



Economy and Covid-19: Public's top concerns

Despite an unprecedented year, little change in beliefs about the direction of the state or in confidence in government

The first in a series of five reports from the 2021 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 *2021 Louisiana Survey* is the nineteenth 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 *2021 Louisiana Survey*, this core is supplemented by measures of experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic; support for paid family leave requirements, extending broadband access, expansion of early childhood education programs, and an increase to the gasoline tax; as well as beliefs about race and socio-economic class.

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 first of five reports from the *2021 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 from questions asking Louisiana residents about their general opinions on government and the economy in the state today. These results include:

- The pandemic appears to have had little, if any, effect on what Louisiana residents think about the direction of the state. Today, 46% say the state is heading in the wrong direction, and 42% say it is heading in the right direction. This is a shift from our last survey in 2019, when 43% said the state was heading in the wrong direction and 47% said it was heading in the right direction, but the change is within the margin of error. Beliefs about the direction of the state have held relatively steady since 2017.
- The pandemic has shifted the public's priorities for what problems the state government should tackle. The economy and the pandemic top state residents' concerns, replacing education and transportation infrastructure, which topped the list two years ago.
- Louisiana residents are neither more nor less confident in state government than they were before the pandemic. Forty-one percent (41%) of state residents say they are either very confident or somewhat confident in state government to address problems effectively. This share is on par with annual results from the *Louisiana Survey* since 2013.
- The public has mixed views about economic well-being. On the one hand, a large majority of Louisiana residents (72%) say that the state's economy is worse than it was a year ago. On the other hand, most state residents (54%) say their own financial situation is the same as it was a year ago, while 29% say it is worse than it was a year ago.

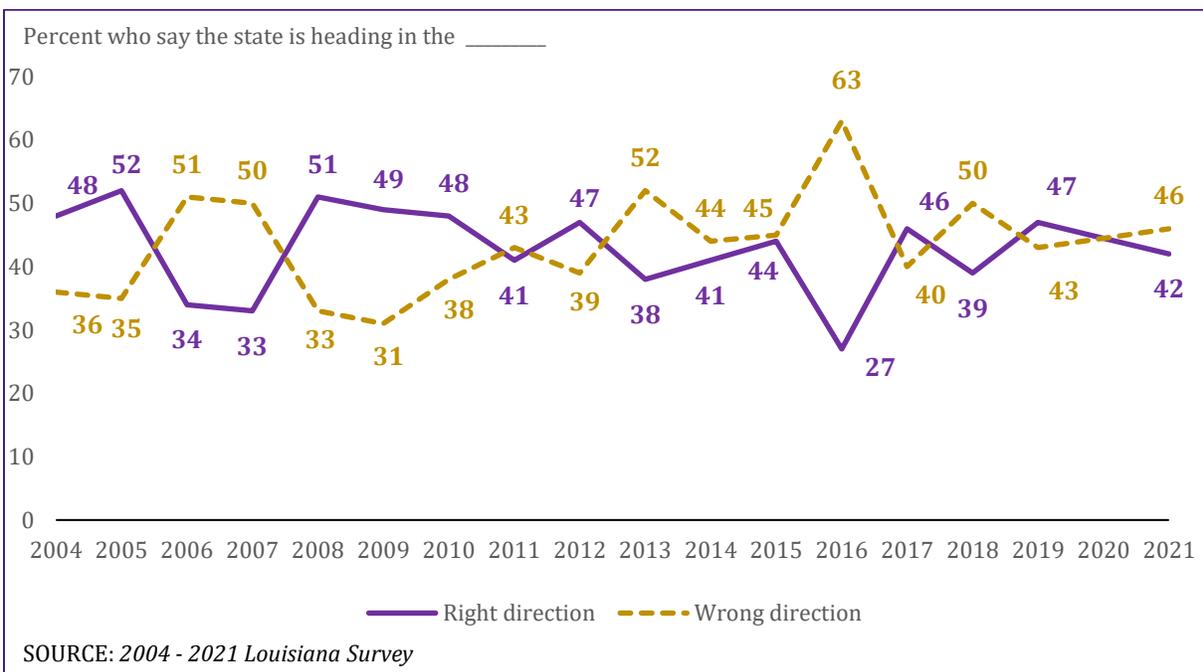
State of the State

Despite pandemic little change in attitudes about how the state is doing

More Louisiana residents say the state is heading in the wrong direction than say it is heading in the right direction, but the difference remains within the survey's margin of error. These percentages show remarkably little change since the last iteration of the *Louisiana Survey* in 2019.

