

# THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2017

**LSU**

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



## Opinion Divided on “Religious Freedom” Laws and Use of Public Restrooms by Transgender Individuals

But More Support for Protections against Discrimination in the  
Workplace



*The final in a series of six reports from the 2017 Louisiana Survey*

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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
ON THIS REPORT:**

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# Reilly Center for Media & 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 *2017 Louisiana Survey* is the sixteenth in an annual series sponsored by the Reilly Center for Media & 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 *2017 Louisiana Survey*, this core is supplemented by measures of support for current fiscal reform proposals as well as potential changes to the state's gasoline tax; support for changing the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS); public opinion on criminal justice reform proposals; beliefs about gender discrimination and equal pay; attitudes toward Medicaid expansion and the federal Affordable Care Act; and opinions on a variety of social issues such as "religious-freedom" laws and rights of transgender individuals.

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

Louisiana is split over policies termed “religious-freedom” laws designed to allow businesses to refuse services to same-sex couples on the basis of religion and tilts in a conservative direction on the use of public restrooms by transgender individuals. Yet, public opinion in the state is much more supportive of state laws to prohibit discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. The *2017 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at LSU’s Manship School of Mass Communication, shows that:

- Like the United States as a whole, Louisianans are split about evenly between those who think businesses should be allowed to refuse services to same-sex couples on religious grounds (47 percent) and those who believe these businesses should be required to provide their services (49 percent).
- A majority (56 percent) think transgender people should be required to use the bathroom of the gender they were born into, while only about a third think they should be allowed to use the restroom of the gender with which they currently identify.
- Approximately three-fourth (76 percent) support legal protection from discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation. A similar share (70 percent) support protection from discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender identity. In each case, Democrats are more supportive than Republicans, but majorities of both parties endorse these protections.

The *2017 Louisiana Survey* was administered over the telephone from February 23 to March 23, 2017, to both landline and cell phone respondents. The project includes a representative sample of 1,012 adult Louisiana residents. The total sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

This is the final in a series of six releases on results from the *2017 Louisiana Survey*.

## Opinion in Louisiana on “Religious Freedom” Laws Follows National Polarization

Like the nation as a whole in recent years, the state of Louisiana has seen factious debates over issues that touch on both the civil rights of LGBT individuals and concerns over religious freedoms and traditional values. One example is the debate over 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 they 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. The most widely cited examples of this practice involve individuals or businesses that

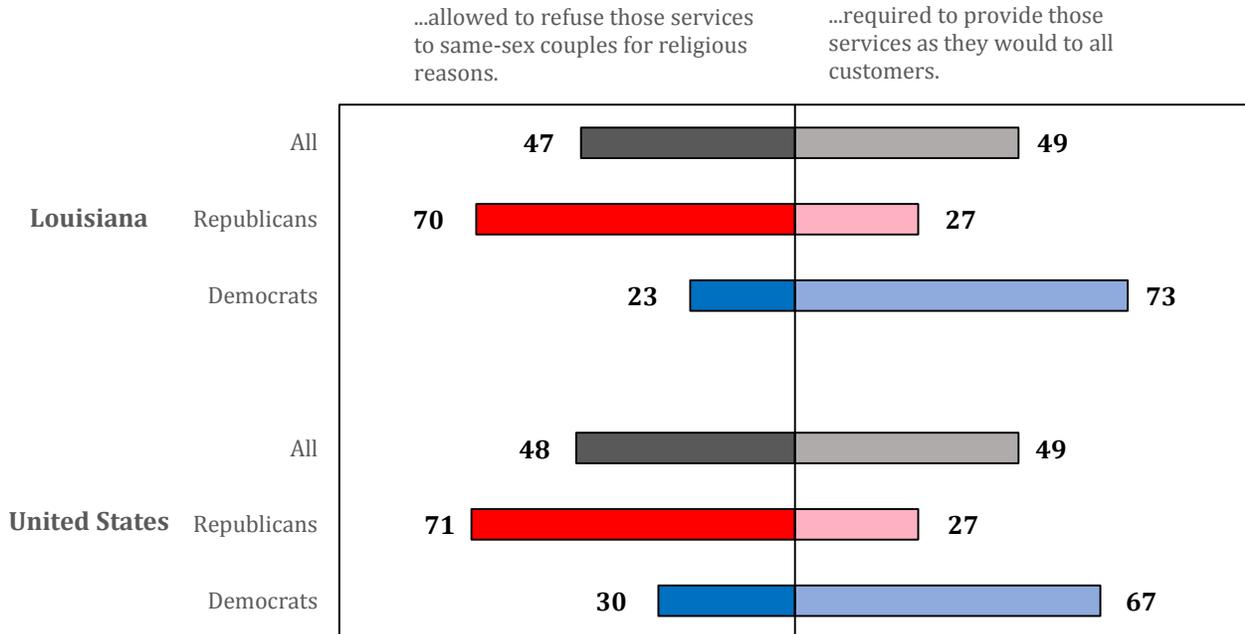
provide wedding services but object to providing these services to same-sex couples. Opponents contend these laws would permit discrimination against LGBT individuals.

