

ELECTION REPORT 2015

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As Gubernatorial Campaign Gears Up, Voters are Inattentive and Disgruntled

August 2015

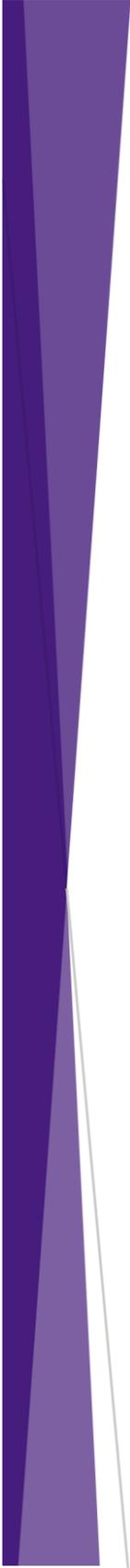


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The Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs
Manship School of Mass Communication
Louisiana State University

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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. It takes seriously its role, within the Flagship University, to respond quickly in times of crisis to help state governance, 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

Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab (PPRL) is a research center dedicated to high quality, state-of-the-art data collection and analytics, with a special emphasis on survey research. 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, 'big data' analytics, social media tracking, and focus group interviews. The Lab is primarily known for its telephone survey work. PPRL has 52 computer-assisted telephone interview call stations and a corps of highly-trained, well-supervised professional callers. It is one of the largest phone survey data collection facilities in the Southeastern Conference.

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 center for survey research and data analysis. The lab does not take candidates or political parties as clients. While the lab occasionally asks about approval and favorability toward public officials in the state of Louisiana, we do not ask "horserace" or "trial heat" questions about elections in Louisiana – that is, questions about for whom respondents plan to vote.

More information on previous surveys may be found at: www.survey.lsu.edu

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Executive Summary

Few voters are paying attention to Louisiana's race for governor. Less than one in three (29%) say they are following news about the election, and large majorities remain too unfamiliar with three of the major candidates to even offer an opinion about them. Unsurprisingly, then, the share of favorable and unfavorable opinions about Public Service Commissioner Scott Angelle, Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne, state Rep. John Bel Edwards, and U.S. Sen. David Vitter remain at essentially the same levels as in our March survey.

Additional findings about what Louisiana voters think about this year's election include:

- With his greater name recognition, Vitter continues to lead in both the percent of voters with a *favorable* opinion of him (45%) and the percent with an *unfavorable* opinion (30%).
- Struggling with name recognition, the remaining candidates follow. Dardenne: 29% favorable and 8% unfavorable; Angelle: 18% favorable and 5% unfavorable; and Edwards: 13% favorable and 8% unfavorable.
- Dardenne leads in *net favorability* (favorable minus unfavorable) at +21, followed by Vitter (+15), Angelle (+13), and Edwards (+5).
- Even as opinions of the candidates have shown little change, there has been a steep rise in the share of Louisiana residents who think the state is heading in the wrong direction. This share rose from 45% in January to 59% in July. It reaches 62% among registered voters. So far, no candidate has built an advantage among these disgruntled voters.
- About half of voters (52%) identify as conservative, including a third of Democrats.
- At this stage of the campaign, voters do not see wide ideological differences across the four major candidates. On a seven point scale where one means "very liberal" and seven means "very conservative," voters on average place all four of these candidates close to a four ("moderate") or five ("somewhat conservative").

Early Campaign Has Not Reached Voters, Vitter Leads in Favorable and Unfavorable Opinions

On October 24, Louisiana voters cast their first ballot in the election of the state’s next governor. With Election Day now just a few months away, the campaign for the state’s highest office has begun to move into a higher gear. The major candidates – Public Service Commissioner Scott Angelle, Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne, state Rep. John Bel Edwards, and U.S. Sen. David Vitter – have sparred at debates and forums. Campaign organizations and Political Action Committees have launched television and radio advertisements. Signs emblazoned with candidate names have sprouted in lawns and along highways.