Today, 46% say the state is heading in the wrong direction, while 42% say it is heading in the right direction. These percentages mark a flip from two years ago when they were 43% and 47%, respectively (see Figure 1). However, this change falls within the margin of error for the survey. In fact, opinions about the direction of the state have remained relatively stable since 2017. Over these past few years opinions have tended to fluctuate within a narrow range in the forties.

Figure 1: Evaluating the direction of the state, 2004-2021



The economy and the pandemic top list of priorities

The 2021 *Louisiana Survey* includes a question asking participants to name up to five problems they would most like state government to work on this year. We coded the verbatim responses to this open-ended question into issue categories. Table 1 shows the percentage of participants who mentioned each issue. The same participants may appear in multiple rows of this column because the survey allowed them to name multiple topics. For example, a participant might mention both the Covid-19 pandemic and economic conditions in the state. Therefore, the percentages in this column do not sum to 100.

About one third of participants mentioned an aspect of the economy, such as jobs, business conditions, or wages. Thirty percent (30%) mentioned the Covid-19 pandemic. Similar shares of participants mention education or transportation infrastructure, the two topics that topped the list in our last survey from 2019.

Immediately following this question, we asked participants which of the problems they named is the single most important for state government to work on in 2021. We coded these verbatim responses in the same way as for the previous question. The results appear in the last column of Table 1. Once again, the economy and Covid-19 top this list, effectively tied at 15%. There is a significant drop off from these two to the next most frequently mentioned problem, education.

Table 1: The percentage of participants who named each issue as most important

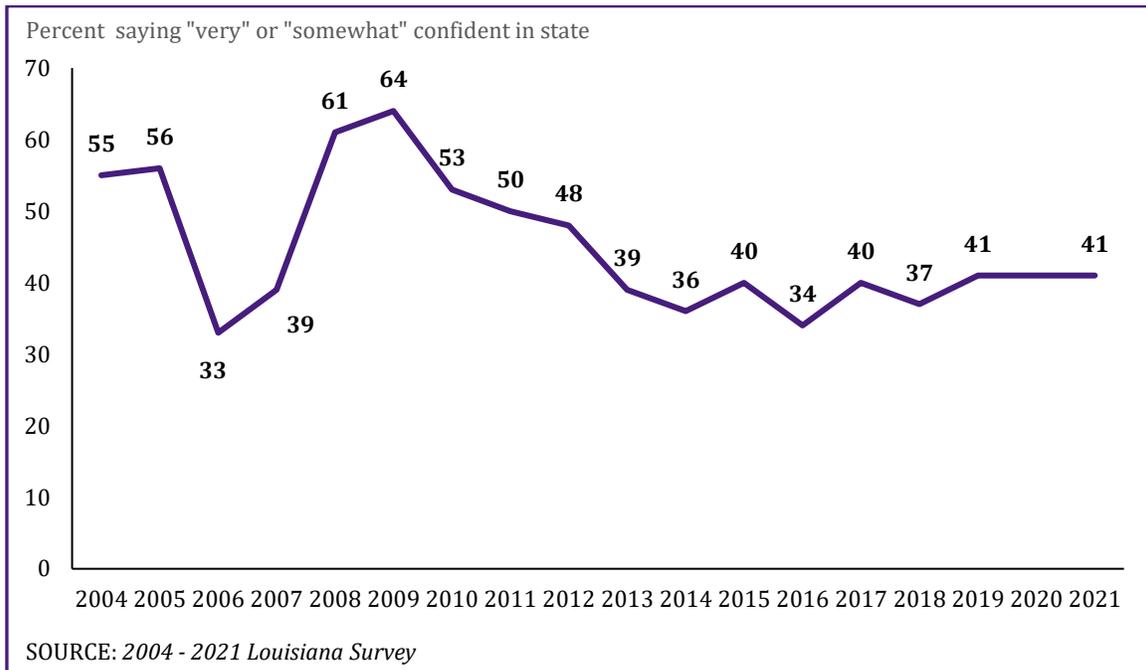
Issue	Mentioned Among Top Five Most Important	Mentioned as Single Most Important
Economy	35	15
Covid-19	30	15
Education	27	8
Transportation infrastructure	26	5
Health care	14	4
Welfare, public assistance, and other social services	12	3
State budget, taxes, and spending	12	3
Politics or government	11	2
Energy, oil and gas	11	3
Law enforcement and the criminal justice system	10	4
Crime	10	3
Environmental issues (other than coast or natural disasters)	5	1
Racism or race issues	4	1
Flooding, drainage, or preparation for natural disasters	3	1
Drugs	3	1
Housing	3	1
Coastal protection and restoration	2	1
Gun issues	2	1
Auto insurance rates and tort reform	2	1
All other issues	19	7
Don't know / Refused	5	25

