

THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2016

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Broad Support for Public Access to Government Records in General

But Support for Specific Policy Proposals Depends on the
Type of Records

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

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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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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.



Press Law & Democracy Project

The Press Law & Democracy Project focuses on the promotion, protection and study of the free press clause of the First Amendment in a 21st century context. Predicated on the idea that democracy only thrives with a free and vibrant press and an engaged and informed citizenry, the Press Law & Democracy Project pursues original research and provides outreach and resources to those who wish to better understand the brave new world of digital media through a legal understanding of the First Amendment guarantee to a “free press.”

Overview

What do the residents of Louisiana think about the need for government transparency? 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 broad support for the principles of transparency and public access to government records. However, when it comes to putting these principles into practice, support is sensitive to the specific kinds of records in question. The survey reveals:

- When asked how much of the time they think they can trust the state government of Louisiana to do what is right, very few respondents to the survey said “just about always” (2 percent) or “most of the time” (16 percent). Most (60 percent) said “some of the time” and about one-in-five said “never.”
- Overall, there is broad support for the idea of transparency and access. Nearly all Louisiana residents (95 percent) *agree* with the statement that “Every citizen should have complete access to information about their state government.” A majority (56 percent) *disagree* with the statement that “Sometimes state officials are justified in keeping government information from the public.”
- Yet, the public expresses more support for transparency in principle than in practice – or, at least, depending on the specific kind of government records at issue. While 82 percent agree that records about state incentives provided to businesses for economic development should be open to the public, just half believe the public should have access to the governor’s calendar and schedule.

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 sixth 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.

Louisiana has come under increased scrutiny over the issue of government transparency and public access to state records. The Center for Public Integrity, a watchdog group that tracks transparency and ethics policies across the United States, recently assigned a grade of F to Louisiana for its record on public access to government information.

Do the residents of Louisiana share this concern about the need for access to government records? 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 broad support for the principles of transparency and public access to government records. However, when it comes to putting these principles in practice, support is sensitive to the specific kinds of records at issue.

Few Trust Government to Do What is Right

When asked how much of the time they think they can trust the state government of Louisiana to do what is right, very few respondents to the survey said "just about always" (2 percent) or "most of the time" (16 percent). Most (60 percent) said "some of the time" and about one-in-five said "never".

The tepid faith in state government is broadly shared across political identities. Among Democrats, 22 percent trust state government to do what is right "just about always" or "most of the time", and 15 percent believe they can never trust state government to do what is right. For Republicans, somewhat fewer trust state government to do what is right "just about always" or "most of the time" (14 percent), but the share who never trust the government to do what is right (19 percent) is statistically indistinguishable from Democrats. Independents are the least trusting: 29 percent say they can never trust state government to do what is right.

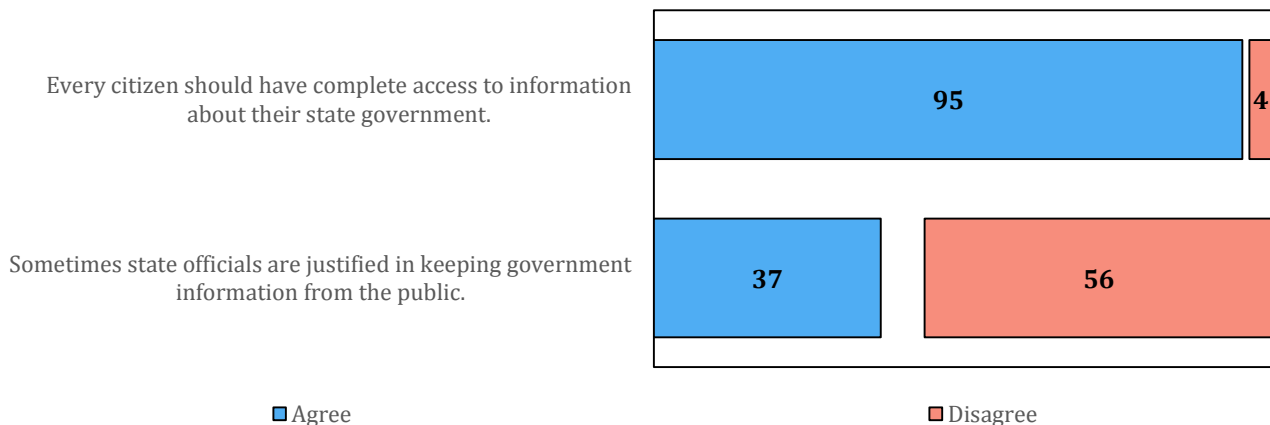
Broad Support for Principles of Transparency

Nearly all Louisiana residents (95 percent) *agree* with the statement that "Every citizen should have complete access to information about their state government" (figure 1). The principle of complete access is shared by similarly large majorities across all demographic and political groups identified in the survey.

