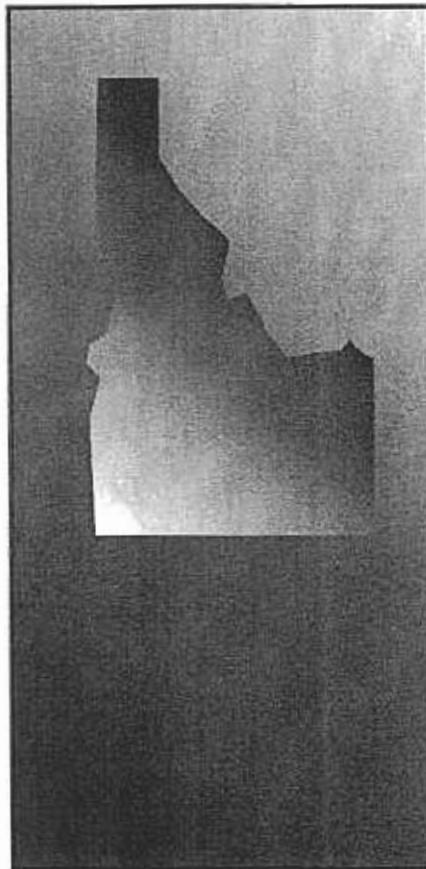

IDAHO

POLICY

SURVEY



The Survey Research Center
College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs
Boise State University

#5

January 1994

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Gary F. Moncrief

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INTRODUCTION

The Idaho State Board of Education has designated public affairs as a primary emphasis area for Boise State University. One of the ways that Boise State is meeting this responsibility is by operating a Survey Research Center. The Center's mission is to conduct timely, high-quality research that will assist Idaho's citizens and policymakers in their efforts to solve state and local problems.

The *Idaho Policy Survey* is a continuing program in the College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs at Boise State University. Its primary purpose is to examine public opinion on issues that are currently the subject of debate or that civic leaders have identified as potentially important on the state's agenda.

Polling has become commonplace in contemporary American life. When designed and administered properly, polls are an effective way to gauge beliefs, attitudes, and opinions on a range of prominent issues. Although the *Idaho Policy Survey* provides an overview of citizens concerns and preferences, it does not make policy recommendations. We recognize that surveys are only one way of gathering information about public opinion, and that public opinion is just one consideration that goes into policymaking.

This report presents the results from the fifth annual omnibus survey of the opinions held by Idahoans on public affairs issues. It builds upon its predecessors by asking many of the same questions that were posed to respondents during the past four years. Our intent is to build a longitudinal data-base so that trends in public opinion can be traced over time. In addition to the questions that we repeat from year to year, each volume of the *Idaho Policy Survey* contains findings that are derived from asking questions that bear upon topics that may be of special interest only during a particular year. Thus the reader is given information that allows over-time comparisons of enduring issues, as well as focused case studies of hot topics.

Volume 5 of the *Idaho Policy Survey* contains four sections. As in the four previous survey reports, the first section examines citizens' opinions on the quality of life in Idaho, and what problems facing the state are seen as the most important. The next section focuses on attitudes toward the federal, state, and local levels of government, as well as on the perceived fairness of different types of taxes and the degree of support for state spending increases in eleven broad service areas. The third section this year is a new one: we explore the public's awareness of and attitudes toward a variety of initiative and referenda questions which may be on the 1994 statewide ballot. Finally, the last section explores how residents of the Gem State feel about a variety of specific policy issues. The report concludes with a methodological appendix that summarizes the procedure used to draw the sample and conduct the interviews.

The research for this report was conducted under the direction of Dr. Gary F. Moncrief, with the assistance of Thomas E. Mayes and the Survey Research Center. Jennifer Carrington was a very able and conscientious project assistant to Dr. Moncrief. We wish to thank Robert Sims, Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs for his support and encouragement.

The Survey Research Center gratefully acknowledges the dedication and enthusiasm of the following individuals who spent many long hours in the Public Opinion Laboratory conducting telephone interviews: Emiliano Beagarie, Erika Beveridge, David Burt, Amy Burton, Kimber Calvert, Timothy Conlon, Brad Duke, Richard Fannon, Buckles Gill, Norma Gomez, John Gutzman, Danielle Hansen, Katie Hobson, Patricia Homeyer, Matt Hunt, Nick Ison, Robert Johnson, Ronald Johnson, Alan Jones, Lisa Ketchum, Destry Langley, Troy Long, Daniel Madden, Michael Mautner, Devin McCarty, Robert McKie, Mary Miranda, Jane Reed, Melissa Rovera, Eric Schaudies, Khri Soden, Amy Southwick, and Joel Wallace. Larry Clark served as the very capable field supervisor.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN IDAHO

Once again, the *Idaho Policy Survey* began by asking the respondents how they felt about the overall quality of life in Idaho. As Figure 1 and Table 1 show, the vast majority of the people in our sample who expressed an opinion gave a positive response to this question. There are slight differences by region (see Map 1), with respondents from Region 1 indicating slightly less satisfaction than respondents from the other regions, but the differences are not statistically significant.

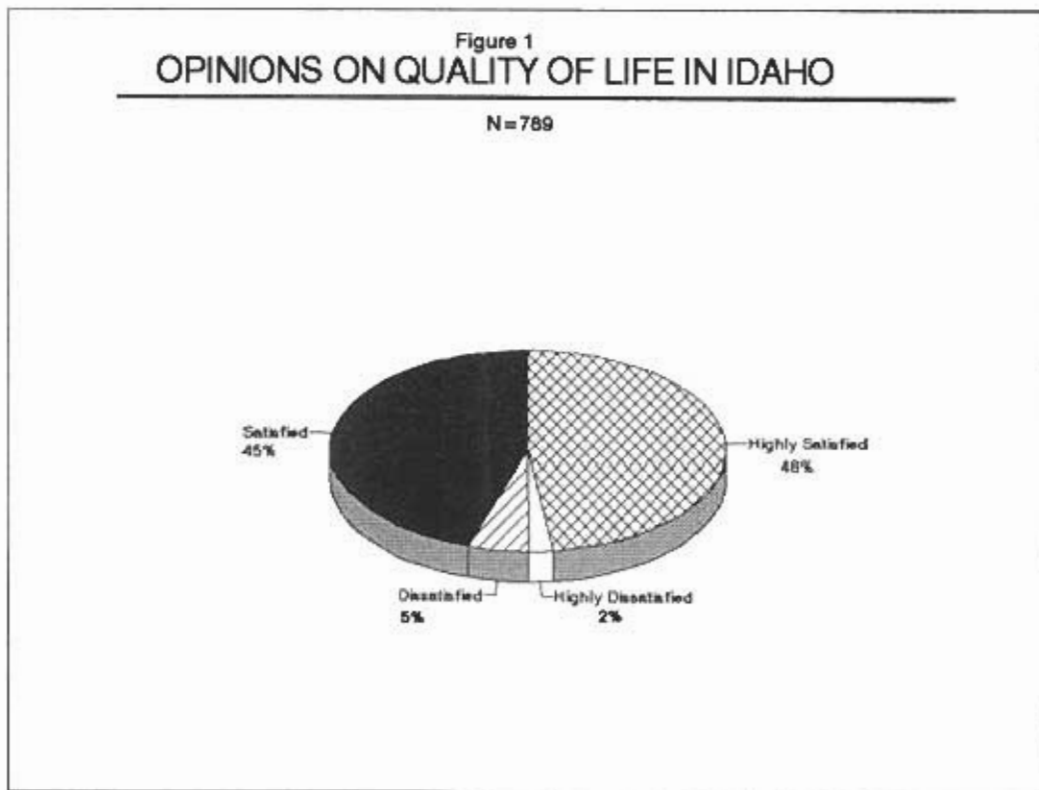
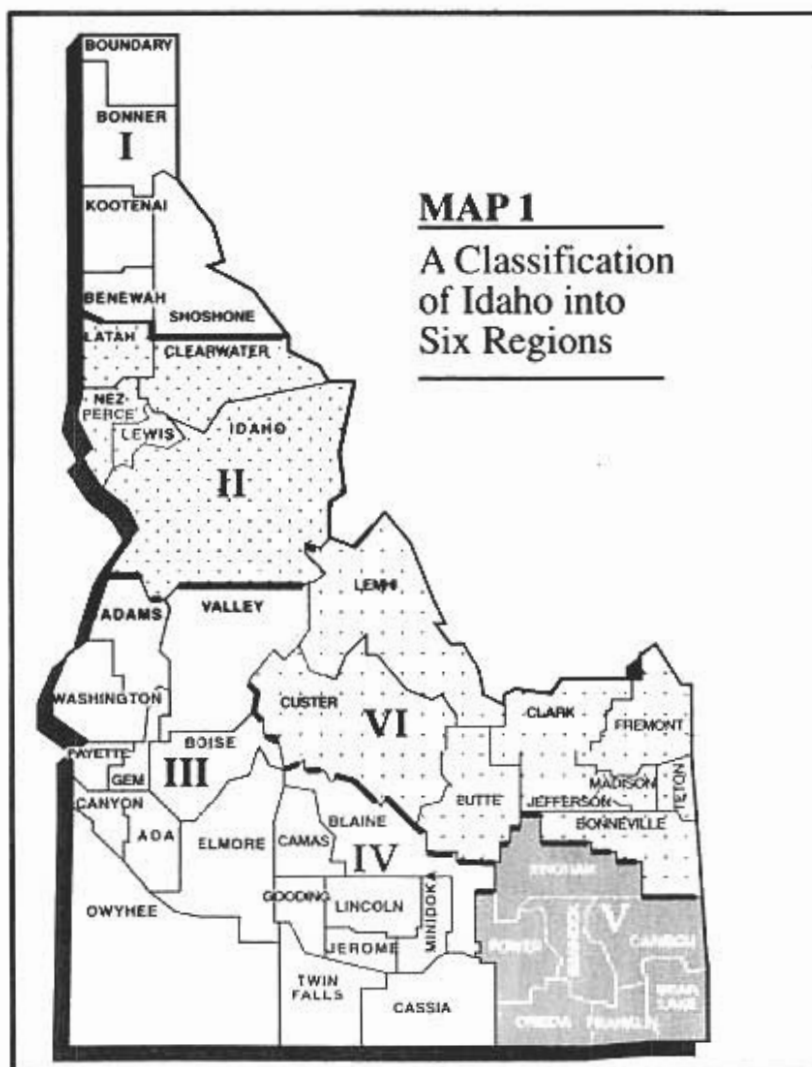


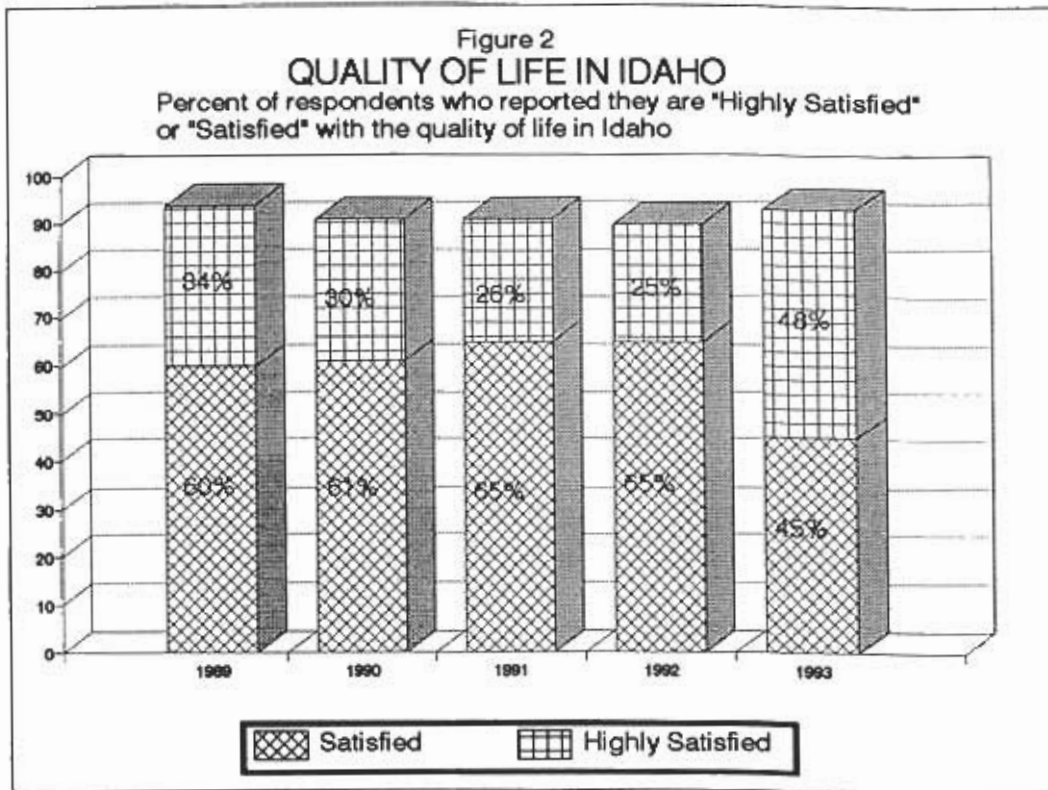
TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF OPINIONS ON QUALITY
OF LIFE IN IDAHO, BY REGION*

