

THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2016

LSU

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



Public Backs Spending Increase for Schools & Roads

Majority willing to *personally* pay higher taxes to fund
education



The first in a series of reports from the 2016 Louisiana Survey

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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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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 social, economic, and political affairs, as well as the developing role of the media in American society. The Center is committed to advancing 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 Louisiana Survey

The *2016 Louisiana Survey* is the fifteenth in an annual series sponsored by the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication.

The mission of the *Louisiana Survey* is to establish benchmarks as well as to capture change in residents' assessments of state government services. The survey is further dedicated to tracking public opinion on the contemporary policy issues that face the state. Each iteration of the *Louisiana Survey* contains core items designed to serve as barometers of public sentiment, including assessments of whether the state is heading in the right direction or wrong direction, perceptions about the most important problems facing the state, as well as evaluations of public revenue sources and spending priorities.

In the *2016 Louisiana Survey*, this core is supplemented by measures of partisan polarization; public opinion of testing, the Common Core State Standards, and school reforms implemented during the Jindal Administration; support for changing the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS); beliefs about the causes and solutions for poverty; public opinion on raising the minimum wage in Louisiana; perceptions of race relations in Louisiana; attitudes toward public memorials to the Confederacy; and opinions on a variety of social issues such as same sex marriage, religious freedom laws, abortion, and gun rights.

As part of an effort to ensure that the *Louisiana Survey* fulfills its public service mission, the research team drew upon expertise in public policy and polling from Louisiana State University faculty in the Public Administration Institute, the Department of Political Science, and the Manship School of Mass Communication. These faculty members provided invaluable insight into the design of the questionnaire and in identifying the contemporary policy questions that could most benefit from an understanding of the public's views. While we are indebted to them for their time and contributions, they bear no responsibility for any mistakes in the questionnaire, analysis, or interpretation presented in this report.

We especially thank the Reilly Family Foundation for their generous support and vision in helping to create the Louisiana Survey.

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Executive Summary

For next year's \$800 million budget hole, Louisiana lawmakers must consider whether to raise additional revenue or make further cuts, but what do Louisiana voters want? The *2016 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs at LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication, shows there is more support for higher taxes to fund key services than for spending cuts. The survey also reveals:

- About half of the public (51 percent) wants more spending for elementary and secondary education and *are willing to pay higher taxes for it*, while only four percent favor cutting spending for education. Similar patterns hold for higher education, transportation infrastructure and, to a lesser extent, health care and coastal protection. In only one area (spending for public assistance programs such as welfare), do more residents favor spending cuts than favor paying more in taxes.
- At the same time, when asked about taxes separately from spending preferences, a majority of residents believe state income and sales taxes are "just about right" at current levels (57 percent in each case). Similarly, 56 percent feel they pay "about the right amount" in state taxes.
- The shares of state residents who think the income tax and the sales tax are "too high and need to be reduced" have dropped significantly in recent years landing at their lowest points on record since the survey began tracking these opinions in 2003.
- Few residents are familiar with the details of the budget. Most are unable to answer questions about how the state spends funds across policy areas, and significant numbers overestimate expenditures on welfare and prisons relative to other policy areas.

The *2016 Louisiana Survey* was administered over the telephone from February 1st to February 26th to both landline and cell phone respondents. The project includes a representative sample of 1,001 adult Louisiana residents. The total sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

This is the first in a series of releases about findings from the *2016 Louisiana Survey*.

For next year’s \$800 million budget hole, Louisiana lawmakers must consider whether to raise additional revenue or make further cuts, but what do Louisiana voters want? The 2016 Louisiana Survey, a project of the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs at LSU’s Manship School of Mass Communication, shows there is more support for higher taxes to fund key services than for spending cuts.

