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Quality of Life in El Paso: Citizen's Perceptions -- 2002

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***Quality of Life in El Paso:
Citizen's Perceptions – 2002***



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Technical Report 2002-09

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Acknowledgements

This project was conducted in the spring of 2002 by the Institute for Policy and Economic Development at the University of Texas at El Paso as part of a series of survey research activities that are aimed at developing a more comprehensive understanding of how the border region sees itself and is defined by attitudes and perceptions. Several individuals contributed to the data collection process, and a variety of El Paso businesses allowed access to their property and customers. The efforts of the Institute are enhanced by the commitment of the community to small projects such as this, and we extend our gratitude for their support.

Participating locations included:

- Bassett Center Mall
- Cielo Vista Mall
- Sunland Park Mall
- Montwood Ave. K-Mart
- Montana Ave. Walgreen's Drug Store
- Alameda Ave. Wal-Mart Supercenter
- Lakeside, Northeast, and Yarbrough branches of Big 8 Food Stores.

We would like to extend our appreciation to Thea Gamble, Cindy Foght, Sylvia Hernandez, Alfredo French, Tony Gutierrez, Harvey Ayala, and Richard Powell for their kind assistance and generosity in this endeavor.

Participating IPED Staff and UTEP Students:

- Mathew McElroy, Assitant Director
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- David Coronado
- Armin Hinojosa
- José Mares
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- Álvaro Muñoz
- Kishore Surapaneni
- América Tirado
- Natalie Varela
- Simeon Williams

Introduction

Like most communities, El Paso asks itself, “How can we make our community a better place to live,” and business leaders discuss “What can we do to attract new businesses to the region?” The answer to either question is not simple, and the complexities that make up the El Paso area often make it difficult to define strategies for community development.

This study replicates a study conducted in the spring of 1999 by the Public Policy Research Center at UTEP, now part of the Institute for Policy and Economic Development. We undertook the first study as a response to previous quality of life studies which we believed were biased and did not properly reflect the community and its citizens. Early in 2002, similar studies reported, for example, that El Paso was not a good place for women-owned businesses because, among other reasons, wind was hard on women’s hair! (*Ladies Home Journal*). Others base their findings on readership (i.e., *Money Magazine*) with subscriber annual incomes over \$75,000 and change the survey criteria annually. Regardless of their utility, we feel that assessing the views of our own citizens provides the best picture of what people like and dislike about El Paso. In addition, a community’s self-assessment, provided by these survey results, creates a composite index of the myriad interests that combine to make up the community and can play a strong role in determining our collective likes and dislikes, while helping to determine what we can do to improve our community and what we can sell to make El Paso more attractive to outside business interests considering expansion or growth in the region.

More importantly, this study points out an interesting question about a community’s quality of life. As many cities experience rapid growth and economic expansion, their overall quality of life comes into question. Seattle, WA and Atlanta, GA, for example, are two cities once hailed for their quality of life, but have experienced rapid rise in pollution, as a result of their growth and commute times resulting in average freeway and expressway speeds well below 40 miles per hour. Recently, Chief Executive Officers in San Diego, sometimes considered a “border town,” reported a sharp decline in quality of life and difficulty in attracting young college graduates because of the excessive costs of housing, air pollution, lack of water to support growth, lengthy commute times, general over-crowding, and a decline in public services. Thus, more than we might expect, our quality of life includes numerous positive factors that are often overlooked, including affordable housing, commuting conditions that are relatively un-congested and short in duration, outstanding weather, and cultural diversity.

The survey was conducted between May 20 and 27, 2002 using intercept surveys and UTEP student researchers. In total, 514 valid surveys were obtained and weighted by zip codes providing for statistical significance at the 4.5 percent level, or put another way, 95.5 times out of 100, the same results can be expected at a level of confidence of +/- 5%.

The survey was developed to replicate the 1999 study and is broken into ten areas of concern related to quality of life, plus a section on demographic characteristics. Each of the ten areas included a set of questions that are individually reported, then placed into an index providing an overall measure of the area. These ten areas are:

1. Environment
2. Transportation
3. Public Safety
4. Education
5. Entertainment and Services
6. Business and Industry
7. Cost of Living
8. Community Relations
9. Health Care
10. City Planning

For each question, the frequency distribution is provided. In addition, index scores for each set of questions are provided and compared to the index score from the 1999 study to assess shifts in

citizen's perceptions. All questions relating to quality of life are based on a five-point scale ranging from 1 – 'Completely Satisfied' to 5 – 'Completely Dissatisfied', with a Neutral mid-point of 3.