Support for transparency dips somewhat when the question is framed in terms of whether state

Figure 1: Broad Support for Government Transparency in Principle

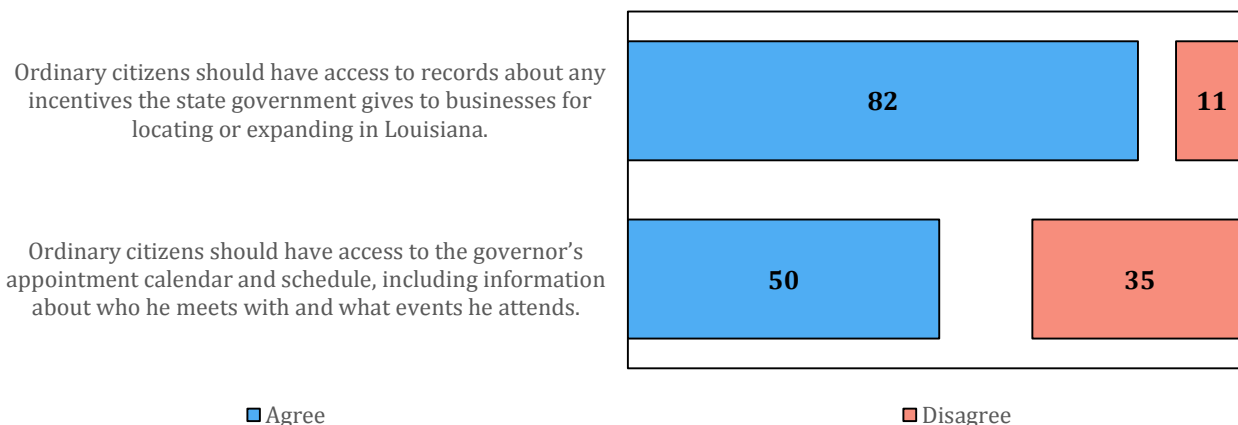
Percent agree/disagree



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

Figure 2: Support for Specific Policies Depends on Type of Records

Percent agree/disagree



SOURCE: 2016 Louisiana Survey

officials are justified in keeping some information secret, but a majority still opt for more access. Overall, 56 percent *disagree* with the statement that “Sometimes state officials are justified in keeping government information from the public.” Only 37 percent *agree* that the government is sometimes justified in withholding information. Again, however, differences across demographic or political groups are quite small.

Support for Transparency Depends on the Specific Application

Despite broad majority support for transparency in principle, when it comes to putting these principles into practice support for specific proposals is sensitive to the kinds of records at issue. To examine this sensitivity, we conducted an experiment within the survey. We asked some respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement that “Ordinary citizens should have access to records about any incentives the state government gives to businesses for locating or expanding in Louisiana,” while asking others whether they agree or disagree with the statement that “Ordinary citizens should have access to the governor’s appointment calendar and schedule, including information about who he meets with and what events he attends.” We

randomly assigned participants to one of these two questions.

While 82 percent of respondents to the question about records of economic incentives agreed the public should have access, only half of respondents to the question about the governor’s calendar and schedule agreed the public should have access (figure 2). It appears, then, that the public support for the principle of government transparency may break down when specific policies are crafted depending on the specific kind of records at issue.

Only 18 percent of Louisiana residents trust state government to do what is right “just about always” or “most of the time.”

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.

Question Wording & Topline Frequencies

NOTE: Frequencies for a given question represent percentages (rounded to nearest whole number) 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. On another topic, how much of the time do you think you can trust the state government in Louisiana to do what is right? Just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, or never?

Just about always	2
Most of the time	16
Some of the time	60
Never	21
Don't know/Refused (Volunteered)	1

Q2. For each of the following statements, please let me know whether you strongly agree, agree neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree: "Every citizen should have complete access to information about their state government."

Strongly agree	56
Agree	39
Neither agree nor disagree	1
Disagree	3
Strongly disagree	1
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	0

Q3. "Sometimes state officials are justified in keeping government information from the public."

Strongly agree	10
Agree	27
Neither agree nor disagree	6
Disagree	30
Strongly disagree	26
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	1

[Half of respondents randomly selected to answer Q4a]

Q4a. "Ordinary citizens should have access to records about any incentives the state government gives to businesses for locating or expanding in Louisiana."

Strongly agree	35
Agree	47
Neither agree nor disagree	3
Disagree	9
Strongly disagree	3
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	3

[Half of respondents randomly selected to answer Q4b]

Q4b. "Ordinary citizens should have access to the governor's appointment calendar and schedule, including information about who he meets with and what events he attends."

Strongly agree	20
Agree	31
Neither agree nor disagree	12
Disagree	28
Strongly disagree	7
Don't know/Refused (Vol.)	4