To measure public opinion in the state regarding this type of law, the *Louisiana Survey* included questions asking 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 whether the business should be required to provide those services as it would to all customers. The wording replicates a [question posed by the Pew Research Center](#) to a national sample in the late summer of 2016.

Opinion in Louisiana is remarkably similar to opinion across the country (figure 1). Like the United States as a whole, Louisianans are split about evenly between those who think businesses should be allowed to refuse services to same-sex couples on religious grounds (47

**Figure 1: Partisan Divides in Louisiana Over Same Sex Wedding Services Follow National Pattern**

Percent saying that businesses that provide wedding services should be...

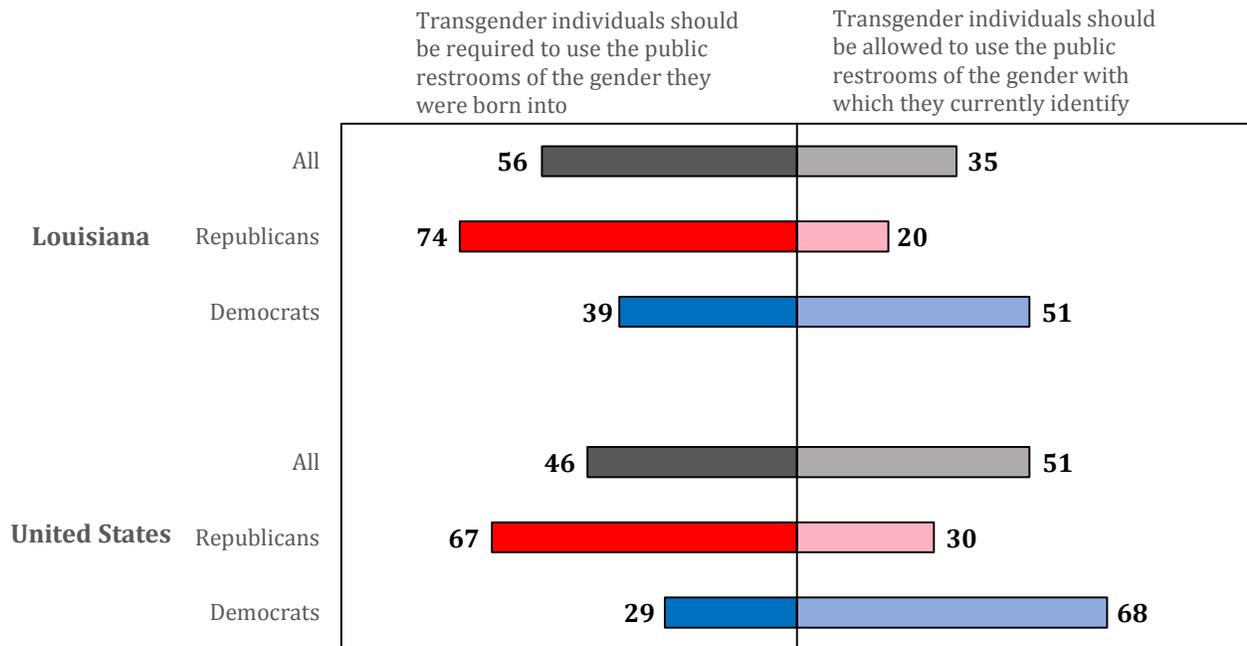


NOTE: Partisans include those who 'lean' toward the party.

SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey and Pew Research Center's "Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination" (2016).

**Figure 2: More Louisiana Residents Say Transgender Individuals Should Be Required to Use Public Restrooms of Gender They Were Born Into**

Percent saying, if you had to choose, which comes closer to your own view...



NOTE: Partisans include those who 'lean' toward the party.

SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey and Pew Research Center's "Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination" (2016).

percent) and those who believe these businesses should be required to provide their services (49 percent).

Furthermore, the opinions of Republicans and Democrats in Louisiana are polarized on this issue in the same way as the parties are nationally. Seventy percent of Republicans in Louisiana think businesses should be allowed to refuse services to same-sex couples for religious reasons, and only about one-fourth (27 percent) think businesses should be required to provide services to same-sex couples as they would to others. This is the mirror opposite of opinion among Democrats, 73 percent of whom think business should be required to serve same-sex couples as they would others and only 23 percent of whom think businesses should be allowed to refuse service on the basis of religion.

**Louisiana More Conservative on Use of Public Restrooms by Transgender Individuals**

Another recent example, nationally, of a political fight between those advocating for civil rights of LGBT individuals and those advocating for traditional values is the debate over the use of public restrooms by transgender individuals. To measure attitudes on this issue in the state, the Louisiana Survey replicated another question from the Pew Research Center's 2016 survey.

Specifically, the question asks, "If you had to choose, which comes closer to your view: Transgender people should be required to use the public restrooms of the gender they were born into, or transgender people should be allowed to use the public restrooms of the gender with which they currently identify?"

National opinion on this issue splits in a very similar manner as opinion on “religious-freedom” laws – 46 percent say transgender individuals should be required to use the restroom of the gender into which they were born, and 51 percent say they should be allowed to use the restroom of the gender with which they currently identify. Once again, the parties are mirror reflections of each other (figure 2).

In Louisiana, however, opinion leans in a more conservative direction. A majority (56 percent) think transgender people should be required to use the bathroom of the gender they were born into, while only about a third think they should be allowed to use the restroom of the gender with which they currently identify. Even within each party, opinion in Louisiana leans in a more conservative direction. This is particularly true among Democrats. Nationally, a clear majority of Democrats (68 percent) think transgender people should be allowed to use the restroom of the gender with which they currently identify, but in

Louisiana only about half of Democrats (51 percent) think so.

