

THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2017

LSU

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



More Optimism about Direction of State, but Few Say Economy Improving

Share saying Louisiana is heading in the right direction rises
from 27 to 46 percent



The second 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 and 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 attitudes toward 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

Optimism about the future of Louisiana and confidence in state government to solve important challenges are on the rise, but at the same time the public remains concerned about the state's budgetary problems and few see an improving economy. The *2017 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at LSU'sanship School of Mass Communication, shows that:

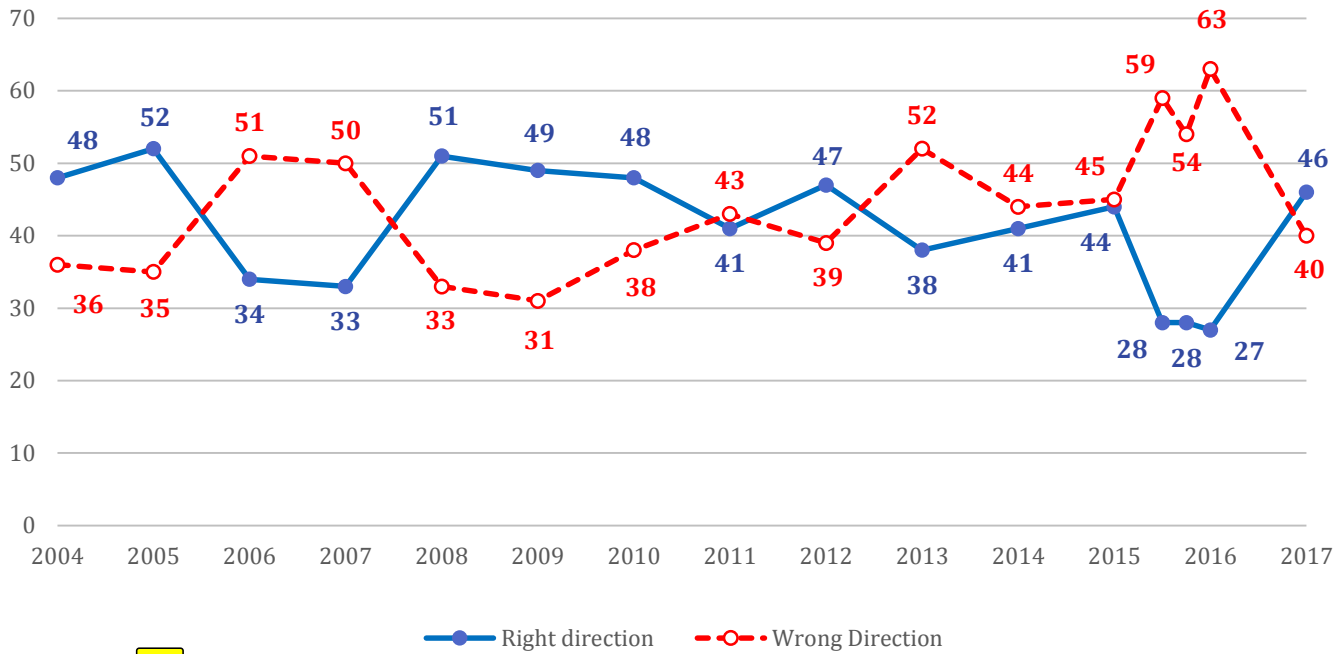
- For the first time since 2012, the share of Louisiana residents who think the state is heading in the right direction (46 percent) exceeds the share who think it is heading in the wrong direction (40 percent). The latter marks a 23 percentage point shift from a historically high pessimism about the direction of the state last year.
- For the second year in a row, the state government's budget challenges top the list of residents' concerns about the state. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) named budgetary issues as the most important problem facing Louisiana. The economy was named about as often (21 percent) as the budget. Education was named third most often (15 percent).
- The share saying they are "very" or "somewhat" confident in state government to effectively address important problems rose six points from 34 percent in 2016 to 40 percent in 2017. This marks only the second time since 2009 that confidence has risen from one year to the next.
- The public has a somewhat dim view of the state's economic health: 40 percent say the state's economy is worse off today than a year ago. A share of nearly the same size (39 percent) say the economy is about the same as it was a year ago, while just 16 percent say the state's economy has improved.
- Residents give the highest grades to the state's colleges and universities (58 percent A or B grades) and to the overall quality of life in Louisiana (55 percent A or B grades). The public assigns the lowest grades to public schools (39 percent D or F grades) and roads, bridges and highways (63 percent D or F grades).