	STATE PLANNING REGION					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Highly Satisfied	38%	54%	46%	51%	49%	44%
Satisfied	47%	40%	44%	41%	46%	44%
Dissatisfied	8%	1%	4%	7%	4%	5%
Highly Dissatisfied	4%	3%	3%	0%	0%	3%
(Number of Cases)	(102)	(70)	(304)	(110)	(109)	(115)

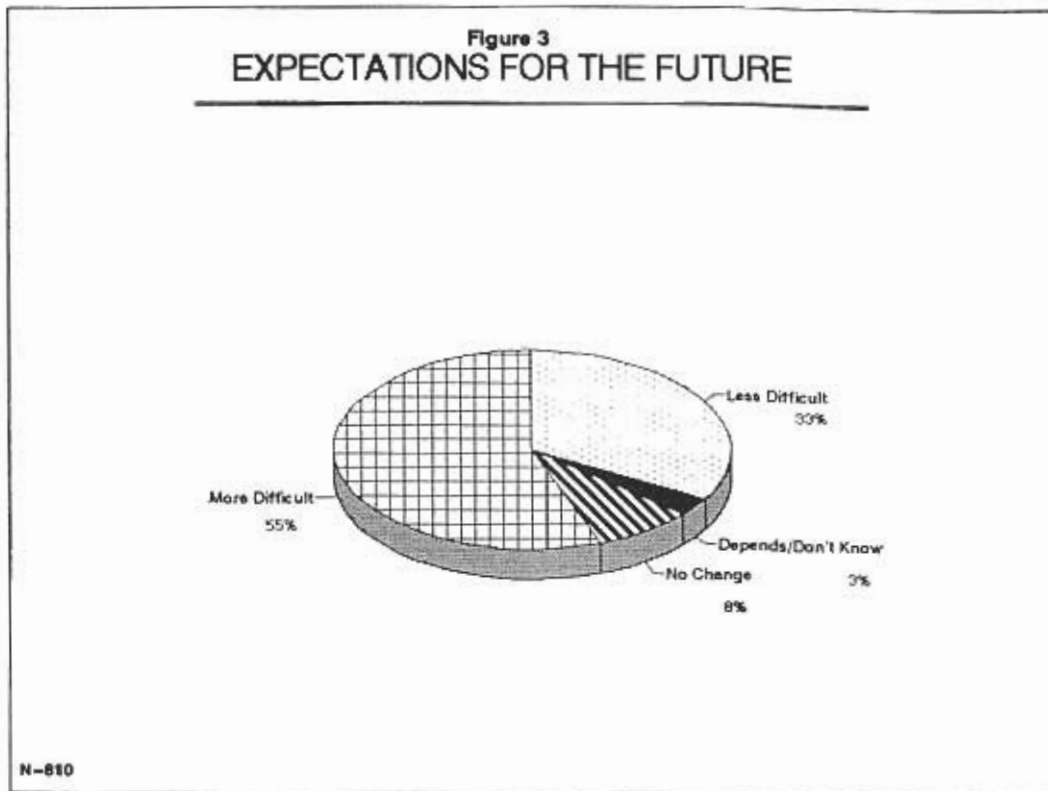
*Column percentages may not total 100% due to omission of "Don't Know" responses

While the overall level of satisfaction remains virtually the same as in past years (at least 90% of all respondents have said they are either "satisfied" or "highly satisfied" in each of the past five surveys), there appears to be a stronger sense of satisfaction today. As Figure 2 indicates, the percentage of individuals who said they were "highly satisfied" is substantially higher this year (48%, compared to 25% in the last survey).





Despite this high level of satisfaction with Idaho's quality of life, a majority of the people interviewed felt that things would get more difficult in the future. Figure 3 shows that 55% of the surveyed Idahoans felt life would become more difficult for the remainder of the decade, while only 33% felt life would get easier. These results are quite



similar to the responses to the same question from last year's survey. There are, however, substantial differences in the relative perceptions of various demographic groups. Table 2 demonstrates these differences:

- **Region 4 respondents were particularly pessimistic, while Region 2 interviewees were equally divided on the outlook for the future (44% thought things would get easier, 44% thought things would get more difficult).**
- **Not surprisingly, education levels are associated with expectations for the future. The higher the education level, the more optimistic the view of the future. The same is true for income levels.**
- **There are also differences in outlook associated with age. Respondents in the 18-34 years old category were almost twice as likely as those over 60 years old to think that life would get easier for the remainder of the decade.**
- **Relative newcomers to the state (those who had lived in Idaho for less than three years), were far more likely to express optimism about the future.**
- **There is virtually no difference between male and female respondents' views on this question.**

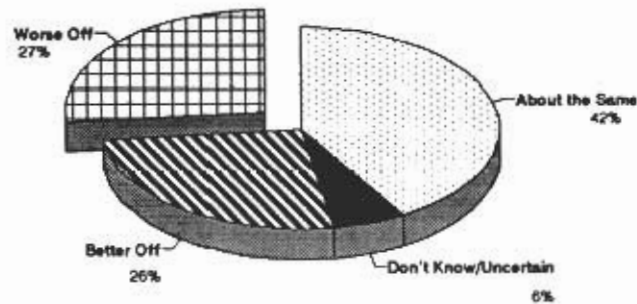
TABLE 2
A COMPARISON OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPECTATIONS
FOR LIFE IN THE 1990s, BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP*

<u>Demographic Group</u>	Citizens' Expectations			
	Easier	More Difficult	No Change	
Total Sample	33%	55%	8%	
Gender				
Male	31%	55%	11%	396
Female	36%	55%	6%	414
Age				
18-34	40%	54%	4%	233
35-60	35%	55%	8%	397
61+	21%	58%	16%	180
Education				
HS or less	29%	57%	9%	302
Some college/tech.	33%	58%	7%	298
BA or more	40%	49%	9%	207
Household Income				
Under \$30,000	24%	65%	6%	250
\$30,000+	38%	51%	8%	510
Length of Residence				
Under 3 years	48%	42%	9%	69
3 years+	32%	56%	8%	741
State Planning Region				
I	36%	47%	14%	102
II	44%	44%	10%	70
III	32%	58%	7%	304
IV	26%	60%	8%	110
V	38%	55%	6%	109
VI	30%	58%	10%	115

**Row percentages may not total 100% due to omission of "Don't Know" responses. Number of cases in certain groups is less than 810 due to refusal of some respondents to report demographic information.*

We also asked Idahoans to compare their financial condition today to the situation four years ago. Figure 4 shows that about equal numbers of respondents felt they were better off today as perceived they were worse off. The largest component (42%) felt their financial situation was about the same.

Figure 4
FINANCIAL SITUATION

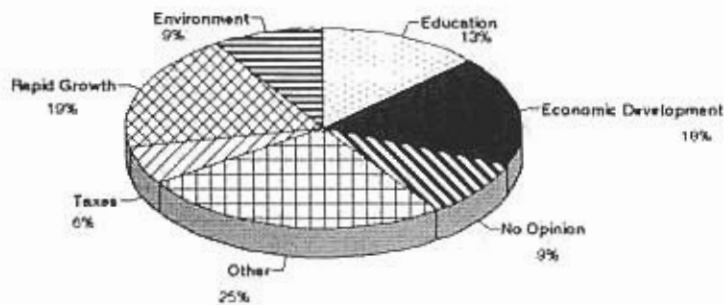


Comparison With Four Years Ago

n=810 Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding error.

As in the past, we asked respondents what they considered to be the most important problem facing the state of Idaho. The question was open-ended to prevent any influence from suggested choices and asked early in the interview before other questions in the survey could bias responses. The problems that were identified, therefore, can be interpreted as being highly salient to Idahoans. Figure 5 depicts the problems identified by the Idahoans surveyed. This figure indicates a shift in concern from last year. Whereas in last year's survey 34% of the respondents identified "economic development" as a major concern, only 18% of this year's respondents did so. Conversely, only 8% of

Figure 5
THE MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEMS FACING IDAHO



N=810

last year's respondents mentioned "rapid growth" as a problem, while 19% did so this year. In fact, the category of "rapid growth" was the largest area of concern specifically mentioned by this year's respondents.

We asked several specific questions about population growth. In Figure 6 are the results from the question, "Overall, do you think the population growth in Idaho is good or bad for the state?" It is apparent that the respondents are divided on their perception of growth: 40% said it was bad, 41% said it was good. Moreover, these perceptions are remarkably consistent—especially among those who identified growth as good—across all regions of the state. As Table 3 shows, the difference between those who view growth as good and those who perceive it as bad is never greater than 6% in any region of the state.

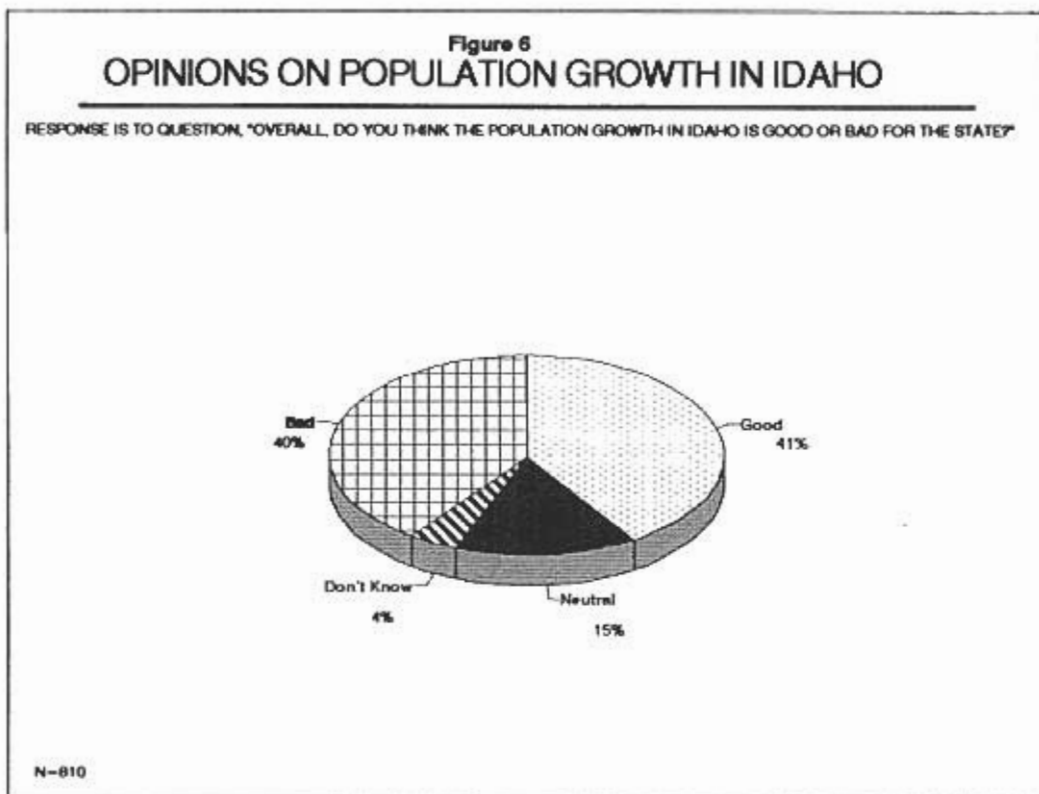


TABLE 3
ATTITUDES TOWARD POPULATION GROWTH BY REGION OF THE STATE*

Planning Region	Good	Bad	Neutral	(n)
I	41%	37%	16%	(102)
II	39%	37%	19%	(70)
III	41%	41%	16%	(304)
IV	41%	35%	19%	(110)
V	42%	39%	14%	(109)
VI	43%	49%	7%	(115)

*Responses do not total 100% because some respondents had no opinion or refused to answer

To further explore the growth issue, we asked those respondents who said that growth was good to explain why. It is apparent from Figure 7 that most people who view population growth as good do so because they equate population growth with economic opportunity. Almost 4 out of 5 respondents who said that growth was good responded with reasons such as "economic growth", "more jobs", or "a better economy". We also asked those who felt that growth was generally bad why they thought so. Table 4 reveals their answers. Clearly, the "downside" of growth is perceived to be changes in the lifestyle traditionally associated with Idaho (loss of rural lifestyle, increased crime, too much change, environmental damage).

