

THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2016

LSU

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



Public in Grim Mood as Lawmakers Convene Legislative Session

Budget Soars to the Top of Louisiana Residents' Concerns

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



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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**
Dr. Michael Henderson
225-578-5149
mbhende1@lsu.edu

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.

Principal Authors

Michael Henderson
Research Director, Public Policy Research Lab
Assistant Professor of Research, Manship School of Mass Communication

Belinda Davis
Associate Director, Public Policy Research Lab
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science

Overview

As Louisiana's lawmakers enter the 2016 Regular Session, the public is in a historically grim mood. The *2016 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs at LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication, shows that Louisiana residents are disgruntled with the direction of the state, increasingly dismayed with economic conditions, and have little confidence in government to solve the state's most important problems. The survey further reveals:

- Nearly two thirds of Louisiana residents (63 percent) think the state is heading in the wrong direction, the most on record since the *Louisiana Survey* began tracking opinion in 2003.
- Evaluations of the state's economy as a whole have declined significantly since 2015, but residents' evaluations of their own financial situation have remained stable. About half (51 percent) now think the state's economy lags behind the nation's economy, compared to 36 percent who said so in 2015. The share saying state business conditions are worse than a year ago rose from 24 percent in 2015 to 40 percent in 2016, while the share saying their own financial situation is worse hardly budged from 23 percent to 26 percent.
- The share of respondents who name the state's budget as the most important problem jumped from 7 percent in 2015 to 26 percent this year. As a result, the budget now tops the public's list of the most important problem facing the state for the first time on record.
- Public confidence that state government will effectively deal with the most pressing problems remains low. Only 34 percent say they are 'very confident' or 'somewhat confident' that state government can address these problems.
- Residents give the highest grades to the Louisiana's public colleges and universities, with 59 percent assigning a grade of A or B. In contrast, residents give relatively low marks to the quality of roads, bridges, and highways (13 percent A and B grades); state economic development efforts to attract, recruit, and create jobs (25 percent); and Louisiana's public schools overall (26 percent).

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 second in a series of releases about findings from the *2016 Louisiana Survey*. Previous releases from the *2016 Louisiana Survey* are available at www.pprllsu.com.

As Louisiana’s lawmakers enter the 2016 Regular Session, the public is in a historically grim mood. The *2016 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs at LSU’s Manship School of Mass Communication, shows that Louisiana residents are disgruntled with the direction of the state, increasingly dismayed with economic conditions, and have little confidence in government to solve the state’s most important problems.

Most Say State Heading in Wrong Direction

More Louisiana residents think the state is heading in the wrong direction than at any point since the *Louisiana Survey* began tracking opinion in 2003 (Figure 1). Nearly two thirds of Louisiana residents (63 percent) think the state is heading in the wrong direction. Only 27 percent think Louisiana is heading in the right direction.

A year ago, respondents to the *2015 Louisiana Survey* split evenly over the direction of the state: 44 percent saying it was heading in the right direction and 45 percent saying it was heading in

the wrong direction. The public mood then soured over the remaining months of 2015 – a trend captured in polls from the summer and fall.

