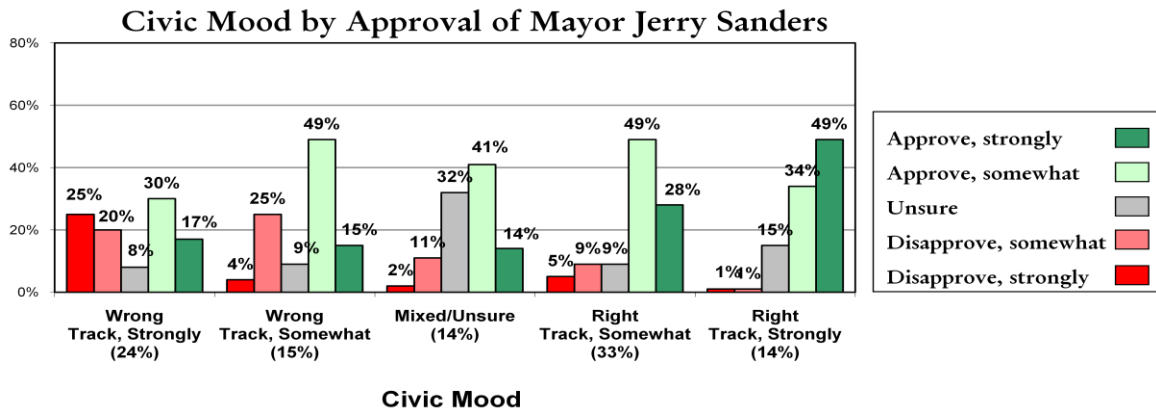


Mayor Sanders’ Job Approval Dips, but Still Way Above City Council, City Attorney Aguirre

Analysis by John E. Nienstedt, President
3/12/07

Job performance ratings for Mayor Jerry Sanders took a hit over the past two months. Among all residents, approval has come down, from 72% to 66% and among voters the drop has been from 77% to 70%. Both of these significant dips are most likely the political cost for taking positions on City issues and from starting from a very high base. Most politicians would be very happy with a 2:1 approve-disapprove ratio; Sanders’ is currently well over 3:1.

The data show that he continues to get vast amounts of support from those who think the City is moving in the right direction. This is natural for a city leader. However, he also generates far more positive than negative ratings among those who think things are somewhat headed in the wrong direction and breaks even with those who strongly feel that the City is on the wrong track. This reflects Sanders’ strong personality and that he is distanced from the City’s woes. Even residents who think the City is fouled up are not inclined to blame the Mayor.



Sanders also gets stronger support from older residents (73% approve). This helps him politically as older folks tend to be more reliable voters. Another similarly beneficial finding: support is stronger among home owners. Older liberals comprise Sanders' most negative demographic segment but, even here, while 40% disapprove of him, 48% approve of the job he is doing.

It is interesting to note that Sanders is actually more popular in the non-San Diego City portion of the County than he is in the City when approve-disapprove ratios are considered. Outside the City of San Diego, Sanders achieves a 5:1 ratio. However, 26% are unsure about his job performance which simply reflects less awareness outside his constituency.

City Attorney Mike Aguirre

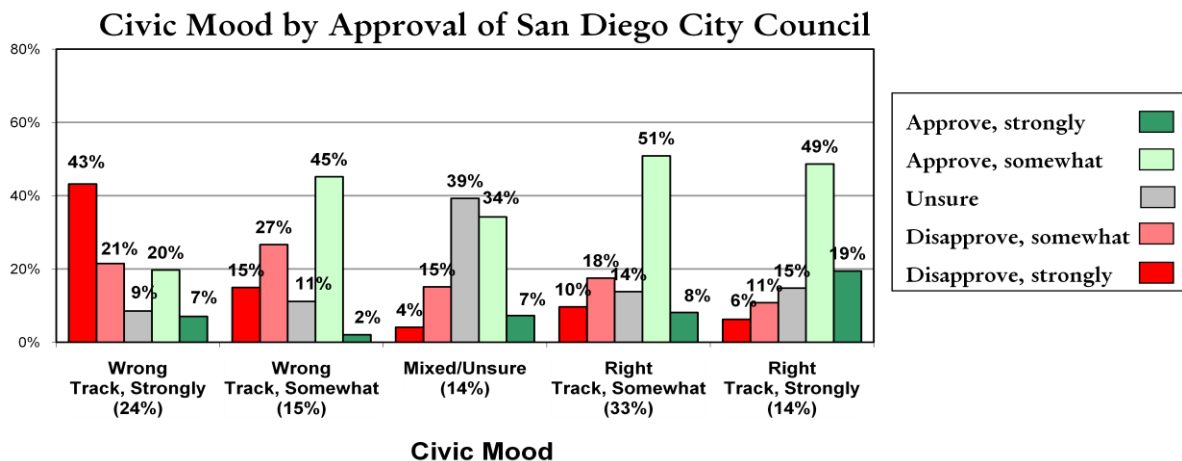
Though Mike Aguirre's approval rating dipped on the order of 4%, this is not a statistically significant decline. Forty-nine percent approve of the job he is doing, while 26% disapprove for a 1.9:1 ratio. Of note, however, is that Aguirre's ratio slumps a bit to 1.7:1 when only voters are considered.