Even as the campaign gears up, most voters have hardly noticed. Twenty nine percent of voters say they are following news about the candidates “very closely” or “fairly closely”, while 71% say they are following “not too closely” or “not at all.” This is roughly equivalent to the 25% who said they were following the campaign in March (see [Louisiana Voters Paying Little Attention to Campaign at Early Stage](#)).

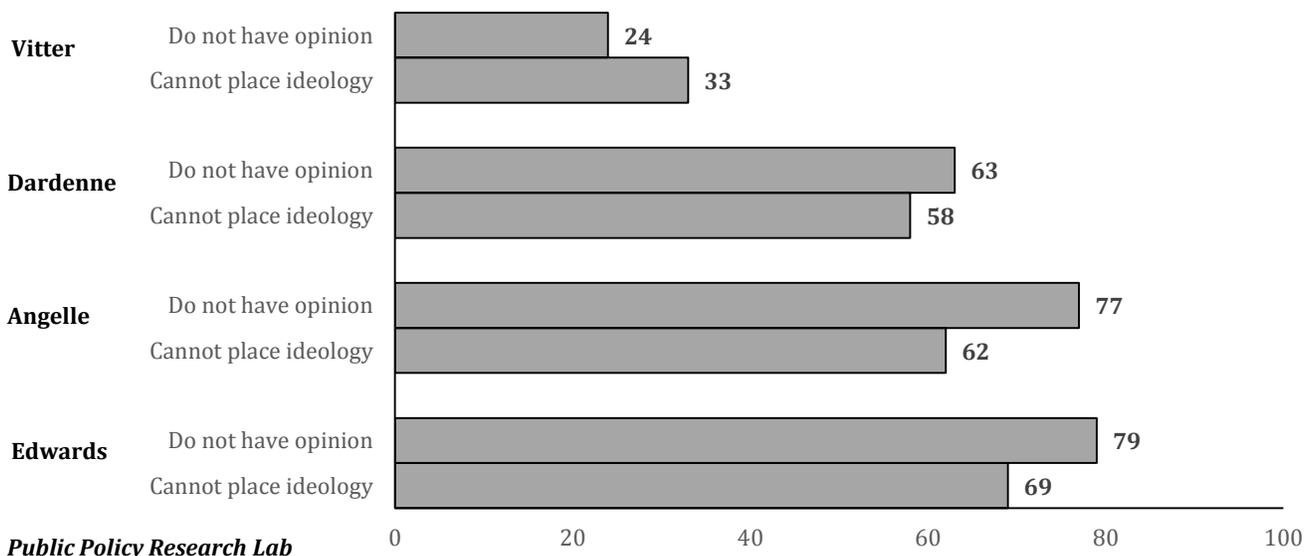
Only 29% of voters say they are following news about the candidates.

When voters are not paying attention to a campaign, their opinions tend to remain undeveloped. This election is no exception. There is no evidence that voters’ opinions of the major candidates, either positive or negative, have shifted in any serious way since March.

In fact, just as when we last asked in March, most voters do not yet even have opinions about three of the four major candidates. We asked voters whether they have favorable or unfavorable opinions of the four announced major candidates.

Figure 1: Most Voters Know Little About Dardenne, Angelle, or Edwards

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



Importantly, these questions were explicitly designed to measure name recognition and opinions about the candidates themselves, rather than about their party, their current office, their hometown, or anything else. We provided no additional information about the candidates beyond their name. Such information potentially muddies responses by invoking recognition or opinion about those specific characteristics rather than about the candidate.

Large majorities simply do not know enough about Dardenne, Angelle, or Edwards to offer an opinion (Figure 1). We also asked voters where they think each candidate falls on a seven point ideological scale from “very liberal” to “very conservative”. Again, most voters could not offer a guess about how the ideology of Dardenne, Angelle, or Edwards.

Voters are more familiar with Vitter and readily offer their opinions about him, positive and

negative. At 45%, Sen. Vitter has the highest percentage of voters with a favorable opinion of him among the four major candidates (Figure 2).