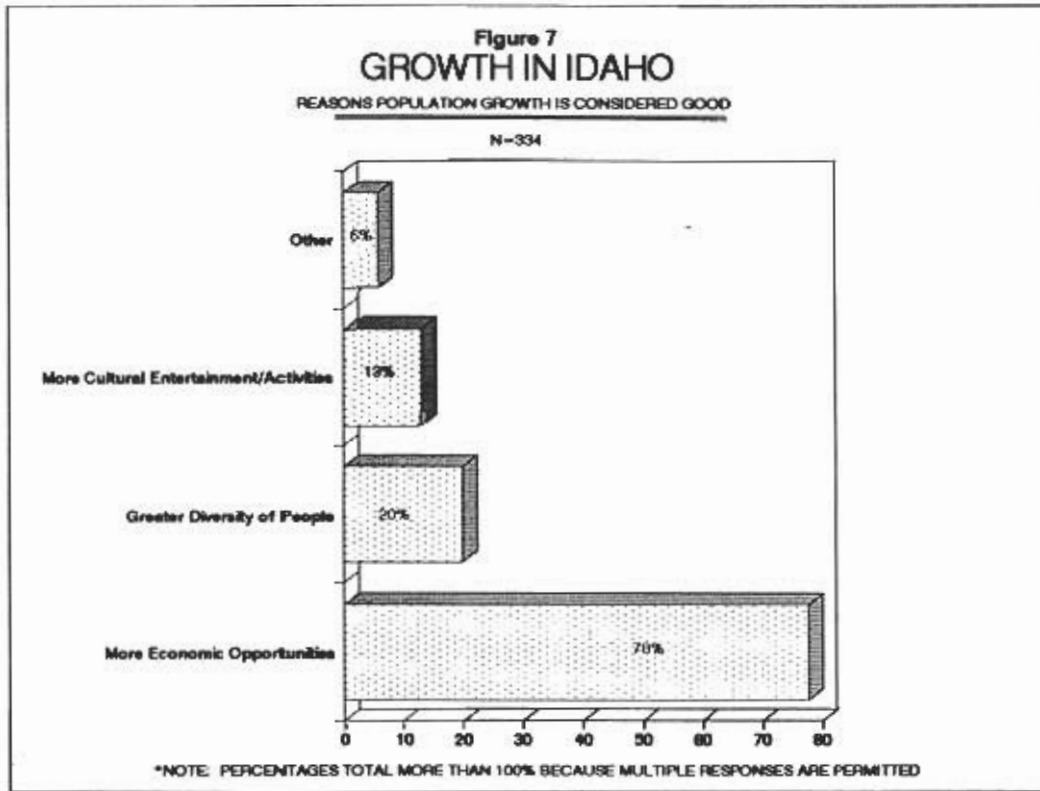


TABLE 4
SPECIFIC REASONS WHY "GROWTH IS BAD"
N = 327

Loss of Rural Lifestyle	28%
Increased Crime	22%
Increased Unemployment	19%
Newcomers want to change things too much	19%
Damage to the Environment	15%
Increased Traffic	8%
Newcomers aren't like us	8%
Other	14%

POLITICAL CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND FINANCING

Recent economic indicators suggest that the state of Idaho will be blessed with a budget surplus this year. We asked citizens of the state what they would like done with any surplus monies (see Figure 8). Of those respondents who voiced an opinion, 14% said the money should be placed in the "rainy day" fund (i.e., saved for the future), 17% said the money should be returned to taxpayers, and 69% felt the surplus should be spent on current needs. Many of the respondents volunteered specific spending priorities for the surplus, as indicated in Figure 9. Of those who volunteered specific spending items, education was clearly the favored recipient. In fact, more people said that surplus funds should go to education than to all other programs combined.

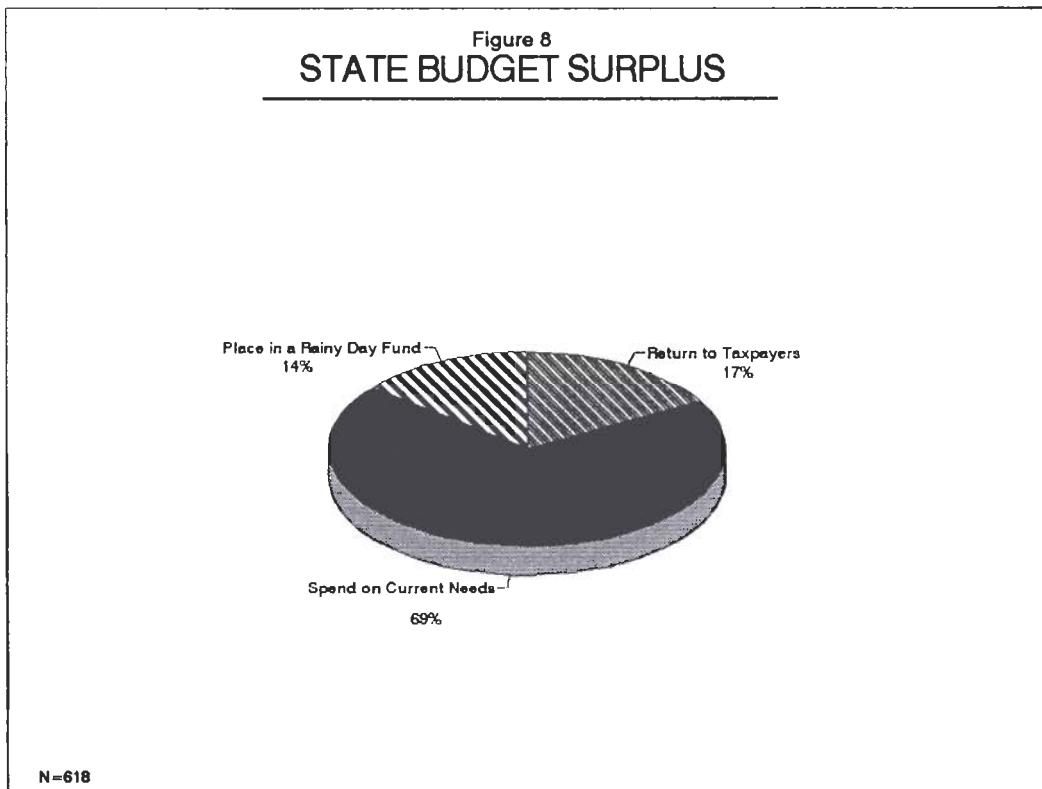
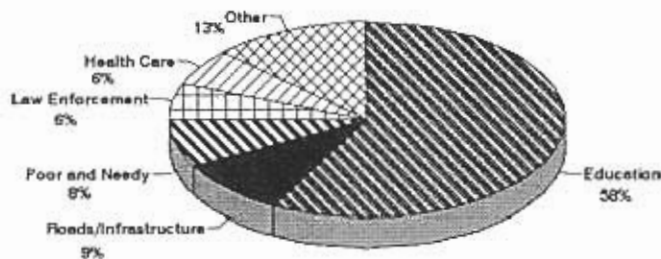


Figure 9
SPECIFIC PROGRAMS FOR BUDGET SURPLUS

SPENDING PREFERENCES OF THOSE IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC SPENDING PRIORITIES FOR THE BUDGET SURPLUS

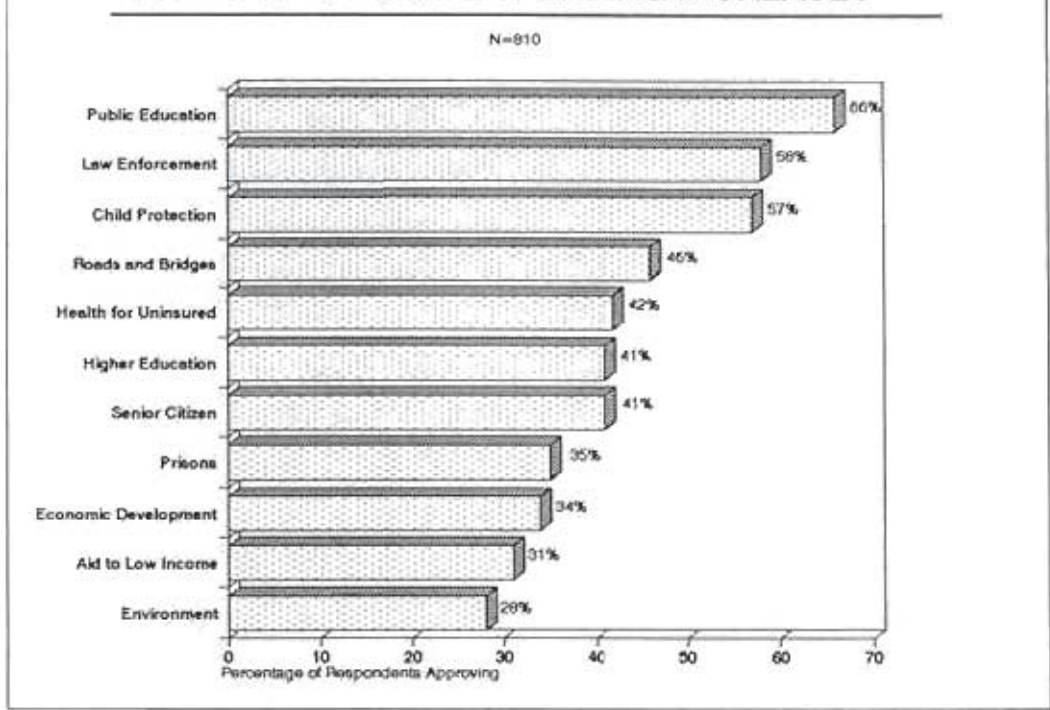


N-281

This opinion was corroborated by another series of questions about public expenditures. As in previous surveys, we asked respondents about their general priorities for government spending. Although most Idahoans probably do not know the exact funding level for specific state programs, they generally have opinions on spending priorities for broad categories of state services. To ascertain citizen spending preferences, survey respondents were first reminded that government spending comes principally from tax revenues, and then asked whether the amount now being spent by the state government should be increased, maintained at present levels, or decreased in various service areas. In Figure 10 we report the percentage of respondents who said that state spending should be increased for various service areas.

