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El Paso Community Legislative Agenda:
Community Questionnaire Results

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**EL PASO COMMUNITY
LEGISLATIVE AGENDA**

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EL PASO COMMUNITY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA Community Questionnaire Results

The Community Legislative Agenda's goal of developing a grassroots sense of the community in helping to frame key issues for the 2001 state legislative session led the group to undertake a community questionnaire in December, 1999. An intercept survey of over 800 respondents was conducted under the direction of Dr. Christine Thurlow Brenner, assistant professor of Political Science at UTEP, with funds and student support from the Public Policy Research Center. Additionally, the survey instrument was posted on the website of several local media where additional surveys were completed and submitted electronically.

The survey instrument consisted of a series of open-ended questions, which asked participants to identify areas of greatest concerns to them and their families. Respondents were then asked to identify areas of greatest concern in specific subject areas. These areas included education, jobs/skills, safety, healthcare and the environment. The following tables present the data and discuss the findings from this survey.



Community-wide areas of greatest concern were:

- **Education**
- **Jobs and employment**
- **Public safety**
- **Health**

The priority placed on these four key issues was consistent across age, race/ethnic group, educational level and geographic area of the city.

Table 1. Issues of Greatest Concern in El Paso

Issue	Most Important		2 nd most important		Combined	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Education	191	26.4%	56	10.7%	247	19.8%
Job/employment	136	18.8%	97	18.6%	233	18.7%
Crime/public safety	114	14.2%	96	11.9%	210	16.9%
Health	56	7.0%	74	9.2%	130	10.4%
Taxes	78	10.8%	20	3.8%	98	7.9%
Local economy	31	4.3%	34	6.5%	65	5.2%
Quality of life	22	3.0%	21	4.0%	43	3.5%
Environment	16	2.2%	26	5.0%	42	3.4%
Transportation	15	2.1%	21	4.0%	36	2.9%
Governance	11	1.5%	14	2.7%	25	2.0%
Sense of community	14	1.9%	16	3.1%	30	1.9%
Diversity	8	1.1%	5	1.0%	13	1.0%
Family	8	1.1%	16	3.1%	24	2.4%
Housing	5	0.7%	9	1.7%	14	1.1%
Citizenship/immigration	5	0.7%	7	1.3%	12	0.9%
Other	13	1.8%	10	1.9%	23	1.8%
TOTAL	723	100.0%	522	100.0%	1245	100.0%



EDUCATION

Areas of greatest concern

- **Quality of education**
- **Education finances**
- **Teacher issues**
- **School safety**

One third of the respondents' surveyed report the quality of education available to youth in the El Paso area is their greatest concern in the community. (See Table 2.) Concern over educational finance (20.4%), teacher issues (12.1%) and school safety (9.6%) are other key areas of concern.

Table 2. Greatest Educational Concerns in El Paso

Area of Concern	Number of responses	Percentage
Quality of education	255	34.0%
Education finances	153	20.4%
Teacher issues	91	12.1%
School safety	72	9.6%
Dropout problem	56	7.4%
Higher education	55	7.4%
Communication & accessibility	17	2.3%
Academic & testing concerns	14	1.9%
Technology	7	0.9%
Youth issues	7	0.9%
Diversity/multi-culturalism	5	0.7%
Governance	4	0.5%
Workforce preparedness	4	0.5%
Other	8	1.1%
Total	748	100.0%

Latino's (21.2%) have a higher level of concern about educational finance than non-Hispanic whites (15.3%). This is primarily related to concerns about funding for higher education, school taxes and financing new school construction. Younger age groups (18-34) are most concerned about educational finance, as many of these people are still pursuing post-secondary degrees. Residents in the Lower Valley (33.3%) are the most focused on finance issues with the Eastside (15.5%) and Northeast (14.7%) least concerned.

All racial/ethnic groups are concerned about quality of education (white 38.6%, Latino 26.6%, African-American 34.1%). Westsiders (40.0%) focused on educational quality more than other areas of the community, however this may be because the socioeconomics of the area make education financing less pressing than in other portions of the city. Concern about educational quality increased with the age of the respondents.

The level of interest in teacher issues is consistent across racial groups. The prime school-age parental group (age 35-64) was most concerned about teacher quality and preparedness (14.8%). Similar levels of concern were expressed throughout the city with the highest concern in the Northeast (14.7%).