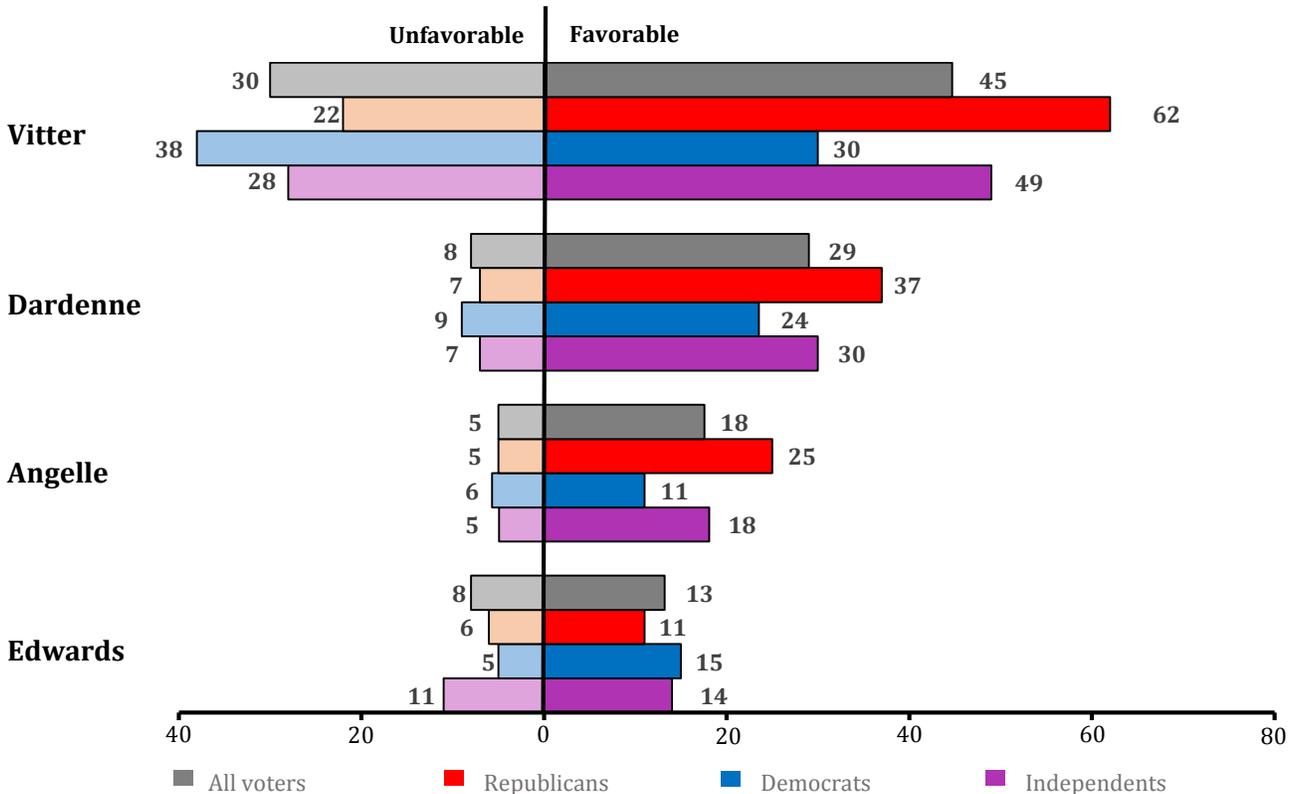
Dardenne, Angelle, and Edwards follow at 29%, 18%, and 13% of voters expressing a favorable opinion respectively. Any differences from March estimates – when the percent of voters with favorable opinions stood at 42% for Vitter, 30% for Dardenne, 17% for Edwards, and 14% for Angelle – fall within the margin of error.