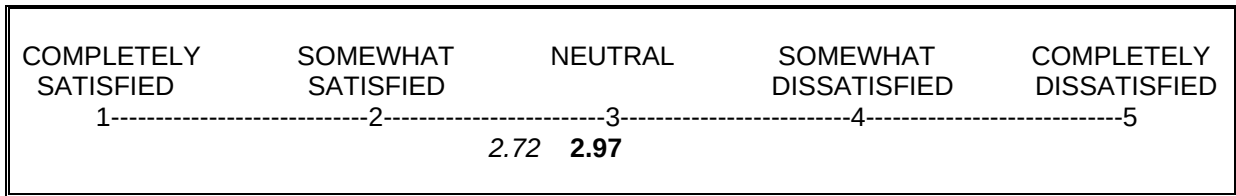
All questions in this survey are based on a five-point scale ranging from 1–Completely Satisfied to 5–Completely Dissatisfied, with 3 as a mid-point.

COMPLETELY SATISFIED	SOMEWHAT SATISFIED	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED	COMPLETELY DISSATISFIED
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5

Index Scores and Findings

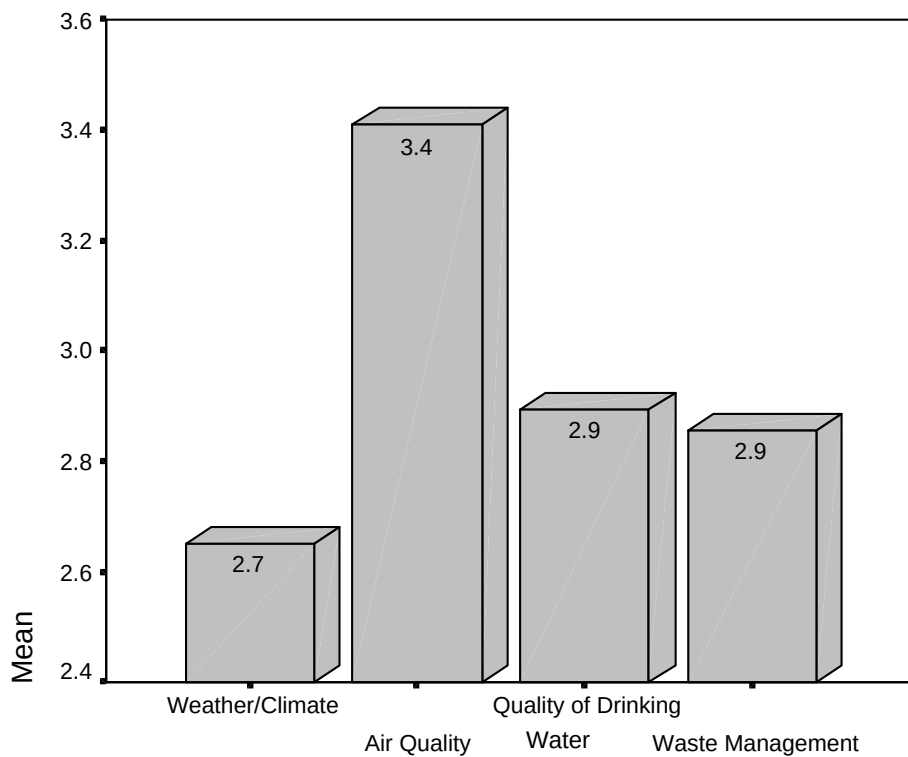
The following reports the results of the **2002 index score in bold**, with comparisons to the 1999 study provided as *appropriate in italics*. In general, it appears that overall satisfaction with the quality of life in El Paso has declined slightly in almost all areas of concern since 1999. However, due to the smaller sample size used in 2002 and the level of confidence of +/- 5 percent, the findings are relatively consistent between the two studies. These findings are followed by summary data on the demographic characteristics of the survey participants.

Environment

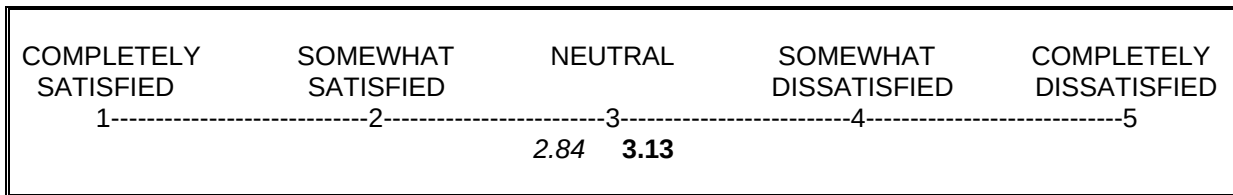


- ✓ Compared to 1999, El Pasoans perceive a slight decrease in the quality of the environment based on the increased index score from 2.72 to 2.97.
- ✓ Weather and climate remained an important quality of life asset with air quality perceived as generally unsatisfactory to the survey participants.

