

# ELECTION REPORT 2015

FINAL IN A THREE  
PART SERIES



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Manship School of  
Mass Communication  
Reilly Center For  
Media & Public Affairs

## As More Voters Tune in to Gubernatorial Campaign, Their Opinions about the Major Candidates Shift

Results from a survey of Louisiana voters

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Public Policy Research Lab



## About the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs

The Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs, an integral part of Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication, uses the intellectual muscle of the school's faculty to help solve practical problems and advance good government initiatives. The Reilly Center's mission is to generate thoughtful programs, dialogue, and research about mass communication and its many faceted relationships with social, economic, and political issues. Evident in everything the Center does is its commitment to strengthen and advance the Manship School's national leadership in media and politics.

The Center's agenda is diverse and fluid – from the annual John Breaux Symposium, which brings in national experts to discuss a topic that has received little or no attention, to conducting the annual Louisiana Survey, a vital resource for policymakers, which tracks advancements and regressions of citizen attitudes about state services. The Center's role, within the state's flagship university, is to respond quickly to the needs of state governance in addressing challenges facing Louisiana, particularly in times of crisis such as during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Its action-oriented and partnership-driven philosophy underscores the Reilly Center's dedication to tackling ideas and issues that explore the relationship of media and the public in democratic society.

## About the Public Policy Research Lab

This survey was administered by Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab (PPRL). PPRL is a center for high quality, state-of-the-art data collection and analytics, with a special emphasis on survey research and policy evaluation. PPRL is a joint effort of the Manship School of Mass Communication's Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

PPRL provides a variety of services including survey research, data analytics, social media tracking, and focus group interviews. The Lab specializes in serving governmental agencies and other clients relying on data to measure and evaluate policy. The Lab is dedicated to meeting the unique goals and objectives for each project by working closely with those seeking data, research expertise, or analysis. PPRL's clients have included: the federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, the Louisiana Department of Labor, Louisiana Public Broadcasting, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium, and the Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

The Public Policy Research Lab is a non-partisan research center. The Lab does not conduct work on behalf of candidates, political parties, or other groups directly involved in an electoral campaign. While the Lab occasionally asks about approval of or favorability toward public figures, it does not ask the "horserace" or "trial heat" questions about elections in Louisiana that are featured in commercial political polling, that is, questions asking respondents which candidate they intend to vote for.

The Lab is primarily known for its telephone survey work. It is one of the largest university-based phone survey data collection facilities in the Southeastern Conference. PPRL has 52 computer-assisted telephone interview call stations and a large corps of highly-trained, well-supervised, professional (non-student) callers, supplemented by a smaller number of student employees.

More information on previous surveys may be found at: [www.survey.lsu.edu](http://www.survey.lsu.edu)

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the results from the third installment of the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs' series of surveys on the 2015 elections in Louisiana. Key results from this survey, administered by the Public Policy Research Lab from September 17 through October 11, include:

- Louisiana voters are waking up to this fall's campaign to elect their next governor. About two-in-five voters (39%) are following news about the election, up from just 25% last spring.
  - Few voters are following news about the legislative elections (29%), the elections for the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (17%), and the election for Lieutenant Governor (15%).
  - Several gubernatorial candidates have higher name recognition compared to the spring and summer. Public Service Commissioner Scott Angelle and state Representative John Bel Edwards have made the most gains in name recognition. The share of voters who could not recognize Angelle dropped from 83% in the spring to 66% this fall. The share for Edwards fell from 76% to 68%. Meanwhile, there has been no change in recognition of Lt. Governor Jay Dardenne or U.S. Senator David Vitter, both of whom remain more familiar to voters than Angelle and Edwards.
- Voters' opinions of the major candidates are evolving. Although the share of voters with favorable opinions has grown for several candidates, the three major Republican candidates have also seen at least a modest rise in the share of voters with unfavorable opinions of them. This is especially true for Vitter, who has both the highest share of favorable opinions (30%) and the highest share of unfavorable opinions (41%). Yet, even as Vitter's net favorability (percent favorable minus percent unfavorable) has shifted from +15 to -11 since July, he remains in a strong position among Republican voters compared to his opponents.
- A majority of Louisiana residents continue to hold a pessimistic view about the direction of the state. Among voters, 56% think the state is heading in the wrong direction; among all adult state residents, 54% take this view. Despite the large share of disgruntled voters, no candidate has yet built an advantage among them.

