

# THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2017



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



## Public Approves of Medicaid Expansion, But Remains Divided on Affordable Care Act

Opinion of the ACA Improves Among Democrats and  
Independents Since 2014



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

Released: April 11, 2017

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
ON THIS REPORT:**  
Dr. Michael Henderson  
225-578-5149  
[mbhende1@lsu.edu](mailto:mbhende1@lsu.edu)



## 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.

## Principal Authors

Michael Henderson  
Assistant Professor, Manship School of Mass Communication  
Research Director, Public Policy Research Lab

Belinda Davis  
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science  
Associate Director, Public Policy Research Lab

## Overview

Louisiana residents approve of the state's decision to expand its Medicaid program last year under the auspices of the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA). However, the public remains deeply divided and relatively less favorable to the ACA itself. The *2017 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at LSU's Manship School of Mass Communication, shows that:

- About three fourths of residents (72 percent) approve of expansion. Approval of the move extends across a number of demographic and political groups. Democrats (91 percent) and independents (73 percent) approve of Medicaid expansion. While Republicans are less enthusiastic about the policy, they lean toward approval (51 percent approval versus 45 percent disapproval).
- Overall, just 42 percent of state residents have a favorable opinion of the ACA. About half of the state (51 percent) has an unfavorable opinion of the federal health care law. There are large cleavages by race, household income and partisanship. Indeed, 76 percent of Democrats have a favorable opinion of the law, while 80 percent of Republicans have an unfavorable opinion.
- Opinion of the ACA is moving in a more favorable direction. The share of respondents with an unfavorable opinion of the ACA in 2017 is seven percentage points lower than it was in 2014 (58 percent), and the share with a favorable opinion is eleven percentage points higher than it was three years ago (31 percent). The shift in opinion has been especially pronounced among Democrats and independents.
- Being told that the ACA allows for Medicaid expansion in Louisiana does not, on average, improve opinion of the federal health care law. In contrast, describing the law as "Obamacare" does increase the share of unfavorable opinions of the ACA when the provision for Medicaid expansion is also mentioned.

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 fifth in a series of six releases on results from the *2017 Louisiana Survey*.

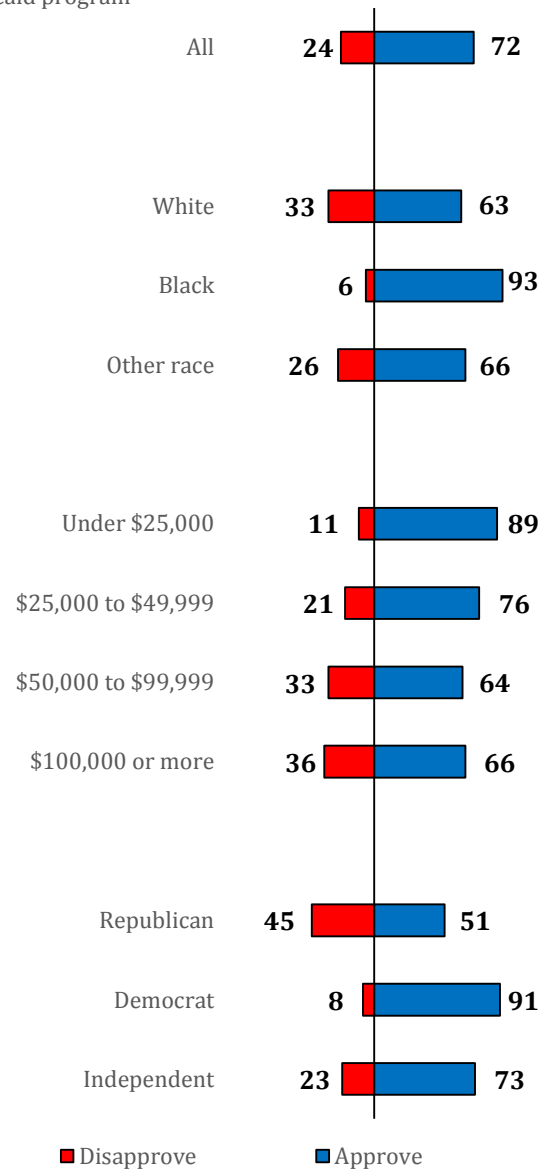
## Widespread Approval of Medicaid Expansion in Louisiana

In 2016, Louisiana expanded its Medicaid program to provide health care coverage to more individuals as allowed under the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA). State residents strongly approve of this move. About three fourths of residents (72 percent) approve of expansion (figure 1). Approval of the move extends across a number of demographic and political groups. For example, majorities of whites and blacks approve of Medicaid expansion as do majorities in upper and lower income households.