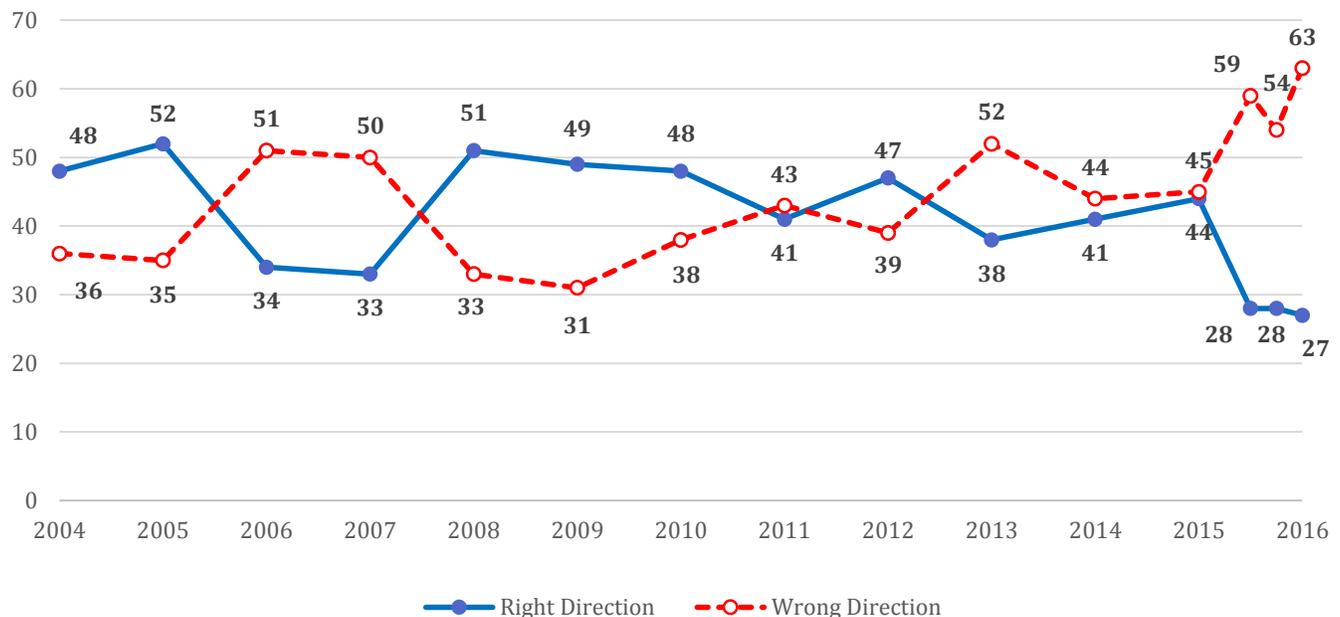
Although the public mood darkened well before he took office, the shift nevertheless leaves Gov. John Bel Edwards facing an unprecedented challenge. In recent years, the public has tended to be most optimistic when new governors take office. For example, about half of Louisiana residents felt the state was heading in the right direction early in Gov. Blanco’s administration, but this share fell to about a third by the end of her term in office. The share rose again to half at the start of the Jindal Administration, but fell to little more than a quarter by his final months in office. The new administration, however, has not had the benefit of a comparable bounce in mood.

Republicans Soured Most on Direction of State

Attitudes about the direction of the state are, in part, a reflection of political allegiances. A year ago, when a Republican governor held office, Republicans were more optimistic about the

Figure 1: Largest Share on Record Think State Heading in Wrong Direction

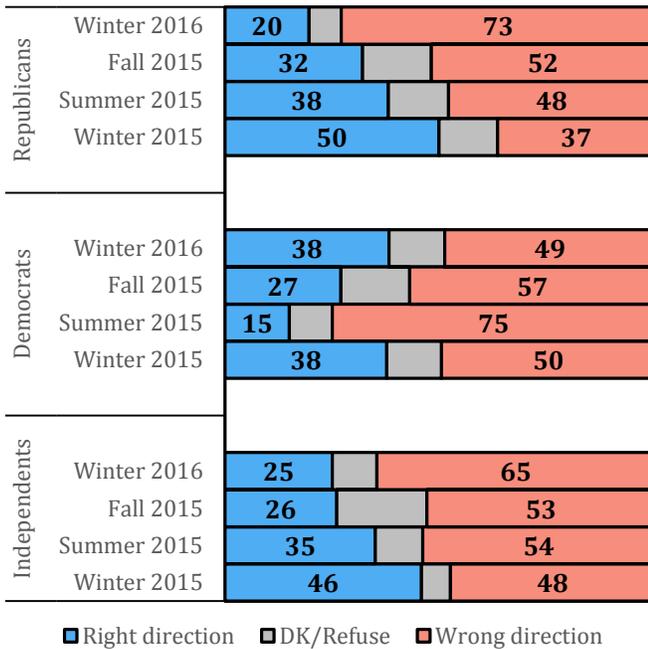
% who say state heading in right/wrong direction



SOURCE: 2004 - 2016 Louisiana Survey, Summer 2015 Election Survey, and Fall 2015 Election Survey

Figure 2: Republicans Soured Most on Direction of State

% who say state heading in right/wrong direction



SOURCE: 2015 & 2016 Louisiana Survey, Summer 2015 Election Survey, and Fall 2015 Election Survey

direction of the state than Democrats. Today, with a Democrat as governor, the pattern is reversed (Figure 2).