Public Would Rather Pay Higher Taxes than Cut Spending for Education

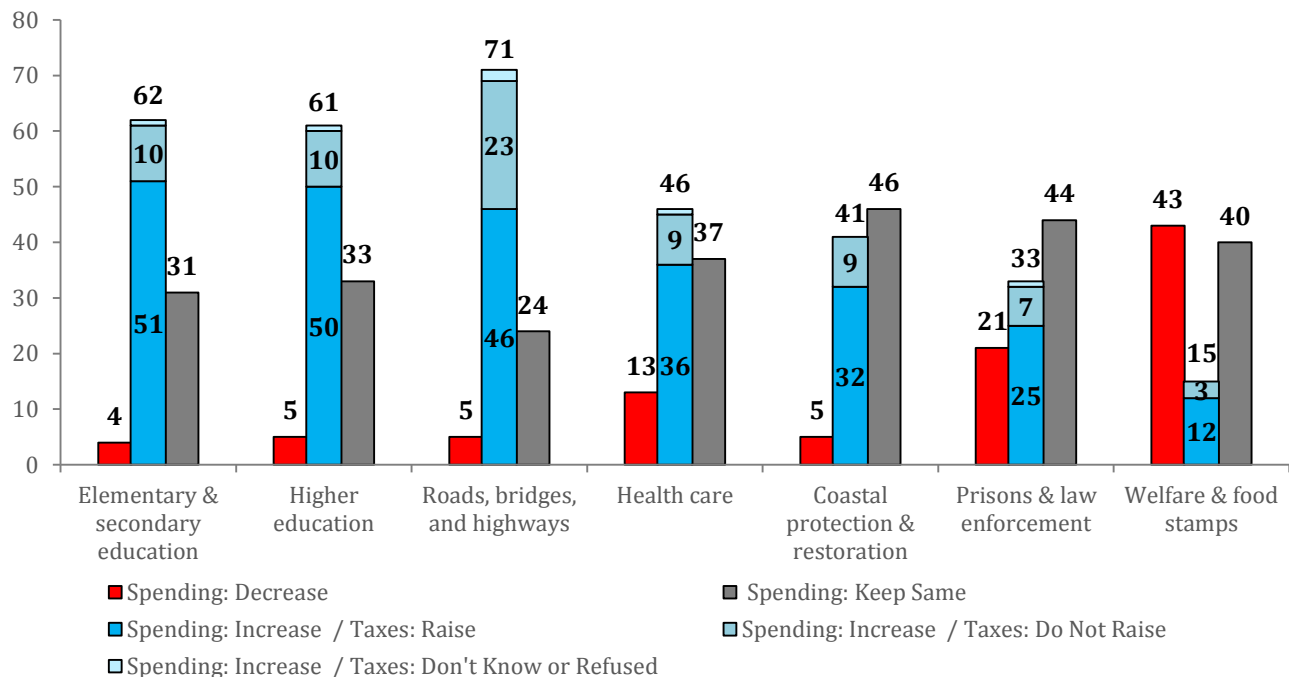
A large share of the public (51 percent) wants the state to spend more on elementary and secondary education and are willing to pay more taxes for it. Similar shares of the public support tax increases to fund higher education (50 percent) and transportation infrastructure (46 percent).

Respondents answered a series of questions gauging their spending preferences across six policy areas. Those individuals who favored more spending in a particular area were then faced with an explicit tradeoff: Would they be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending in this area? Combined responses from the initial and follow up questions appear in Figure 1.

The share of Louisiana residents who are willing to pay higher taxes for elementary and secondary education is more than 13 times bigger than the share favoring spending cuts in this area. Ten times as many would rather raise taxes for higher education than cut spending for it. Nine times as many favor higher taxes to pay for roads, bridges, and highways than support cuts to transportation spending. The share favoring higher taxes to pay for health care outnumber those backing health care cuts by two and half times.

Figure 1: More Support for Raising Taxes to Fund Programs than for Spending Cuts to Programs

% Saying state spending for _____ should be increased, decreased, or kept the same and whether willing to pay more in taxes to fund increases.

