



## **Majority supports state protections for individuals with pre-existing medical conditions if federal protections thrown out**

Medicaid expansion remains popular, but debate over cost polarizes opinion

*The fourth in a series of six reports from the 2019 Louisiana Survey, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs*

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# Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs

The Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs is partnership-driven, action-oriented, and dedicated to exploring contemporary issues at the intersection of mass communication and public life. Its interdisciplinary approach draws together experts from diverse fields to advance research and dialogue. The intent is to inspire our communities to think deeply, develop solutions, take action and broaden knowledge. 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, the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the 2016 historic floods. Underlying the Center's endeavors is to strengthen and advance the Manship School's national and state leadership in media and politics.

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## About the Louisiana Survey

The *2019 Louisiana Survey* is the eighteenth 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 *2019 Louisiana Survey*, this core is supplemented by measures of support for compromise; support for increases in teacher pay, the minimum wage, and the gasoline tax; approval of major recent policy developments such as criminal justice reform and Medicaid expansion; and attitudes toward a number of social issues such as gun policy, marijuana legalization, and sports gambling.

As part of an effort to ensure that the *Louisiana Survey* fulfills its public service mission, the research team solicited input about topics for the survey from members of the government and policy community across the political spectrum. Additionally, the research team drew upon expertise in public policy and polling from Louisiana State University faculty. These advisors 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 final decisions on the questionnaire, analysis, and interpretation presented in this report or any mistakes therein.

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

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## Summary

This is the fourth of six reports from the *2019 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication.

This report includes results for health care.

Key findings include

- If the courts toss out the federal protection for people with pre-existing health conditions, 74 percent of Louisiana residents want the state to establish its own protections even if doing so results in higher insurance costs for healthy people.
- Seventy-six percent of Louisiana residents approve of Medicaid expansion. Although Democrats express the highest levels of approval, majorities of Republicans (57 percent) and independents (73 percent) also express favorable opinions of the policy.
- Emphasizing potential costs of the state's Medicaid program doubles the size of the gap between Democratic and Republican approval for expansion.
- Most state residents (55 percent) indicated that they are unsure whether the state has expanded its Medicaid program or not. Only 35 percent of participants correctly believe that the state has expanded its Medicaid program. Ten percent incorrectly believe the state has not expanded the program.