Aguirre's job performance is not nearly as clear in the public's mind as Sanders' is, so we find fewer relationships with demographic sub-groups. However, the data does show that Aguirre is more popular among newer residents. Only 14% of those who have lived in San Diego County for less than a decade have assess his job performance negatively. In contrast, 32% of those residing here more than 10 years give the City Attorney low marks. Aguirre also gets significantly more support from residents who are less educated and from ideologically moderate Republicans.

The San Diego City Council

Unlike the Mayor’s job approval numbers, the City Council’s have held steady. While that may be perceived as a positive development, the Council starts from a much lower base. While 49% approve of the job the Council is doing, 35% disapprove and the intensity is on the negative side. That is, though 9% strongly approve, twice as many strongly disapprove. And the numbers are a bit worse among voters.

Like the Mayor’s job performance, the Council’s job performance tracks closely with civic mood. However, while Sander’s hangs on to many of those who strongly think things are headed in the wrong direction, the Council gets pummeled among them. Further, the approval ratings among those on the other side of the mood scale, while positive, are fairly weak. So the Council is taking the blame for the City’s ills and not getting a whole lot of credit from those who think things are heading in the right direction.

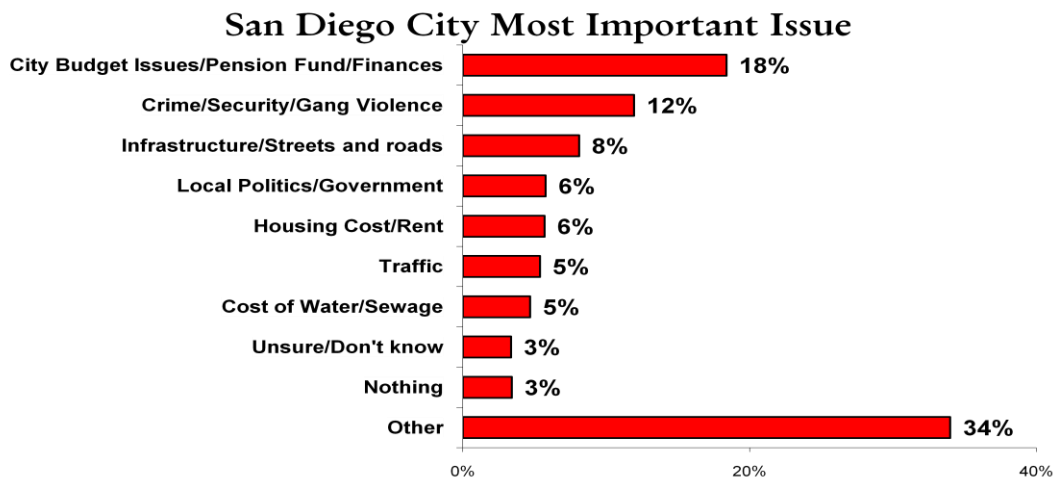


Another startling finding is that older voters have largely turned against the Council. Fifty-five percent of the elderly disapprove of the Council’s performance with one-third strongly disapproving. The results get only slightly better among 45 to 74 year-olds. It is among those under the age of 45 that the Council actually gets into positive territory. This age-based relationship is the opposite of what we find with the Mayor and clearly works to the

detriment of the Council. Democrats, especially strong ones, tend to like the Council much more than do Republicans. Another distinct pool of support for the Council exists among Spanish speakers: 61% register approval, while only 44% of whites do the same (just 3% strongly).