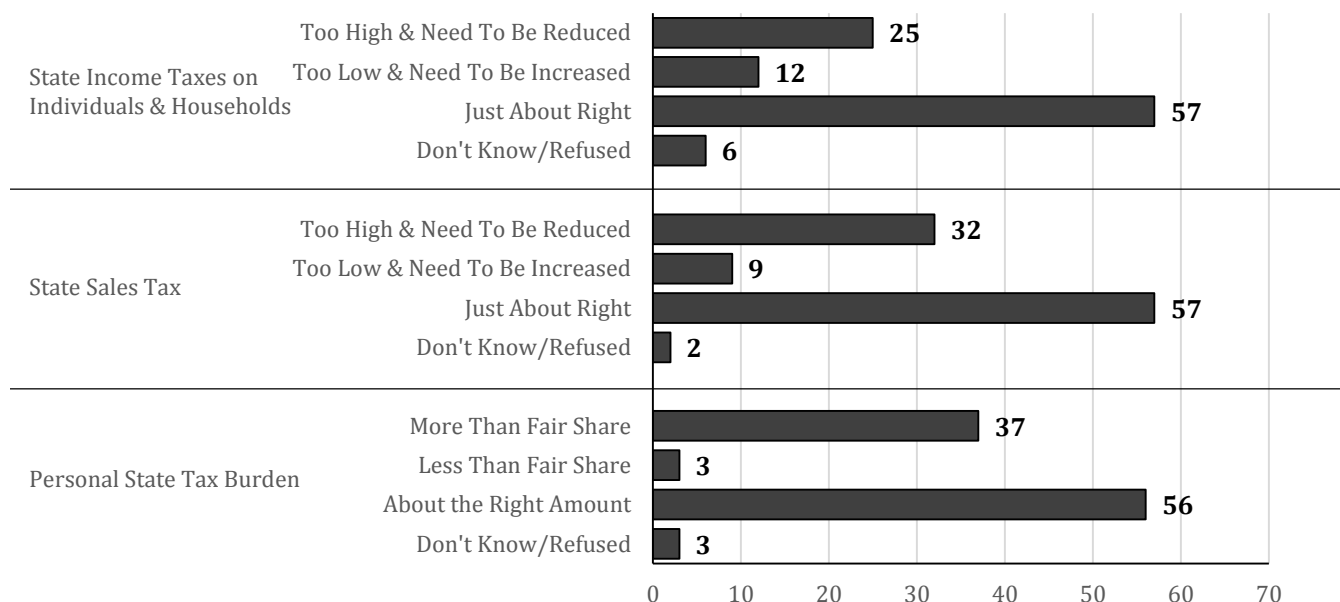


NOTE: Numbers above bars are responses to an initial question about spending preferences. Numbers within the blue bars are the percent of the total sample who answered they would/would not be willing to pay higher taxes to fund spending increases when asked a follow up question about how to fund increased spending.

SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

Figure 2: When Asked Only About Taxes, Public Satisfied with Status Quo

% saying ____ when asked tax questions.



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

The value of asking about preferences for *specific* government expenditures and following up with a question about taxes to fund those expenditures is that it forces respondents to think in terms of the same sort of tradeoffs that lawmakers face. When faced with a budget deficit, would they favor less spending or more revenue? Without framing these issues in terms of this fundamental tradeoff, survey respondents will typically say they want both more spending and lower taxes (see, for example, the [2015 Louisiana Survey](#)).

Fewer People Think Taxes Too High

Residents' willingness to pay higher taxes is strongly tied to what they believe those taxes will fund. When asked solely about state taxes and their personal tax burdens in isolation from the expenditure programs they support, most are satisfied with current taxation levels (Figure 2). A majority of Louisiana residents say that the state sales and income taxes are "just about right" (57 percent in each case). A similar share (56 percent) feel they currently pay the right amount in taxes.

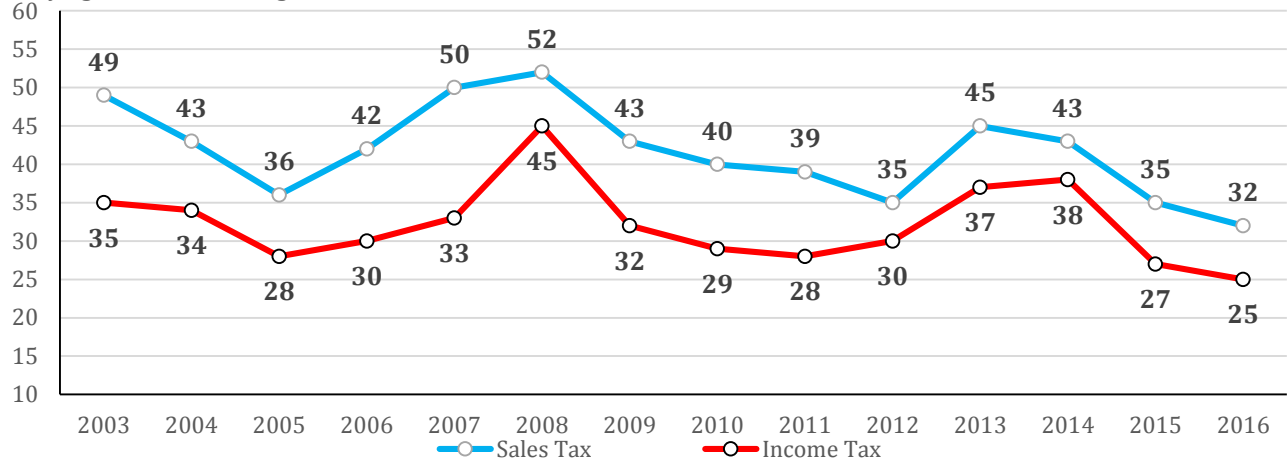
It is important to remember, however, that these questions ask respondents about overall tax levels without drawing out the tradeoff between preferences for spending and preferences for revenue.