Vitter also leads in the share of unfavorable opinions at 30%. In short, more voters like Vitter than like any of the remaining candidates, but more voters *dislike* him as well. At this point, most voters appear to already know where they stand when it comes to Vitter, but few have developed opinions about the other candidates.

All four major candidates have a positive *net favorability* rating, meaning more voters like

Figure 2: Vitter Has Highest Favorability and Unfavorability Ratings

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



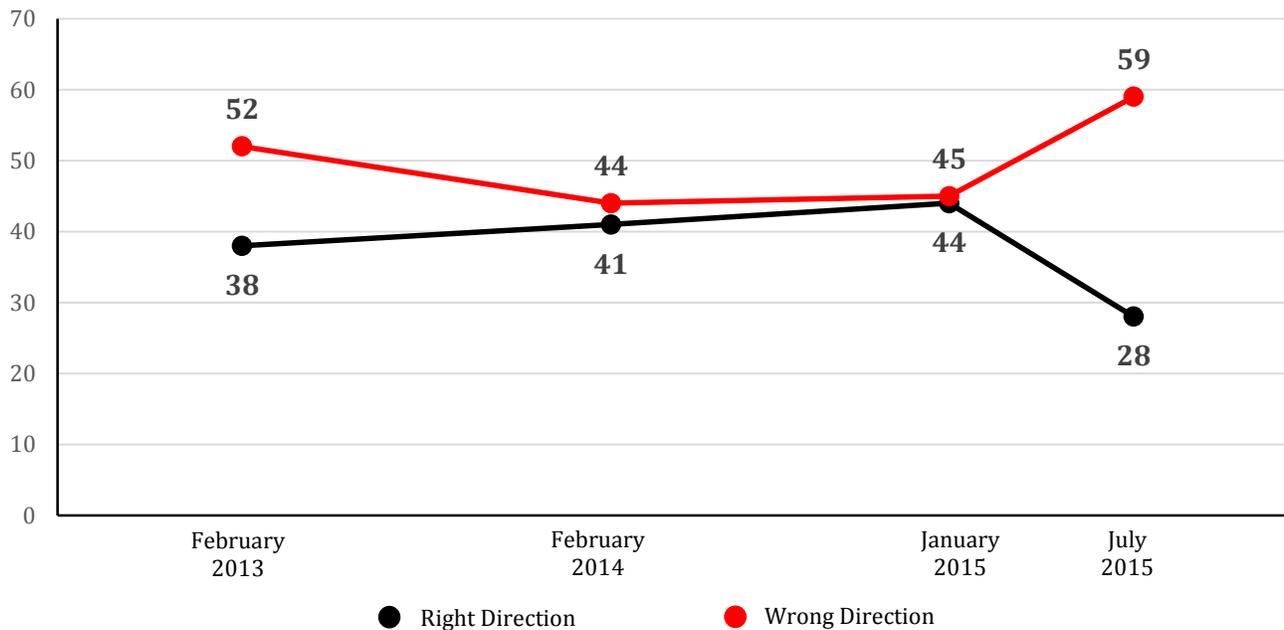
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Figure 3: Trend in Direction of State Reverses

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



Source: Louisiana Survey (2013-2015) and 2015 Election Survey
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them than dislike them. Dardenne leads in net favorability at +21. Vitter follows at +15, Angelle at +13, and Edwards at +5.

With so many voters still unfamiliar about the major candidates, these early opinions should be interpreted with caution. Indeed, these results indicate that any early polling about whom voters may cast ballots for come October should be taken with a large grain of salt. Significant shifts in opinion can unfold before Election Day, particularly about the least known candidates.

Any movement, however, will depend not only on how the candidates work to boost their name

59% of Louisiana residents think the state is heading in the wrong direction

recognition but also on much voters pay attention to the campaign. At this point, few voters are paying much attention.

Majority Says State Heading in Wrong Direction

Although there is no evidence that voters are changing their minds about the candidates, there has been a large downward swing in the mood of Louisiana residents over the first half of 2015. Fifty nine 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 slightly larger among voters, 62% to 25%.