Crosstabs from this survey may be found at: [www.survey.lsu.edu](http://www.survey.lsu.edu)

## Voters Just Beginning to Follow Gubernatorial Campaign

With the primary election for Louisiana’s next governor just weeks away, voters in the state are now paying a bit more attention than they were earlier in the year. About two in every five voters (39%) say they are following news about the candidates “very closely” or “fairly closely.” This is up from just 25% who said they were following the campaign in March.

Even as more voters tune in, many others continue to give the campaign little, if any, attention. Two fifths (40%) say they are following news about the gubernatorial candidates “not too closely,” and another 20% are not paying any attention at all. A year ago, during the campaign for one of the state’s U.S. Senate seats, 49% of voters were following the campaign “very closely” or “fairly closely.”

Still, more voters are following the governor’s race this year than are following other elections (Table 1). Only 29% are following the legislative elections “very closely” or “fairly closely”. The share paying attention to the elections for Lieutenant Governor or for the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) are even smaller at 15% and 17% respectively.

The increasing attention to the governor’s race can also be seen in candidate name recognition. To measure name recognition, we asked voters whether they have a favorable opinion of each major candidate, an unfavorable opinion, or do not know enough to say. Name recognition of Public Service Commissioner Scott Angelle and state Representative John Bel Edwards have improved since the spring and summer (Figure

39% of voters say they are following news about the gubernatorial candidates “very closely” or “fairly closely.”

Fewer than half as many are following the BESE elections closely.

1). Although the share of voters who do not know enough to offer an opinion about these candidates is about two-thirds for each, this is significantly lower than the approximately 80% who did not recognize them earlier this year. The share of voters unfamiliar with Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne remains about 60%. U.S. Senator David Vitter is better known. Only 29% fail to recognize his name.

**Table 1: More Voters Paying Attention to Governor's Election Than Other Contests**

How closely following news about elections for...	Governor	Legislature	Lieutenant Governor	BESE
Very closely	12%	8%	4%	10%
Fairly closely	27%	21%	11%	7%
Not too closely	40%	37%	39%	27%
Not at all	20%	33%	46%	55%

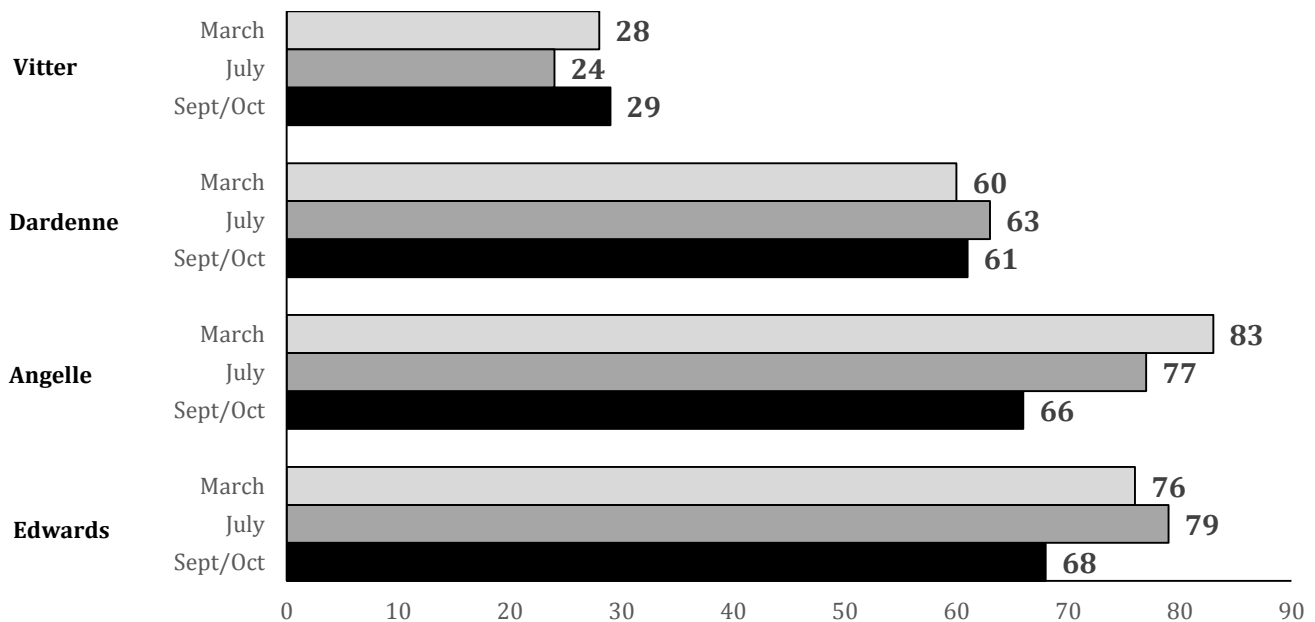
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**Figure 1: Angelle and Edwards Have Boosted Name Recognition Over Campaign**