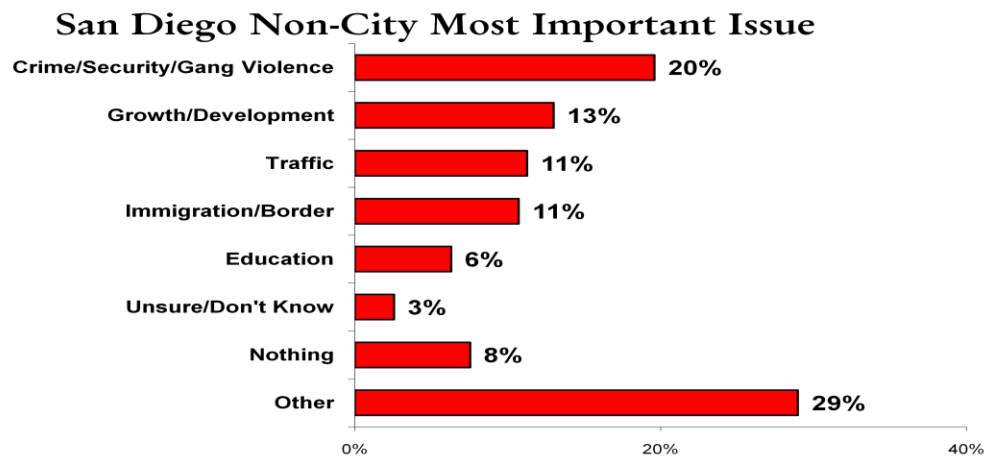
Important Issues

As we found in the January Barometer, City residents tend to be focused on the town's financial mess. Other perennial issues like traffic (now 5%), growth (now 4%) and education (now 3%), have taken a back seat to the city budget and pension fund scandals (18%). The real surprise continues to be the resurgence of crime: 12% put it at the top of their list. And, among lower income residents, this rises to over 20% while an incredible 49% of Spanish-speakers say crime is number one.



Crime is an even bigger issue in the non-San Diego City portion of the County. One-in-five residents say it is the most important issue facing their city or town. These findings dovetail with a study released last week by the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington-based law enforcement think tank, showing that a national lull in violent crime has ended. Crime and violence is again a bigger problem for lower income residents and Hispanics. Renters and less educated residents are also more prone to cite crime as the most important issue. Crime is

followed by more “usual” issues like growth (13%) and traffic (11%). Immigration and border issues are also prevalent, as 11% say it is their top concern.



San Diego County Board of Supervisors

Residents follow the actions of the County Board of Supervisors less closely than San Diego City residents follow their City Council’s performance. This is reflected in the finding that, while one out of every six City residents is unsure of what grade to give the Council, more than one out of every four is unable to evaluate the Supervisors. Like the City Council, however, the Board’s approval ratings themselves are merely OK – 44% approve and 28% disapprove -- and a bit worse when looking only at voters.

People who believe things are going better – either generally or economically – tend to think the Board is doing a much better job than those who say things are on the wrong track or the economy is worsening. This is interesting since the Supervisors, by virtue of their lower profile, would seem to exert less influence on the economy and the overall state of affairs in the County. However, it is likely that a “halo” effect is at work. That is, since the Board is *less* well known, residents rely more on external factors, such as the economy and a general sense of where things are headed, rather than personalities on the Board or their actual job performance.

More support for the halo effect theory comes from the finding that approval and disapproval of the Board is strongly related to the perception of Mayor Jerry Sanders' performance. Residents who think Sanders is doing a good job tend to think the Board is doing a good job and vice versa. So Sanders may also be providing the Board with a positive halo. Note that Sanders does not have a similar effect on the San Diego City Council nor is there a reverse effect (i.e. those who approve of the job Sanders is doing are not more likely to disapprove of the job the Council is doing). This leads to the question of whether residents might actually believe that Sanders is on the Board of Supervisors or somehow related to the Board.

The data also show that residents who have earned a college degree are significantly less likely to have a positive impression of the Board. Only 41% rate the Board's performance positively while 53% of those without a college degree say the Board is doing a good job.

Governor Schwarzenegger

Like the Mayor, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's job approval took a bit of a tumble over the past two months in the City of San Diego. Strongly approve moved from 25% to 16% and disapprove moved up from 27% to 35%. Forces similar to those acting on the Mayor are probably also pushing the Governor's approval rating south. The not-so-simple acts of governing – proposing a healthcare plan, for instance – force residents and voters to take sides. Like the Mayor, Schwarzenegger started the year with a vast reservoir of good will behind him and he has seen fit to spend some of that political capital to advance an agenda that has critics on both the left and the right.