Mean Scores on Environmental Issues

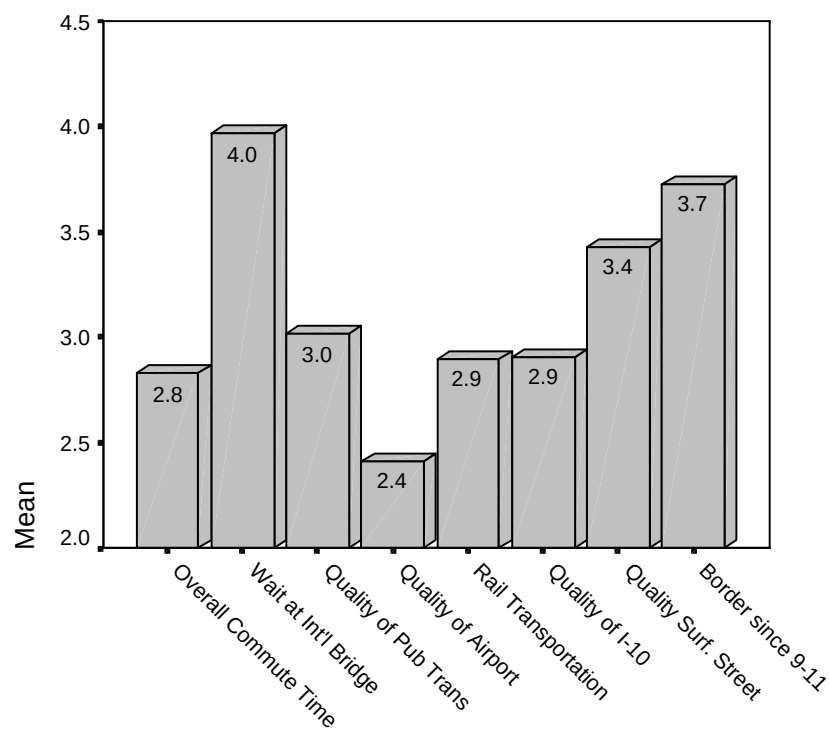


Transportation

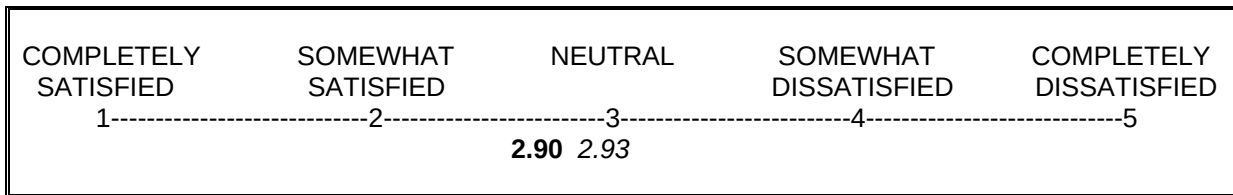


- ✓ Survey respondents felt greater dissatisfaction with transportation than in 1999; however, wait times at the international bridges and an additional question pertaining to border crossing since September 11th, 2001 are likely to account for some of this additional concern.
- ✓ Overall the quality of the El Paso Airport rates very favorably, and commute times are also viewed positively.
- ✓ Both commute issues and airport services are critical factors for business development in the region and for attracting new industries.

