

# THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2016

**LSU**

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



## Louisiana Remains Conservative on Most Social Issues

Support “Religious Freedom” Law, Preservation of  
Confederate Monuments Among Other Right-leaning  
Policies



*The seventh 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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## Overview

Just over half of Louisiana residents continue to oppose legal recognition of same sex marriage, despite the U.S. Supreme Court ruling a year ago that states cannot refuse to recognize such marriages. Indeed, 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 across a number of social or cultural issues – including same sex marriage, allowing business to refuse services to same sex couples, abortion, gun control, and the removal of images representing the former Confederacy from public spaces – most Louisiana residents hold conservative views. Specifically, the survey reveals:

- Opponents of same sex marriage continue to edge out supporters in the state (53 percent to 41 percent), a division unchanged from a year ago before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling.
- About half of residents (52 percent) believe a business providing wedding services, such as catering or flowers, should be allowed to refuse services to same sex couples for religious reasons, and 41 percent believe they should be required to provide those services as they would to all customers.
- Louisiana residents are generally more opposed to abortion than are Americans as a whole. In Louisiana a majority (55 percent) think abortions should be *illegal* in all or most cases, while just 40 percent think it should be *legal* in all or most cases – nearly the mirror opposite of what national surveys show. While a large majority support some restrictions on access to abortion (82 percent), a relatively small share (26 percent) think it should be illegal in all cases.
- Roughly two-thirds of Louisiana residents (68 percent) oppose allowing refugees from the conflict in Syria to settle in Louisiana. Only 24 percent favor having Syrian refugees settle in Louisiana.
- Just over one-third of Louisiana residents (36 percent) favor a statewide ban on assault weapons, most (61 percent) oppose such a ban. However, Louisiana residents are more supportive of gun control when asked a broader question about stricter statewide restrictions on access to firearms. A majority (55 percent) favor more restrictions.
- Nearly three-fourths of Louisiana residents (73 percent) oppose removing monuments to people who fought on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War from public spaces. About half of Louisiana residents (49 percent) favor the state issuing license plates that contain the image of the confederate battle flag when requested by individual drivers, and 44 percent oppose the practice.

The *2016 Louisiana Survey* was administered over the telephone from February 1<sup>st</sup> to February 26<sup>th</sup> 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 fifth in a series of releases about findings from the *2016 Louisiana Survey*. Previous releases from the *2016 Louisiana Survey* are available at [www.pprlsu.com](http://www.pprlsu.com).

## Law Has Changed, but Public Opinion Has Not

Despite the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2015 legalizing same sex marriage throughout the country, Louisiana residents are no more supportive of legal recognition for same sex marriage than they were a year ago. Opponents continue to edge out supporters in the state: 53 percent to 41 percent.

Republicans, evangelical Christians, and older residents are the most opposed to legalized same sex marriage (Figure 1). Republicans oppose legal recognition of same sex marriage nearly two to one (61 percent oppose and 32 percent favor). Democrats and independents split more evenly (50 percent oppose and 44 percent favor among Democrats; 45 percent oppose and 49 percent favor among independents).

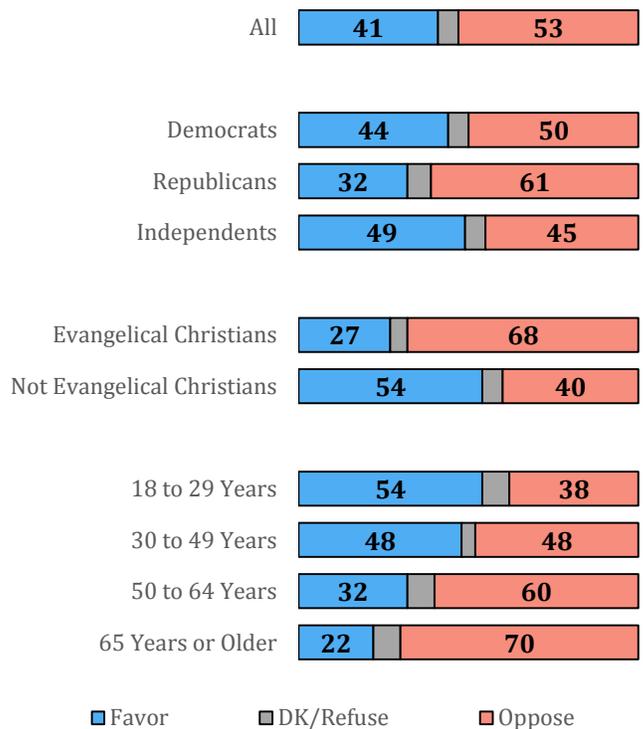
Two thirds of evangelical Christians (68 percent) oppose legal same sex marriage. Among residents who do not consider themselves evangelical Christians, a majority (54 percent) favor allowing same sex couple to marry legally.