JOBS/SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

Areas of greatest concern

- **Job Security/ Downsizing**
- **Wage Level**
- **Job opportunities**

El Pasoans are most concerned about their job security. In the light of the number of plant closures and downsizings the area has experienced in the past few years this result should hardly be surprising. Latinos (22.7%) are most concerned about this issue, followed by whites (19.9%) and then African-Americans (11.1%). Citywide all areas find job security important with a range from a high of 23.5% on the Eastside to a low of 18.9% in the Northeast. While all age groups are concerned about job security, those in the 35-64 year age group have the highest percentage of concern (23.4%). This is the age that is the most vulnerable to downsizing as firms' change and contract with globalization of the economy and the infusion of new technologies into the workplace.

Wage levels that provide a living wage to sustain families is the second greatest concern in El Paso. Again, a higher percentage of Latinos (22.7%) are focused on this concern than other racial/ethnic groups. Given all the job-related concerns reported, persons living in the Lower Valley (24.6%) and the Eastside (23.1%) have a higher percentage of concern than those on the Westside (16.2%), Central (17.1%) or Northeast (12.2%) areas of the city. The youngest wage earners, those 18-34 years of age, had the highest percentage of concern about wage levels (24.2%). These are often entry-level workers who are just beginning their careers, may be beginning a family and find themselves highly focused on income levels.

The third most important area of concern is the job opportunities available in the El Paso area. While all areas of the city find job opportunities important, residents of Central El Paso exhibit the highest percentage of concern (19.7%). Seniors and younger adults are more concerned about this than those in their prime earning years

(ages 35-64). Regardless of educational level or racial/ethnic group identification all El Pasoans are seeking good job opportunities.

Table 3. Greatest Job, Skills and Employment Concerns in El Paso

Issue	Number	Percentage
Job security/downsizing	135	20.9%
Wage level	131	20.3%
Job opportunities	102	15.8%
Quality of work	59	9.1%
Benefits	39	6.0%
Need for personal recognition	35	5.4%
Working conditions	33	5.1%
Job safety	19	2.9%
Local economy	16	2.5%
Government regulation	8	1.2%
Family issues	8	1.2%
Technology	7	1.1%
Language	4	0.6%
Other	16	2.4%
TOTAL	645	100.0%



SAFETY

Areas of greatest concern

- Criminal activity
- Traffic
- Police Protection

The presence of criminal activity in El Paso is the greatest concern expressed by survey respondents. This concern increases with the educational level and age of the respondents. Lower Valley (31.6%) and Central (27.5%) residents are those most concerned with this issue.

Table 4. Greatest Safety Concerns in El Paso

Issues	Number	Percent
Criminal activity	152	21.9%
Police protection	95	13.7%
Traffic	90	13.0%
Personal security	60	8.6%
Legal system	60	8.6%
Community safety	59	8.5%
Youth safety	53	7.6%
Health	30	4.3%
Vandalism/violence	23	3.3%
Family safety	17	2.4%
Insurance	15	2.2%
Emergency services	10	1.4%
Other	27	3.9%
TOTAL	694	100.0%

Approximately 15% of all El Pasoans expressed concern about the issue of police protection. This figure was consistent across racial/ethnic, age, and geographic and educational levels.

Traffic concerns included the issues of uninsured motorists, persons driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, congestion and road rage. The percentage of

persons worried about traffic concerns increases with educational level and age. Approximately 15% of the population across the community is concerned with traffic issues, with the sole exception being the Northeast where only 4.9% of the respondents cited this safety concern.



HEALTH

Areas of greatest concern:

- **Cost of healthcare**
- **Insurance**
- **Accessibility**
- **Quality of healthcare**

The cost of healthcare is the primary concern of approximately 40% of all citizens. This level of concern is consistent across educational levels, racial/ethnic, and age groups. A higher percentage of Lower Valley residents (44.8%) and Eastsiders (40.4%) are worried about healthcare costs than those in Central (36.3%), Northeast (32.2%) or West (33.7%) El Paso.

Table 5. Greatest Healthcare Concerns in El Paso

Issues	Number	Percent
Cost of healthcare	286	39.3%
Insurance	173	23.8%
Accessibility	97	13.3%
Quality of healthcare	75	10.3%
Facilities	25	3.4%
Diseases	25	3.4%
Prevention	13	1.8%
Environment	7	1.0%
Other	26	3.6%
TOTAL	727	100.0%

Linked to healthcare costs is the issue of health insurance. The elderly are more concerned about insurance issues than younger working adults. Central (29.0%) and Lower Valley (29.3%) residents are most concerned about health insurance.

Concerns over accessibility to healthcare increase with education. Westside residents (16.9%) find accessibility a higher percentage of concern than other sections of the city.