Mean Scores on Transportation Issues

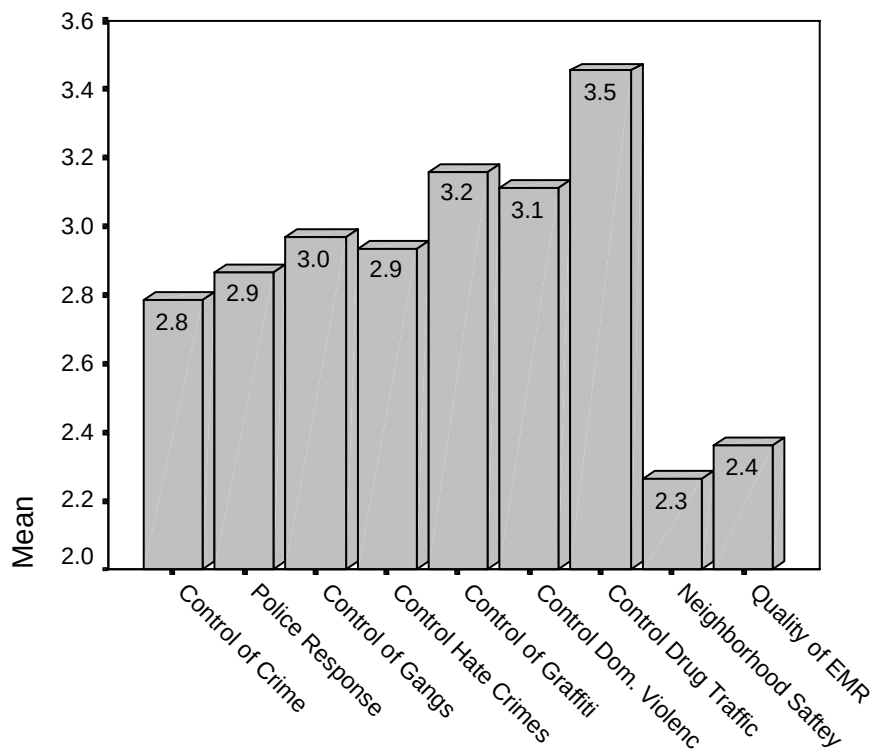


Public Safety

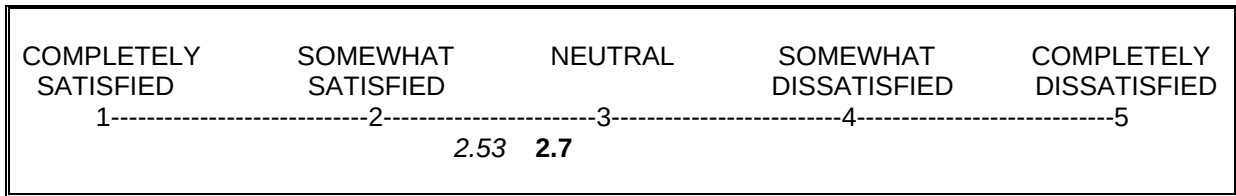


- ✓ Overall perception of public safety issues has improved since 1999.
- ✓ The overall level of neighborhood safety rates high among local residents, an important factor in quality of life determination.
- ✓ Public concerns about gangs and domestic violence reflect a concerned citizenry that seeks solutions to these problems that are prevalent in major urban areas.
- ✓ Overall perceptions about drug trafficking remain problematic for El Paso, undoubtedly a function of the international border and associated drug issues related to the border.

Mean Scores on Public Safety Issues

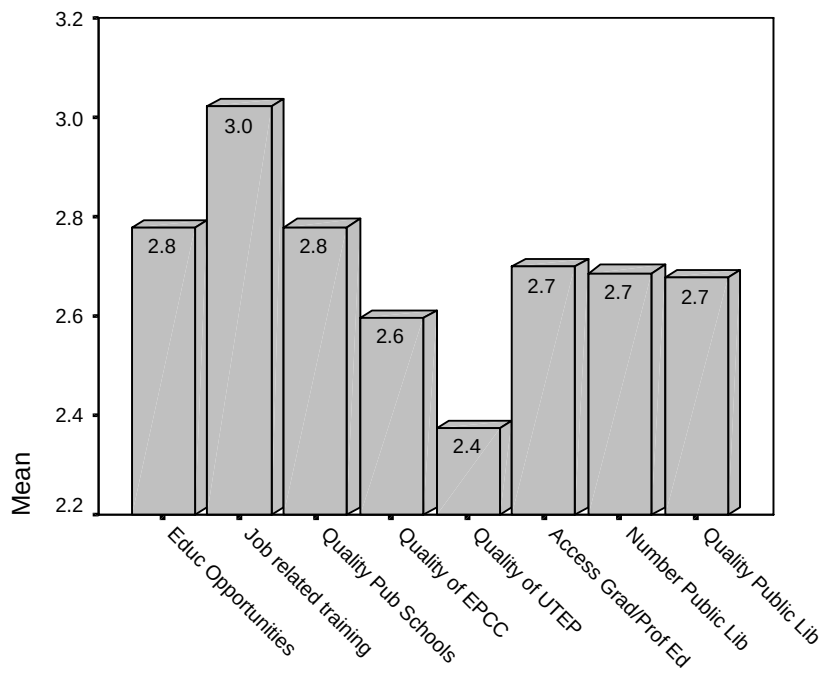


Education

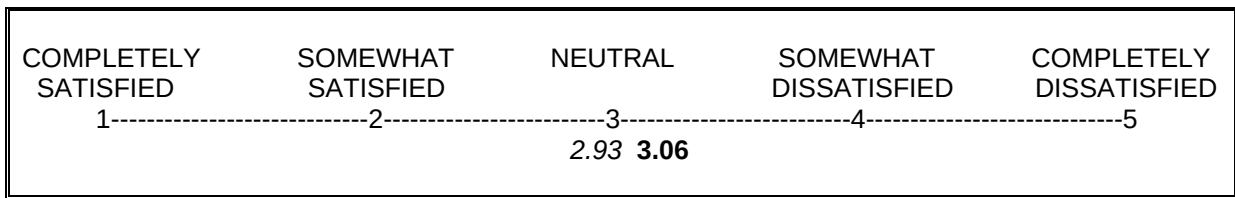


- ✓ The quality of both UTEP and EPCC are recognized by the community.
- ✓ Overall there is general satisfaction with educational opportunities, but a slight decline from 1999.