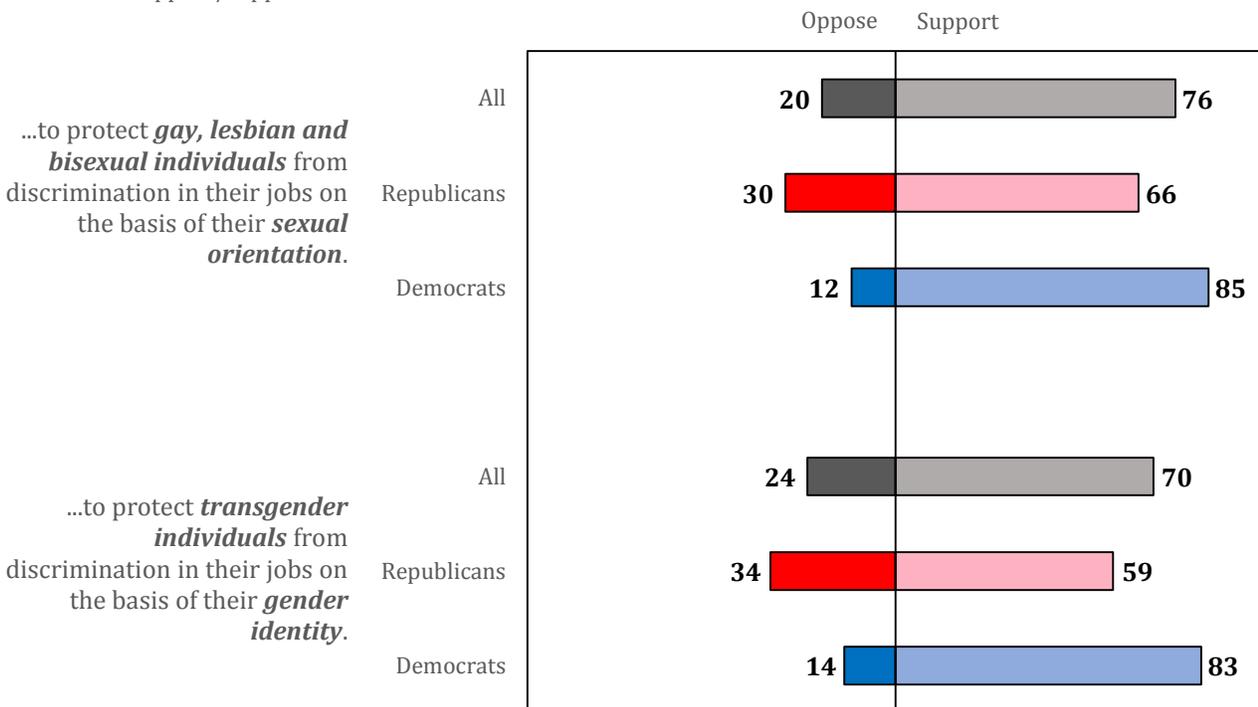
### Most Support Legal Protection against Discrimination in the Workplace on the Basis of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

Despite a conservative tilt on the issue of public restroom use by transgender individuals, a large majority of Louisianans support state laws to protect LGBT individuals from discrimination in their jobs on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (figure 3).

Among the Louisiana public as a whole, 76 percent support legal protection from discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation. A similar share (70 percent) support protection from discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender identity. In each case, Democrats are more supportive than

**Figure 3: Smaller Divisions On Workplace Protections Against Discrimination**

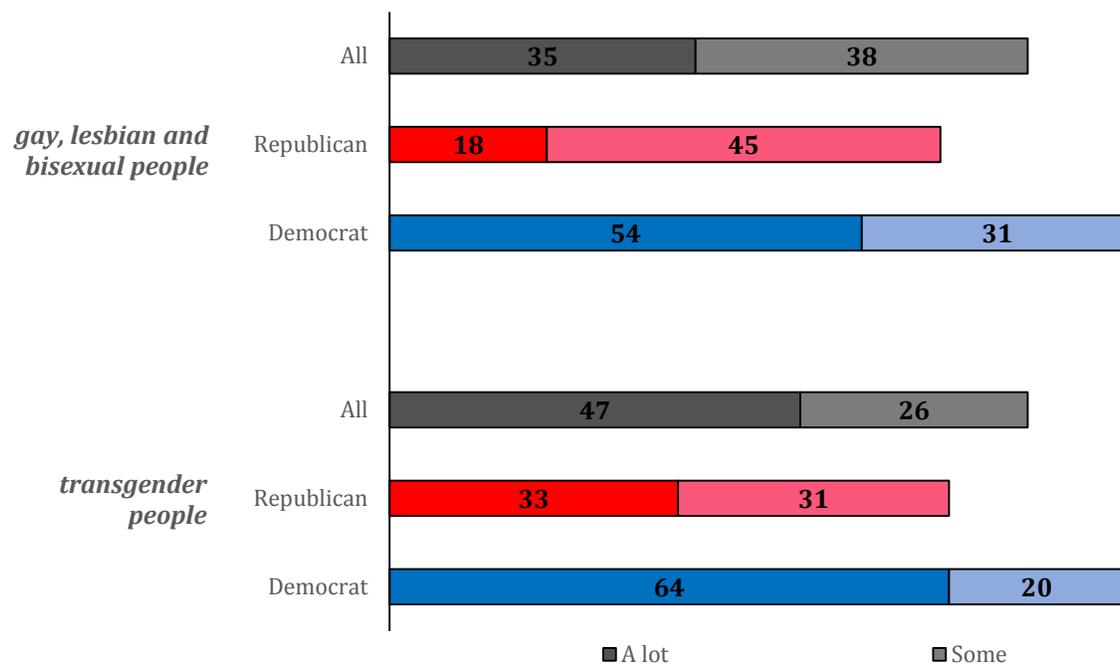
Percent who oppose/support a state law...