Democrats (91 percent) and independents (73 percent) approve of Medicaid expansion. Republicans are less enthusiastic about the policy change but lean toward approval over disapproval (51 percent to 45 percent).

**Figure 1: Widespread Approval of Medicaid Expansion in Louisiana**

Percent who say they \_\_\_\_\_ of the state expanding its Medicaid program



SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey

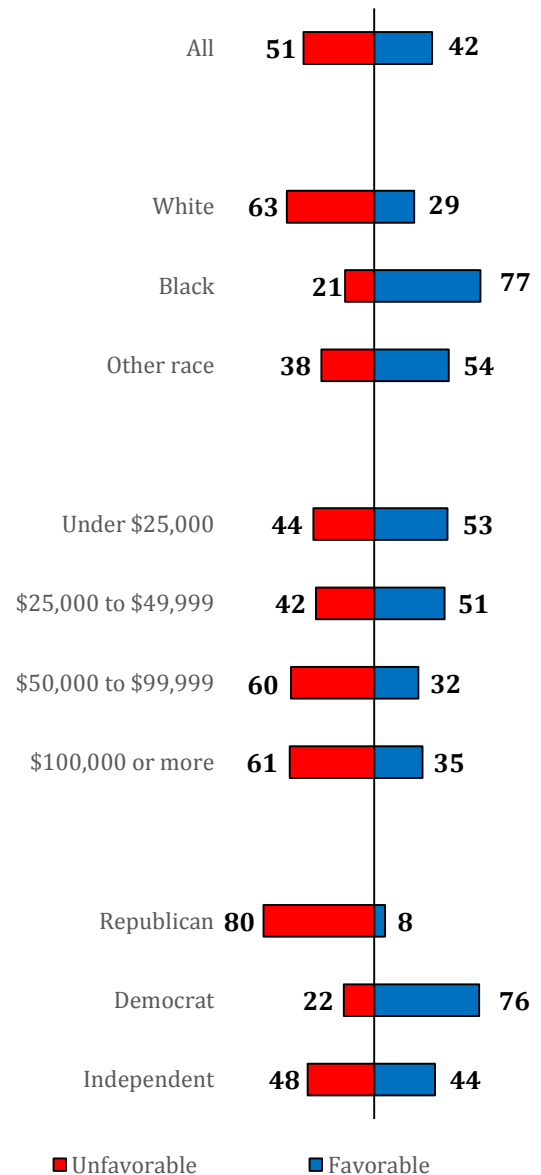
## Divisions over the Affordable Care Act

Despite robust support for Medicaid expansion in the state, Louisiana residents have a less favorable view of the ACA itself. Overall, just 42 percent of state residents have a favorable opinion of the ACA. This share is 30 percentage points less than the share who approves of Medicaid expansion. About half of the state (51 percent) has an unfavorable opinion of the federal health care law.

Opinion of the ACA is also far more divided than opinion of Medicaid expansion (figure 2). There are large cleavages by race, household income and partisanship. Most whites have an unfavorable opinion of the ACA, but most blacks and most residents of other races have a favorable opinion of the law. Slightly more than half of state residents with household incomes below \$50,000 have a favorable opinion of the ACA, but an even larger share – about 60 percent – of residents with household incomes of \$50,000 or more have an unfavorable opinion. Unlike in the case of Medicaid expansion, majorities of Republicans and Democrats stand on opposite sides of the ACA: The share of the latter who have a favorable opinion of the law (76 percent) is roughly as large as the share of the former who have an unfavorable opinion (80 percent).

**Figure 2: Louisiana Divided Over ACA**

Percent who say they have generally \_\_\_\_\_ opinion of the Affordable Care Act



SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey

## Opinion of Affordable Care Act Moving in More Favorable Direction

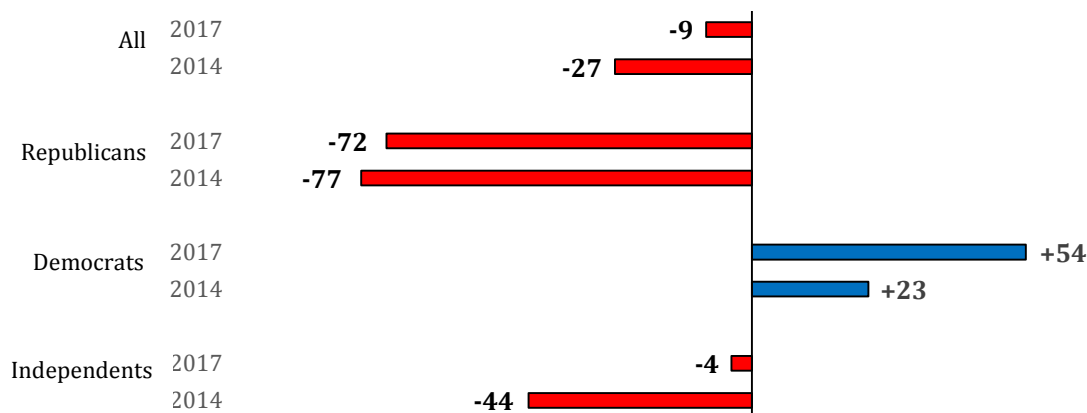
This partisan gap – which is nearly twice as large over the ACA as over Medicaid expansion – is largely a consequence of uneven softening of opinion of the law over recent years. Across the state as a whole, opinion toward the ACA has moved in a favorable direction since 2014 when the *Louisiana Survey* last included this question about the ACA.<sup>1</sup> The share of respondents with an unfavorable opinion of the ACA in 2017 is seven percentage points lower than it was in 2014 (58 percent), and the share with a favorable opinion is eleven percentage points higher than it was three years ago (31 percent). Net favorability toward the ACA in Louisiana (the percent with a

favorable opinion minus the percent with an unfavorable opinion) went from -27 to -9.

The shift in opinion has been especially pronounced among Democrats and independents. The ACA had a net favorability rating of +23 among Democrats in 2014 (54 percent favorable and 31 percent unfavorable). Today, the law has a net favorability of +54 among Democrats (76 percent favorable and 22 percent unfavorable). Independents also saw a strong shift in a more favorable direction, from a net favorability of -44 in 2014 (22 percent favorable and 66 unfavorable) to a net favorability of -4 in 2017 (44 percent favorable and 48 percent unfavorable). In contrast, the balance of opinion among Republicans remained relatively stable. In 2014 it was -77 (10 percent favorable and 87

**Figure 3: Opinion on ACA Moving in Favorable Direction**

Net favorability toward the Affordable Care Act in 2014 and 2017 by party identification



NOTE: Net favorability is the percent favorable minus the percent unfavorable.

SOURCE: 2014 and 2017 Louisiana Surveys

<sup>1</sup> The wording of the question itself is identical in the 2014 and 2017 surveys: “As you may know, the Affordable Care Act was signed into law in 2010. Given what you know about the Affordable Care Act, do you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of it?” However, the 2014 survey also included instructions for callers to clarify that the ACA is sometimes known as “Obamacare” *only if* the respondent asks if the ACA is Obamacare. Callers were instructed not to independently introduce the term “Obamacare” into the question. Unlike 2014, the

version of the 2017 question discussed in this paragraph did not allow callers to use the term “Obamacare” if a respondent introduced the term. This was done because the 2017 survey also included a different version of the question that inserted the phrase “sometimes called Obamacare” into the wording. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the different versions of the question in order to test the impact of the term “Obamacare” on responses. The results of this experimental design are discussed more fully below.



percent unfavorable) and in 2017 it is -72 (eight percent favorable and 80 percent unfavorable).

## Knowledge of Medicaid Expansion Provision Has No Impact on Opinion of Affordable Care Act

Unfavorable opinions of the ACA in Louisiana are *not* driven by a failure to understand that the law allows for the popular policy of expanding Medicaid. To test for this possibility in the *2017 Louisiana Survey*, respondents were randomly assigned either to the question measuring favorability of the ACA described above or to another version of the question that also included the statement: “One of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act allows states like Louisiana to expand their Medicaid programs to cover more people who did not have health insurance.”