When we last asked this question in January the two views were statistically tied following a steady increase in “right direction” over the previous two years (see [The Louisiana Survey, 2015](#)). The past six months have undone all of the previous trend. Indeed, Louisiana residents are more disgruntled now than at any point since we

began tracking their mood about the direction of the state in 2003.

No candidate has capitalized on this souring mood. Two of the candidates do worse among those who think the state is heading in the wrong direction than among those saying the state is heading in the right direction (Table 1). The other two do about the same among both groups of voters.

The failure so far of any candidate to galvanize support among these dissatisfied voters could have resulted because each of these candidates has made efforts to draw distinctions between himself and the administration of Gov. Bobby Jindal. Just as likely, however, it is because voters who are not paying attention to the campaign are not equipped to align their opinions about the state with their choice for governor.

Conservatives Hold Edge among Voters, Small Differences Seen across Candidates

Most Louisiana voters, 52%, identify themselves as politically conservative (Figure 4). We asked voters to place themselves on a seven point scale ranging from “very liberal” to “very conservative”. Less than one in five voters identify as liberal, and just under one in four identify as moderate. The average placement on

this seven point scale is 4.8, which falls between “moderate” and “somewhat conservative.”

As expected, most Republicans (76%) call themselves “somewhat conservative,” “conservative,” or “very conservative.” Republicans have an average response of 5.6 (between “somewhat conservative” and “conservative”). Independents and Democrats have average responses of 4.0 (“moderate”) and 4.8 (between “moderate” and “somewhat conservative”) respectively. Nevertheless, 34% of Democrats call themselves conservative, as do 48% of independents.

In addition to asking voters where they place themselves on this ideological scale, we also asked them where they think the candidates are (Figure 5). Among voters who are able to venture a guess to these questions, 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 Sen. Vitter as the most conservative, but the average placement (5.1) is just a hair to the right of “somewhat conservative”. In short, at this stage of the campaign, voters do not see large ideological differences between the candidates.

Table 1: No Candidate Has Advantage Among Voters Who Think State Heading in Wrong Direction

Percent with favorable opinion of candidate among voters who think the state is heading in the ...	Wrong Direction	Right Direction	Difference
Vitter	38	63	-25
Dardenne	30	31	-1
Angelle	16	24	-8
Edwards	14	15	-1

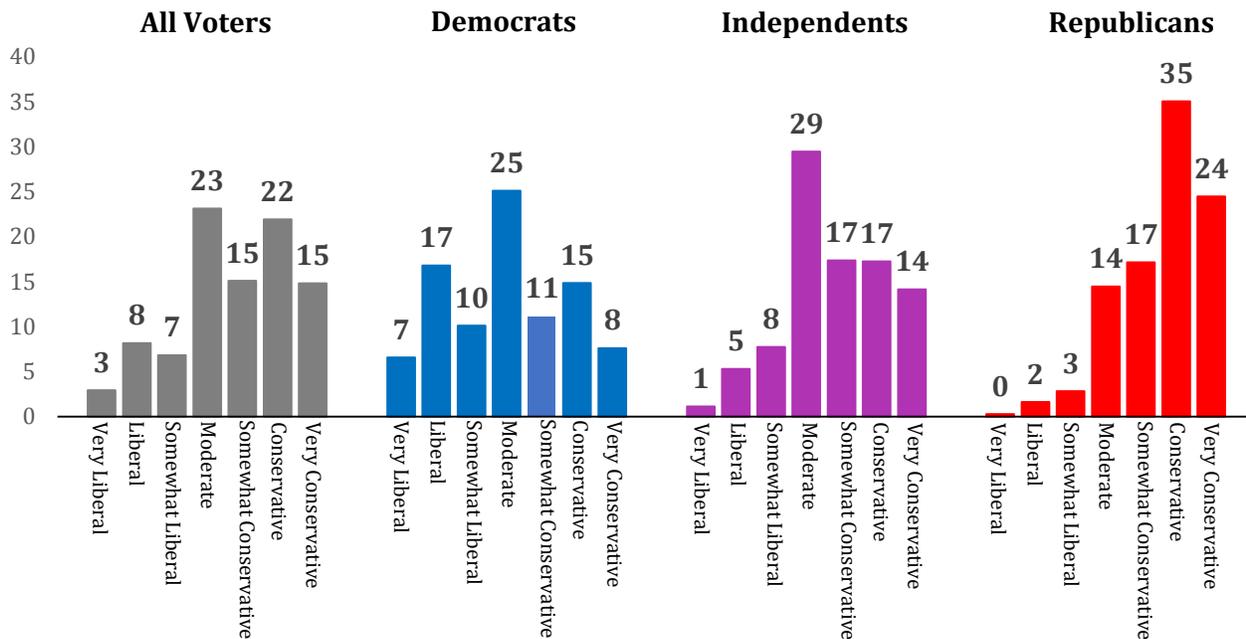
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Figure 4: Conservatives Make Up Half of All Voters, Third of Democrats