As we saw in January, the Governor's image is tied closely to partisanship. He generally receives quite high marks from Republicans while getting mixed grades from Democrats.

However, in March he has apparently slipped with independents, as 48% of them disapprove of the job he is doing (25% strongly) and only 41% believe he is doing a good job.

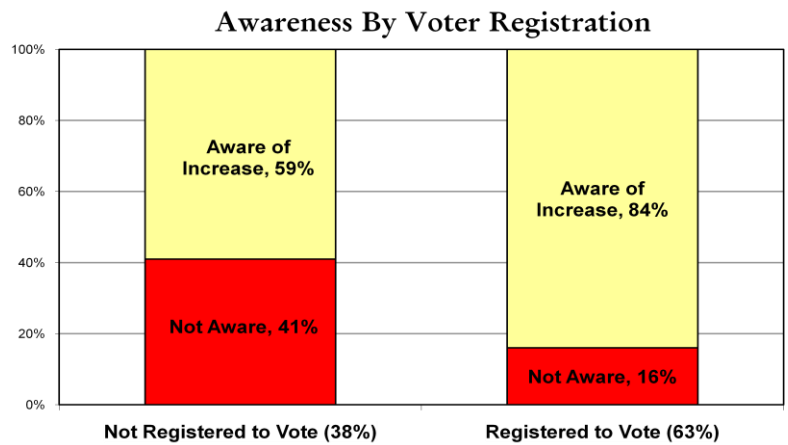
The Governor continues to do very well with older residents. More than 60% of those over 45 give him positive reviews and 26% of the elderly strongly approve of the job Schwarzenegger is doing. On the other hand, as we observed in January, his grades are mixed among those under the age of 45 and one-in-five in that age bracket strongly disapprove of the job he is doing.

Debating Water and Sewer Rate Increases

Awareness of the Issue

The survey asked San Diego City residents about the recent decision by the City to increase the rates paid for water and sewer service. Were residents even aware of the rate increase or was

this debate “inside baseball” to a lot of folks? The answer for registered voters is a resounding “yes, we’re watching!” Eighty-four percent of them say they are aware of the rate increase. While non-registrants are not entirely out to lunch on the rate increase issue, 41% say they do not know anything about it. This shows the wide disparity between voters and non-voters when it comes to civic engagement.

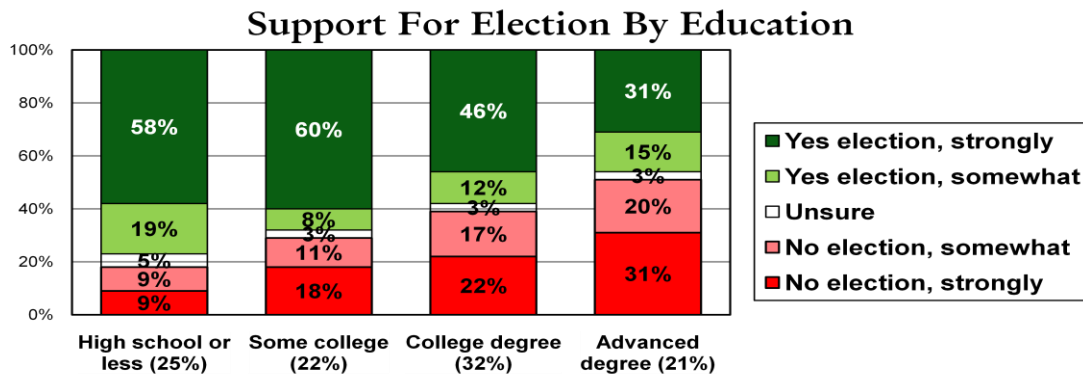


Other interesting findings related to who is paying attention to the issue of rates: more than 90% of those over 44 know about the increase, while only 38% of those 18 to 24 do; 91% of those living here more than two decades are aware, while only 55% of new residents (less than three years) are aware; 88% of homeowners, but only 62% of renters are aware; older females,

people living north of Interstate 8 and male Democrats are also more likely to be aware of the issue than their counterparts.

Initial support for the rate increase is anemic.