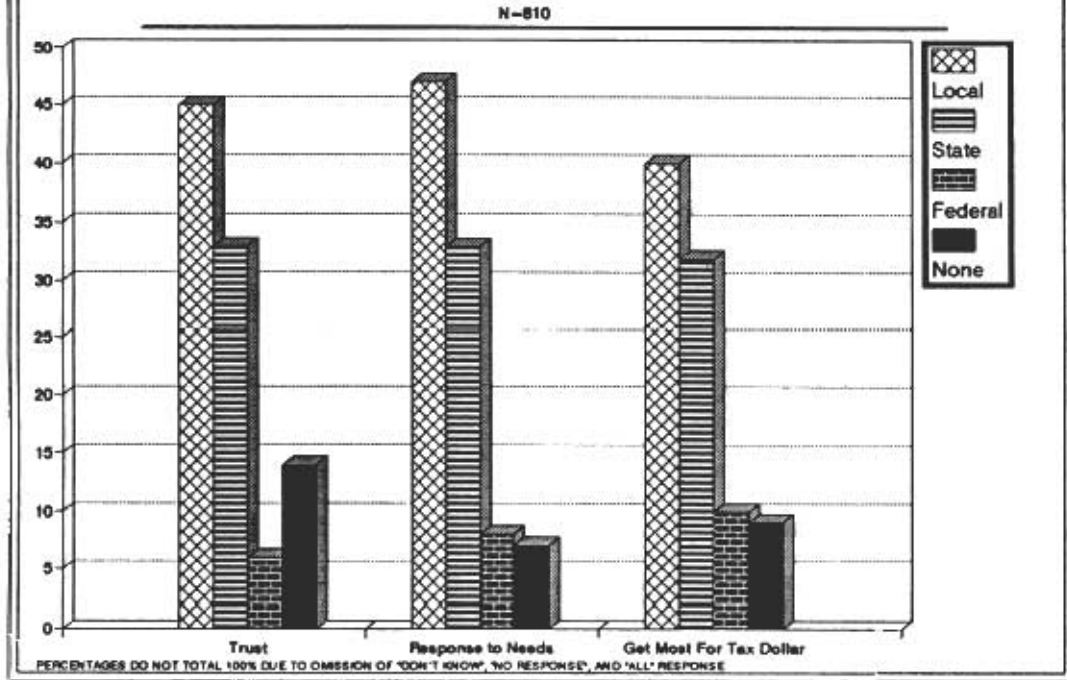
- Public Education (K-12th grade) again garnered the greatest support; two-thirds of all respondents said they supported an increase in state spending for public education. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents said education spending should be maintained at current levels, and 4% thought education spending should be decreased.
- Compared to survey results from last year, there is greater support for an increase in spending on Law Enforcement activities. Last year 40% of the respondents felt that law enforcement activities warranted a spending increase; this year the figure is 58% .
- Increased spending on Child Protection services remains a popular choice among survey respondents. As in the past, this service area remains one of the top three spending priorities for survey respondents.
- Support for spending increases for Roads and Bridges, Health for the Uninsured, Higher Education, and services for Senior Citizens is similar to last year's levels.
- Support for increased spending on Prisons is up (from 24% in 1992 to 35% in 1993). However, 15% of the respondents thought spending on prisons should be reduced.
- Support for spending increases on Economic Development, Aid to Low Income Families, and Environmental Protection were similar to last year's results.

Figure 10
SUPPORT FOR STATE SPENDING INCREASES



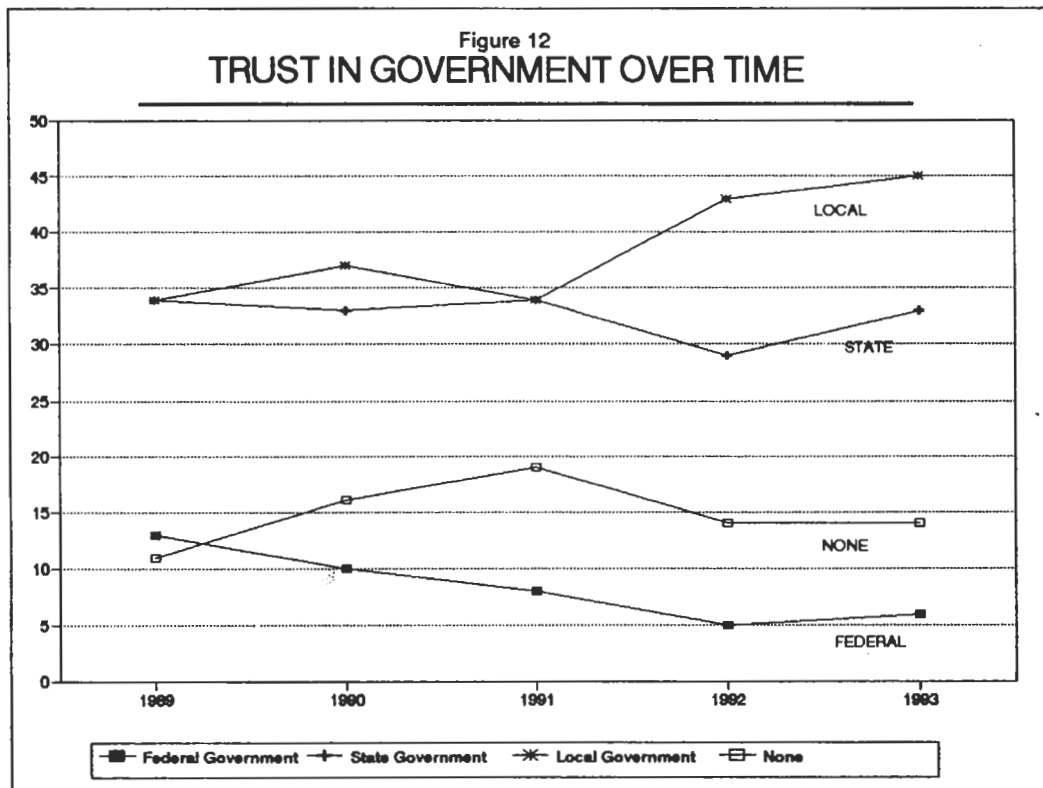
In Figure 11 we turn from questions of budgetary support to more general questions about the perception of government. These questions are identical to those asked in previous surveys and provide us with an opportunity to compare public opinion on these issues over time. As in the past, we asked Idahoans three questions about their attitudes toward the various levels of government. First, we asked in which level of government "do you have the most trust and confidence?". Then we asked which level of government "do you think best responds to your needs?".

Figure 11
EVALUATION OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

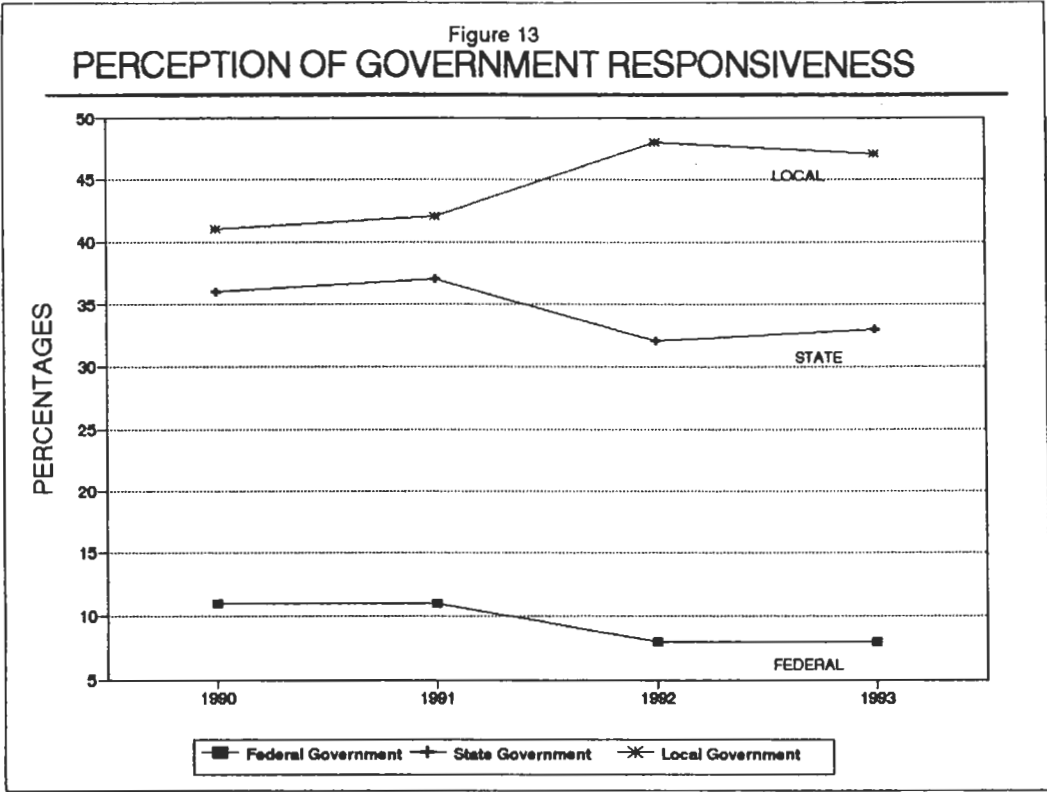


Finally, we asked, "from which level of government do you think you get the most for your tax money?". As in the past, respondents view local government most positively, followed by state government, with the federal government a distant third. Figures 12, 13, and 14, allow us to examine public opinion on these questions over time:

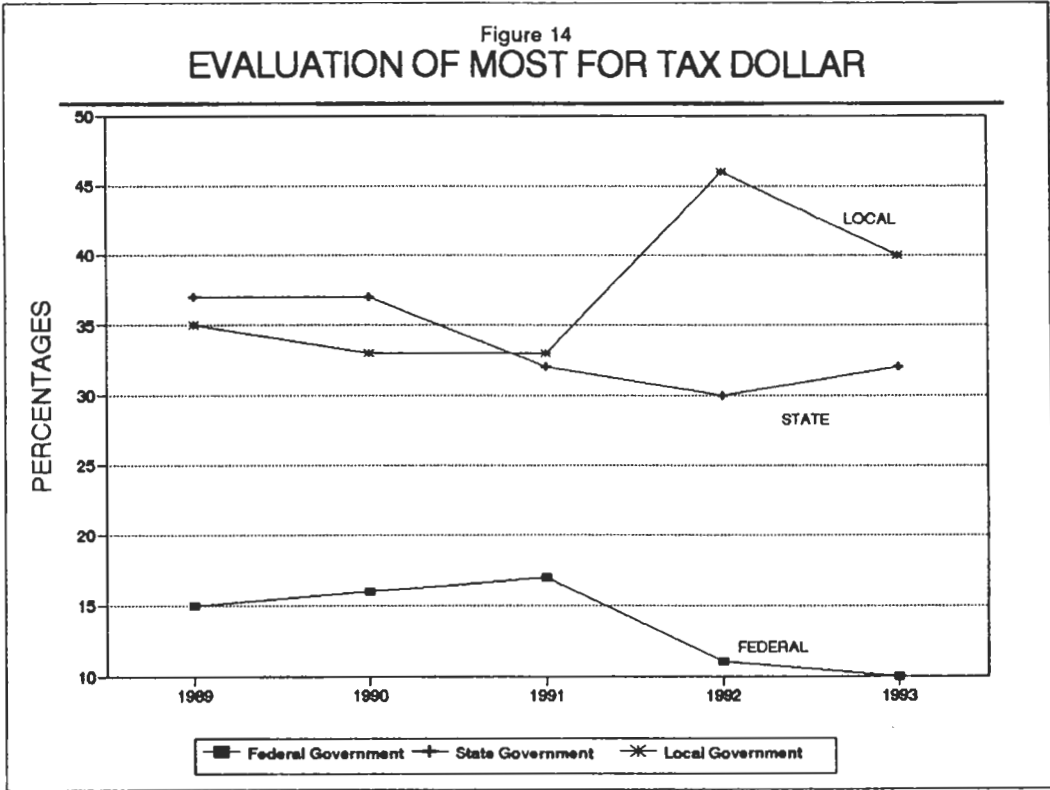
- The rankings of the three levels of government have not changed much over the past five years. Respondents usually indicate a bit more trust and confidence in local than state government.
- Relative trust and confidence in the federal government has been consistently low since our first survey.
- The percentage of people who indicate they do not have trust or confidence in any level of government remains in the 10-20% range.



