



## **More Louisiana residents say state is heading in the right direction**

But confidence in state government to solve problems and expectations for political compromise remains low

*The first 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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## 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 first 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 from questions asking Louisiana residents about their general attitude about government and politics in the state today. These results include:

- Forty seven percent of Louisiana residents say the state is heading in the right direction, up from 39 percent a year ago. The share saying the state is heading in the wrong direction fell from 50 percent in 2018 to 43 percent today.
- Education and transportation top the list of concerns among Louisiana residents. When asked to name what problems they would most like to see the state government work on in 2019, 34 percent mentioned education and 32 percent mentioned transportation infrastructure.
- The public's confidence in state government to tackle these problems remains low. Taken together, 41 percent of state residents say they are either very confident or somewhat confident in state government to address their most important problem effectively.
- Many state residents have a more positive view about their own financial situation than about the state's economy.
- The share of state residents who assign an A or B grade to the state's public schools has climb modestly from 18 percent in 2015 to 25 percent in 2019. However, grades for economic development, transportation infrastructure, and overall quality of life in the state have falls over the same period.
- Fifty-seven percent of state residents prefer to see the elected officials in state government who share their positions on important issues to work with other politicians they disagree with, even if it results in some disliked policies, rather than to stand up for their positions at the cost of getting little done. At the same time, 80 percent do not expect the parties to work together to solve the state's problems.

# State of the State

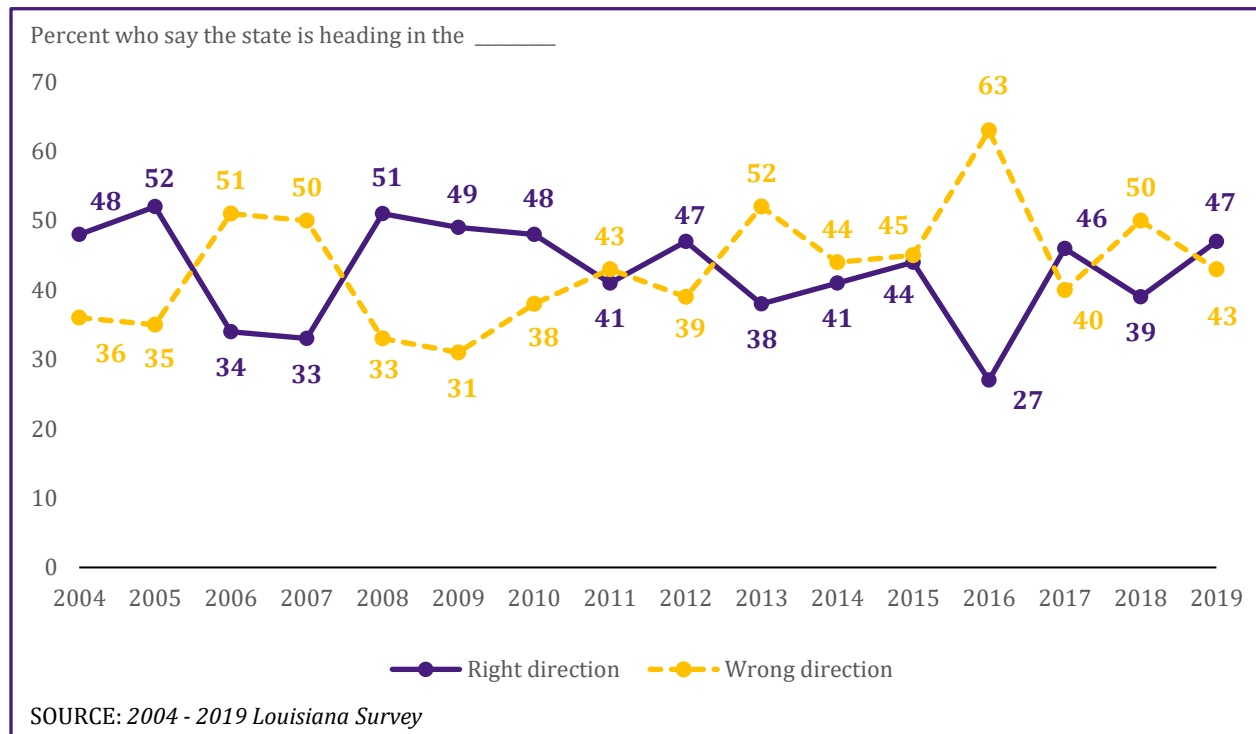
## More say Louisiana is heading in the right direction

As Louisiana approaches elections this fall, more residents say the state is heading in the right direction. Forty seven percent of Louisiana residents say the state is heading in the right direction, up from 39 percent a year ago (see figure 1). The share saying the state is heading in the wrong direction fell from 50 percent in 2018 to 43 percent today.