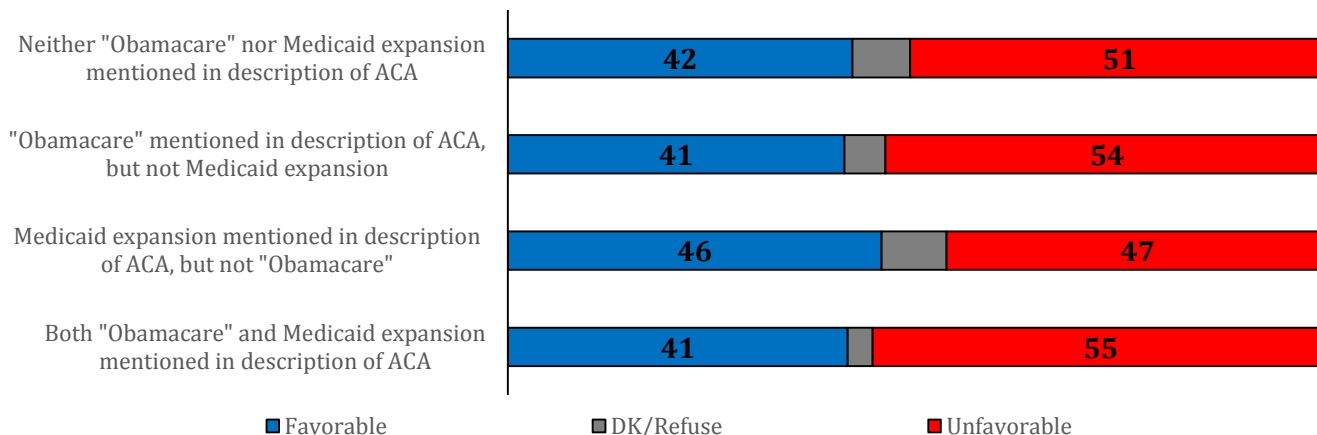
Additionally, respondents were further split randomly across two other versions of these questions that also included the phrase “sometimes called Obamacare” after first referring to the health care law as the Affordable

Care Act. The purpose of this variation is to determine the effect of a potentially more familiar (and more polarizing) title on respondents’ opinions of the ACA. Thus, there are four versions of the question about favorability toward the ACA: One that mentions neither the term “Obamacare” nor Medicaid expansion; a second that mentions the term “Obamacare” but not Medicaid expansion; a third that mentions Medicaid expansion but not “Obamacare;” and a fourth mentioning both “Obamacare” and Medicaid expansion.

Being told that the ACA allows for Medicaid expansion in Louisiana does not, on average, improve opinion of the federal health care law (figure 4). This is true whether or not the law is also described as “Obamacare.” In contrast, describing the law as “Obamacare” does increase the share of unfavorable opinions *when the provision for Medicaid expansion is also mentioned*.<sup>2</sup> In other words, even potentially favorable information about a popular provision of the ACA is undercut by the implications of using the term “Obamacare.”

**Figure 4: Connecting Medicaid Expansion to ACA Does Little to Change Opinions of ACA**

Percent saying they have a generally \_\_\_\_\_ opinion of the Affordable Care Act



NOTE: Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of four versions of the question. The versions differed in the inclusion of the phrase “Obamacare” and reference to Medicaid expansion in the description of the Affordable Care Act.

SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey

<sup>2</sup> When the Medicaid expansion provision is not also mentioned, the term “Obamacare” has no particular impact on opinions of the ACA.



# 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.

As you may know, Medicaid is a program to provide health coverage mostly to low-income individuals. Last year 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	72
Disapprove	24
Don't know/Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	3

Q2A. [RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO ONLY ONE OF Q2A, Q2B, Q2C OR Q2D.]

As you may know, the Affordable Care Act was signed in to law in 2010. Given what you know about the Affordable Care Act, do you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of it?

Favorable	42
Unfavorable	51
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	7

Q2B. [RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO ONLY ONE OF Q2A, Q2B, Q2C OR Q2D.]

As you may know, the Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare, was signed into law in 2010. Given what you know about the Affordable Care Act, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?

Favorable	41
Unfavorable	54
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	5

Q2C. [RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO ONLY ONE OF Q2A, Q2B, Q2C OR Q2D.]

As you may know, the Affordable Care Act was signed into law in 2010. One of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act allows states like Louisiana to expand their Medicaid programs to cover more people who did not have health insurance. Given what you know about the Affordable Care Act, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?

Favorable	46
Unfavorable	47
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	8

Q2D. [RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO ONLY ONE OF Q2A, Q2B, Q2C OR Q2D.]

As you may know, the Affordable Care Act, sometimes called Obamacare, was signed into law in 2010. One of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act allows states like Louisiana to expand their Medicaid programs to cover more people who did not have health insurance. Given what you know about the Affordable Care Act, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it?

Favorable	41
Unfavorable	55
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	3