Only one-third of the City’s residents support it, while 42% strongly oppose it. Support is stronger among those earning more than \$80,000 – reflecting the bottom-line rationale for support and opposition to the rate increase. Even among upper income earners, however, support gets to only 47%, while two-thirds of residents making less than \$80,000 oppose the increase. In fact, the only two groups in which more than half initially support the water rate increase are very liberal residents and those who believe the City’s financial problems are the most important issue currently facing San Diego. Conservatives, for the most part, strongly oppose the increase.



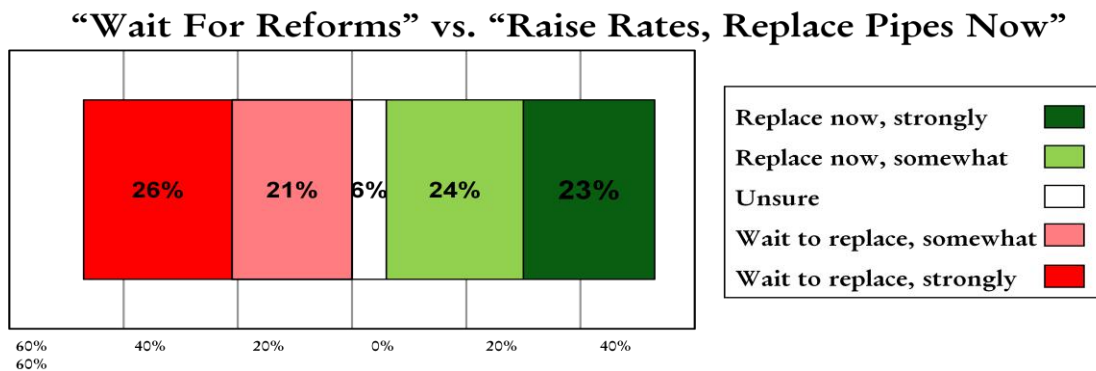
Support for \$25 Increase by 2011

But what if people knew the amount of the rate increase? The results to a follow-up question which told respondents that rates would rise by \$25 by the year 2011 are more favorable. With this information, 41% support the increase, though 56% continue to oppose it. A nearly microscopic 3% of the respondents are unsure at this point, which shows how hot this issue has become.

The \$25 amount clearly comes as a pleasant surprise to some. Support among high income residents now gets over 50% and opposition drops by 6% among those earning less.

Raise Rates and Replace Pipes Now or Wait for Reforms?

Things really get interesting when residents are asked whether raising water and sewer rates and replacing the City’s aging pipes should have waited for pension reforms or whether repairs should be made immediately. This “where-the-rubber-meets-the-road” question presents respondents with a more realistic scenario. The result shows an even split with 47% wanting to put reforms before repairs and the same percentage wanting rates raised now. In view of the vehement opposition to the rate increase registered earlier, this result can be taken as evidence of how serious the water and sewer situation appears to be.



Opinions here tend to revolve around civic mood. That is, most folks who believe things are headed in the right direction want the pipes fixed now, while most who see things as on the wrong track want to see reforms first. Why is this? Dissatisfied residents are more prone to focus on the unfinished pension reforms – believing that going ahead with the rate increase does not address the City’s underlying problems. They tend to feel that the additional fees amount to throwing good money after bad. On the other hand, those who are more positive about the City tend to trust its leaders and want to move forward on the City’s infrastructure needs. Probably reflecting liberal Democrats’ tendency to reject the idea that the City’s problems stem from high pensions, the data also show that they are strongly in favor of

moving ahead with the rate increase and pipe repairs. In contrast, middle-aged conservatives are significantly more inclined to support waiting for reforms. We also find that upper income residents continue their support for the rate increase.

Ratify the Rate Increase at the Ballot Box

Should this go to a vote of the people? Ask any group of Americans whether they should have the opportunity to vote on a topic and the answer is usually a loud “yes.” This case is no different as 63% say that approval of the water and sewer rate increases should have been put to a Citywide vote. Only 23% say no “to” an election. Predictably, support and opposition to an election generally falls along the lines of support and opposition to the rate increase itself. A whopping 85% of those who strongly oppose the rate increase want a vote to be held, while only 26% of those who strongly support the City’s decision think an election is necessary. Interestingly, as education levels increase, support for an election decreases dramatically. More than two-thirds with less than a college education want to be able to cast a ballot on the issue, but that drops to 58% among those with college degrees and half those with advanced degrees actually *oppose* holding an election.