## Health care

### Majority wants state to protect coverage of pre-existing conditions if federal protections dropped

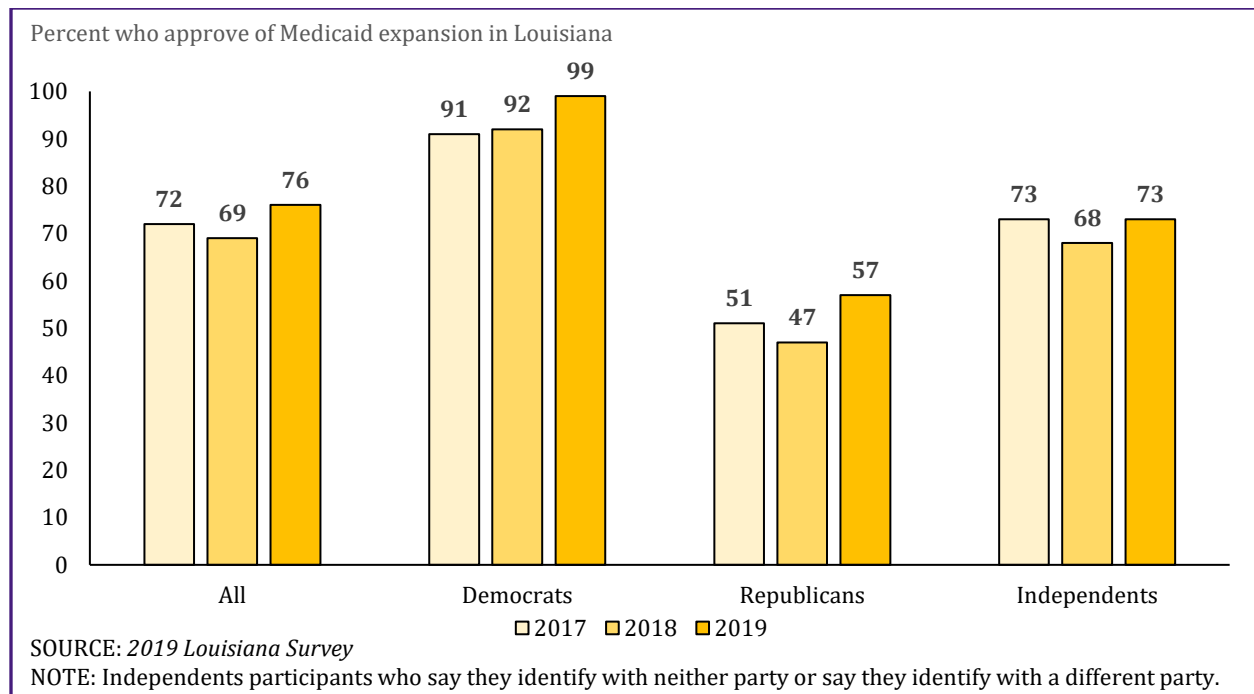
The federal Affordable Care Act prohibits insurance companies from denying coverage based on a person's medical history. A number of states, including Louisiana, have joined a case challenging the law in federal court. If the courts toss out the federal protection for people with pre-existing health conditions, 74 percent of Louisiana residents want the state to establish its own protections even if doing so results in higher insurance costs for healthy people.<sup>1</sup> These protections have broad support from

Democrats (83 percent), Republicans (66 percent), and independents (75 percent).

### Approval of Medicaid expansion remains high

Louisiana expanded its Medicaid program in 2016 under the auspices of the federal Affordable Care Act. For the third straight year, the *Louisiana Survey* shows that a large majority of state residents approve of this move. Today, 76 percent of Louisiana residents approve of Medicaid expansion. This percentage of approval has remained steady since expansion (figure 1).

**Figure 1: Medicaid expansion remains popular, approval increasing among Republicans**



<sup>1</sup> We base the wording for this question on national polling from the Kaiser Family Foundation. Responses in Louisiana are similar to national results in which 70 percent of Americans

support their states establishing protections for people with pre-existing health conditions in the event that courts rule the federal protections unconstitutional.

Approval of Medicaid expansion is bipartisan. Although Democrats express the highest levels of approval, majorities of Republicans (57 percent) and independents (73 percent) also express favorable opinions of the policy. Of particular interest, Republican approval for Medicaid expansion has grown in the years since the state implemented the change.

### Debate over the costs of expansion polarizes opinion

Supporters of Medicaid expansion often highlight its effect on health care coverage in the state, while opponents frequently point to the potential for rising costs. To determine how this debate over the program’s consequences can shape opinion of Medicaid expansion, we randomly divided participants into three groups. We asked the first group the same question used since 2017, described in the previous section. We asked the second group this question after providing the following claim about coverage:

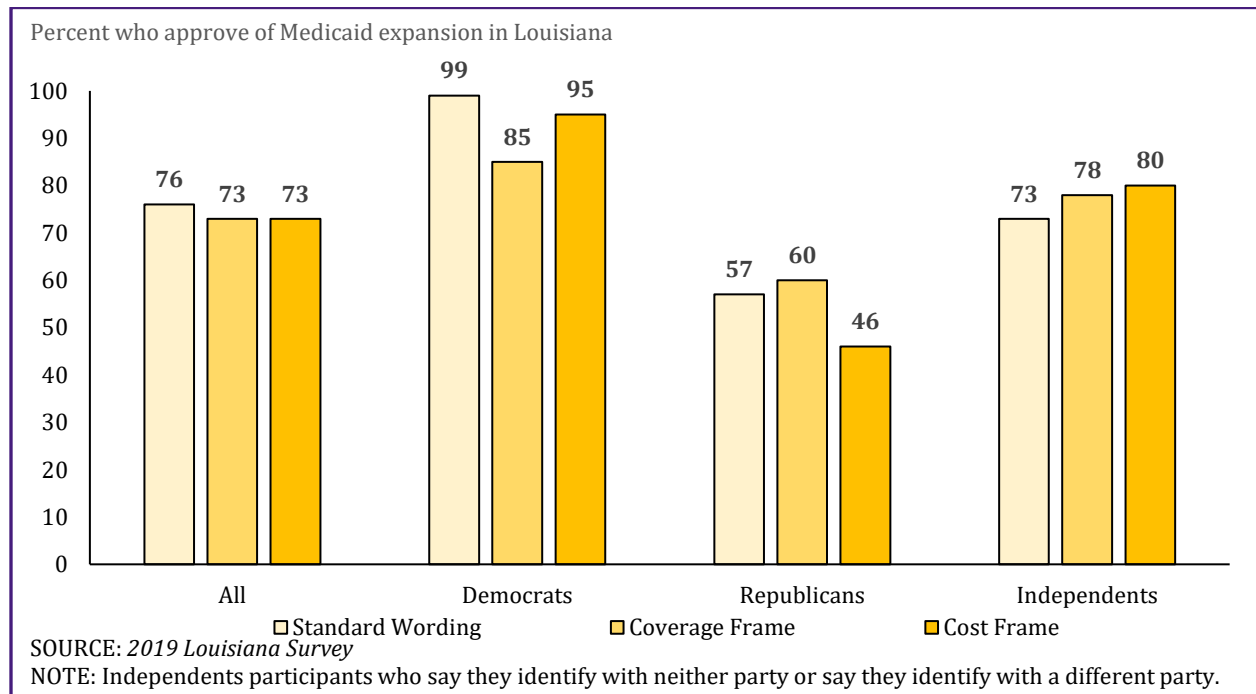
“Many state residents have enrolled in the program, and now fewer people in Louisiana go without health coverage.”

We asked the third group about their approval of expansion after providing the following claim about costs:

“The state must spend tax dollars to pay for part of the program, and this cost will increase in coming years.”

These coverage and cost frames do not affect the level approval in the overall sample (figure 2). However, this similarity in topline approval masks important partisan shifts. The coverage frame has no impact on approval among Republicans and independents, but interestingly decreases approval among Democrats by 14 percentage points bringing them closer to Republicans on the issue.

**Figure 2: Party gap widest when referencing cost**



This drop among Democrats is a puzzle. Because a Democratic governor launched Medicaid expansion in Louisiana, a Democratic president's signature policy allowed for expansion, and both of these prominent Democrats emphasized increased health care coverage as a primary benefit of expansion, observers might expect Democrats to show strong approval of the policy especially when its impact on coverage is highlighted. One possible explanation is that Democrats expect a larger effect on coverage than the one we describe as "fewer people in Louisiana go without health care coverage." Unfortunately, the available data from this survey cannot resolve this puzzle.

The cost frame, on the other hand, has no substantial effect on Democrats and independents but drives down Republican approval of Medicaid expansion – pushing them even farther from the views of Democrats. In other words, the cost frame further polarizes opinion between Democrats and Republicans. The party gap between Democrats and Republicans for our standard question is 25 percentage points and grows to 49 percentage points when Medicaid expansion is framed in terms of potential costs.

## **Most state residents unaware that Louisiana has expanded Medicaid**

Prior to asking about opinions of Medicaid expansion, we queried participants about a factual question: Whether or not Louisiana has expanded Medicaid. Most state residents (55 percent) indicated that they are unsure whether the state has expanded its Medicaid program or not. Only 35 percent of participants correctly believe that the state has expanded its Medicaid program. Ten percent incorrectly believe the state has not expanded the program.