The share of Louisiana residents who think the sales tax is "too high and should be reduced" has fallen steadily from 45 percent in 2013 to 32 percent this year (Figure 3). Opinions of the state's income tax follow the same trend, falling by nearly half from a peak of 45 percent in 2008 to 25 percent today. The shares are at their lowest point since the *Louisiana Survey* began tracking them in 2003.

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Figure 3: Share of Public Saying Taxes Too High Has Declined in Recent Years

% Saying state ___ is too high and need to be reduced.



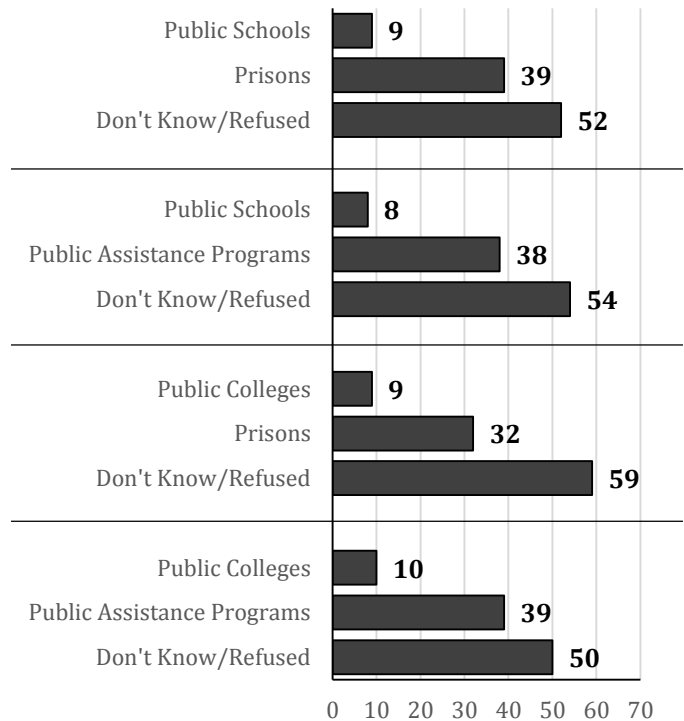
SOURCE: 2003-2016 Louisiana Surveys

There is a Knowledge Deficit When It Comes to Budget Issues

Large swaths of the public are uninformed – even *misinformed* – about where the state government spends its money. Each respondent to the *2016 Louisiana Survey* was presented with one of four possible pairs of expenditure areas in the state budget and asked to select the area where they thought the most money is spent. Anywhere from 50 to 59 percent could not answer the question. Among those who ventured a guess, larger shares consistently chose prisons and welfare over public schools and public colleges and universities (Figure 4). In actuality, corrections and public assistance programs, like welfare, make up relatively small shares of total state expenditures – three percent and under one percent respectively – less than the share spent for education, health care, transportation, and other areas.¹ The belief that state government spends more on corrections and welfare than it actually does may underlie the relatively high support for spending cuts to these programs seen in Figure 1.

Figure 4: Public Overestimates Spending on Public Assistance and Prisons

% saying state spends more to fund ___ when asked to choose between two expenditure areas.



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

¹ Expenditure data are from the *State Expenditure Report 2013-2015* of the National Association of State Budget Officers.

Survey Methodology

The data in this report were collected from a randomly selected sample of adult (18 years or older) residents of Louisiana via telephone interviews conducted from February 1 to February 26, 2016. The project includes live-interviewer surveys of 302 respondents contacted via landline telephone and 699 respondents contacted via cell phone, for a total sample of 1,001 respondents. 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 3%. 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. Response rates for telephone have been on decline for several decades and frequently fall in the single digits even among the very best survey research organizations.

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. 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.

The sample has an overall margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

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

Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab, a division of the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs, designed the survey questionnaire and sampling strategy, computed the survey weights, and conducted all statistical analysis. Telephone interviews were conducted by Reconnaissance Market Research.