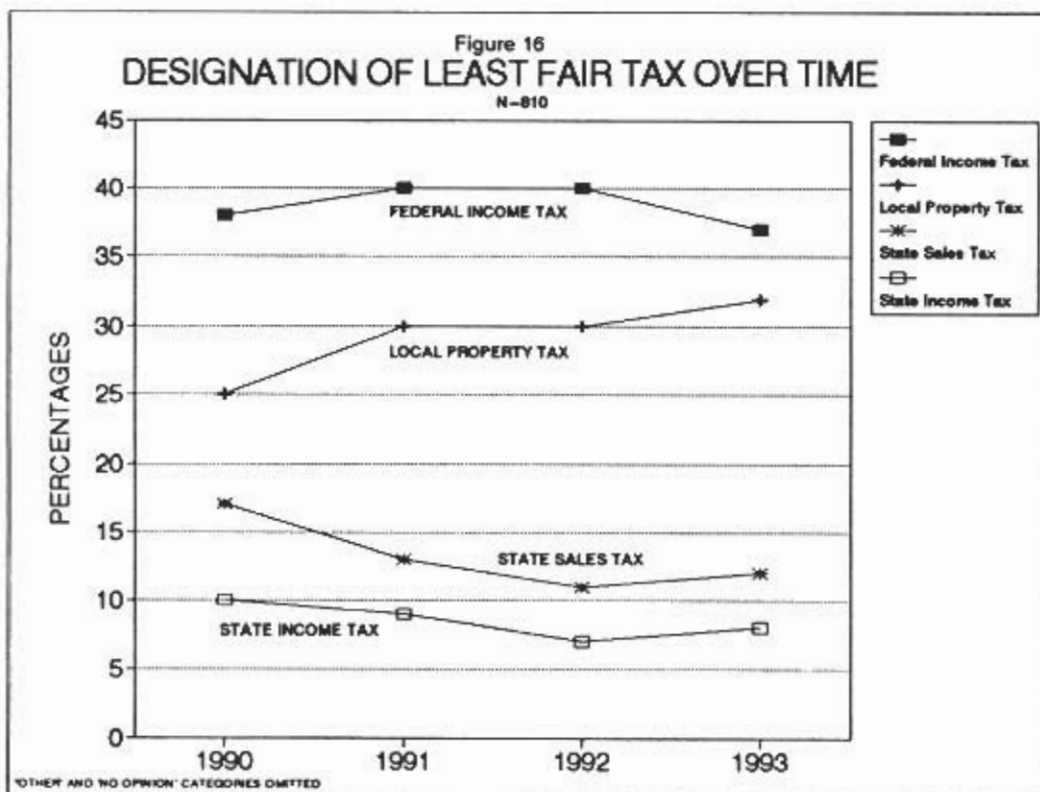
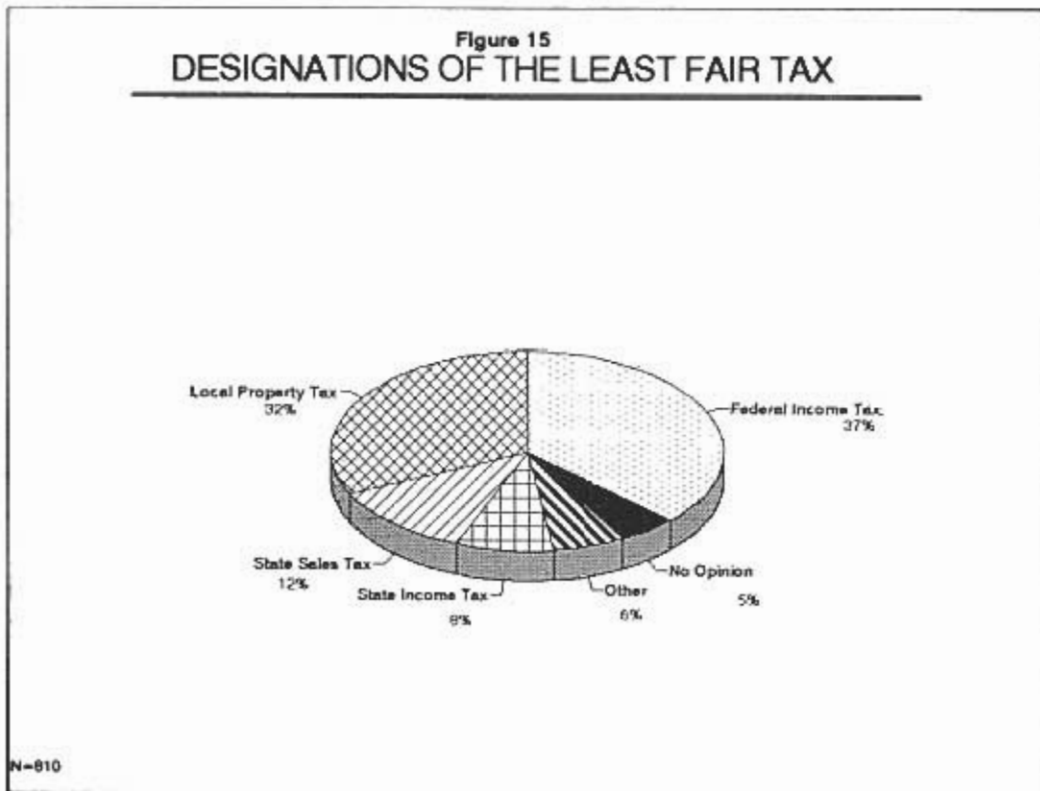
- Similar results exist for the perception of responsiveness (Figure 13). Very low percentages of those surveyed say they believe the federal government to be the most responsive. Consistently over time, more people believe local government to be the most responsive level of government. (Note: this question was not asked in the 1989 survey).
- We see in Figure 14 that more people identify local government as providing the most for the tax money, although the percentage who believe so is more volatile than is the case for those who identify state government as the best "value". Since 1989 the percent of respondents who identify state govern-



ment as providing the most for the tax dollar has consistently ranged between 30-37%. Likewise, the proportion of those surveyed who identify the federal government as the best value ranges between 10-17%. The perception of local government as providing the most for the tax dollar is more variable, ranging from 33% in 1990 and 1991 to a high of 46% in 1992. The 1993 figure is 40%.



In the last few years in Idaho, there has been a lot said and written about various types of taxes. Figure 15 shows that 37% of those surveyed feel that the federal income tax is the least fair tax that they pay, while another 32% identify the local property tax as the least fair. Significantly fewer respondents identified other types of taxes (e.g., state sales tax or state income tax). Moreover, as Figure 16 demonstrates, these attitudes appear to be relatively stable over time (within the margin of error).



PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF POSSIBLE INITIATIVE AND REFERENDA ISSUES

The 1994 statewide election is likely to have more issues on the ballot than any election in recent memory. In addition to a referendum on the establishment of an independent reapportionment commission, as many as five or six initiative proposals may qualify for the ballot. We asked Idahoans if they had heard about the following proposals:

- * to limit the number of terms of office that elected officials in Idaho can serve
- * to establish policies regarding homosexuality
- * to change the date for property tax notifications from November to October
- * to limit campaign contributions in Idaho elections to \$100 from any individual
- * to limit property taxes to 1% of the assessed value of property
- * to limit local government budget increases to 5% per year
- * to require public schools in Idaho to make available classroom space for the teaching of courses on coinage, credit, and the circulation of money
- * to transfer from the state legislature to an independent reapportionment commission the authority to draw legislative district lines

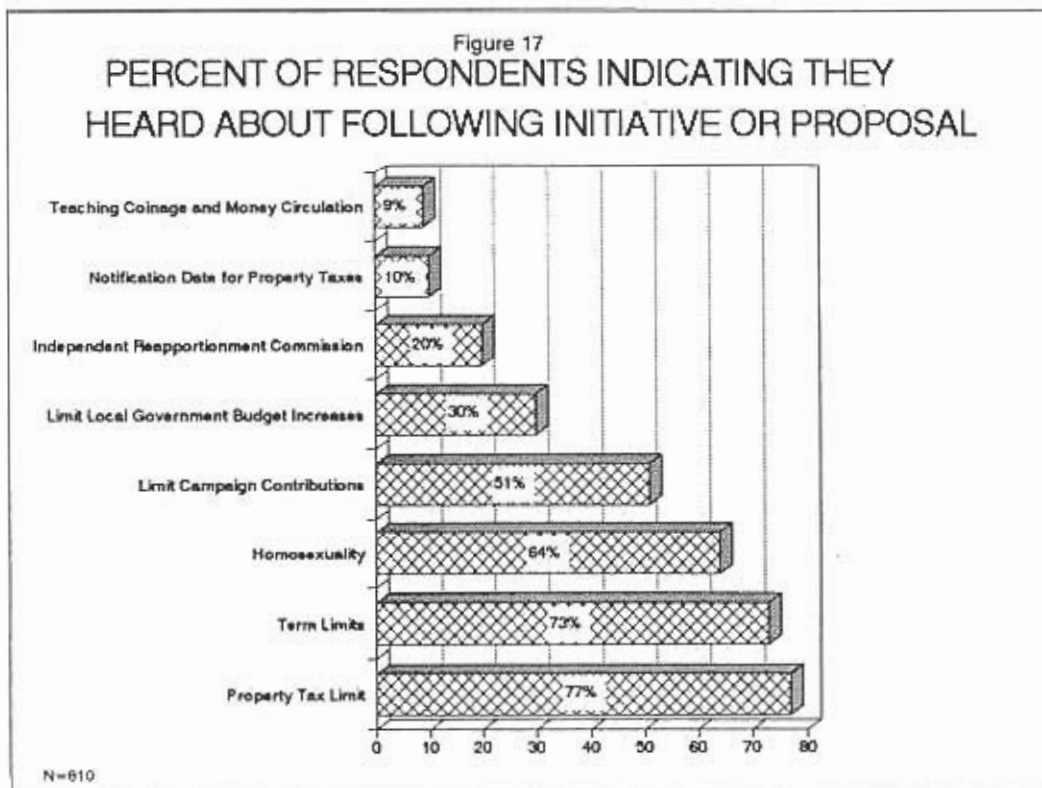
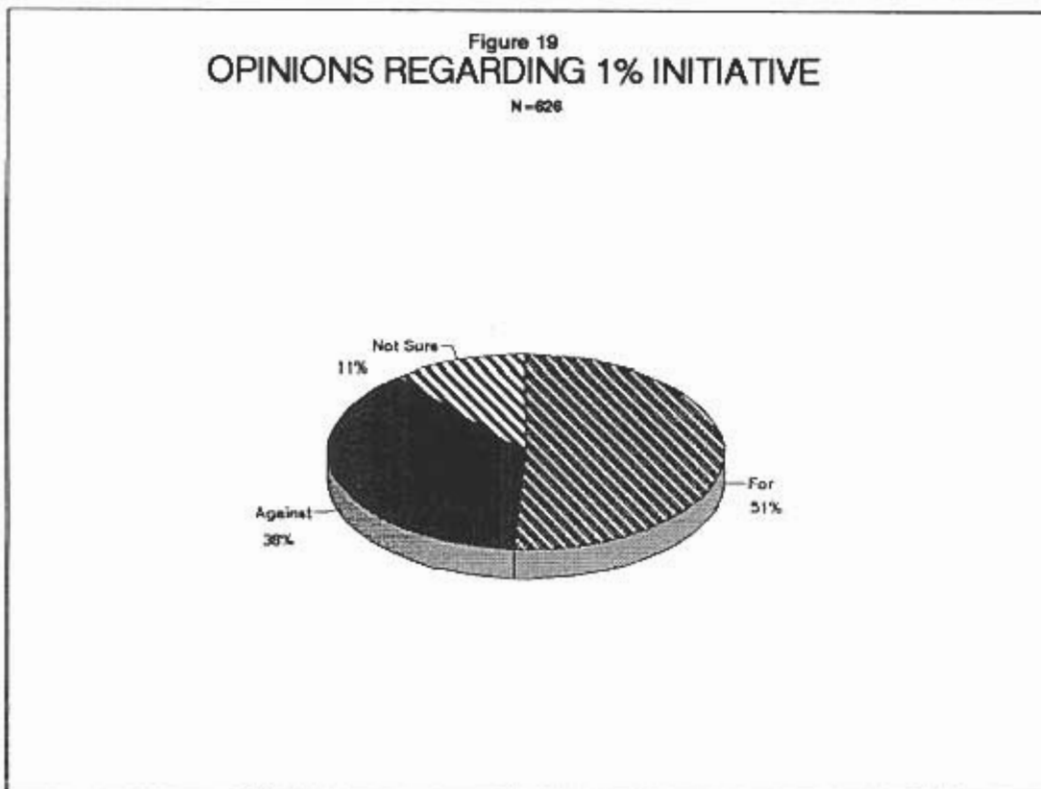
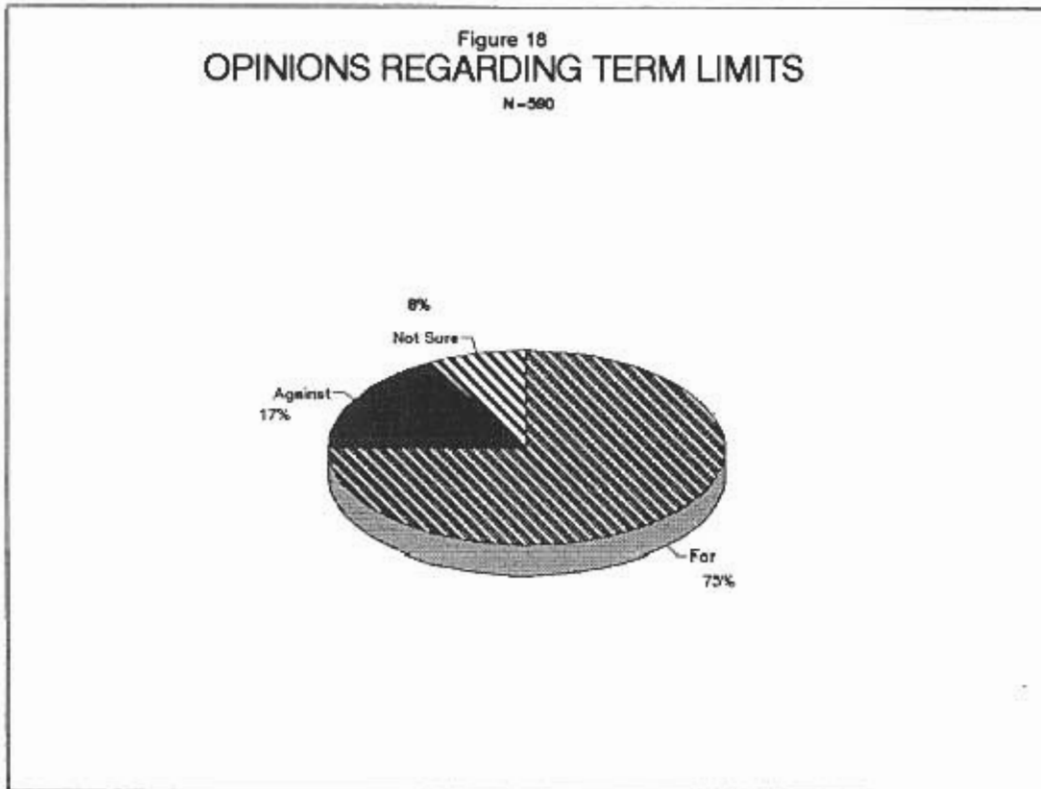