Healthcare quality is the focus for a higher percentage of those with high school education or less (13.0%) than those with post-secondary education. Senior citizens (19.0%) are more concerned about quality healthcare than younger adults. A higher percentage of Northeast (13.8%) and Lower Valley (12.1%) residents are focused on healthcare quality than other areas of El Paso.



ENVIRONMENT

Areas of greatest concern:

- **Pollution**
- **Air quality**
- **Water**
- **Quality of life**

Pollution concerns are higher in Northeast (42.2%) El Paso and lowest on the Westside (20.2%). Approximately 35% of Central, Eastside and Lower Valley residents find pollution an area of concern. African-Americans (40.5%) and Latinos (37.6%) are more concerned than non-Hispanic whites (29.4%). Pollution concerns decrease with age, and those with some college education (42.7%) have the highest percentage of concern about pollution.

Twenty-five percent of residents in all geographic areas of the city are worried about air quality. Those in their middle years, ages 35-64, are more concerned about air pollution than older or younger adults. Air pollution concerns increase with educational level.

Table 6. Greatest Environmental Concerns in El Paso

Issues	Number	Percent
Pollution	246	34.6%
Air quality	167	23.5%
Water	112	15.8%
Quality of life	69	9.7%
Trash/Graffiti	37	5.2%
Border environmental issues	23	3.2%
Economic growth spillover effects	10	1.4%
Other	29	4.0%
TOTAL	711	100.0%

Westside (22.6%) residents have the highest percentage of concern about water quality and availability than other areas of the city. (Northeast and Central—14.5%; Eastside-13.8% and Lower Valley-11.9%) Persons with college education (21.1%) are most concerned about water issues followed by those with high school education or less (14.5%) with those with some college or trade certification showing the lowest percentage of concern (11.9%). All age groups are equally concerned about water issues.

Quality of life concerns, as an environmental measure of the community, were higher for Latinos (11.9%) than whites (4.6%) or African-Americans (5.4%). Eastside (13.8%), Lower Valley (11.9%) and Central (8.1%) residents are more focused on quality of life concerns than Westside (6.0%) or Northeast (3.6%) residents, when considered in the context of overall community environmental concerns. Younger residents (18-34 year olds) and those with high school education or less have higher percentages of concern about quality of life issues, than others in the city.



OBSTACLES TO HOME OWNERSHIP

Areas of greatest concern:

- **Cost of housing**
- **Financing**

Twenty-five percent of the survey respondents live in rental properties, either homes or apartments. Respondents were asked what was their greatest obstacle preventing them from owning a home. Fifty-seven percent of the renters reported the cost of housing was their greatest concern while 20.8% cited financing as the reasons.

Table 7. Greatest Obstacles to Homeownership in El Paso

Issue	Number	Percent
Cost of housing	118	57.0%
Financing	43	20.8%
Job security/mobility	11	5.3%
Don't want to own	10	4.8%
Location	9	4.3%
Life status	9	4.3%
Taxes	5	2.4%
Other	2	1.0%
TOTAL	207	100.0%

Persons with higher levels of education (47.6%) find the cost of housing less prohibitive than those with some college or trade certification (60.2%) or high school or less (59.2%). While all geographic areas of the city found cost of housing over 50% of the reason for non-ownership, in Central El Paso this reason was cited by 66.7% of the respondents. More than half of all responses by racial/ethnic group listed cost as the greatest concern; however a higher percentage of African-Americans (66.7%) and Latinos (59.7%) mentioned this than whites (51.3%).

All community residents reported financing concerns, but the highest percentage of concern was on the Eastside (37.0%). Percentages of concern in other areas of the city were 25.0% in the Northeast, 20.8% in the Lower Valley, 14.0% Central and 8.7% on the Westside. Those with high school or less education were most concerned (29.6%) with financing issues, followed by those with college degrees (21.4%). Persons with some college or trade certification (14.5%) found financing less problematic than cost of housing. Latinos (24.2%) were more concerned about financing than whites (17.9%) or African-Americans (11.1%).



DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The total number of valid surveys was 804. Of that 58.0% of the respondents were Latino, 26.7% non-Hispanic White, 5.5% African American and 9.8% other racial/ethnic groups. Those with high school education or less represented 27.1% of the respondents. Persons with some college or trade certification were 42.5% and individuals with college degrees 30.3%.

Adults 18-24 years of age made up 28.5% of the respondents. Those age 25-34 were 18.6%, 36.9% were 35-54 years old. Ten percent were 55-64 years of age and 5.9% were persons 65 and older.

Geographically, 38.0% were Eastsiders, 18.4% from Central El Paso, 11.7% Westsiders, 13.3% from the Northeast and 9.0% lived in the Lower Valley. Nine percent were from the region, but outside the city limits.