*% of voters who do not know enough to have a favorable/unfavorable opinion of candidate or to identify ideology of candidate*



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## Campaign Taking Toll on Candidate Favorability Ratings

As voters start tuning in, their evaluations of the candidates are evolving. At 30%, Vitter continues to have the highest percentage of voters with a favorable opinion of him (Figure 2). Yet, this share is down from 45% in July. As a result, his favorability advantage over Dardenne, Angelle, and Edwards (who are statistically tied in the mid- to low-twenties) has narrowed.

Vitter also leads in the share of *unfavorable* opinions with 41%, which rose from 30% in July. Vitter is not the only candidate whose unfavorable ratings have risen since the summer. In fact, each of the major Republican candidates – who have been sparring with each other more than they have with the lone major Democrat – had at least a modest bump in unfavorable opinions. The share of voters with an unfavorable opinion of Dardenne climbed from 8% to 15%, while the share with an unfavorable opinion of Angelle went up from 5% to 13%. In contrast, unfavorable opinions of Edwards

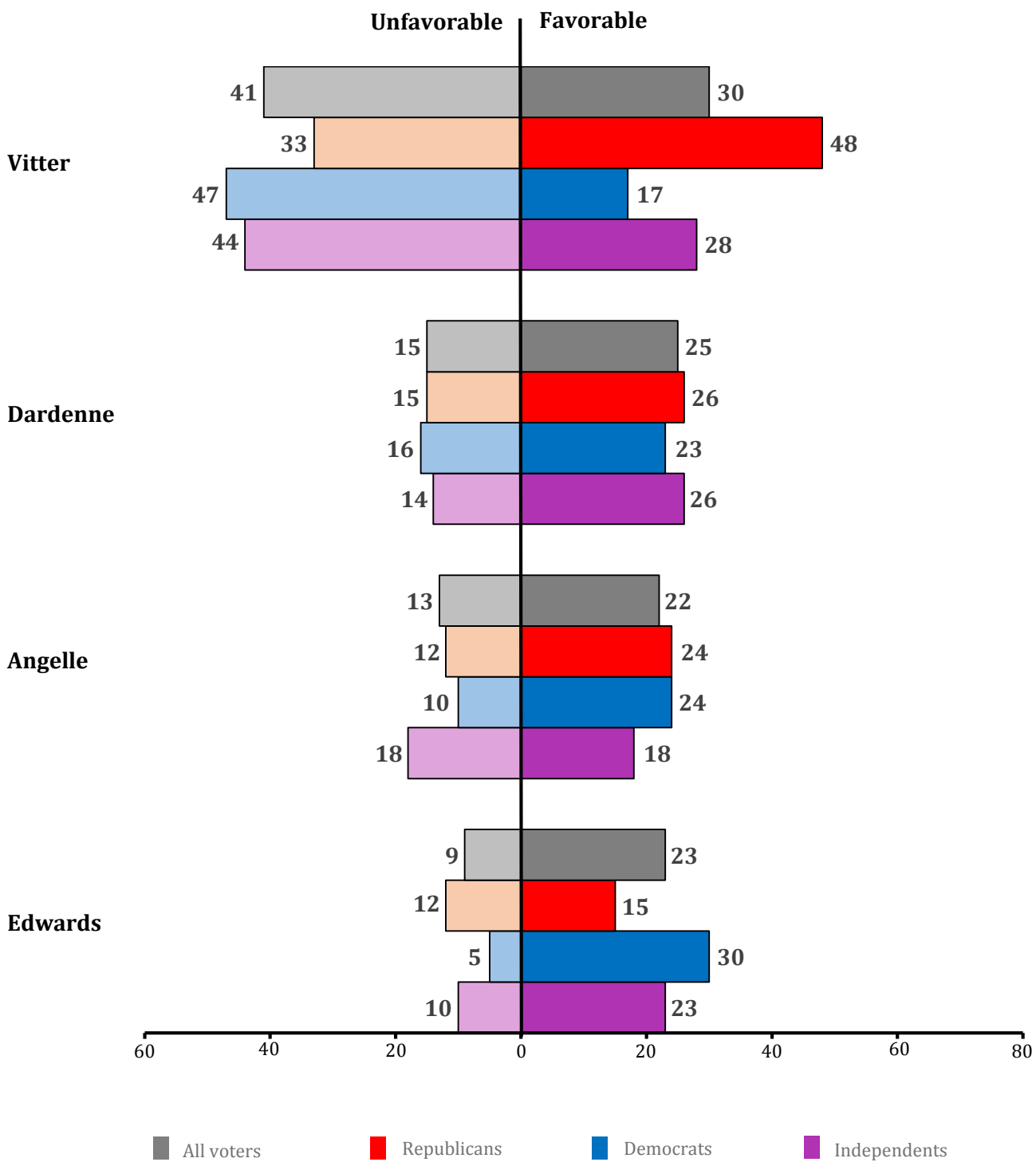
remain unchanged, and favorable opinions rose from 13% to 23%.