% voters saying they identify as _____

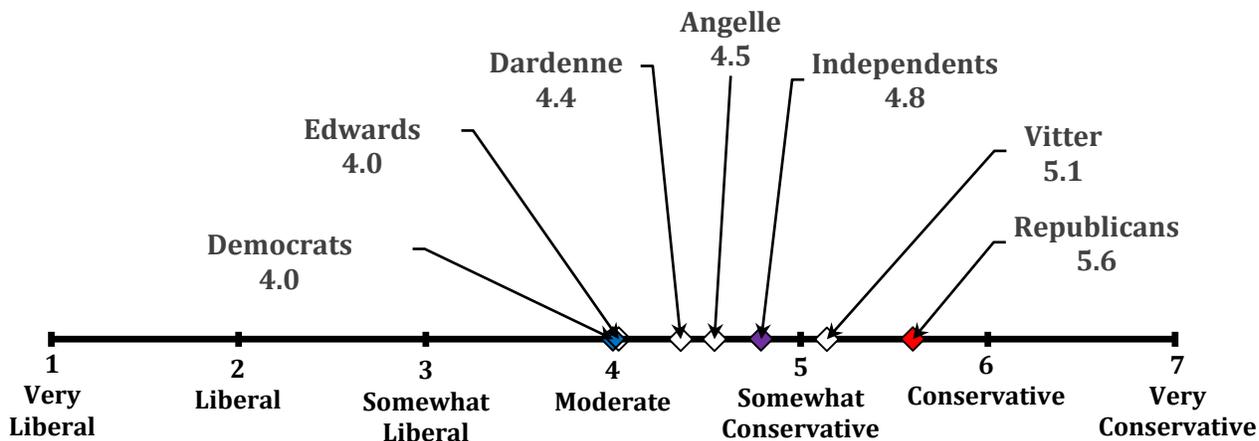


Note: Percent saying 'don't know' or refusing to answer not shown.

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Figure 5: Voters Do Not See Wide Ideological Differences Between Candidates

Voters average placement of themselves (by party) and average placement of the candidate on ideological scale



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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 July 7 to August 3, 2015, among a randomly selected state sample of 1,023 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 of 1,023 respondents includes 511 respondents interviewed on a landline and 512 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 12.9% for the landline sample and 6.1% 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 879 respondents reporting they are registered voters. The registered voter sample has an overall margin of error of +/- 4.7 percentage points. The margin of error and tests for statistical significance take the weighting into account.