Aside from partisanship and religion, attitudes toward same sex marriage also differ dramatically across age groups. The youngest cohort of adult residents, from 18 to 29 years of age, favors legal recognition of same sex marriage (54 percent). Opinions split evenly among residents 30 to 49 years old (48 percent favor and 48 percent oppose). A large majority of residents age 50 or older oppose legal recognition of same sex marriage.

Opinion toward same sex marriage also varies across regions of the state. In the New Orleans area, 58 percent favor allowing same sex couples to marry legally – the only region of the state where a majority of residents favor legal recognition of these marriages. Support is lowest in north and southwest Louisiana, where only about one in three residents favor allowing same sex couples to marry legally.

**Figure 1: Religious and Generational Divisions Over Same Sex Marriage**

Percent favor/ oppose



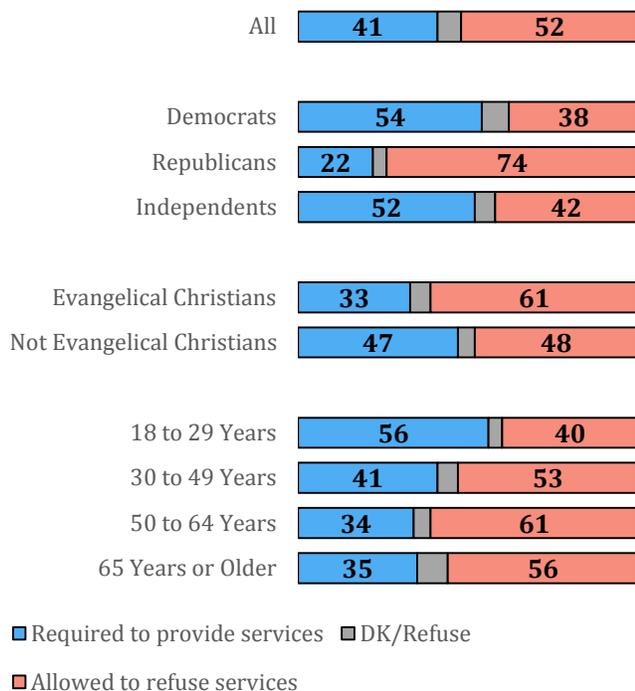
SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

## Most Think Businesses Should Not Be Required to Provide Services for Same Sex Weddings if They Object for Religious Reasons

A number of states have debated and adopted laws that would allow businesses or other organizations to refuse services to individuals whose behaviors do not comport with the religious beliefs of the organization or business operator. Supporters, who often refer to these policies as “religious freedom laws,” argue that these laws protect the liberty of the organizations and business operators to practice their religion by allowing them to conduct their activities in keeping with their faith. Opponents contend these laws permit discrimination on the basis of religion, particularly against LGBT individuals.

## Figure 2: Parties Divide Over "Religious Freedom" Law

Percent saying businesses that provide wedding services should be \_\_\_ to same sex couples



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

To measure sentiment in Louisiana regarding this type of law, we asked respondents whether a business providing wedding services, such as catering or flowers, should be allowed to refuse services to same sex couples for religious reasons, or should the business be required to provide those services as it would to all customers.

Opinion in Louisiana toward these sorts of laws parallels opinion about same sex marriage (Figure 2). About half of residents (52 percent) believe these businesses should be allowed to refuse services, and 41 percent believe they should be required to provide services.