Knowledge of Medicaid expansion is particularly low among low-income households. Although the demographic data collected in the survey does not allow us to identify which participants are eligible for Medicaid coverage, it is likely that more individuals whose household incomes are below \$25,000 (roughly the bottom 30 percent of Louisiana households) are eligible for Medicaid than individuals whose household incomes are greater because it is a means-tested program. Yet, this is the income group with the lowest level of awareness of Medicaid expansion.

## Survey Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted among a statewide sample of 917 adults (18 years of age or older) living in Louisiana. The survey was conducted by interviewers at Louisiana State University's Public Policy Research Lab. The sample includes 385 respondents interviewed via landline telephone and 532 respondents interviewed on a cellphone, including 365 who do not have a landline telephone. Interviews for this survey were conducted from February 7 to March 15, 2019.

Approximately three-fourths of the sample (76 percent) was stratified across parishes proportional to their adult population to ensure geographic representation across the state. The remaining 24 percent of the sample was drawn statewide. For both the parish and statewide samples, the design of the landline samples ensures representation of both listed and unlisted numbers by use of random digit dialing. Similarly, the cell phone samples are randomly drawn from known, available phone number banks dedicated to wireless service. Both samples, landline and cellphone, were provided by Marketing Systems Group.

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 2017 one-year estimates. 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 +/- 4.6 percentage points. The margin of error includes adjustment due to the weighting procedure. The design effect due to weighting is 1.4 percentage points; that is, the margin of error is 1.4 percentage points larger than it would be for a simple random sample of this size without weighting.

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. As often as possible, the *Louisiana Survey* follows the wording of relevant questions repeatedly used by reputable public opinion research institutions and projects, such as the Pew Research Center, Gallup Inc., and the American National Election Studies.

The *2019 Louisiana Survey* has a response rate of six 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 telephones have been on decline for several decades and frequently fall in the single digits even among the very best survey research organizations.



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, computed the survey weights, and conducted all statistical analysis.

## Question Wording and Toplines

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 only for those respondents who were asked the particular question. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

### Q1.

Turning to health care, as you may know, Medicaid is a program to provide health coverage mostly to low-income individuals. In recent years, several states throughout the country have expanded their Medicaid programs to provide health care coverage to more people. From what you may have heard, has Louisiana expanded its Medicaid program in recent years or not? Or, are you not sure?

Yes, has expanded.....	35
No, has not expanded .....	10
Unsure .....	55
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

### Q2A. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, OR C.]

As it turns out, a few years ago, Louisiana expanded its Medicaid program to provide health care coverage to more people. Do you approve or disapprove of the state expanding its Medicaid program?

Approve .....	76
Disapprove .....	19
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	5

### Q2B. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, OR C]

As it turns out, a few years ago, Louisiana expanded its Medicaid program to provide health care coverage to more people. Many state residents have enrolled in the program, and now fewer people in Louisiana go without health coverage. Do you approve or disapprove of the state expanding its Medicaid program?

Approve .....	73
Disapprove .....	23
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	4

### Q2C. [PARTICIPANTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO VERSION A, B, OR C]

As it turns out, a few years ago, Louisiana expanded its Medicaid program to provide health care coverage to more people. The state must spend tax dollars to pay for part of the program, and this cost will increase in coming years. Do you approve or disapprove of the state expanding its Medicaid program?

Approve .....	73
Disapprove .....	25
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

**Q3.**

As you may know, a 2010 federal law established protections for people with pre-existing conditions that prohibit insurance companies from denying coverage because of a person's medical history. Some states have filed a lawsuit challenging this law. If the federal law's protections for people with pre-existing conditions are ruled unconstitutional, would you want the state of Louisiana to establish its own protections for people with pre-existing health conditions even if this means some healthy people may pay more for insurance coverage, or would you not want to see Louisiana establish such protections?

Establish protections for pre-existing conditions.....	74
Do not establish protections .....	19
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	6