NOTE: Partisans include those who 'lean' toward the party.  
SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey

## Figure 4: Partisan Gaps in Perceptions of Discrimination Against LGBT Individuals

Percent who say that there is "a lot" or "some" discrimination in our society today against \_\_\_\_



NOTE: Percentages for "only a little" and "none at all" are not shown. Partisans include those who 'lean' toward the party.  
SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey

Republicans, but majorities of both parties endorse these protections.

### Parties Have Different Views of How Much Discrimination There Is against LGBT Individuals

One potential explanation for partisan differences on issues involving the civil rights of LGBT individuals may be gaps in how much actual discrimination Democrats and Republicans think

LGBT individuals face in society today. Both in the case of gay, lesbian and bisexual people as well as the case of transgender people, the share of Democrats who say these groups face "a lot" or "some" discrimination is about 20 percentage points higher than the share among Republicans (figure 4). Furthermore, the share of Democrats who say these groups face "a lot" of discrimination is far higher than the share of Republicans.

# 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 23 through March 23, 2017. The project includes live-interviewer surveys of 414 respondents contacted via landline telephone and 598 respondents contacted via cell phone, for a total sample of 1,012 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 ten percent. This response rate is the percentage of eligible residential households or personal cell phones in the sample for which an interview is completed. The rate is calculated using the American Association for Public Opinion Research's method for Response Rate 3 as published in their Standard Definitions. Response rates for telephone surveys have declined for several decades and frequently fall in the single digits even among the very best survey research organizations. The response rate for this survey is within the typical range for reputable live-interviewer telephone survey firms.

The combined landline and cell phone sample is weighted using an iterative procedure that matches race, education, household income, gender and age to known profiles for the adult population of Louisiana found in the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2015 one-year estimates. The sample is also weighted for population density by parish. Weighting cannot eliminate every source of nonresponse bias. However, proper administration 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 & Public Affairs, designed the survey questionnaire and sampling strategy, conducted telephone interviews, computed the survey weights, and conducted all statistical analysis.

# Question Wording & Toplines

NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, results are for the total sample. Not all respondents were asked each question, and questions asked to a subset of respondents are labelled accordingly. For these questions, percentages are for only those respondents who were asked the particular question. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Q1.

How much discrimination would you say there is in our society today against gay, lesbian and bisexual people?

A lot	35
Some	38
Only a little	19
None at all	4
Don't know/Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	4

Q2.

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 be required to provide those services as it would to all customers?

Allowed to refuse services to same sex couples	47
Required to provide services to same sex couples as it would others	49
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	5

Q3.

Do you support or oppose a state law to protect gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals from discrimination in their jobs on the basis of their sexual orientation?

Support	76
Oppose	20
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	4

Q4.

How much discrimination would you say there is in our society today against transgender people, such as people who were [RANDOMIZE: born female but now identify and live as males / born male but now identify and live as females]?

A lot	47
Some	26
Only a little	16
None at all	4
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	6

Q5. [ORDER OF RESPONSE OPTIONS MATCH RANDOMIZED ORDER APPEAR IN QUESTION TEXT]

As you may know, recent stories in the news have highlighted a debate over the use of public restrooms by transgender individuals. Some argue that transgender people [RANDOMIZE: should be allowed to use the public restrooms of the gender with which they currently identify / should be required to use the public restrooms of the gender they were born into]. Others argue that transgender people [should be required to use the public restrooms of the gender they were born into / should be allowed to use the public restrooms of the gender with which they currently identify]. We're interested in your views about this situation. If you had to choose, which comes closer to your view?

They should be allowed to use the public restrooms of the gender with which they currently identify	35
They should be required to use the public restrooms of the gender they were born into	56
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	10

Q6.

Do you support or oppose a state law to protect transgender individuals from discrimination in their jobs on the basis of their gender identity?

Support	70
Oppose	24
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	5