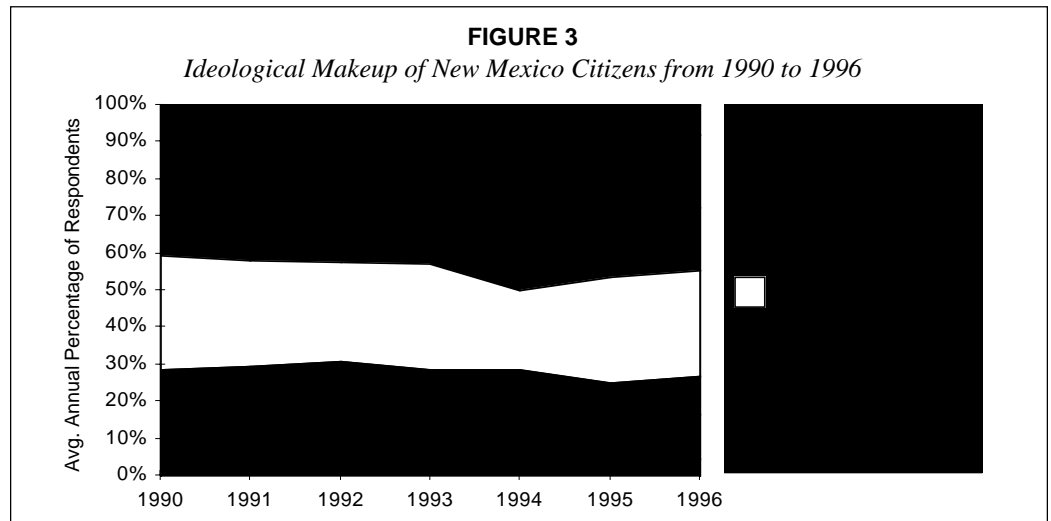
For several years, the *Quarterly Profile* survey has asked respondents about their ideological leanings, their party membership, and the strength of their party affiliations. In this 33rd *Quarterly Profile*, we re-examined these data to see if there were changes in the partisanship of the New Mexico public during the past six years.

Interviewers typically ask respondents to rate their political views on a scale from “strongly liberal” to “strongly conservative.” In 1990, 30% identified themselves as liberal and 41% said they were conservative. This year, 27% said they were liberal and 44% said they were conservative. Figure 3 shows that between those years, conservatism peaked at 51% in 1994, with the election of Republican majorities in the U.S. Congress. Note that the increase in conservatism was matched by a decrease in “middle of the road” responses; the proportion of New Mexicans viewing themselves as liberal remained stable.

Partisanship in New Mexico appears to have undergone more change than ideology since 1990. Figure 4 shows that a majority of the New Mexicans surveyed in the 1990 and 1991 *Quarterly Profiles* said that they identified with the Democratic party, but the percentage identifying with the party has now declined to the mid-forties. Identification with the Republican party was also declining until it rose in 1994 and 1995. The party identification that’s undergone the most change is “none.” In 1990 only 9% of New Mexicans surveyed said they had no party identity, but in 1993 and 1994, 18% had no party identity.

The increase in “independent” citizens may account for the pattern shown in Figure 5. Since 1991, interviewers have asked those with party identities whether they “completely,” “somewhat,” or “slightly” identify themselves with the party named in the previous question. The percent having only a slight party identification has dropped from nearly one-in-four (24%) in 1991 to fewer than one-in-

six (15%) in 1996. Meanwhile, those strongly identifying with their respective party has climbed from 24% to 32%. In other words, party identification may have declined somewhat, but on average, allegiance among the *remaining* partisans is stronger.