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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Regional Definitions

Respondents are divided into six regional groups based on parish of residence using the following classifications:

New Orleans Area: Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard
[177 respondents; 156 registered voters]

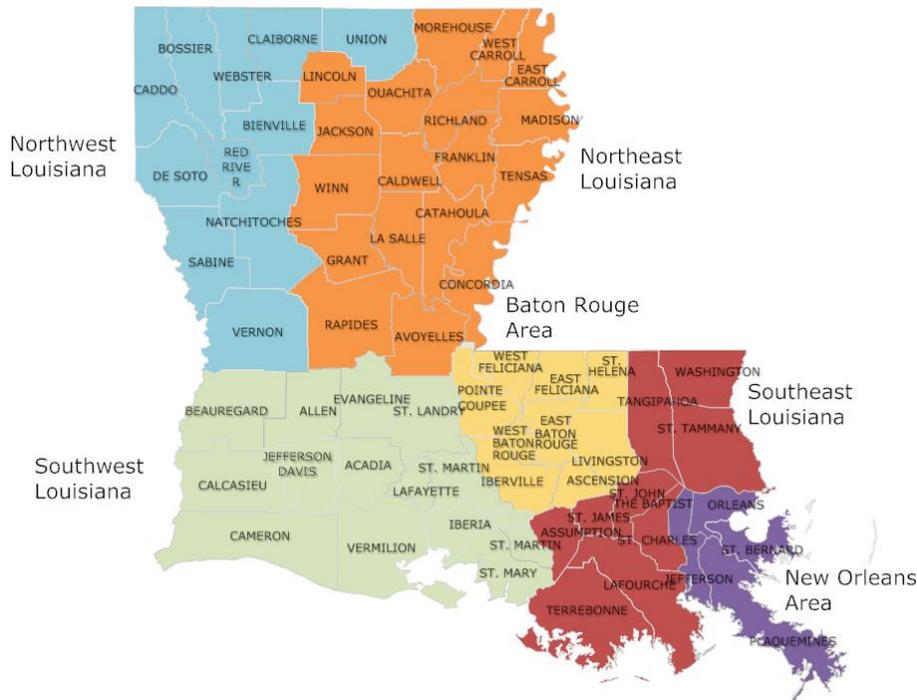
Baton Rouge Area: Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Point Coupee, St. Helena, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana
[201 respondents; 175 registered voters]

Northwest Louisiana: Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, De Soto, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Union, Vernon, Webster
[120 respondents; 105 registered voters]

Northeast Louisiana: Avoyelles, Caldwell, Catahoula, Concordia, East Carroll, Franklin, Grant, Jackson, La Salle, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Rapides, Richland, Tensas, West Carroll, Winn
[141 respondents; 122 registered voters]

Southwest Louisiana: Acadia, Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberia, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Vermilion
[203 respondents; 167 registered voters]

Southeast Louisiana (excluding New Orleans Area and Baton Rouge Area): Assumption, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Terrebonne, Washington
[181 respondents; 154 registered voters]



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	14	16
Somewhat favorable	29	30
Somewhat unfavorable	13	14
Very unfavorable	14	16
Don't know enough to say	30	24
Refused (Volunteered)	1	1

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

Very favorable	6	7
Somewhat favorable	11	11
Somewhat unfavorable	3	3
Very unfavorable	2	2
Don't know enough to say	78	77
Refused (Vol.)	0	1

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

Very favorable	7	8
Somewhat favorable	20	21
Somewhat unfavorable	4	4
Very unfavorable	3	3
Don't know enough to say	67	63
Refused (Vol.)	0	1

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	3	3
Somewhat favorable	9	10
Somewhat unfavorable	5	5
Very unfavorable	2	2
Don't know enough to say	81	79
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	6	8
Fairly closely	19	21
Not too closely	39	41
Not at all	36	30
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	0	0

Q6. 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	25
Wrong direction	59	62
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	13	12

Q7. When it comes to politics, would you say you are very liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

Very liberal	3	3
Liberal	8	8
Somewhat liberal	7	7
Moderate	22	23
Somewhat conservative	15	15
Conservative	22	22
Very conservative	15	15
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	9	7

INTRO to Q8 – Q11. Thinking about the following candidates for governor, please tell me where you would place them on the same scale. [RANDOMIZE ORDER OF Q8 – Q11]

Q8. 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	3	2
Liberal	5	5
Somewhat liberal	4	3
Moderate	9	10
Somewhat conservative	12	12
Conservative	18	20
Very conservative	13	15
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	38	33

Q9. Scott Angelle. Is he very liberal, liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

Very liberal	1	1
Liberal	4	4
Somewhat liberal	4	4
Moderate	9	10
Somewhat conservative	7	8
Conservative	7	8
Very conservative	4	4
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	65	62

Q10. Jay Dardenne. Is he very liberal, liberal, liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, conservative, or very conservative?