As with same sex marriage, the major cleavages in opinion fall along partisan, religious, and age lines. Most Democrats (54 percent) believe businesses should be required to provide services to same sex couples, while most Republicans (74 percent) believe businesses should be allowed to refuse services for religious reasons.

Three in five individuals (61 percent) who identify themselves as evangelical Christian believe businesses should be allowed to refuse services for religious reasons. Opinion splits almost evenly among individuals who do not think of themselves as evangelical Christians (48 percent versus 47 percent).

A majority of residents between the ages of 18 and 29 believe businesses should be required to provide services, but majorities among all older age groups believe businesses should be allowed to refuse services.

## More Opposition to Abortion in Louisiana than in the US as a Whole

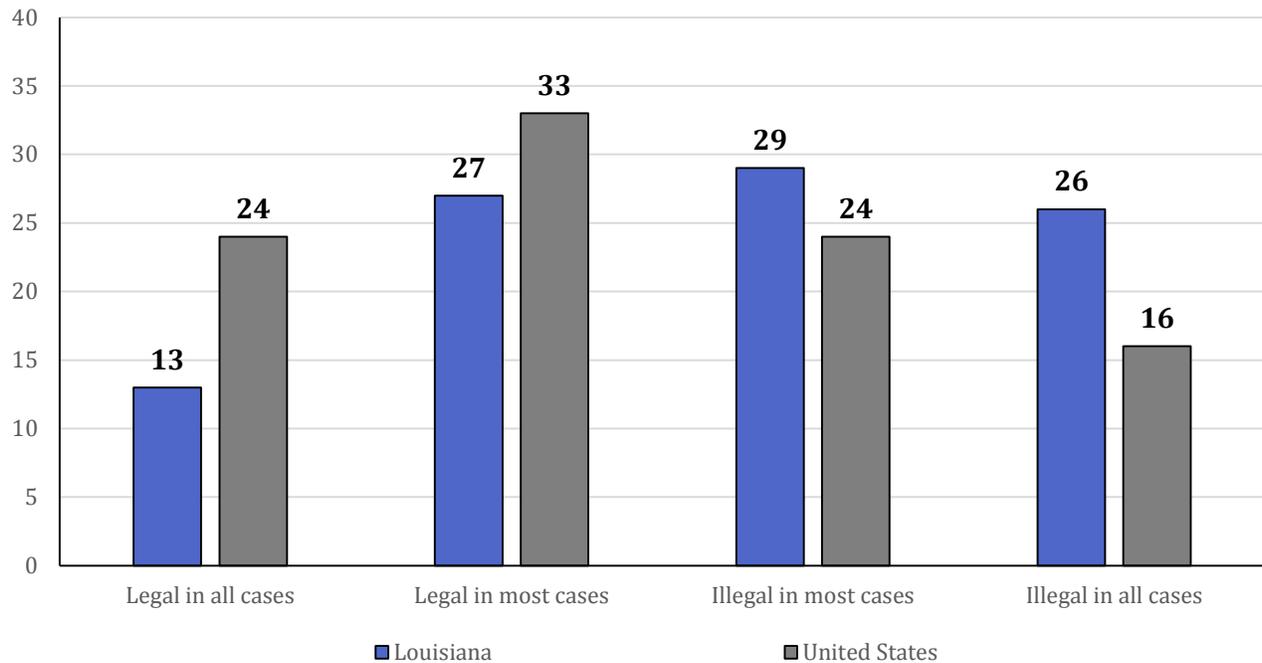
Louisiana residents are generally more opposed to abortion than are Americans as a whole. We asked respondents whether abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases. This question is identical to the one posed by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press to a national sample.<sup>1</sup>

The response patterns from these two samples are nearly mirror opposites (Figure 3). A majority of Americans (56 percent) think abortion should be legal in all or most cases, and 41 percent think it should be illegal in all or most cases. In Louisiana a majority (55 percent) think abortions should be illegal in all or most cases, and just 40 percent think it should be legal in all or most cases.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/files/2016/03/03-31-2016-Political-topline-for-release.pdf>

**Figure 3: More Opposition to Legal Abortion in Louisiana than in United States as a Whole**

Percent saying abortion should be \_\_\_\_



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

Opinion on abortion follows the familiar lines of partisanship and religion. A majority of Democrats (53 percent) think abortion should be legal in all or most cases, and 39 percent think it should be illegal in all or most cases. A majority of Republicans (69 percent) think abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, and slightly more than one quarter (27 percent) think it should be legal in all or most cases.