Mean Score on Education Issues

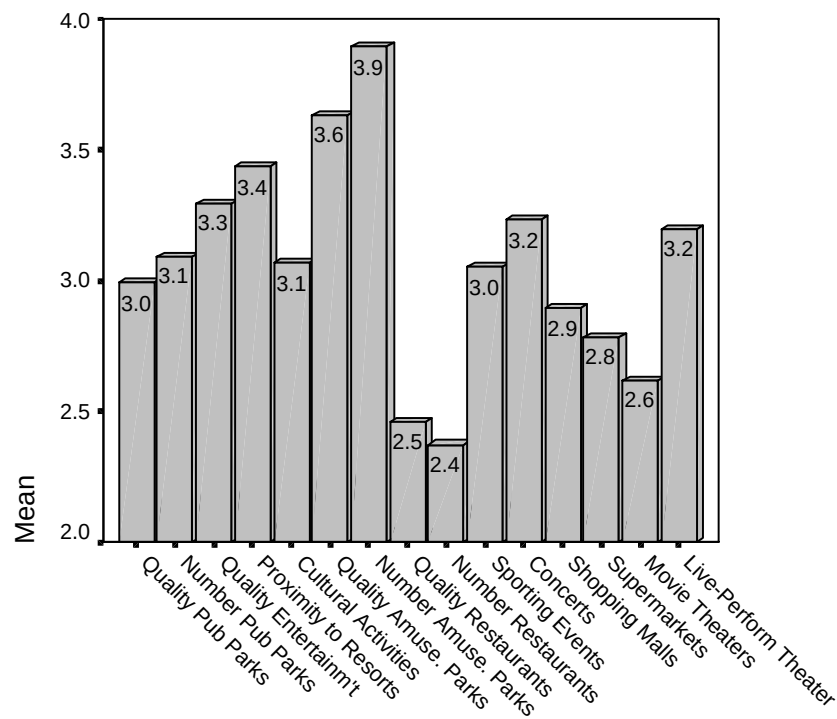


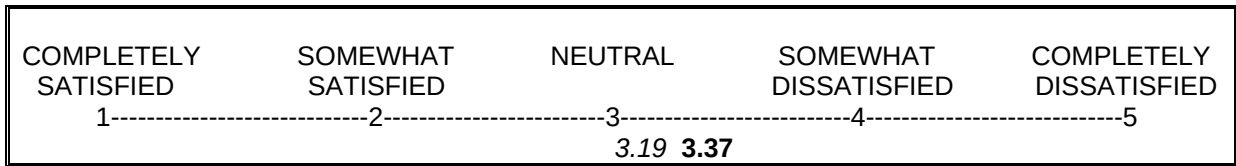
Entertainment and Services



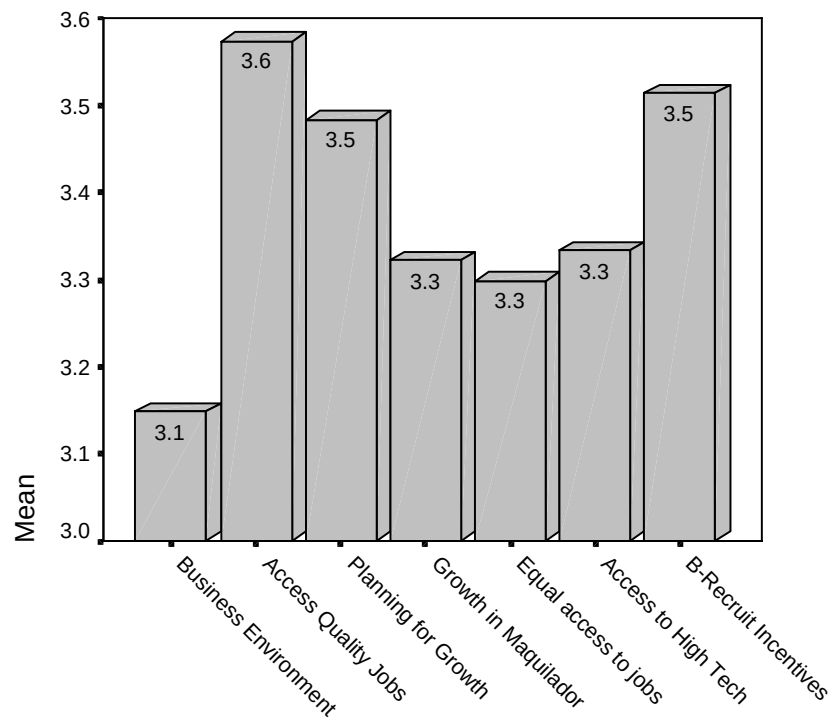
- ✓ El Paso residents see need for improvement in several entertainment areas, including amusement parks and a variety of event alternatives.
- ✓ While top-level concerts and live theater continue to grow in number of performances, demand does not appear to have been satisfied.

Mean Scores on Entertainment and Services

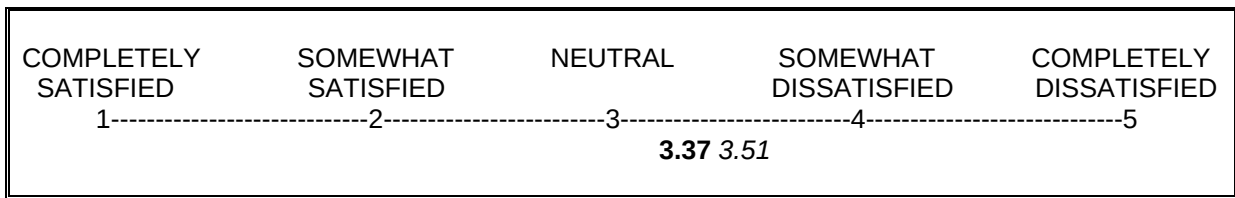


Business and Industry

- ✓ Overall impressions about the quality of business and industry opportunities in El Paso have dropped among residents since 1999 by nearly two-tenths of a point.
- ✓ Access to quality jobs, planning for industrial and business growth and developing incentives to attract new industries all rate unsatisfactory among the survey participants.