Because the data collection occurred both before and during a special legislative session to address fiscal issues in the state, responses to all questions used in this report were tested for any difference that may have been induced as a result of the session. Responses were divided into two periods: Before the governor's February 11th televised speech on the state's budget challenges (February 1st-11th; 477 respondents) and after the speech (February 12th-26th; 524 respondents). There are no statistically significant differences between the periods for any items except opinion on the state's income tax, which saw an eight percentage point increase in the share of respondents saying it is "too low and should be increased".

Question Wording & Toplines

NOTE: Results are shown for all respondents. Not all respondents were asked each question, and questions asked to a subset of respondents are labelled accordingly. Frequencies for a given question represent percentages among only those respondents who were asked that particular question. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Q1-Q7 INTRO. Now I'm going to read you some different areas where Louisiana spends tax dollars. As I read each one, tell me if you would like to see *state spending* in this area increased, decreased, or kept about the same. **[Randomized order in which Q1 to Q7 appear.]**

Q1a. What about spending for primary and secondary education? Should this be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased	62
Decreased	4
Kept about the same	31
Don't know/Refused (Volunteered)	2

[Q1b was asked only if respondents answered "increased" to Q1a.]

Q1b. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending for primary and secondary education?

Yes	82
No	16
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

Q2a. What about spending for higher education? Should this be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased	61
Decreased	5
Kept about the same	33
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	1

[Q2b was asked only if respondents answered "increased" to Q2a.]

Q2b. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending for higher education?

Yes	82
No	17
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	1

Q3a. What about spending for health care? Should this be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased	46
Decreased	13
Kept about the same	37
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	4

[Q3b was asked only if respondents answered "increased" to Q3a.]

Q3b. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending for health care?

Yes	78
No	20
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

Q4a. What about spending for roads, bridges, and highways? Should this be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased	71
Decreased	5
Kept about the same	24
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	1

[Q4b was asked only if respondents answered "increased" to Q4a.]

Q4b. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending for roads, bridges, and highways?

Yes	65
No	33
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

Q5a. What about spending for prisons and law enforcement? Should this be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased	33
Decreased	21
Kept about the same	44
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	3

[Q5b was asked only if respondents answered “increased” to Q5a.]

Q5b. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending for prisons and law enforcement?

Yes	76
No	21
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	3

Q6a. What about spending for welfare, food stamps, and other public assistance programs? Should this be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased	15
Decreased	43
Kept about the same	40
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

[Q6b was asked only if respondents answered “increased” to Q6a.]

Q6b. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending for welfare, food stamps, and other public assistance programs?

Yes	79
No	19
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

Q7a. What about spending for coastal protection and restoration? Should this be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?

Increased	41
Decreased	5
Kept about the same	46
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	8

[Q7b was asked only if respondents answered “increased” to Q7a.]

Q7b. Would you be willing to pay more in taxes in order to increase spending for coastal protection and restoration?

Yes	79
No	21
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	1

Q8. Now, thinking about state income taxes on individuals and households, would you say that state income taxes are too high and need to be reduced, too low and need to be increased, or just about right?

Too high and need to be reduced	25
Too low and need to be increased	12
Just about right	57
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	6

Q9. What about the state sales tax, would you say that the state sales tax is too high and needs to be reduced, too low and needs to be increased, or just about right?

Too high and need to be reduced	32
Too low and need to be increased	9
Just about right	57
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

Q10. Thinking about the taxes you pay to the state of Louisiana, do you think you're paying more than your fair share, less than your fair share, or about the right amount?

More than your fair share	37
Less than your fair share	3
About the right amount	56
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	3

[Respondents were randomized to only one from Q11a, Q11b, Q11c, or Q11d.]

Q11a. To the best of your knowledge, does the state spend more to fund public colleges and universities or to fund prisons? Or, if you don't know, you can just tell me that.

Public colleges and universities	9
Prisons	32
Don't know	59
Refused (Vol.)	0

Q11b. To the best of your knowledge, does the state spend more to fund public colleges and universities or to fund public assistance programs like welfare and food stamps? Or, if you don't know, you can just tell me that.

Public colleges and universities	10
Public assistance programs	39
Don't know	50
Refused (Vol.)	2

Q11c. To the best of your knowledge, does the state spend more to fund public schools or to fund prisons? Or, if you don't know, you can just tell me that.

Public schools	9
Prisons	39
Don't know	52
Refused (Vol.)	0

Q11d. To the best of your knowledge, does the state spend more to fund public schools or to fund public assistance programs like welfare and food stamps? Or, if you don't know, you can just tell me that.

Public schools	8
Public assistance programs	38
Don't know	54
Refused (Vol.)	1