For Vitter, the declining share of favorable opinions and the rising share of unfavorable opinions combine for a *-11 net favorability rating* (percent favorable minus percent unfavorable). However, his unfavorable numbers are driven in large part by voters who were never likely to cast a ballot for him. About half of those with an unfavorable opinion of Vitter are either Democrats or independents who lean toward the Democratic Party. Vitter fares much better among Republican voters, where his net favorability is +15.

These favorability ratings represent voters' overall evaluations of candidates. While they provide a sense about how voters see the slate of choices, they do not indicate which candidate voters will ultimately choose in the primary election, much less in a runoff.

## Figure 2: Vitter Continues to Have Highest Favorability Ratings, But Also Highest Unfavorability

% saying they have favorable/unfavorable opinion of four major candidates for all voters and by party



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**Table 2: Voters Do Not See Large Ideological Differences Between Candidates**

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	All voters	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
Vitter	5.1	4.9	5.1	5.3
Dardenne	4.6	4.4	4.5	4.7
Angelle	4.4	4.1	4.6	4.4
Edwards	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.9

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Note: Values are the average placement of the candidates ideology on a seven point scale from 'very liberal' (1) to 'very conservative' (7). The margin of error for the average among all voters is approximately 0.2. The margin of error within partisan groups is approximately 0.4. Because of the magnitude of the margin of error it is impossible to make statistical distinctions between the average placement of candidates by partisan groups except for the difference between Vitter and Edwards.

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## **Voter See Small Differences between Candidates**

We asked voters to place each of the four major candidates on a seven point scale ranging from “very liberal” to “very conservative” (Table 2). The average placements for the four candidates cluster around a four (“moderate”) and five (“somewhat conservative”). Edwards is seen as the most liberal, but the average response falls almost exactly at four (“moderate”). Voters see Vitter as the most conservative, but the average placement (5.1) is just a hair to the right of “somewhat conservative.”