Assessments of the state are often correlated with a person’s partisan leaning. People who share the same party identification as the

governor tend to view the direction of the state more positively than people do in the opposite party. Unsurprisingly, Democrats are especially positive in their view: 55 percent say the state is heading in the right direction and 37 percent say it is heading in the wrong direction. Perhaps less expected, Republicans do not take an especially negative view of the state’s direction under the administration of Democratic governor John Bel Edwards. They split evenly between those who say the state is heading in the right direction (46 percent) and those who say the state is heading in the wrong direction (45 percent).

**Figure 1: Evaluating the direction of the state, 2004-2019**



## Education and transportation top list of priorities

The 2019 Louisiana Survey included a different approach to understanding the most important concerns of state residents. Rather than simply ask participants to name the single most important problem facing the state, we asked participants to name up to five problems they would most like state government to work on in 2019. We coded the verbatim responses to this open-ended question into issue categories. Table 1 shows the percentage of participants who mentioned each issue.

About one third of participants mentioned education. A similar percentage mentioned transportation infrastructure. The economy (including jobs, wages, business climate, and poverty) as well as the state budget (including comments about spending or

taxes) make up the second tier of public concerns at 25 percent and 21 percent, respectively. Health care and crime make up a third tier at 16 percent and 15 percent, respectively. No more than ten percent of participants mentioned each of the other issues.

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 2019. 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, education tops the list of most frequently mentioned issues. The economy, transportation infrastructure, and the state budget round out the top four most frequently mentioned issues, but in a slightly different order than when asked to name up to five problems.

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

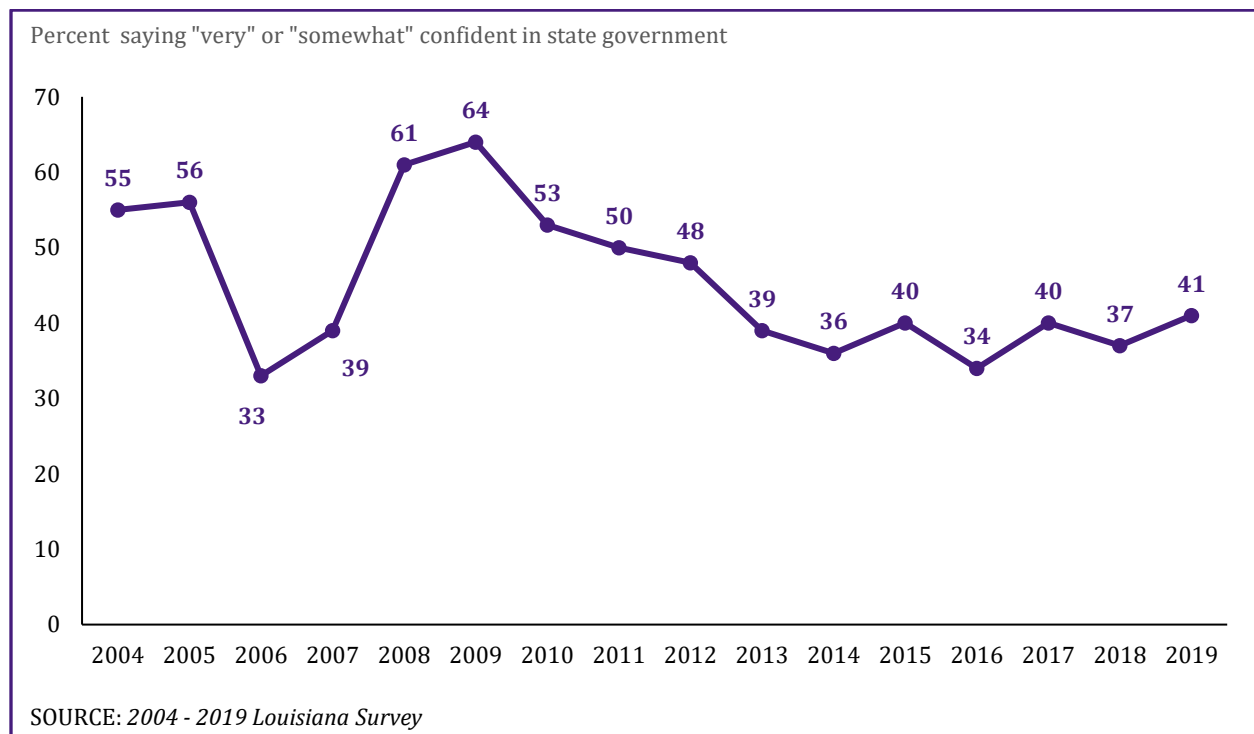
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Mentioned Among Top Five Most Important</b>	<b>Mentioned as Single Most Important</b>
Education	34	16
Transportation infrastructure	32	9
Economy	25	13
Budget	21	9
Health care	16	5
Crime	15	5
Welfare, public assistance, and other social services	10	3
Politics or government	9	3
Law enforcement and the criminal justice system	7	3
Environmental issues (other than coast or natural disasters)	7	2
Coastal protection and restoration	4	1
Flooding, drainage, or preparation for natural disasters	4	1
Housing	4	0
Insurance	3	1
Immigration	2	1
Abortion or reproductive rights	2	1
Gun issues	2	0
Racism or race issues	1	0
All other issues	15	4
Don't know / Refused	7	24