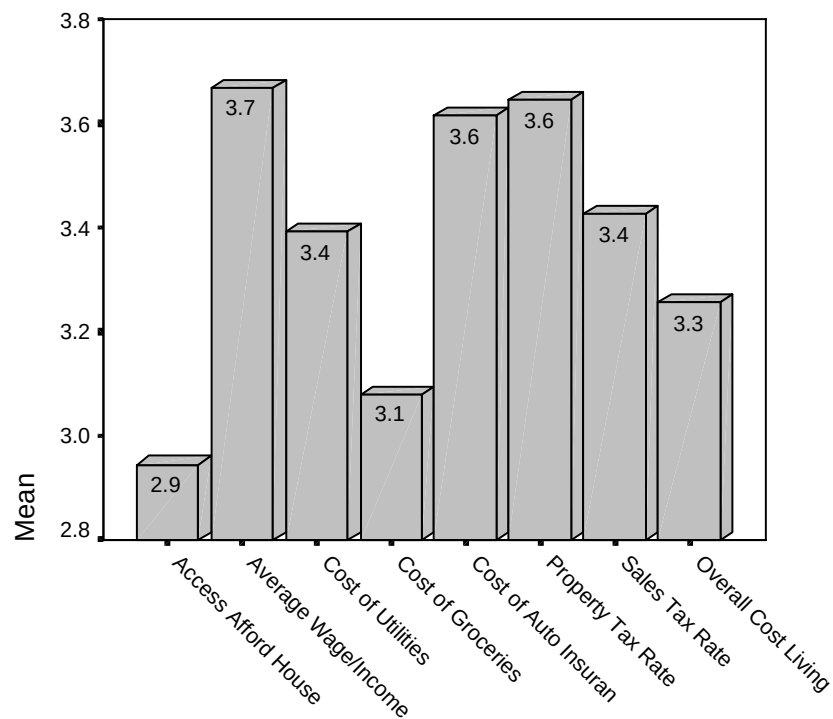
Mean Scores on Business and Industry

Cost of Living

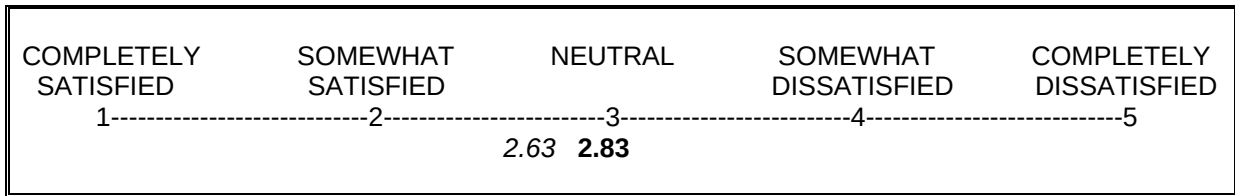


- ✓ Overall perceptions indicate that the cost of living has improved slightly since 1999.
- ✓ Cost of Housing is perceived as reasonable, reflecting El Paso's housing market relative to other communities.
- ✓ Average salaries and wages, along with tax issues, are perceived as unsatisfactory overall, as is the cost of auto insurance.