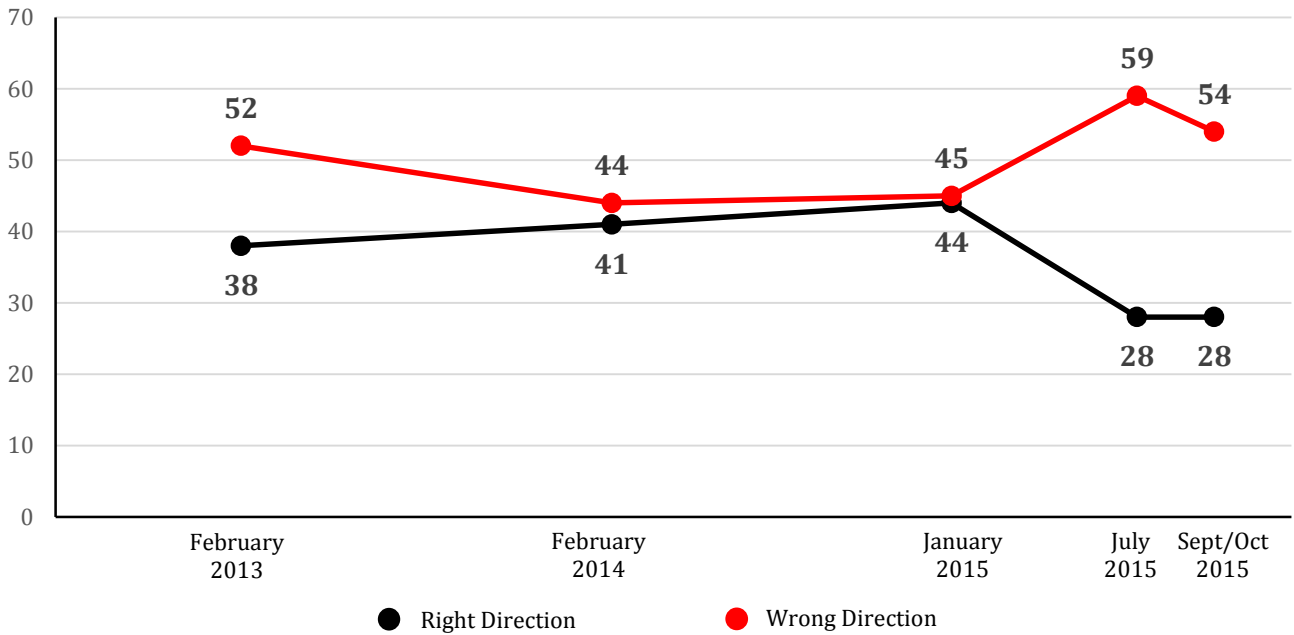
## **Public Mood about Direction of State Remains Sour**

Fifty four percent of residents think the state is heading in the wrong direction. Only 28% think it is heading in the right direction (Figure 3). The gap is essentially the same among voters, 56% to 29%, as among the general public. Yet, so far, no candidate has capitalized on this pessimism. No candidate has especially high favorability ratings among voters who think the state is heading in the wrong direction (Table 3). What’s more, no candidate does better among voters who think the state is heading in the wrong direction than among voters who think the state is heading in the right direction. In short, each of the candidates has so far failed to consolidate the support of these dissatisfied voters.



**Figure 3: Public Mood Remains Sour into Fall of 2015**

*% of all respondents saying the state is headed in the right/wrong direction*



Source: Louisiana Survey (2013-2015) and 2015 Election Surveys  
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**Table 3: Voters Who Think State Heading in Wrong Direction Have Less Favorable Opinions of All Candidates Than Those Who See State Going in Right Direction**

Percent with favorable opinion of candidate among voters who think the state is heading in the ...	Wrong Direction (56% of voters)	Right Direction (29% of voters)	Difference
Vitter	28	41	-13
Dardenne	21	29	-8
Angelle	20	27	-7
Edwards	23	27	-4

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# Survey Methodology

Data in this report are from a randomly selected, statewide representative group of adult residents of Louisiana. Data were collected via telephone interviews conducted from September 17 to October 11, 2015, among a randomly selected state sample of 1,040 adult residents (18 years or older). The survey includes a traditional landline telephone survey combined with a survey of Louisiana cell phone users. The combined sample includes 517 respondents interviewed on a landline and 523 respondents interviewed on a cell phone. The design of the landline sample ensures representation of both listed and unlisted numbers by use of random digit dialing. The cell phone sample is randomly drawn from known, available phone number banks dedicated to wireless service.

The response rate is 12.1% for the landline sample and 6.5% for the cell phone sample. This response rate is the percentage of residential households or personal cell phones for which an interview is completed. The rates are calculated using the American Association for Public Opinion Research's method for Response Rate 3 as published in their Standard Definitions. Response rates have declined steadily for all surveys over the past several decades. The response rates for this survey are within the range of what national survey research organizations such as Gallup and the Pew Research Center have reported.