Republican mood began turning even while Gov. Jindal still held office. From early 2015 through the fall, the share of Republicans who felt the state was heading in the wrong direction rose by 15 percentage points, from 37 to 52 percent. Yet, this share jumped an additional 21 percentage points between the fall of 2015 and the 2016 Louisiana Survey, a period that coincides with the election and inauguration of Gov. Edwards.

Likewise, Democrats' shift in mood over the second half of 2015 is nearly the mirror image of Republicans'. Despite their softening mood, Democrats are no more positive today than they were a year ago.

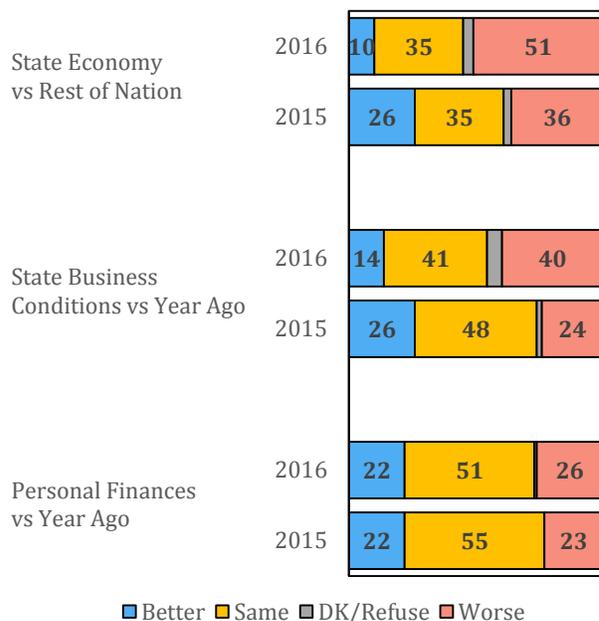
Residents More Negative about State Economy than about Own Finances

In addition to political leanings, mood about the direction of the state also reflects actual conditions in the state, particularly economic conditions. Already reserved in their view of the state's economy a year ago, residents are even more dismayed today.

A majority of Louisiana residents (51 percent) now says the state's economy lags behind the nation's economy; only ten percent think it compares favorably. Last year, a smaller plurality (36 percent) felt the state's economy was doing worse than the economy of the nation as a whole, and 26 percent felt it was outperforming the country (Figure 3).

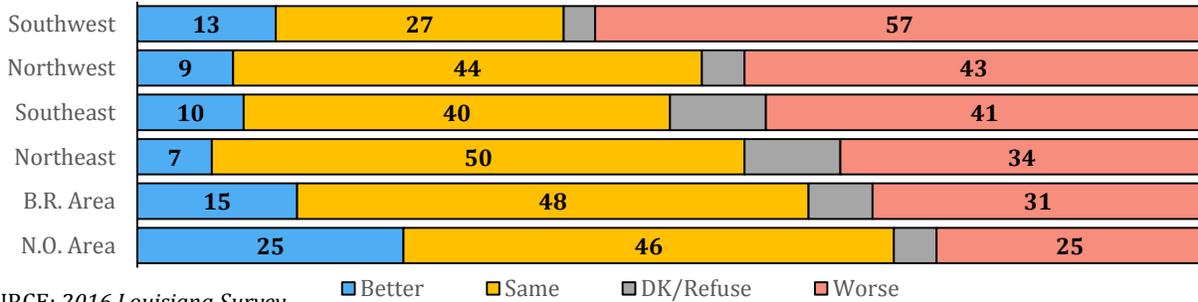
Each year, the Louisiana Survey asks respondents if they think the state's business conditions and their own personal finances have improved or worsened over the previous year. In the 2015 survey, the share who felt that state business conditions had improved (26 percent) was

Figure 3: Pessimism about State Economy % saying _____ better, worse, or the same



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

Figure 4: Residents in Southwest See Worst Economic Declines



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

roughly equivalent to the share that said conditions had worsened (24 percent). This year, 40 percent say that state business conditions are worse, and just 14 percent think they are better.