Figure 17 shows the percent of those surveyed who said they had heard about the various proposals. Clearly, there are substantial differences in the public's awareness of some of these issues. Over half of the respondents indicated that they had heard of four of these issues: campaign contribution limits, the ICA initiative regarding homosexuality, the imposition of term limits, and the 1% property tax limitation. Less than one-third of the respondents said they had heard anything about the other four issues.

We also asked those respondents who said they had heard about a particular proposal how he or she would likely vote on the issue. Figures 18-21 show the results for the four most salient proposals.



- There appears to be substantial support for the term limit initiative. Most people said they had heard of the initiative, and the overwhelming majority of those people indicated they were likely to vote for it.
- While a smaller proportion of those interviewed said they had heard about the proposal to limit campaign contributions, those who had heard of it were extremely supportive of the idea. Of those who said they were aware of the proposal, 85% said they were likely to vote for it, and only 11% said they would vote against it.

Figure 20
 OPINIONS REGARDING LIMITING CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS
 N=415

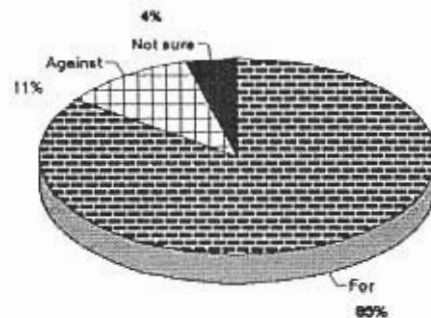
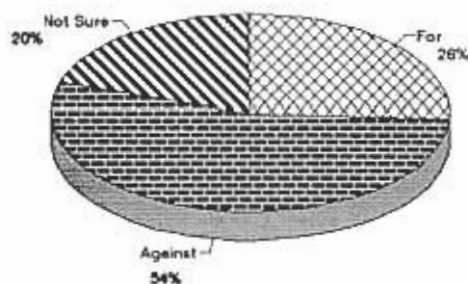


Figure 21
 OPINIONS REGARDING ICA INITIATIVE ON HOMOSEXUALITY
 N=515

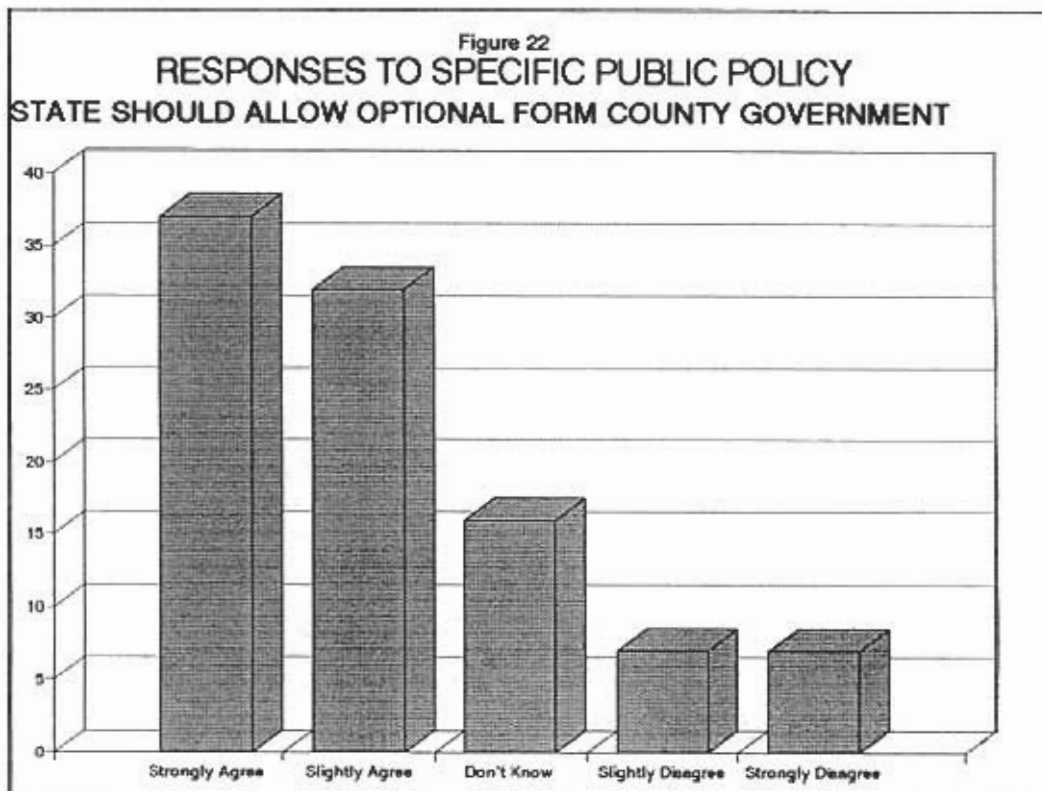


- **More people said they had heard about the 1% property tax limit than any other proposal. 51% of those who had heard of it, indicated they would likely vote for it, while 38% said they would probably vote against it.**
- **Almost 2 out of 3 persons interviewed said they had heard about the proposal in regard to homosexuality (commonly referred to as the “Anti-Gay Rights” or “Anti-Gay” initiative). 54% of our respondents indicated they would likely vote against the initiative. 26% indicated they would probably vote for the proposal, and 20% said they were not sure how they would vote.**

ATTITUDES IN REGARD TO SOCIAL AND PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

Each year we ask respondents a series of questions designed to gauge their attitudes about a variety of social and public policy issues. Some of these questions are posed as "reaction statements", whereby the interviewer makes a statement and asks the respondent to say if they strongly agree, agree, have no opinion, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement. Figures 22-26 show the reactions to five such questions.

- There was strong support for the statement, "The state constitution should be changed to allow optional forms of county government".
- Reaction was decidedly mixed to the statement, "The state constitution should be changed to require the governor and Lt. governor to run as a team."
- There was also mixed reaction to the statement, "The state should continue environmental protection regardless of economic costs involved," although the largest component of respondents said they "strongly disagreed" with the statement. Overall, 42% of the respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, while 53% "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed".



The responses to two questions about abortion policy elicited the strongest reaction from our respondents. In other words, people tended to either "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree", indicating the emotional nature of this issue. To the statement, "State law should make it harder to get an abortion," 30% of the respondents said they "strongly agreed" while 43% said they "strongly disagreed". Only 8% held no opinion on this issue.

To the statement, "The decision on whether or not to get an abortion should be left to the woman", 67% of the respondents said they "strongly agreed"; 13% said they "strongly disagreed".

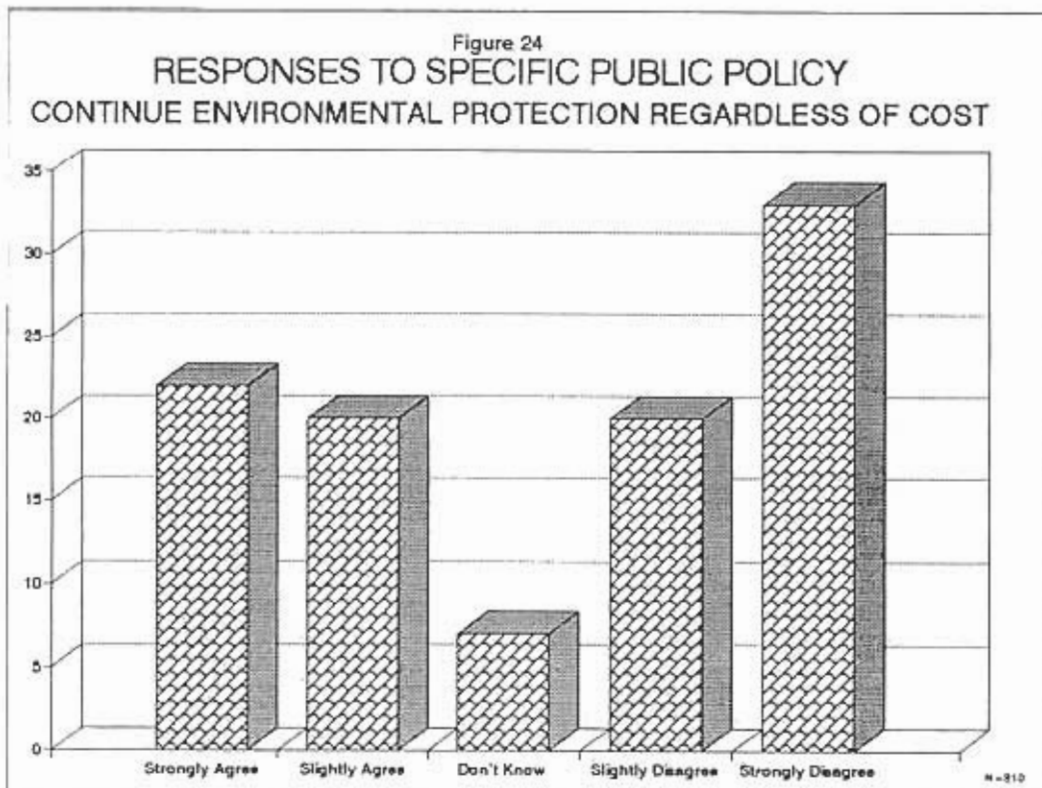
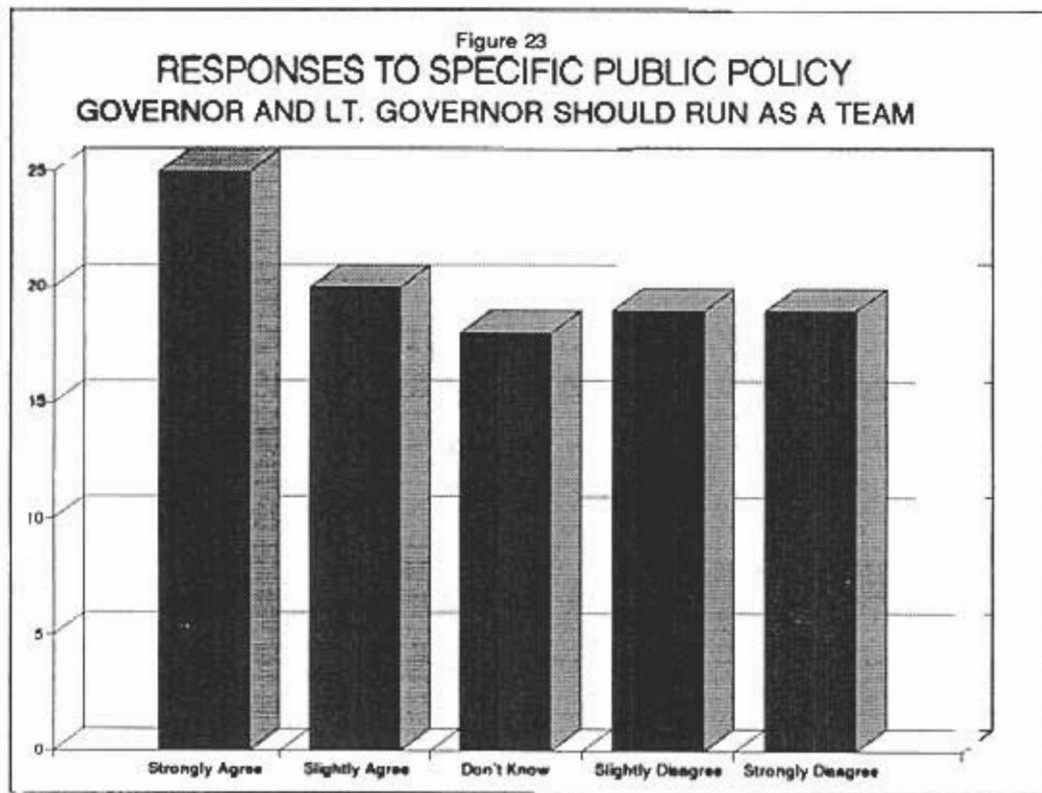