The combined landline and cell phone sample is weighted using an iterative procedure that matches race and ethnicity, education, household income, gender and age to known profiles for Louisiana found in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. The sample is also weighted for population density by parish using parameters from United States Census data. The specific factors used for weighting are: parish of residence, gender, age, household income, education, race, and Hispanic ethnicity. Weighting cannot eliminate every source of nonresponse bias. However, proper conduction of random sampling combined with accepted weighting techniques has a strong record of yielding unbiased results.

Results in this report are for 893 respondents reporting they are registered voters. The registered voter sample has an overall margin of error of +/- 3.3 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, as accounted for through the margin of error, readers should recognize that questions wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Please direct any questions concerning survey methodology to:

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# Survey Toplines

NOTE: Results are shown for all respondents and for respondents reporting that they are certain that registered to vote. Frequencies represent percentages of respondents who received the question. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

INTRO to Q1 – Q4. For each of the following individuals, please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of that person. If you don't know enough about him to have an opinion, you can just tell me that. [RANDOMIZE ORDER OF Q1 – Q4.]

Q1. David Vitter. Is your opinion very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or don't you know enough to say?

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Very favorable	6	7
Somewhat favorable	21	23
Somewhat unfavorable	18	21
Very unfavorable	18	20
Don't know enough to say	35	29
Refused (Volunteered)	0	0

Q2. Scott Angelle. Is your opinion very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or don't you know enough to say?

Very favorable	7	7
Somewhat favorable	13	15
Somewhat unfavorable	7	8
Very unfavorable	5	5
Don't know enough to say	68	66
Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q3. Jay Dardenne. Is your opinion very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or don't you know enough to say?

Very favorable	4	5
Somewhat favorable	18	20
Somewhat unfavorable	10	11
Very unfavorable	5	4
Don't know enough to say	64	61
Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q4. John Bel Edwards. Is your opinion very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable, or don't you know enough to say?

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Very favorable	6	7
Somewhat favorable	14	16
Somewhat unfavorable	5	5
Very unfavorable	3	3
Don't know enough to say	72	68
Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q5. Have you been following news about the candidates for the 2015 governor's election in Louisiana very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all?

Very closely	11	12
Fairly closely	24	27
Not too closely	39	40
Not at all	25	20
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	1

[RANDOMIZE ASSIGNMENT TO Q6A, Q6B, OR Q6C.]

Q6A. Have you been following news about the election for the state legislature very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all?

Very closely	7	8
Fairly closely	16	21
Not too closely	35	37
Not at all	41	33
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q6B. Have you been following news about the election for Lieutenant Governor very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all?

Very closely	4	4
Fairly closely	11	11
Not too closely	38	39
Not at all	47	46
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q6C. Have you been following news about the election for the state’s Board of Elementary and Secondary Education very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all?

Very closely	9	10
Fairly closely	6	7
Not too closely	27	27
Not at all	57	55
Don’t know / Refused (Vol.)	1	1

Q7. Would you say things are generally going in the right direction, or do you think things are going in the wrong direction here in Louisiana?

Right direction	28	29
Wrong direction	54	56
Don’t know / Refused (Vol.)	17	15

Q8. When it comes to politics, would you say you are very liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

Very liberal	4	4
Liberal	8	7
Somewhat liberal	9	9
Moderate	21	18
Somewhat conservative	14	16
Conservative	19	20
Very conservative	14	17
Don’t know / Refused (Vol.)	11	8

INTRO to Q9 – Q12. Thinking about the following candidates for governor, please tell me where you would place them on the same scale. [RANDOMIZE ORDER OF Q9 – Q12]

Q9. David Vitter. Is he very liberal, liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Very liberal	2	2
Liberal	7	6
Somewhat liberal	4	4
Moderate	7	6
Somewhat conservative	12	13
Conservative	16	19
Very conservative	11	13
Don’t know / Refused (Vol.)	41	36

Q10. Scott Angelle. Is he very liberal, liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

Very liberal	2	2
Liberal	5	6
Somewhat liberal	6	7
Moderate	8	8
Somewhat conservative	8	9
Conservative	8	9
Very conservative	4	5
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	59	55

Q11. Jay Dardenne. Is he very liberal, liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

Very liberal	2	2
Liberal	4	4
Somewhat liberal	2	3
Moderate	9	10
Somewhat conservative	10	11
Conservative	8	9
Very conservative	3	3
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	62	57

Q12. John Bel Edwards. Is he very liberal, liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Very liberal	2	2
Liberal	5	6
Somewhat liberal	6	7
Moderate	10	10
Somewhat conservative	7	7
Conservative	6	6
Very conservative	2	2
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	63	61

Q13. These days many people are so busy they can't find the time to register to vote, or move around so often they don't get a chance to register. Are you NOW registered to vote in your precinct or haven't you been able to register yet?