Very liberal	1	1
Liberal	4	4
Somewhat liberal	4	5
Moderate	12	13
Somewhat conservative	9	9
Conservative	7	7
Very conservative	3	3
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	62	58

Q11. 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	1	1
Liberal	4	5
Somewhat liberal	4	4
Moderate	10	12
Somewhat conservative	5	5
Conservative	4	4
Very conservative	2	2
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	70	69

Q12. 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	84	100
No, not registered	16	--
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	--

[ASK Q13A ONLY IF Q12 = 'Yes']

Q13A. 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 Q13B ONLY IF Q12 = 'No' or 'Don't know / Refused']

Q13B. Do you plan to register to vote or is there a chance you may not register?

Plan to register	52	--
Chance may not register	44	--
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	4	--

Q14 THROUGH Q36 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE.

Q37. We just have a few follow up questions left. Your data is very helpful and will be used only for statistical purposes. In what year were you born?

[OPEN-ENDED ANSWERS CODED INTO CATEGORIES]

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
18-29	24	18
30-49	30	32
50-64	28	30
65 or older	17	19
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	1	1

Q38. Generally speaking do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?

Democrat	33	36
Republican	29	30
Independent	27	25
Other	7	5
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	4	4

[ASK Q39A ONLY IF ANSWERED "Democrat" OR "Republican" TO Q38]

Q39A. Would you consider yourself a strong or a not so strong [INSERT ANSWER TO Q38]?

Strong	60	61
Not so Strong	37	36
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	3	3

[ASK Q39B ONLY IF DID NOT ANSWER "Democrat" OR "Republican" TO Q38]

Q39B. 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	12
Republican Party	20	23
Independent (Don't lean to either party)	59	56
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	10	9

Q40. 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 th grade	6	4
9 th – 12 th grade but did not graduate high school	11	11
High school diploma	34	32
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.)	1	1

Q41. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban?

Yes	4	5
No	95	94
Don’t know / Refused (Vol.)	1	1

Q42. Which of the following best describes you? Are you white, African-American, or something else?

White	61	61
African-American	32	33
Other	5	4
Don’t know / Refused (Vol.)	2	2

Q43. Is your religious preference Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Agnostic, Atheists, or something else?

Christian	80	82
Jewish	1	1
Muslim	0	0
Agnostic	2	2
Atheist	2	1
Something Else	14	12
Don’t know / Refused (Vol.)	2	2

[ASK Q44 ONLY IF ANSWERED "Christian" TO Q43]

Q44. Do you generally consider yourself Catholic, Baptist, another Protestant denomination, or something else?

	<u>All</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Catholic	33	33
Baptist	35	36
Other Protestant	12	13
Something else	19	17
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	2	2

[ASK Q45 ONLY IF ANSWERED "Christian" TO Q43]

Q45. Do you generally consider yourself an evangelical or born again Christian?

Yes	56	56
No	40	39
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	5	5

Q46. 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	10	10
\$10,000 - \$14,999	6	6
\$15,000 - \$24,999	11	9
\$25,000 - \$34,999	6	6
\$35,000- \$49,999	6	6
\$50,000 - \$74,999	17	18
\$75,000 - \$99,999	11	12
\$100,000 - \$149,999	11	12
\$150,000 - \$199,999	4	4
\$200,000 or more	3	3
Don't know / Refused (Vol.)	18	15

Q47. [RECORD GENDER. DO NOT ASK.]

Male	48	47
Female	52	53