Nearly two-thirds of evangelical Christians think it should be illegal in all or most cases. Similarly, a majority of individuals who attend religious services weekly or twice a month think abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, but a majority of individuals who rarely or never attend religious services think it should be legal in all or most cases.

While a substantial majority support some restrictions on access to abortion (82 percent), only a relatively small share (26 percent) think it should be illegal in all cases.. Even among Republicans and evangelical Christians, only

about 30 percent think it should be illegal in every case.

### **Most Do Not Want Refugees from Syria Settling in Louisiana**

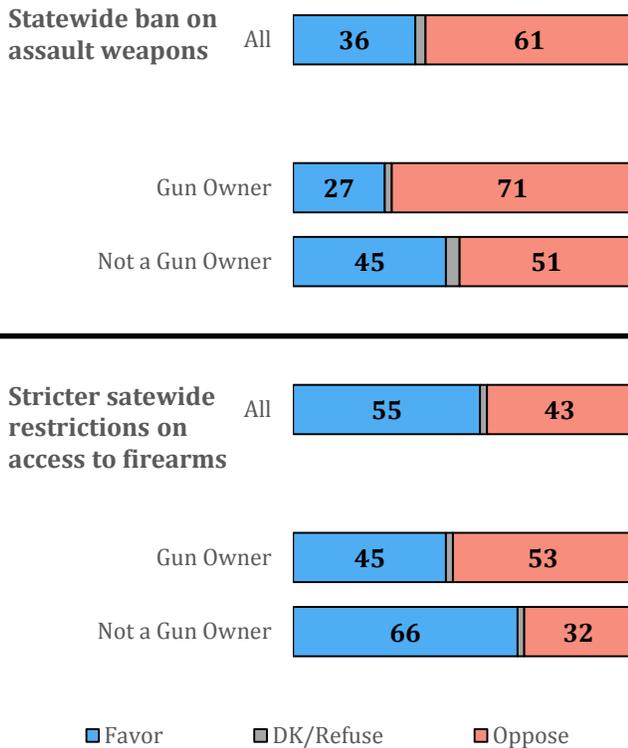
Roughly two-thirds of Louisiana residents (68 percent) oppose allowing refugees from the conflict in Syria to settle in Louisiana. Only 24 percent favor having Syrian refugees settle in Louisiana. Large majorities of Republicans (84 percent) and independents (66 percent) oppose settlement of Syrian refugees in Louisiana, while Democrats are more divided with 50 percent opposing and 39 percent favoring.

### **Louisiana Residents Oppose Ban on Assault Weapons but Open to Other Firearm Restrictions**

Just over one-third of Louisiana residents (36 percent) favor a statewide ban on assault weapons; most (61 percent) oppose such a ban

### Figure 4: Majority Rejects Assault Weapon Ban but Open to Other Firearm Restrictions

Percent favor/oppose



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

(Figure 4). Gun owners are especially opposed to an assault weapons ban in the state (71 percent), while residents who do not own a gun split more evenly between support (45 percent) and opposition (51 percent).<sup>2</sup>

However, Louisiana residents are more supportive of gun control when asked a broader question about stricter statewide restrictions on access to firearms. A majority (55 percent) favor more restrictions. Residents who do not currently own a gun are especially favorable toward greater restrictions (66 percent). Gun

<sup>2</sup> Breaking out non-gun-owners into those who live with someone who owns a gun and those who do not reveals negligible difference between these two groups.

<sup>3</sup> The opposite may be true among black respondents to the survey who live in the New Orleans area (Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, and St. Bernard

owners, though more likely to oppose tighter restrictions on access to firearms, are split more closely on this question: 45 percent favor and 53 percent oppose.

### No Broad Call for Removal of Confederate Monuments and Images

Nearly three-fourths of Louisiana residents (73 percent) oppose removing monuments to people who fought on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War from public spaces (Figure 5). Only 20 percent favor their removal.