Yes, registered	82	100
No, not registered	18	--
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	--

[ASK Q14A ONLY IF Q13 = 'Yes']

Q14A. Are you absolutely certain that you are registered to vote, or is there a chance your registration has lapsed because you moved or for some other reason?

Absolutely certain	95	100
Chance registration lapsed	4	--
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	--

[ASK Q14B ONLY IF Q13 = 'No' or 'Don't know / Refused']

Q14B. Do you plan to register to vote or is there a chance you may not register?

Plan to register	40	--
Chance may not register	52	--
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	7	--

Q15. On October 24, the election for Louisiana governor will be held. Using a 1 to 10 scale, where 10 means you are completely certain that you will vote and 1 means that you are completely certain you will not vote, how likely are you to vote in the governor's election?

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
1 Certain will not vote	13	5
2	1	0
3	2	1
4	1	0
5	4	3
6	3	3
7	3	2
8	8	7
9	4	5
10 Certain will vote	60	72
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	2	2



Q16. I have just a few more questions for you. In what year were you born?

[OPEN-ENDED ANSWERS CODED INTO CATEGORIES]

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
18-29	22	17
30-49	34	34
50-64	27	29
65 or older	17	19
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	1

Q17. Generally speaking do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?

Democrat	34	36
Republican	28	32
Independent	25	21
Other	9	9
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	4	2

[ASK Q18A ONLY IF ANSWERED "Democrat" OR "Republican" TO Q17]

Q18A. Would you consider yourself a strong or a not so strong [INSERT ANSWER TO Q17]?

Strong	66	68
Not so Strong	33	32
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	1

[ASK Q18B ONLY IF DID NOT ANSWER "Democrat" OR "Republican" TO Q17]

Q18B. Would you say, you lean to the Democratic Party or Republican Party, or would you say you don't lean to either party?

Democratic Party	11	13
Republican Party	20	25
Independent (Don't lean to either party)	62	56
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	7	6

Q19. Which of the following categories best describes your level of education? Please stop me when I get to that category.

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> grade	6	5
9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade but did not graduate high school	11	9
High school diploma	34	33
Some college or vocational school but no degree	21	22
Associates degree	5	6
Bachelor's degree	15	17
Graduate or professional degree	7	8
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q20. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban?

Yes	4	4
No	95	96
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q21. Which of the following best describes you? Are you white, African-American, or something else?

White	61	62
African-American	32	31
Other	5	5
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	1

Q22. Is your religious preference Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Agnostic, Atheists, or something else?

Christian	80	82
Jewish	0	0
Muslim	0	1
Agnostic	2	2
Atheist	2	2
Something Else	13	12
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	2

[ASK Q23 ONLY IF ANSWERED "Christian" TO Q22]

Q23. Do you generally consider yourself Catholic, Baptist, another Protestant denomination, or something else?

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Catholic	30	31
Baptist	38	37
Other Protestant	12	12
Something else	18	18
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	2

[ASK Q24 ONLY IF ANSWERED "Christian" TO Q22]

Q24. Do you generally consider yourself an evangelical or born again Christian?

Yes	61	64
No	34	32
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	5	4

Q25. We would like to know what your household income was last year before taxes. This information will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for statistical purposes. Please stop me when I get to the category that includes your household income.

Under \$10,000	9	8
\$10,000 - \$14,999	6	5
\$15,000 - \$24,999	11	9
\$25,000 - \$34,999	7	7
\$35,000- \$49,999	6	6
\$50,000 - \$74,999	17	18
\$75,000 - \$99,999	11	12
\$100,000 - \$149,999	11	13
\$150,000 - \$199,999	4	4
\$200,000 or more	3	4
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	15	14

Q26. [RECORD GENDER. DO NOT ASK.]

Male	48	46
Female	52	54