Figure 25
RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC PUBLIC POLICY
STATE LAW SHOULD MAKE IT HARDER TO GET AN ABORTION

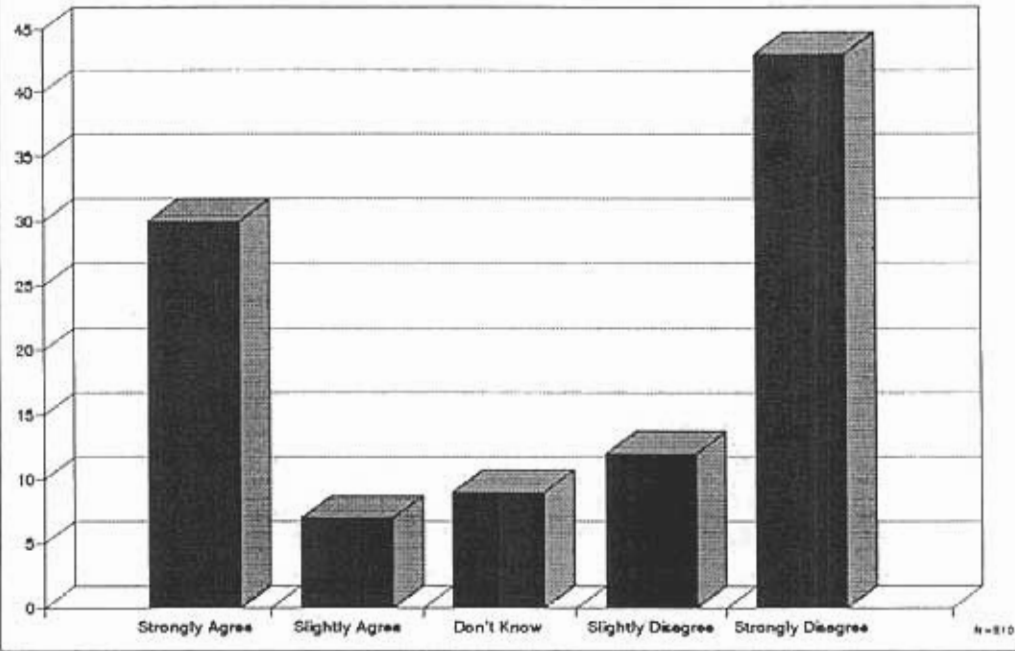
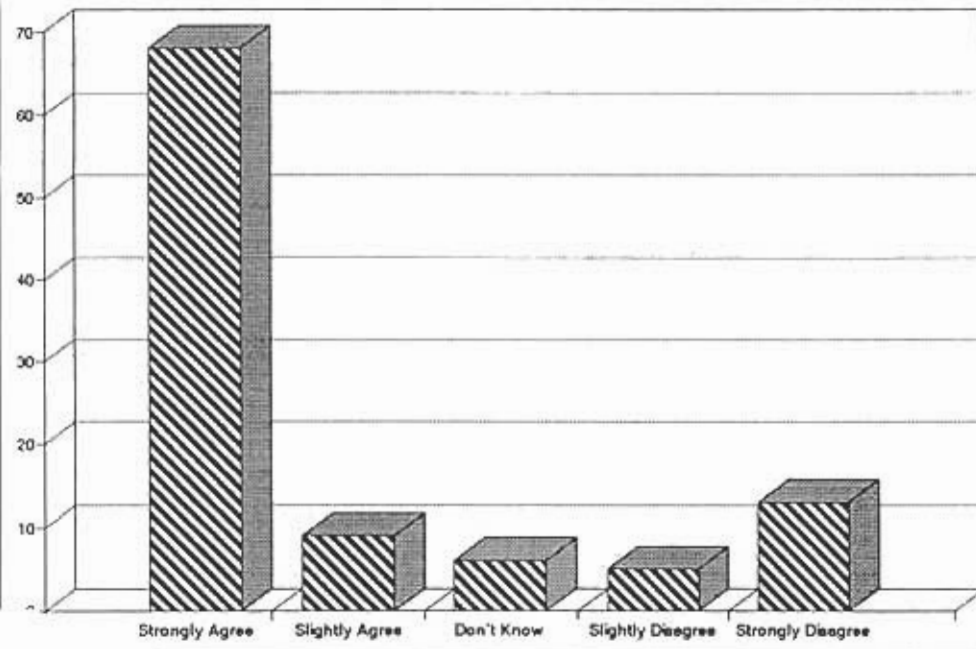
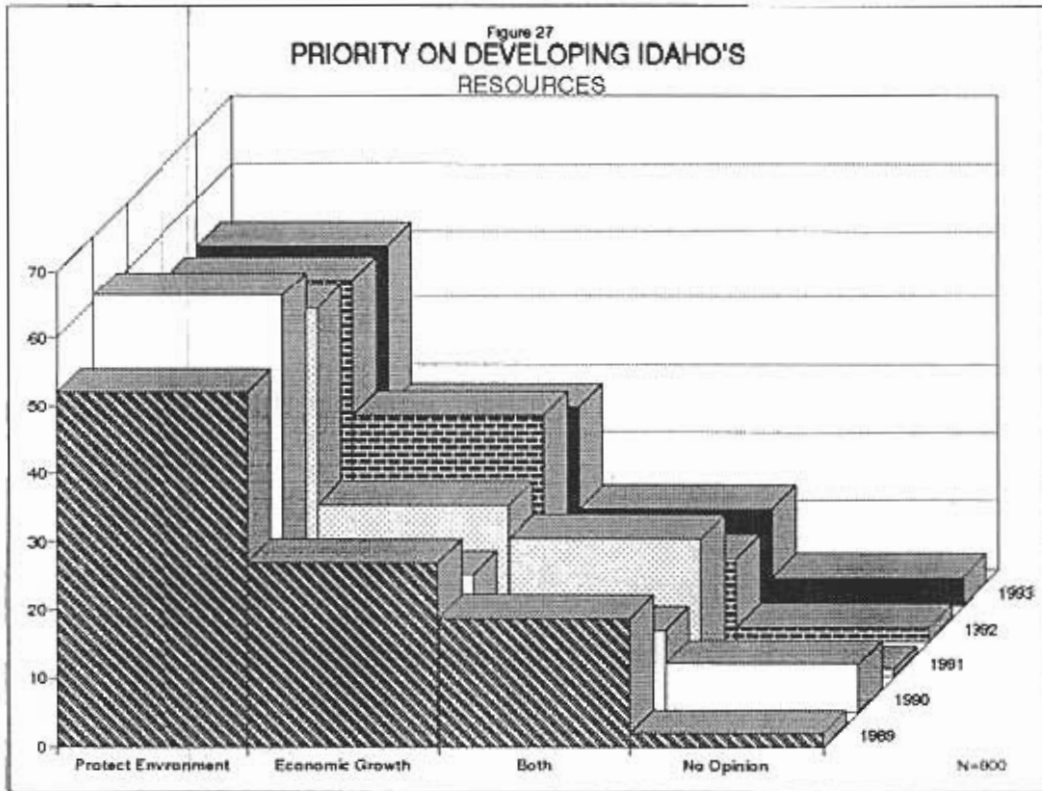


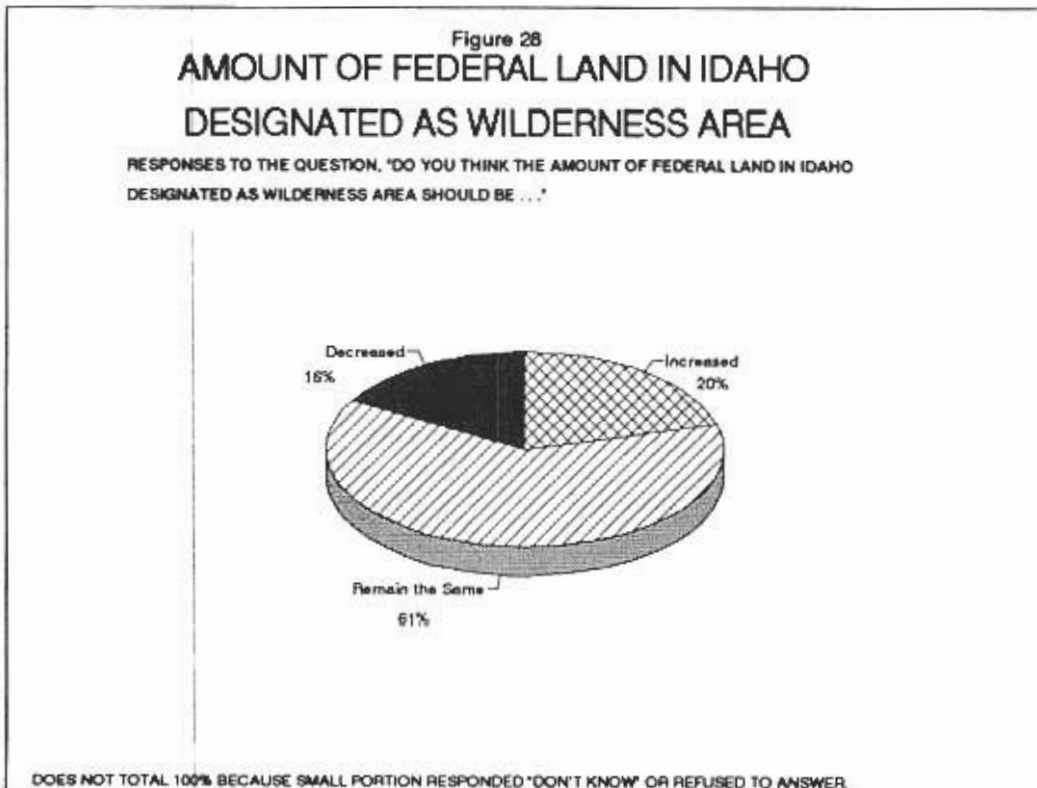
Figure 26
RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC PUBLIC POLICY
ABORTION DECISION SHOULD BE LEFT TO WOMAN