Mean Scores on Cost of Living

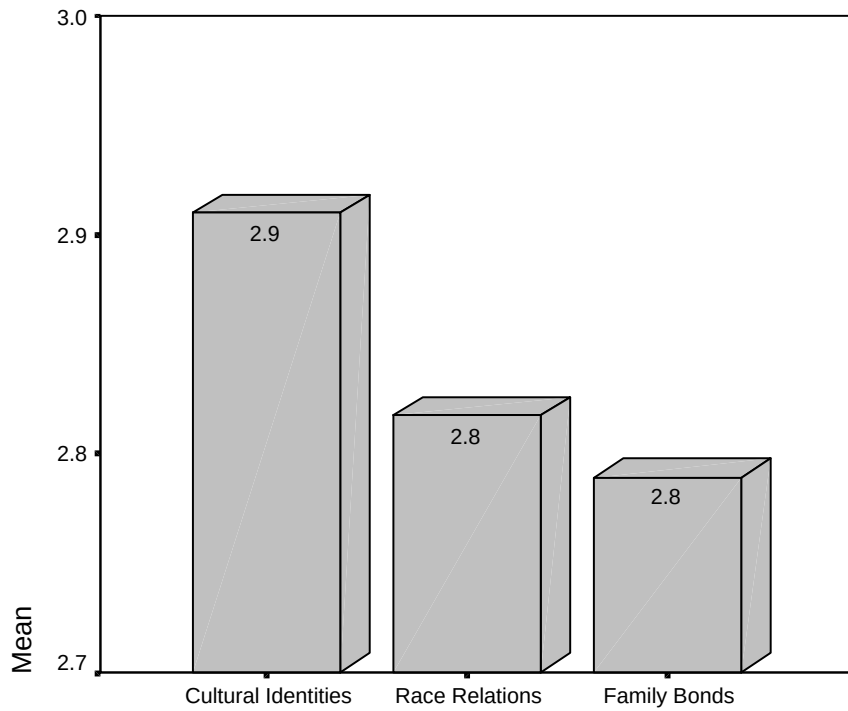


Community Relations

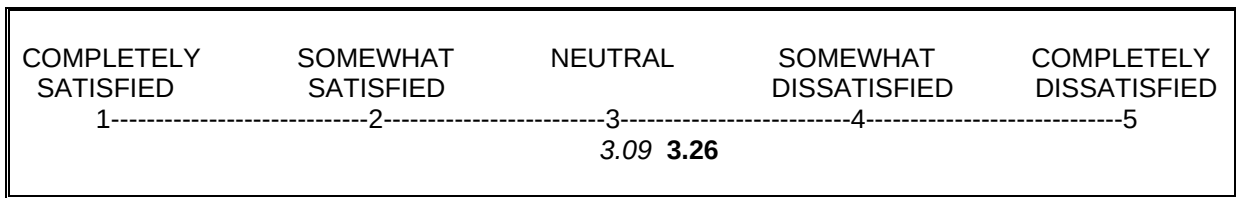


- ✓ All factors associated with community relations fall into the satisfied range and re-confirm the diversity that is El Paso' hallmark.

Mean Scores on Community Relations

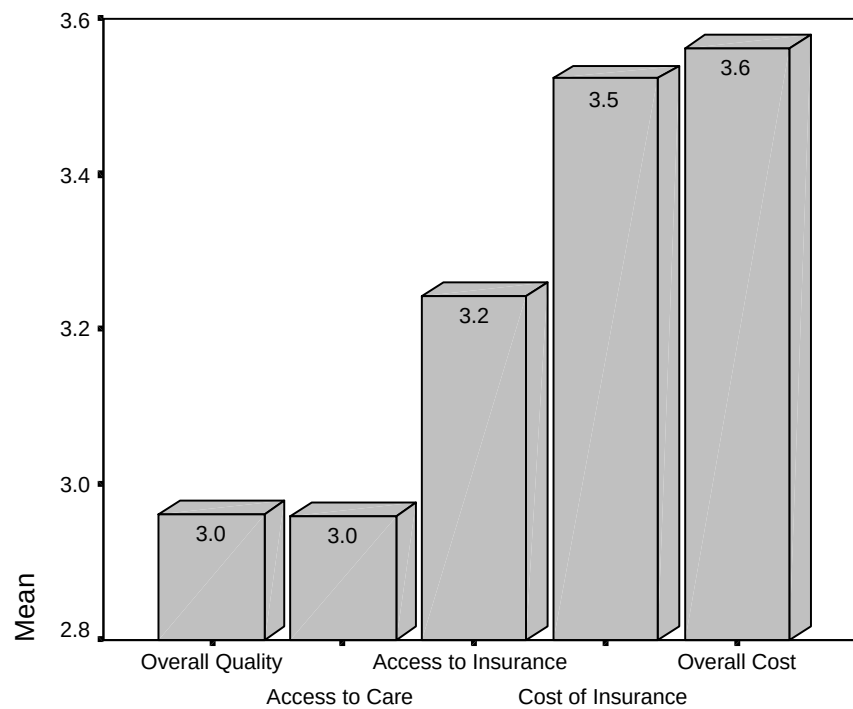


Health Care

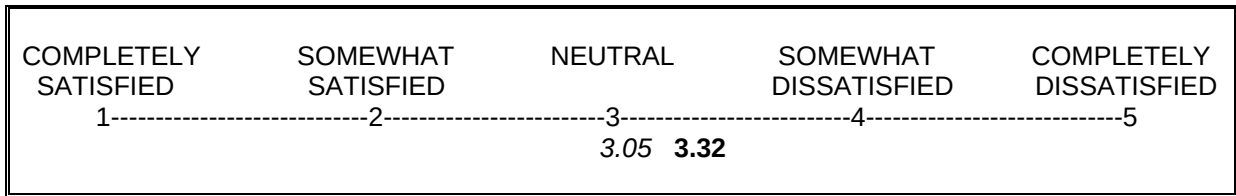


- ✓ The cost of health care is a significant issue among survey respondents and reflects the rising costs of health care over the past few years.
- ✓ Access to insurance is an issue among El Paso residents, while overall neutrality exists about access to health services.