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

Figure 1: Rising Optimism about Direction of the State

Percent who say the state is heading in the _____



SOURCE: 2004-2017 Louisiana Survey, Summer 2015 Election Survey, and Fall 2015 Election Survey

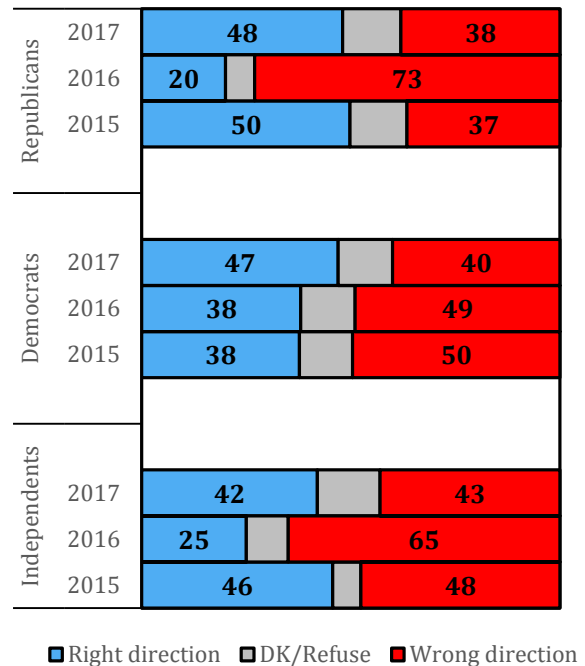
Optimism about Direction of the State is on the Rise

More residents think Louisiana is heading in the right direction than think it is heading in the wrong direction. The pattern marks a reversal in mood. From 2013 through 2016, the share who believed the state was heading in the wrong direction outnumbered those thinking it was heading in the right direction (figure 1). Indeed, this share hit a record high last year when 63 percent said the state was heading in the wrong direction. That share has fallen to 40 percent this year, while the share saying the state is heading in the right direction rose by nearly 20 points from 27 to 46 percent.

Republicans, in particular, are driving the mood change. Last year, just 20 percent of Republicans said the state was heading in the right direction and 73 percent said it was heading in the wrong direction. Now, 48 percent feel the state is heading in the right direction and 38 percent say it is heading in the wrong direction (figure 2).

Figure 2: Republicans Show Most Change

Percent who say the state is heading in the _____



SOURCE: 2015 - 2017 Louisiana Survey

Looking back over a three year period, the results stand out for last year – just three months after a Democrat was elected to the state’s top office. In contrast, the mood of Republicans in 2017 is strikingly similar to 2015.

Democrats show a more modest bump in optimism since last year – with a nine percentage point increase in the share saying the state is heading in the right direction, this is only about a third of the size of the Republican shift. Together, these shifts have erased the partisan gap in mood.

Independents have shifted in the same direction but to a smaller degree than Republicans. As a result, about equal shares of Independents say the state is heading in the wrong direction versus heading in the right direction.