However, residents’ perceptions of their own financial health have not followed the same path. Half (51 percent) say their own financial situation is the same as a year ago, while just 22 percent and 26 percent say their finances have improved or worsened respectively. Hardly an overwhelming vote of confidence, these perceptions of personal economic health are nevertheless more positive than perceptions of the state’s economic health.

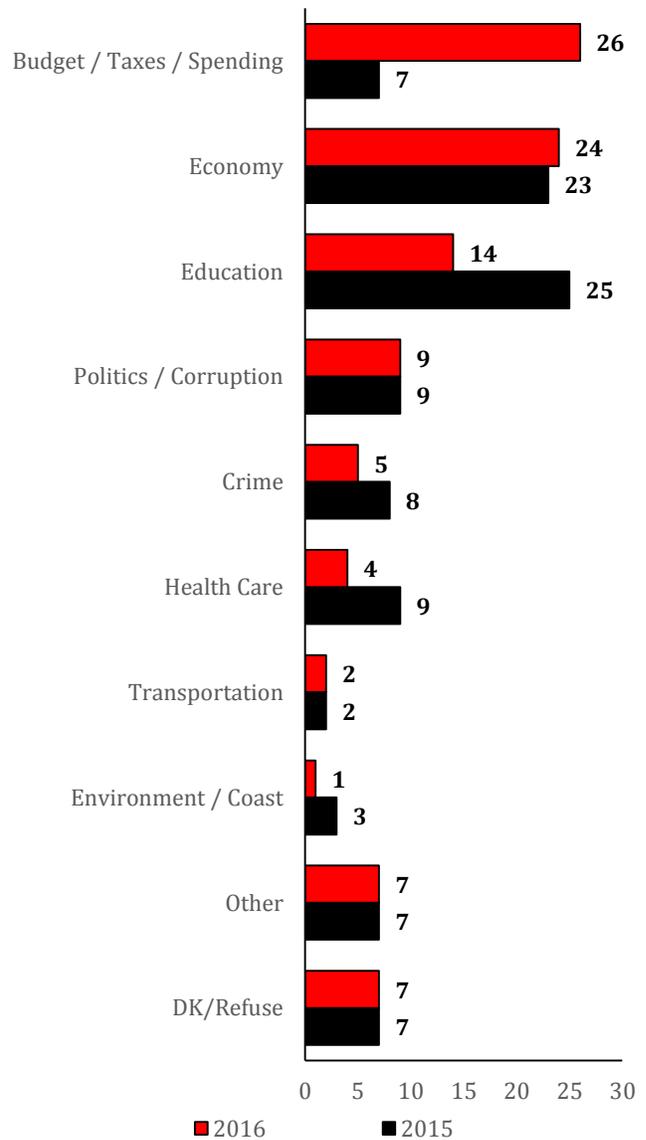
There is significant variation in economic perceptions across regions of the state. Residents of southwest Louisiana are, by far, the most likely to say business conditions are worse (Figure 4).

Budget Tops List of Most Important Problems

More than one in four residents say that the budget (including comments about state revenue or expenditures) is the most important problem the state faces today (Figure 5). The result is striking because the economy and education tended to dominate the public’s list of concerns in past years.

A year ago, just seven percent named the budget as the most important problem, lagging well behind education (25 percent) and the economy (23 percent). Concern about the economy has remained high, named as the most