## Confidence in state government to solve important problems remains low

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

their most important problem effectively. This share is on par with annual results from the *Louisiana Survey* since 2013. After declining from its peak at over 60 percent in 2009, confidence in state government has never substantially recovered. Today, 35 percent of state residents are not very confident in state government while another 22 percent are not at all confident.

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





## **State residents have a dimmer view of the state's economy than of their own financial situation**

We asked participants about their own personal financial situation, the economy in their local communities, and the economy in Louisiana as a whole. However, we randomly assigned participants to one of two versions for these questions. We asked one set to assess how their finances and the economy compare to a year ago and asked the other set to evaluate the state of their finances and the economy today.

When compared to a year ago, 51 percent of residents say their personal financial situation is the same. Another 26 percent say it is better than a year ago, and 23 percent say it is worse. When evaluating the local economy, the share saying it has grown worse than a year ago is higher at 27 percent. Forty-three percent say it is the same as a year ago, and 29 percent say it is better than in 2018. Evaluations of the state's economy dip slightly more. Twenty-nine percent say it is worse than a year ago. Forty-one percent say it is the same as a year ago, and 25 percent say it is better.

The pattern is starker among the participants who were asked to rate their financial situation and the economy without an explicit comparison to 2018. Half say their personal financial situation is excellent (10 percent) or good (40 percent). Thirty-three percent say it is only fair, and 17 percent say poor. When evaluating their local economy, however, the share saying excellent or poor drops to 36

percent, with 27 percent saying poor. Even fewer – just 20 percent – say the state's economy is excellent or good. Approximately one-third (32 percent) say the state's economy is poor.

## **Views of public schools improve, but hold steady or slip for other services**

Periodically, the Louisiana Survey asks participants to grade the overall quality of life in Louisiana as well as the quality of various state activities or services such as public schools, transportation infrastructure, and economic development efforts. After declining from 33 percent in 2011 to 18 percent in 2015, the share of Louisiana residents who assign an A or B grade to the state's public schools has rebounded modestly to 25 percent in 2019 (see table 2).

The share of residents giving an A or B to the state's public colleges and universities has held steady in the low sixties since 2015 (that is, the slight difference across years are within the margins of error). Likewise, this share has held steady in the low thirties since 2015 for grades of the quality of health care in the state.

The share of A and B grades has dropped over the past four years for evaluations of Louisiana overall as a place to live (by six percentage points), the state's economic development efforts (by 11 percentage points), and the state's roads, bridges and highways (by six percentage points).

**Table 2: The percentage of state residents grading Louisiana and its public services with an A or B in each of the last four election years**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2019</b>
Louisiana as a place to live	39	63	41	35
State economic development efforts to attract, recruit, and create jobs	<i>Not asked</i>	33	38	27
Louisiana roads, bridges, and highways	12	16	14	8
Overall quality of health care in Louisiana	27	34	31	32
The state's Coastal protection and restoration efforts	<i>Not asked</i>	36	<i>Not asked</i>	36
Louisiana's public colleges and universities	68	70	64	61
State government efforts to reduce crime and ensure public safety	<i>Not asked</i>	40	<i>Not asked</i>	25
Louisiana's public schools overall	22	33	18	25

## **Most want political compromise, but few expect to see it**

A majority of Louisiana residents wants to see their elected officials compromise, but few expect to actually see it. Fifty-seven percent prefer elected officials in state government who share their positions on important issues to work with other elected officials they

disagree with, even if it results in some disliked policies, rather than to stand up for their positions at the cost of getting little done.