The largest cleavage in opinion on this issue occurs along racial lines. Whites overwhelmingly oppose removal of Confederate monuments: 88 percent oppose it and just 9 percent favor it. Black residents of Louisiana are much more likely than whites to support removal of these monuments. Even so, more black residents oppose removal (47 percent) than favor it (40 percent).<sup>3</sup>

The public is more divided on the question of whether the state should issue license plates that include an emblem of the Confederate battle flag when requested by individual drivers. Since 1999, the state of Louisiana has issued a Sons of Confederate Veterans specialty license plate that includes an image of the battle flag to drivers who request it and pay an additional fee. As of 2015, there were about 160 vehicles with a valid Sons of Confederate Veterans specialty plate out of approximately 4.5 million vehicles registered in Louisiana.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last year that state rejection of license plates featuring the Confederate battle flag does not constitute a violation of freedom of speech.<sup>5</sup> Around the same time as that ruling, the

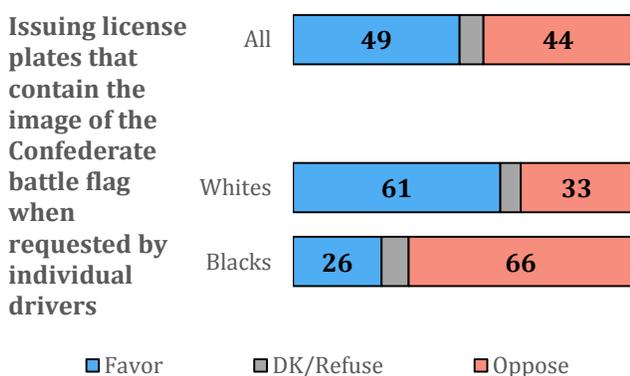
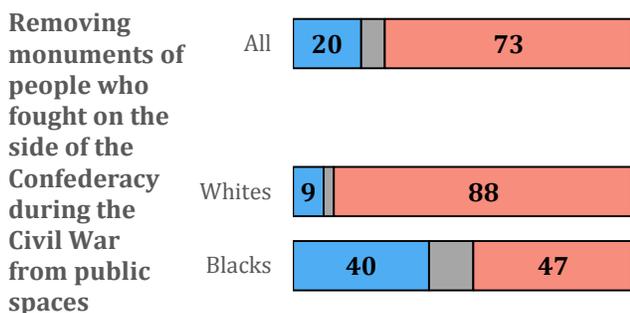
Parishes): 51 percent favor removal and 45 percent oppose. However, the sample of black residents in this area is too small to estimate opinion precisely.

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/06/confederate\\_flag\\_license\\_plate.html](http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2015/06/confederate_flag_license_plate.html)

<sup>5</sup> *Walker v Texas Division, Sons of Confederate Veterans* (2015)

### Figure 5: Large Racial Divisions Over Public Use of Confederate Symbols

Percent favor/oppose



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

Louisiana State Conference of the NAACP requested that then-governor Bobby Jindal take steps to end the issuing of the Sons of Confederate Veterans specialty plates.<sup>6</sup>

About half of Louisiana residents (49 percent) favor the state issuing license plates that contain the image of the confederate battle flag when requested by individual drivers, and 44 percent oppose the practice.

There are stark divisions across races and political parties. A majority of whites (61 percent) favor the state issuing these plates, while a majority of blacks oppose the policy (66 percent).

<sup>6</sup><http://media.nola.com/politics/images/NAACP%20letter%20re%20flag.jpeg>

Most Republicans (68 percent) favor the state issuing plates with the Confederate battle flag when requested by individual drivers, but most Democrats (64 percent) oppose these plates. Independent are split: 48 percent favor and 46 percent oppose.

### Few See Improvement in Race Relations

One-third of Louisiana residents (33 percent) think race relations in the state are getting worse. Nearly half (49 percent) say that race relations are about the same as they have been, and only 16 percent believe they are getting better. The patterns of opinion are similar across demographic and political groups.