Mean Scores on Health Care

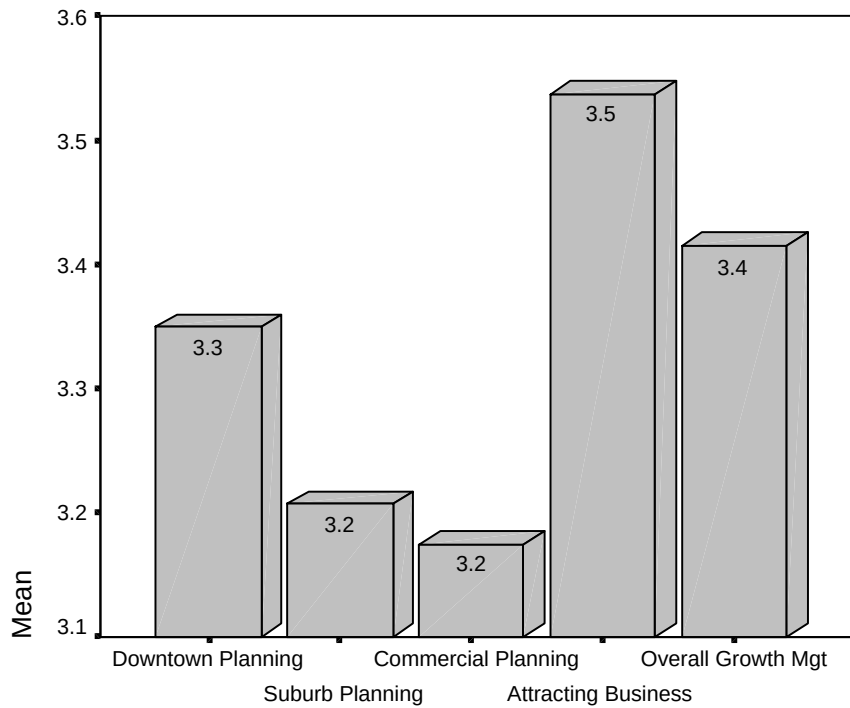


City Planning



- ✓ Overall lack of satisfaction about City Planning prevails among survey participants and has increased since 1999 across all categories.

Mean Scores on City Planning



Demographic Characteristics

Area of El Paso Where Respondent Resides:

	Frequency	Percent
Westside	85	16.6
Northeast	87	17.0
North Central	57	11.1
South Central	33	6.4
East	122	23.8
Lower Valley	130	25.2
Total	514	100.0

Highest Level of Education:

	Frequency	Percent
Less than High School	61	12.8
High School Graduate	98	20.7
Some College	156	33.0
Trade School or Two Year College	59	12.5
Graduate		
4 Year College Degree	58	12.3
Post Graduate or Advanced Degree	41	8.6
Total	471	100.0

Housing Arrangement:

	Frequency	Percent
Rent an Apartment or Room	67	13.7
Rent a House	54	11.1
Rent a Condominium or Townhouse	8	1.6
Own a House	204	41.9
Own a Mobile Home	14	2.9
Own a Condominium or Townhouse	2	.5
Live In Public Housing	9	1.9
Live with Parents	113	23.1
Other	15	3.1
Total	488	100.0

Age:

	Frequency	Percent
Under 18	40	8.1
18 to 25 years old	166	33.7
26 to 35 years old	98	20.0
36 to 45 years old	84	17.0
46 to 55 years old	53	10.7
56 to 65 years old	22	4.4
Over 65 years old	30	6.2
Total	493	100.0

Occupation:

	Frequency	Percent
Scientific/Technical	48	9.3
Professional/Managerial	109	21.1
Sales	103	20.0
Clerical/Bookkeeping	40	7.7
Service	61	11.8
Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing	6	1.2
Manufacturing/Processing	25	4.8
Construction	17	3.4
Transportation	13	2.5
Homemaker or Not Employed	94	18.2
	514	100.0

Number of Children under 18 Living in Household:

	Frequency	Percent
None	199	41.9
1-2	200	42.0
3-5	64	13.4
6-9	10	2.2
More than 9	2	.5
Total	475	100.0

Racial or Ethnic Background:

	Frequency	Percent
White	97	19.8
Hispanic of Mexican Descent	283	58.0
Hispanic Other	65	13.4
African American	18	3.7
Pacific Islander	5	.9
Asian/ Asian-Indian	1	.1
Native American	5	1.1
Other	15	3.0
Total	487	100.0

Marital Status:

	Frequency	Percent
Single, Never Married	223	46.9
Single, Divorced	52	10.9
Single, Widowed	8	1.8
Married	192	40.4
Total	476	100.0

Total Family Household Income:

	Frequency	Percent
Less than \$10,000	74	14.5
\$10,000 to \$14,999	39	7.7
\$15,000 to \$19,999	41	7.9
\$20,000 to \$24,999	47	9.2
\$25,000 to \$29,999	43	8.5
\$30,000 to \$39,999	51	10.0
\$40,000 to \$49,999	49	9.6
\$50,000 to \$74,999	66	12.8
Over \$75,000	63	12.3
Total	475	92.4

Gender:

	Frequency	Percent
Male	259	53.0
Female	230	47.0
Total	488	100.0