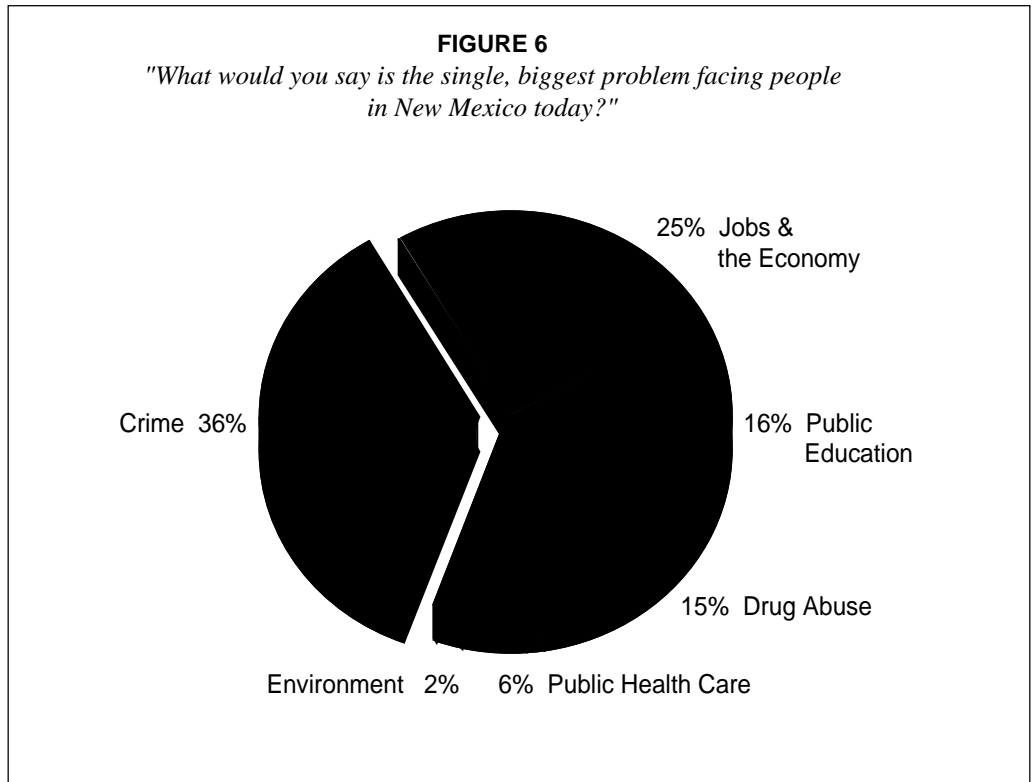


TRENDS

Most Pressing Policy Concerns

Crime remains the most frequent answer to the question, "What would you say is the single, biggest problem facing people in New Mexico today?" Figure 6 shows that 36% of respondents said this was the state's biggest single problem. A quarter said jobs and the economy were most important, followed by public education (16%), drug abuse (15%), public health care (6%), and the environment (2%).

Concern about crime appears to be related to the amount of television news that respondents reported watching. Twenty-nine percent of those who said they watch TV news fewer than five times a week rated crime as the biggest problem facing New Mexico; by comparison, 39% of those who said they watch TV news five or more times a week rated crime as the state's biggest problem. (This association existed in both high- and low-income households.)



TRENDS

Citizen Approval Ratings

In this most recent *Quarterly Profile*, approval ratings for the legislature, public employees, and the police were relatively consistent with the other surveys conducted this year, but the governor's approval rating went up slightly in the last quarter. Table 4 shows that the governor began the year with a 38% approval rating and ended with a 44% rating. The current rating for the governor is the highest since his May '95 rating of 47%.

Interviewers also asked the 191 Bernalillo County residents in the survey to rate the job performance of Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez. Sixty-seven percent of respondents approved of his performance, which is the same percentage that rated the Mayor favorably in each of the two previous quarters.

It is possible that Mayor Chavez will consider running for Governor in 1998, so we chose to compare the Mayor's statewide

TABLE 4
The Percentage of New Mexicans Who Approve of the Performance of Four New Mexico Public Officials and Institutions

	Feb '96	May '96	Aug '96	Nov '96
Governor Gary Johnson	38%	40%	39%	44%
New Mexico Legislature	26%	26%	25%	27%
New Mexico's public employees	42%	41%	41%	40%
"the police in your area"	61%	66%	63%	63%

approval ratings with those of Governor Johnson and the Legislature (from which one or more candidates for Governor might emerge). Because the approval ratings for the Mayor, Governor, and the Legislature have been rather steady for the past two years, we chose to compare their *average* performance ratings for the two-year period.

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TRENDS

Citizen Approval Ratings

(continued from page 5)

Figure 7 breaks their average performance ratings down into “excellent,” “good,” “fair,” “poor,” and “don’t know/no answer” (DK/NA). The figure shows that *statewide*, Chavez has the highest percentage of excellent ratings (11%), as well as the highest percentage of combined excellent/good ratings (45%). Johnson has the highest combined excellent/good/fair ratings (77%), but he and the Legislature share the most poor ratings (19%). Chavez has only a 3% poor rating statewide, but he also has a 31% DK/NA rating.

In sum, more than two-fifths of New Mexicans rate Chavez’s and Johnson’s job performance as excellent or good, but relatively even percentages of citizens rate these two officials and the Legislature as doing at least a fair job. Chavez has the fewest detractors statewide, but during the past two years, nearly a third of New Mexicans have declined to rate his job performance, probably because he is not their elected official. (For the same reason, an even *larger* percentage of New Mexicans would

probably decline to rate any individual legislator.) If the figures shown in Figure 7 hold steady, then the Mayor, Governor, or legislators who identify themselves with the Legislature as a whole will have a majority of New Mexicans believing they have done at least a fair job as a public official. That may provide the setting for a competitive race for Governor in 1998.

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