Budget Remains Top Concern

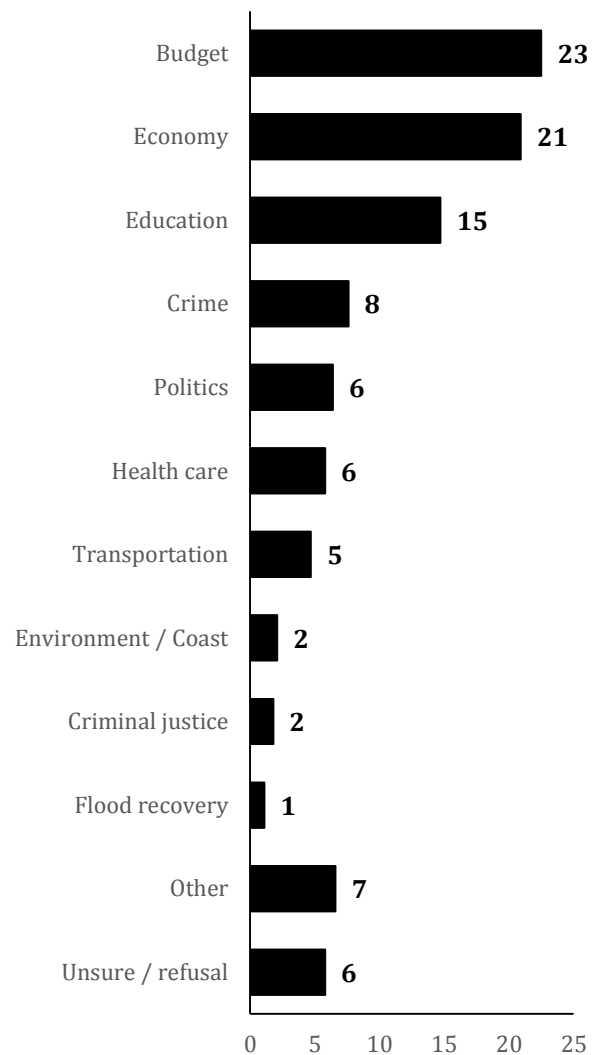
For the second year in a row, the state government’s budget challenges top the list of residents’ concerns about the state. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) named budgetary issues as the most important problem facing Louisiana (figure 3). The economy (including mentions of jobs, prices and income) was named about as often (21 percent). Education was the third most often named problem (15 percent).

Public confidence in state government to effectively deal with these challenges has crept up slightly. The share saying they are “very” or “somewhat” confident rose six points from 34 percent in 2016 to 40 percent in 2017 (figure 4).¹ This marks only the second time since 2009 that confidence has increased from one year to the next. Yet, despite the uptick, confidence remains well below the heights seen in the first two years of the Blanco and Jindal administrations.

¹ The question specifically asks respondents about their confidence in state government to effectively address the problem they named in the previous question as the single most important problem facing the state. There is no evidence that confidence varies by whether respondents named the budget or the

Figure 3: Budget, Economy Top Priorities

Percent saying ____ is state's most important problem



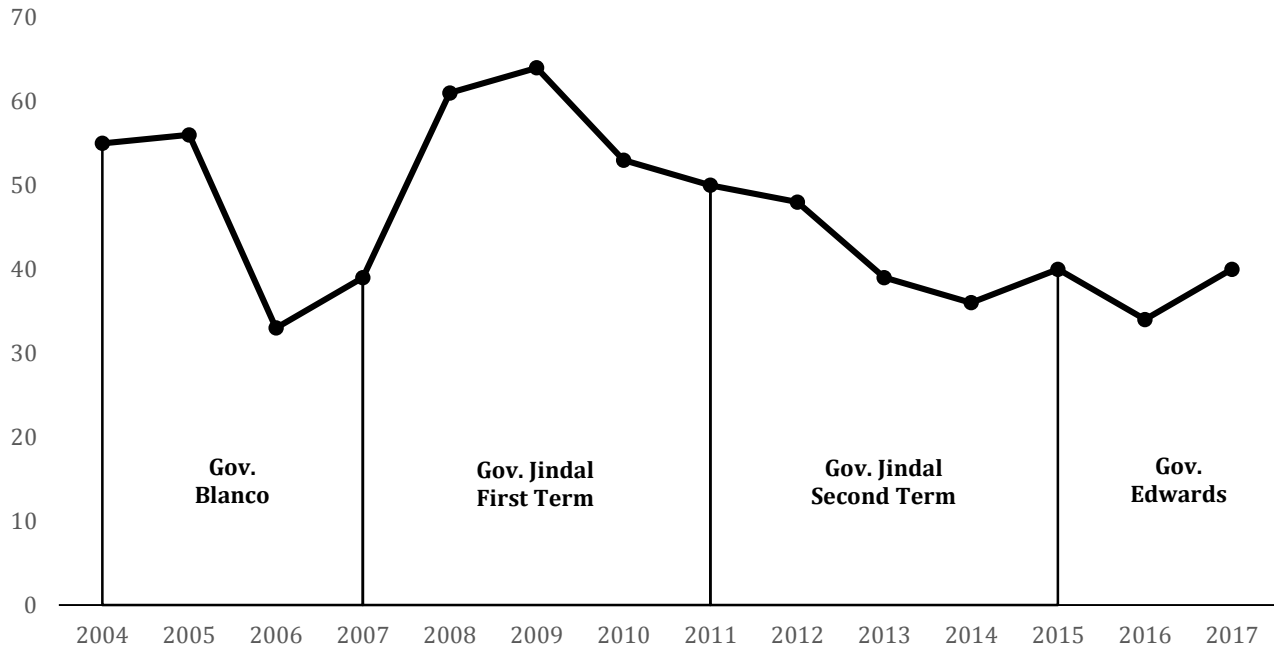
NOTE: Verbatim responses to open-ended question ("In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing the state of Louisiana?") coded into categories with more than one percent of sample.

SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey

economy. There is modest evidence that confidence is slightly lower for those who named education as the most important problem. There are too few respondents in the remaining categories of problems to estimate difference in confidence with meaningful precision.

Figure 4: Slight Uptick in Confidence That State Can Solve Important Problems

Percent saying "very" or "somewhat" confident in state government to effectively address state's most important problem



SOURCE: 2003 - 2017 Louisiana Survey

No Improvement in Economic Assessments

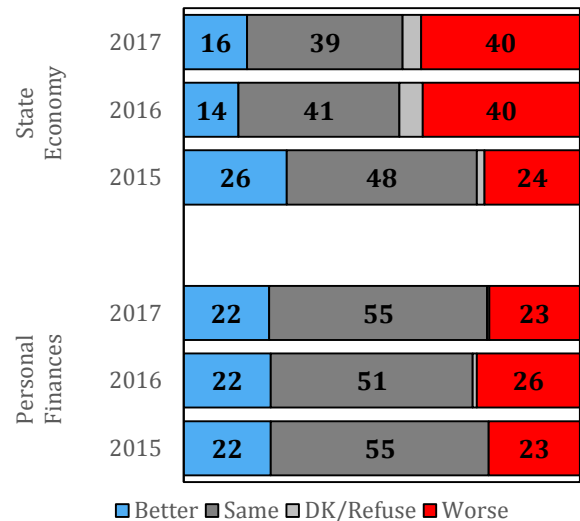
The cause driving the boost in public optimism about the direction of the state remains unclear in the survey results. However, one hypothesis can probably be rejected. There is no evidence that the public's perceptions of economic wellbeing are boosting overall assessments of the state.

Compared to 2016, there has been no change in how the public sees their personal financial situation. Most (55 percent) feel their financial situation is the same as a year ago (figure 5). Just under one quarter (22 percent) say they are financially better off than a year ago, and about the same share (23 percent) say they are worse off. This response pattern has been consistent during the past three iterations of the *Louisiana Survey*.

The public has a more negative view of the state's economic health. Nearly twice as many (40 percent) say the state's economy is worse off

Figure 5: No Change in Economic Assessments from 2016 to 2017

Percent saying ___ better off, worse off, or about the same as a year ago



NOTE: Prior to 2017 the question about the state's economy used the phrase "business conditions in the state of Louisiana" rather than "the economy in Louisiana as a whole."

SOURCE: 2015 - 2017 Louisiana Surveys

today than it was a year ago than say they are personally worse off. A share of about the same size (39 percent) say the economy is about the same as it was a year ago, while just 16 percent say the state's economy has improved.