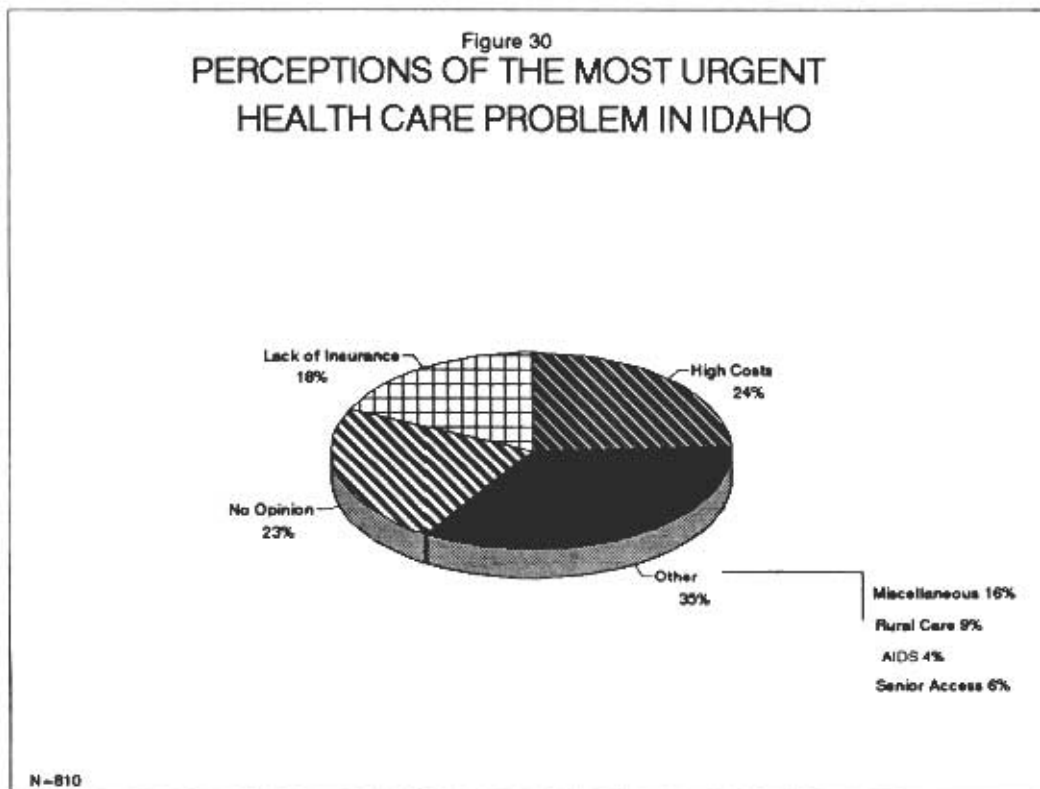
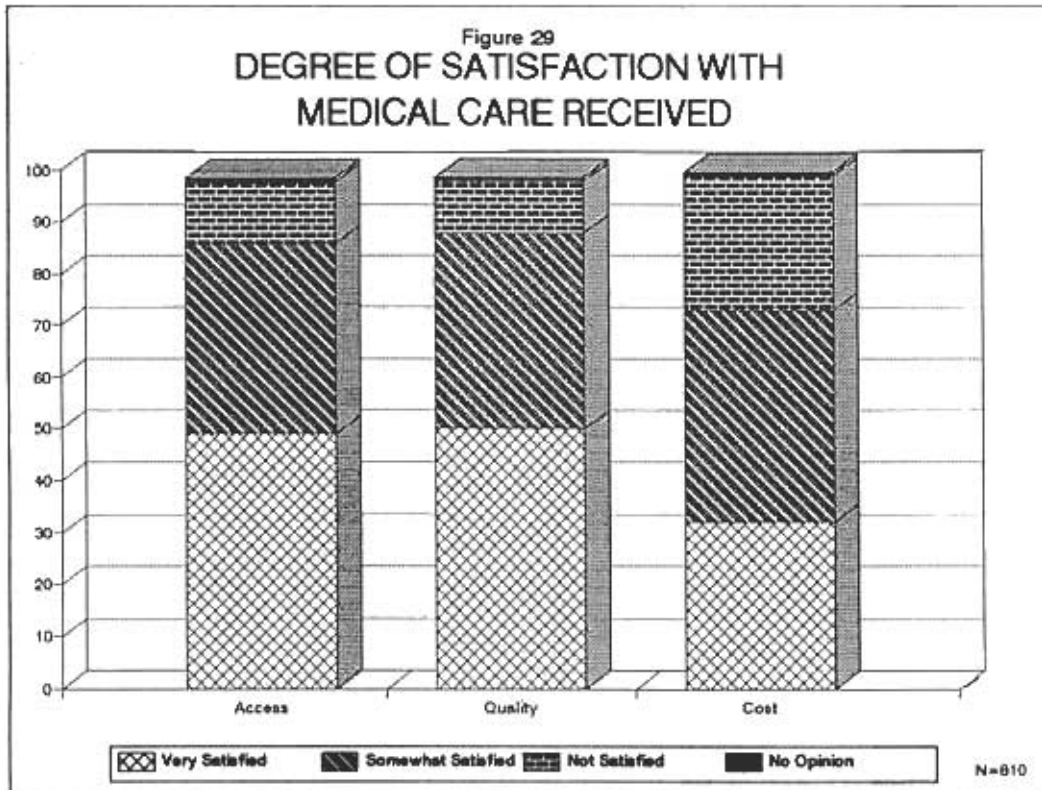
Each year we ask our respondents the following question, "It might be nice to have both, but if you had to make a choice, would you say that Idaho's natural resources should be developed and managed with the most emphasis on making the economy grow, protecting the environment, both, or neither." Figure 27 shows that the 1993 responses are remarkably similar to those of 1992.



We also asked Idahoans about the amount of federal land designated as wilderness area. As Figure 28 shows, most of the respondents indicate that the amount of wilderness acreage should neither increase or decrease, but instead should remain the same.

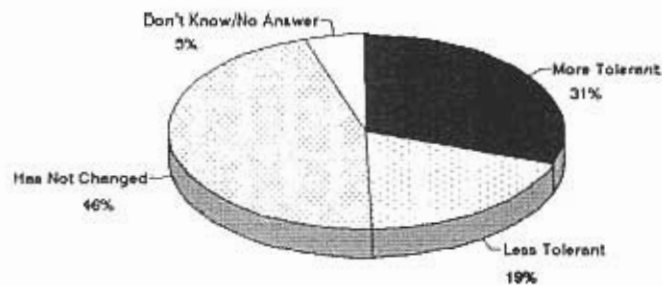


In regard to health care, we asked several questions. As Figure 29 shows, an overwhelming majority of Idahoans surveyed said they are satisfied with their access to medical care, and with the quality of health care. Satisfaction with the cost of medical care, while relatively high, is less robust. About 32% of those interviewed said they were "very satisfied", 41% "somewhat satisfied", and 26% "not at all satisfied" with their ability to pay for medical care. Figure 30 corroborates this finding; 24% of respondents said that "high cost" was the most urgent health care problem in Idaho.



Finally, we asked Idahoans if they perceived any change over the last few years in their own community in regards to tolerance towards minorities. Figure 31 shows that 46% feel there has been no change, while 31% believe their community has become more tolerant and 19% say their community has become less tolerant. There were some differences by region on this issue. Forty percent of the Region 5 respondents said they felt their community had become more tolerant (12 percent said they were now less tolerant). In Region 1, 23 percent felt their community had become more tolerant, while 14% said they were less tolerance. In Region 6, 29% of the respondents felt their own community was now less tolerant; less than 6% of the Region 2 residents felt so.

Figure 31
TOLERANCE TOWARDS MINORITIES
N=810



METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The findings reported above were derived from an analysis of data collected in a survey of 810 respondents who were interviewed by telephone during the last week of October and the first week of November, 1993. Interviews were conducted from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on weekdays, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to each respondent.

Sample Selection

The survey questionnaire was administered to individuals 18 years of age or older in a random probability sample of private households in Idaho. In order to draw the sample, the state was divided into the six regions shown in Map 1, and then separate sub-samples were selected from these regions. Each regional sub-sample size was made proportional to the regional population size. The primary benefits of this procedure are an increase in geographic representativeness and a reduction in sampling error.

A sampling frame of all working telephone exchanges within each region was constructed based on the Waksberg method. All of the central office codes within a region were organized into banks of 100 numbers each, with the banks being defined by suffixes of 0000-0099, 0100-0199, 0200-0299, ..., 9900-9999. These banks were sampled with equal mathematical probability by means of computer generated random numbers. If a number turned out to be a working household number, an interview was attempted and the bank was retained for additional calls. If it was not a residential phone number, the bank was eliminated from further sampling consideration. By using this version of random-digit dialing, we obtained complete coverage of all residential numbers, including both listed and unlisted exchanges.

Once a given household was identified, we used the "last birthday" technique to randomly select a respondent within the household. This procedure was employed because it lowers refusal rates, is easy for interviewers to use, and yields a far more representative sample than uncontrolled selection.

In sum, our sampling design avoids selection bias by giving each element in the sampling frame a known and nonzero probability of being selected. Of course, no survey is a perfect barometer of public opinion. By using the above procedures, however, we can estimate with a certain degree of confidence how discrepant the sample results are from the true population values. Since we have adopted the most stringent statistical assumptions about the variability of the population under investigation, we are 95 percent confident that our results are accurate within plus or minus 3.4 percentage points for findings based on the entire sample. In other words, the chances are 95 out of 100 that if the entire adult population of Idaho living in private households with access to a telephone had been polled, the results would not deviate from our sample findings by more than 3.4 percentage points. Whereas this is the maximum sampling error of the state-wide sample, the sampling error associated with estimates based on subsets of the overall sample can be higher, particularly for numerically small groups within the sample.

Interviewing Procedures

Methods of interviewing can affect the accuracy of survey results. Consequently, the questionnaire was given developmental and polishing pretests, and all interviews were conducted with the Survey Research Center's computer-assisted telephone interviewing system (CATI). The final version of the questionnaire was programmed into the computer, read by the interviewer from the computer screen, and responses directly entered from the keyboard into the computer. Because the CATI system allows for extensive branching and nesting of questions, as well as the inclusion of logical checks and the randomization of response categories, the program makes sure that the questions are asked in the correct sequence and the responses are consistent with the questions being asked. Thus the procedures we used improved our quality control over the interview by eliminating possible data entry errors and allowing the interviewer to focus on one question at a time without worrying about whether the next question in the survey was appropriate for the type of individual being interviewed.

To further enhance the accuracy of the survey, the nonresponse problem was dealt with by making callbacks to interview respondents who initially could not be contacted (busy signal, not at home, etc.) or were momentarily un-

available. In addition, the interviewers were carefully trained in ways to reduce the number of refusals.

Caveats and Qualifications

By using the procedures described above, we preserved the anonymity of those individuals who were interviewed. Moreover, following standard professional practice, their names were not asked and if they were volunteered, they were not recorded.

Although the sample reflects the state-wide population about which we want to generalize, it would be well to sound a note of caution about the inferences that may be drawn from the findings. First, the problem of nonattitudes is one of the most pervasive and complex problems in public opinion polling. If the topic of a poll is so remote from the respondent's concerns that they do not hold genuine views on it, then the poll will give a misleading portrait of public opinion. One factor that mitigates the problem of nonattitudes in this survey is the use of screening and filter questions to separate likely attitude holders from nonattitude respondents. Another factor that minimized the possibility of receiving superficial responses to the interview was the use of careful probing by interviewers to be sure that those respondents with a nonexistent opinion were not forced into a choice, and those respondents with a genuine opinion did not opt for a neutral position on a controversial question.

A second caveat that must be borne in mind when interpreting the results is the problem of refusals. A bias can be introduced into the data if for some reason the refusals were concentrated among certain group within the population. Fortunately refusals did not appear to be concentrated within any specific region of the state. Nevertheless, care should still be exercised so as not to attribute greater precision to the results than is justified.

The last warning that should be raised pertains to the nature of telephone surveys. Despite widespread ownership of telephones throughout the target population, low-income households and those households in which the head is nonwhite and under the age of 35 tend to have a lower percentage of phones than other households. This sampling bias may result in an under-representation of some types of potential respondents within certain minority groups. Given the homogeneity of Idaho's population, this is not as severe a problem as it might be in more ethnically diverse states. Nonetheless it is a limitation that is inherent to some degree in any telephone survey.

For Information

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