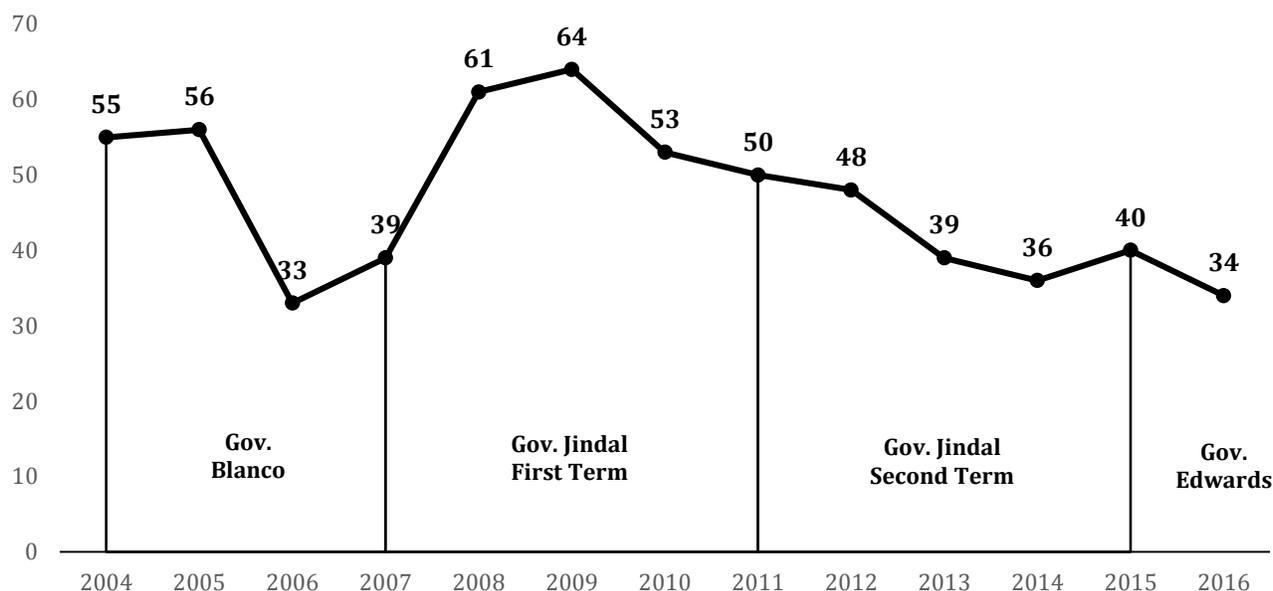
Figure 5: Budget Soars to Top Priority
% naming each as the state’s most important problem



SOURCE: 2015 & 2016 Louisiana Survey

Figure 6: Confidence That State Can Solve Important Problems Remains Low

% saying "very" or "somewhat" confident in state government to effectively address state's most important problem



SOURCE: 2003 - 2016 Louisiana Survey

important problem by 25 percent of respondents. The share naming education has dropped to 14 percent.

Confidence in Government to Solve Important Problems Remains Low

Like the public's mood about the direction of the state, the public's confidence that Louisiana's government will effectively deal with the most pressing problems remains low. Confidence in state government has steadily eroded since 2009. While the decline appeared to taper off somewhat last year, it has slipped again this year (Figure 6). Today, only about one in three respondents (34 percent) say they are 'very confident' or 'somewhat confident' in state government's ability to deal with the most pressing problems.

Also like mood about the state generally, there is a substantial partisan gap in confidence. Just over half of Democrats (51 percent) are either 'very confident' or 'somewhat confident' in state government. On the other side of the aisle, 73 percent of Republicans are either 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident.' This is a near

mirror image of last year when 50 percent of Republicans were 'very confident' or 'somewhat confident,' and 66 percent of Democrats were 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident.'

Higher Education Earns Top Grades, Economic Development Efforts Slide

For more than a decade the *Louisiana Survey* has asked respondents to grade quality of life in the state as well as the quality of specific public services. With the exception of economic development efforts, the 2016 grades remain similar to the 2015 grades. As in previous years, respondents again give the highest marks to the state's colleges and universities among the seven items they were asked to grade on the 2016 *Louisiana Survey* (Figure 7). A majority of respondents (59 percent) give the state's public colleges and universities an A or B grade. It is the only item to receive a majority of A or B grades.

Once again, the lowest grades are given to transportation infrastructure, for which about two thirds (65 percent) assign a D or F grade.

Evaluations of the state economic development efforts to attract, recruit, and create jobs have declined since last year. The share of A and B grades fell from 38 percent to 25 percent, while the share of D and F grades rose from 23 percent to 36 percent. As a result, evaluations of state economic development efforts are now worse than evaluations of the quality of health care and public schools in the state.