However, only 18 percent of state residents expect that Democrats and Republicans in state government will find a way to work together and solve problems this year. Eighty percent expect partisan fighting instead.

## 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.

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.

Interviews for this survey were conducted from February 7 to March 15, 2019.

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.

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 .....	47
Wrong direction .....	43
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 2019? **[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 2019?

**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.....	10
Somewhat confident.....	31
Not very confident.....	35
Not at all confident.....	22
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	2

**Q5a. [FOR Q5 TO Q7, RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED EITHER TO BATTERY A OR TO BATTERY B.]**

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 .....	26
Same .....	51
Worse.....	23
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	0

**Q6a. [FOR Q5 TO Q7, RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED EITHER TO BATTERY A OR TO BATTERY B.]**

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 .....	25
Same .....	41
Worse.....	29
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	5

**Q7a. [FOR Q5 TO Q7, RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED EITHER TO BATTERY A OR TO BATTERY B.]**

Now thinking about the community where you live, would you say that over the past year the economy in your community has gotten better, stayed the same or gotten worse?

Better .....	29
Same .....	43
Worse.....	27
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	2

**Q5b. [FOR Q5 TO Q7, RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED EITHER TO BATTERY A OR TO BATTERY B.]**

Thinking about your personal finances, how would you rate your own personal financial situation? Would you say you are in excellent shape, good shape, only fair shape or poor shape financially?

Excellent .....	10
Good .....	40
Only fair .....	33
Poor .....	17
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

**Q6b. [FOR Q5 TO Q7, RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED EITHER TO BATTERY A OR TO BATTERY B.]**

Thinking about the economy in Louisiana as a whole, how would you rate economic conditions in this state today - as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

Excellent .....	2
Good .....	18
Only fair .....	47
Poor .....	32
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

**Q7b. [FOR Q5 TO Q7, RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED EITHER TO BATTERY A OR TO BATTERY B.]**

Now thinking about the community where you live, how would you rate economic conditions in your community today - as excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

Excellent .....	5
Good .....	30
Only fair .....	37
Poor .....	27
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	0

**Q8.**

As you know, students are often given a grade A through F to evaluate their performance. What grade would you give Louisiana as a place to live?

A .....	10
B .....	24
C .....	41
D .....	16
F .....	7
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

**Q9.**

What grade would you give to state economic development efforts to attract, recruit, and create jobs?

A .....	7
B .....	21
C .....	37
D .....	21
F .....	11
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	3



**Q10.**

What grade would you give to Louisiana's roads, bridges, and highways?

A.....	3
B.....	6
C.....	23
D.....	31
F.....	37
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	1

**Q11.**

What grade would you give to the overall quality of health care in Louisiana?

A.....	10
B.....	22
C.....	33
D.....	19
F.....	14
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	2

**Q12.**

What grade would you give to the state's coastal protection and restoration efforts?

A.....	9
B.....	28
C.....	33
D.....	15
F.....	6
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	10

**Q13.**

What grade would you give to Louisiana's public colleges and universities?

A.....	18
B.....	44
C.....	24
D.....	7
F.....	2
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	6

**Q14.**

What grade would you give to the state government efforts to reduce crime and ensure public safety?

A.....	6
B.....	19
C.....	38
D.....	21
F.....	14
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	3

**Q15. [ASKED TO ONLY HALF OF SAMPLE, RANDOMLY SELECTED]**

What grade would you give to Louisiana's public schools overall?

A.....	12
B.....	27
C.....	38
D.....	10
F.....	7
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	6

**Q16.**

On another topic, thinking about elected officials in state government who share your positions on the most important issues facing Louisiana. Should they work with elected officials they disagree with, even if it results in some policies you don't like, or should they stand up for their positions, even if that means little gets done in state government?

They should work with others they disagree with.....	57
They should stand up for their positions.....	38
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	5

**Q17.**

This year, do you think Republicans and Democrats in state government will work together to solve problems or do you think they will bicker and oppose one another even if it keeps them from solving problems?

Work together.....	18
Bicker and oppose one another.....	80
Don't know/Refused [VOL.] .....	3