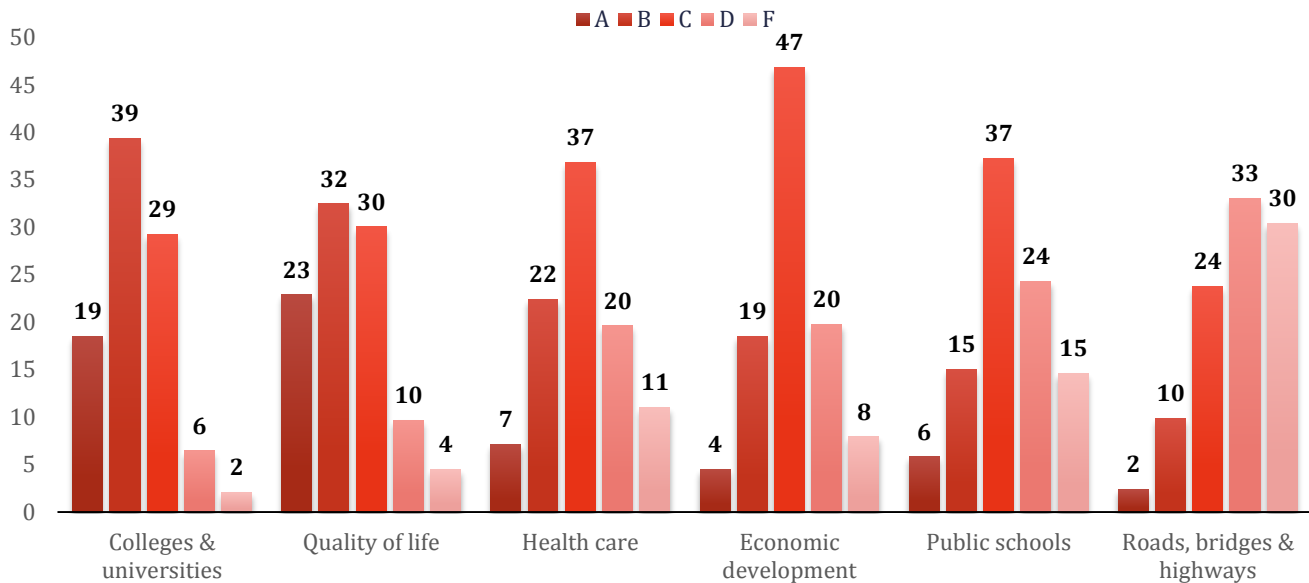
Top Grades for Higher Education and Quality of Life

For more than a decade the *Louisiana Survey* has asked respondents to grade various aspects of life in the state, including a number of government services. As has been typical in recent years,

respondents give the highest marks (that is, the most A or B grades) to the state's colleges and universities and to Louisiana as a place to live overall (figure 6). In fact, assessments of the state overall as a place to live show strong signs of improvement. A year ago, 39 percent gave overall quality of life in the state a grade of A or B; today, 55 percent do so. The remaining topics for evaluation are comparable to past years. As is typical, the public assigns the lowest marks to public schools (39 percent D or F grades) and roads, bridges and highways (63 percent D or F grades).

Figure 6: Higher Education and Overall Quality of Life Receive Most A and B Grades

Percent assigning each grade to each feature of the state



NOTE: Darker columns represent higher grades on A to F scale. Items sorted left to right by combined percent A & B grades.

SOURCE: 2017 Louisiana Survey

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.

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	46
Wrong direction	40
Don't know/Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	15

Q2. [OPEN-ENDED QUESTION]

In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing the state of Louisiana?

VERBATIM RESPONSES RECORDED AND CODED INTO CATEGORIES (SEE FIGURE 3)

Q3.

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	5
Somewhat confident	35
Not very confident	36
Not at all confident	20
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	3

Q4.

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	22
Same	55
Worse	23
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	1

Q5.

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	16
Same	39
Worse	40
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	5

Q6.

As you may know, students are often given a grade A through F to evaluate their performance. We would like you to give grades to various aspects of life in Louisiana. First, what grade would you give to Louisiana as a place to live?

A	23
B	32
C	30
D	10
F	4
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	1

Q7.

What grade would you give to state economic development efforts?

A	4
B	19
C	47
D	20
F	8
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	2

Q8.

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

A	2
B	10
C	24
D	33
F	30
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	0

Q9.

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

A	7
B	22
C	37
D	20
F	11
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	3

Q10.

What grade would you give to state colleges and universities?

A	19
B	39
C	29
D	6
F	2
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	4

Q11.

What grade would you give to public schools in Louisiana?

A	6
B	15
C	37
D	24
F	15
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	3