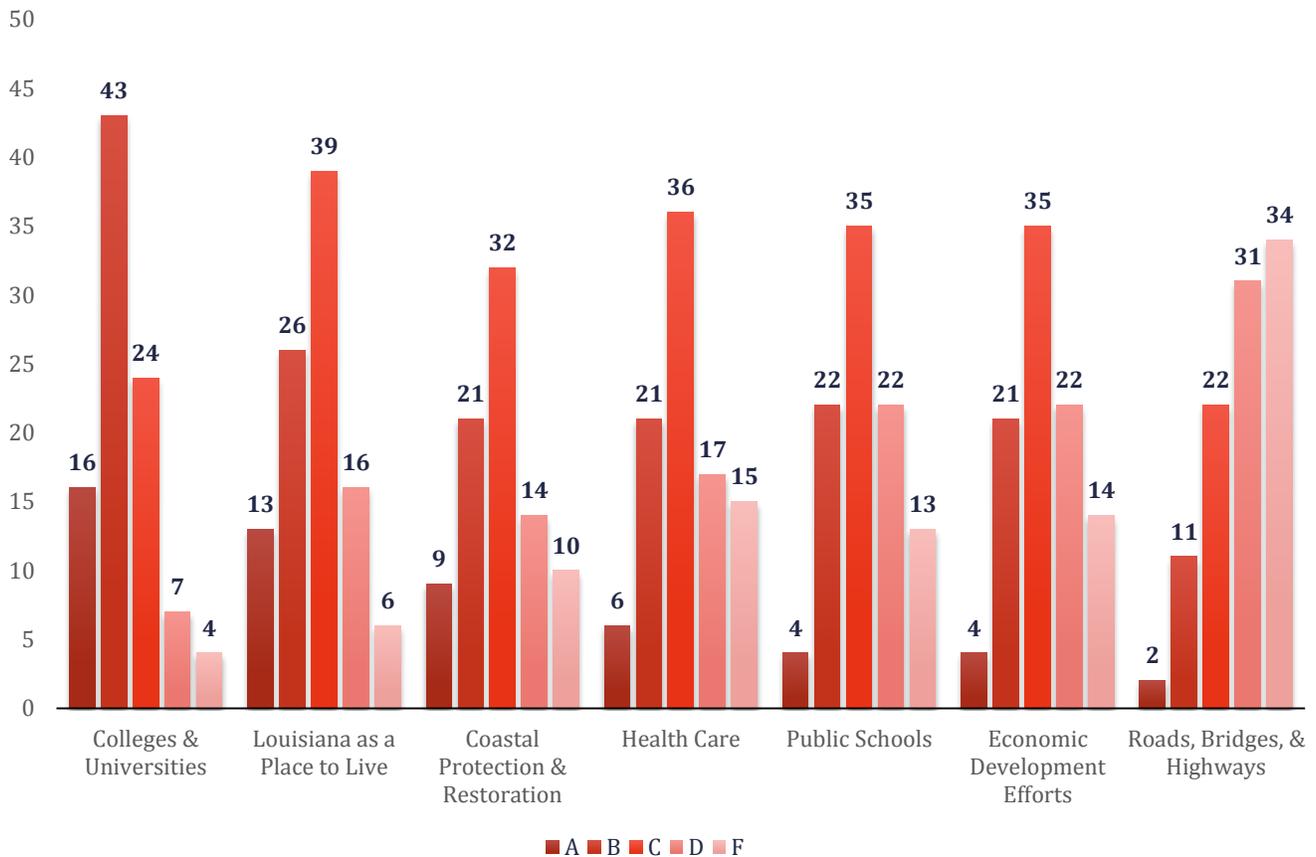
It is also worth reiterating that overall evaluations of Louisiana as a place to live have not changed since 2015. Despite a souring public mood, growing pessimism about the economy, and declining confidence in state government during the past year, the public does not find the overall quality of life in Louisiana any worse today. Just as in 2015, about two fifths of

residents continue to give Louisiana a grade of A or B as a place to live.

Evaluations of state economic development efforts to attract, recruit, and create jobs have declined since last year.

Figure 7: Higher Education Gets Highest Grades, Transportation Lowest

% assigning each grade to each feature of the state



NOTE: Darker columns represent higher grades on A to F scale. Items sorted left to right by combined percent A & B grades.
SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

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.