Even the difference between how black and white Louisiana residents see the trend in race relations is relatively small. Black residents are somewhat more likely than white residents to say relations are getting worse, but the difference is only seven percentage points (37 percent of black residents and 30 percent of white residents). Whites, in turn, are more likely than blacks to say race relations are about the same (53 percent of whites versus 46 percent of blacks). Only 16 percent of white residents and 17 percent of black residents say race relations in the state are improving.

# 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

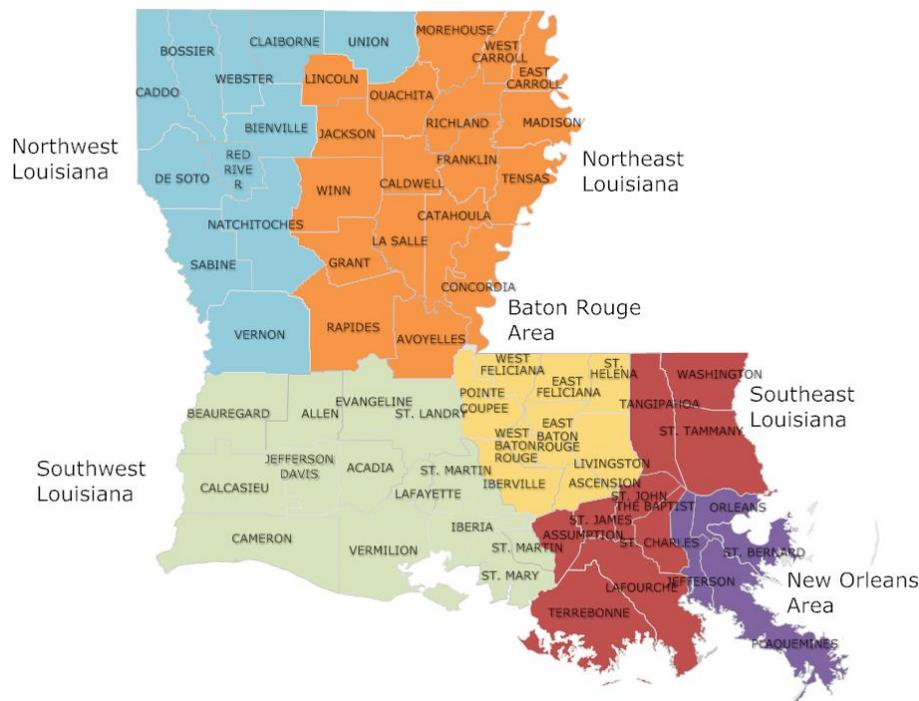
Baton Rouge Area: Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Point Coupee, St. Helena, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana

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 & Topline Frequencies

NOTE: Frequencies for a given question represent percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Q1. Now, thinking about race relations in Louisiana, do you think race relations in Louisiana are getting better, getting worse or staying about the same?

Getting better	16
Getting worse	33
Staying about the same	49
Don't know/Refused (Volunteered)	1

Q2. Do you favor or oppose removing monuments of people who fought on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War from public spaces?

Favor	20
Oppose	73
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	7

Q3. Do you favor or oppose the state of Louisiana issuing license plates that contain the image of the Confederate battle flag when requested by individual drivers?

Favor	49
Oppose	44
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	8

Q4. Would you favor or oppose a statewide ban on the sale of assault weapons?

Favor	36
Oppose	61
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	3

Q5. Would you favor or oppose stricter statewide restrictions on access to firearms?

Favor	55
Oppose	43
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	2

Q6. Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?

Legal in all cases	13
Legal in most cases	27
Illegal in most cases	29
Illegal in all cases	26
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	5

Q7. Do you favor or oppose allowing same-sex couples to marry legally?

Favor	41
Oppose	53
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	7

Q8. If a business provides wedding services, such as catering or flowers, should it be allowed to refuse those services to same-sex couples for religious reasons, or required to provide those services as it would to all customers?

Be allowed to refuse those services to same sex couples for religious reasons	52
Be required to provide those services to same sex couples as it would to all other customers	41
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	6

Q9. Do you favor or oppose allowing Syrian refugees to move into Louisiana?

Favor	24
Oppose	68
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	9