Confidence in state government to solve important problems remains low

The public's confidence in state government to tackle important problems remains low. Taken together, 41% of state residents say they are either very confident or somewhat

confident in state government to address important problems effectively. This share is on par with annual results from the *Louisiana Survey* since 2013. After a steep decline from 2009 through 2013, confidence in state government has never substantially recovered. The share has remained near forty percent since then.

Figure 2: Confidence that state government can solve important problems remains low



State residents say economy has worsened over the past year, own finances have not

The survey includes questions asking participants about their own personal financial situation and the economy in Louisiana as a whole. In each case, the questions ask participants to compare the current condition to what it was a year ago.

A substantial majority of participants (72%) say that the state's economy is worse than it was a year ago. Only 6% say it is better, and 20% say it is the same. In contrast, a majority (54%) say their own financial situation is the same as it was a year ago. A smaller share, 29%, say their personal financial situation is worse than it was a year ago. Only 17% say it is better.

These results suggest that many Louisiana residents see a difference between the economic situation of the state and their own

financial situation. Although 25% of participants say both their own financial situation and the state's economy have worsened over the past year, nearly twice as many (47%) say the state's economy is worse but their own financial situation is the same as or better than it was.

Looking just at participants who say their own financial situation is *worse* than it was a year ago, a very large majority of them (85%) say that the state is also in worse economic shape. But, they are not the only ones with a dim view of the state's economy. Looking just at people who say their own financial situation is *the same* as it was a year ago, two-thirds (68%) say the state's economy is worse. Even 61% of the people who say their own financial situation is *better* than it was still say the state's economy is worse. Regardless of what they think about their own financial situation, most Louisianans think the state's economy as a whole has soured over the past year.

Survey Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted among a statewide sample of 781 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 154 respondents interviewed via landline telephone and 627 respondents interviewed on a cellphone, including 476 who do not have a landline telephone.

Approximately four-fifths of the sample (82 percent) was stratified across parishes proportionally to their adult population ensuring geographic representation across the state. The remaining 18 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 2019 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 +/- 6.4 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.

Interviews for this survey were conducted from January 4 to March 1, 2021. However, 80% of interviews occurred from February 1 to March 1, 2021.

The *2021 Louisiana Survey* has a response rate of four 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. 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	42
Wrong direction	46
Don't know/Refused [VOLUNTEERED].....	11

Q2. [OPEN-ENDED QUESTION]

Thinking about the problems facing Louisiana, which problems would you most like the state government to be working on in 2021? **[CALLERS RECORD UP TO FIVE RESPONSES. IF RESPONDENT PROVIDES LESS THAN FIVE, PROMPT WITH "Any others?" UNTIL RESPONDENT HAS NO MORE OR REACHES FIVE.]**

VERBATIM RESPONSES RECORDED AND CODED INTO CATEGORIES (SEE TABLE 1)

Q3.

Which of those problems is the SINGLE MOST important for state government to be working on in 2021?

VERBATIM RESPONSES RECORDED AND CODED INTO CATEGORIES (SEE TABLE 1)

Q4.

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.....	9
Somewhat confident.....	33
Not very confident.....	31
Not at all confident.....	24
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	4

Q5.

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	17
Same	54
Worse.....	29
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	0

Q6.

Now thinking about the economy in Louisiana as a whole, would you say that over the past year the state's economy has gotten better, stayed the same or gotten worse?

Better	6
Same	20
Worse.....	72
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	3