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

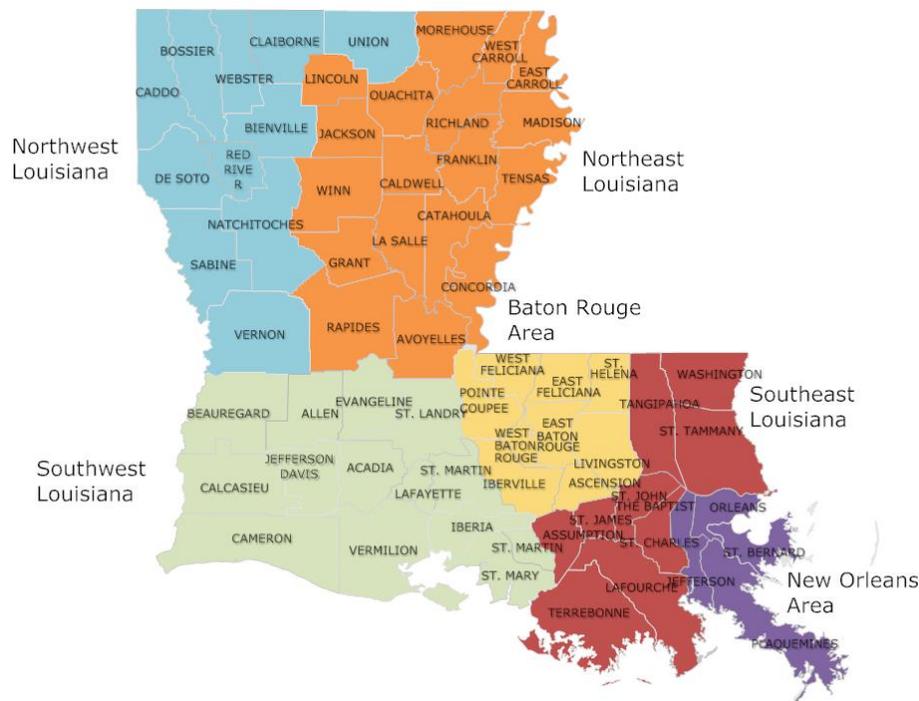
Baton Rouge Area: Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Point Coupee, St. Helena, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana

Northwest Louisiana: Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, De Soto, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Union, Vernon, Webster

Northeast Louisiana: Avoyelles, Caldwell, Catahoula, Concordia, East Carroll, Franklin, Grant, Jackson, La Salle, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Rapides, Richland, Tensas, West Carroll, Winn

Southwest Louisiana: Acadia, Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberia, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Vermilion

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



Question Wording & Toplines

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

Q1. To begin with, 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	27
Wrong Direction	63
Don't know/Refused (Volunteered)	10

Q2. In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing the state of Louisiana?

[OPEN-ENDED, See Figure 5 for coded frequencies]

[Q3 was asked only if respondents answered Q2.]

Q3. How much confidence would you say you have in state government to effectively address this problem? Would you say you are very confident, somewhat confident, not very confident, or not at all confident?

Very Confident	7
Somewhat Confident	27
Not Very Confident	33
Not at all Confident	26
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

Q4. We are also interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you are better off financially, worse off, or about the same as you were a year ago?

Better	22
Same	51
Worse	26
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	1

Q5. What about business conditions in the state of Louisiana -- do you think that at the present time business conditions in Louisiana are better, worse, or about the same as they were a year ago?

Better	14
Same	41
Worse	40
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	6

Q6. When it comes to the overall state economy, would you say Louisiana is currently faring better than the rest of the country, worse than the rest of country or about the same as the rest of the country?

Better	10
Same	35
Worse	51
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	4

Q7. As you know, students are often given a grade A through F to evaluate their performance. What grade would you give **Louisiana as a place to live?**

A	13
B	26
C	39
D	16
F	6
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	1

[Order in which Q8 through Q12 appeared was randomized.]

Q8. What grade would you give to **state economic development efforts to attract, recruit, and create jobs?**

A	4
B	21
C	35
D	22
F	14
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	4

Q9. What grade would you give to **Louisiana's roads, bridges, and highways?**

A	2
B	11
C	22
D	31
F	34
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	0

Q10. What grade would you give to **the overall quality of health care in Louisiana?**

A	6
B	21
C	36
D	17
F	15
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	4

Q11. What grade would you give to **the state's coastal protection and restoration efforts?**

A	9
B	21
C	32
D	14
F	10
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	14

Q12. What grade would you give to **Louisiana's public colleges and universities?**

A	16
B	43
C	24
D	7
F	4
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	7

Q13. What grade would you give to **Louisiana's public schools overall?**

A	4
B	22
C	35
D	22
F	13
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	3