

# THE LOUISIANA SURVEY 2018

**LSU**

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



## **Criminal justice reforms and Medicaid expansion remain popular with Louisiana public**

Popular support for work requirements and copayments for Medicaid



*The fifth in a series of six reports from the 2018 Louisiana Survey*

April 13, 2018

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION  
ON THIS REPORT:**

Dr. Michael Henderson  
225-578-5149  
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.

For Further Information on the Reilly Center:

Jenee Slocum, Director  
225-938-9333  
jenee@lsu.edu

# About the Louisiana Survey

The *2018 Louisiana Survey* is the seventeenth 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 *2018 Louisiana Survey*, this core is supplemented by measures of perceptions of political polarization in the state and support for compromise; trust in government and media; opinion on proposals to address the state's "fiscal cliff;" beliefs about the role of government in business and the economy; approval of major recent policy developments such as criminal justice reform and Medicaid expansion; and beliefs about gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

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 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  
Director, Public Policy Research Lab

Belinda Davis  
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, College of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Associate Director, Public Policy Research Lab

## Overview

The *2018 Louisiana Survey*, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs, examined public opinion about changes in two major areas of state policy during the John Bel Edwards Administration – criminal justice reform and Medicaid expansion. Results show:

- Criminal justice reform remains popular in Louisiana. Today, 61 percent of state residents approve of the changes made in 2017, while just 30 percent disapprove. Democrats are the most approving of the policy changes, but approval is high among independents as well. Republicans, on the other hand, are divided nearly evenly.
- Even as Louisiana residents continue to approve of the state's changes to its criminal justice system, there is at least one sign that support may be waning. In 2017, 72 percent of state residents supported judicial discretion in sentencing over mandatory minimum sentences. Today, that share has slipped somewhat to 64 percent.
- The changes to the state's criminal justice system have not increased perceptions of the system's fairness. Today, 54 percent do not think the system is fair. These perceptions are more prevalent among Democrats and non-white residents of the state than they were a year ago.
- Public perceptions of crime remain stable. In 2017, 65 percent of state residents said crime in Louisiana had increased over the previous five years. Today, 68 percent say so.
- Most Louisiana residents (58 percent) favor the death penalty.
- Most Louisiana residents continue to approve of the state's expansion of the Medicaid program: 69 percent approve and 24 percent disapprove. Democrats overwhelmingly approve of the expansion (92 percent), as do a majority of independents (68 percent). Republicans remain divided with 47 percent approval and 46 percent disapproval. However, relatively few state residents (35 percent) even know the state has expanded its Medicaid program.
- Proposal to add work requirements and copayments to Medicaid receive majority, bipartisan support.

The *2018 Louisiana Survey* was administered over the telephone from January 26 to March 3, 2018, to both landline and cell phone respondents. The project includes a representative sample of 852 adult Louisiana residents. The total sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.4 percentage points.

This is the fifth in a series of six releases on results from the *2018 Louisiana Survey*.

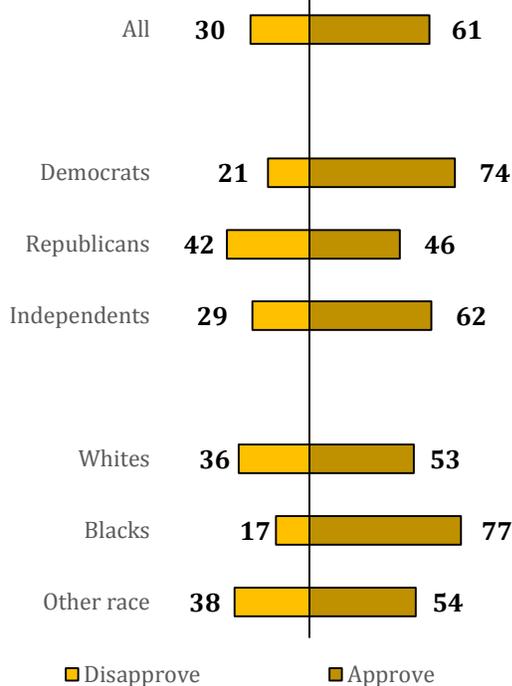
## Majority of state residents approve of 2017 criminal justice reforms

Criminal justice reform remains popular in Louisiana. In 2017, the state made several changes to its criminal justice system, such as shortening prison sentences for certain crimes. Today, 61 percent of state residents approve of those changes, while just 30 percent disapprove (Figure 1).

Democrats are the most approving of the policy changes: 74 percent approve and 21 percent disapprove, for a net approval of +53. Approval is high among independents as well: 62 percent approval and 29 percent disapproval, for a net approval of +33. Republicans, on the other hand, are divided on recent criminal justice reforms, splitting almost evenly between approval (46 percent) and disapproval (42 percent).

**Figure 1: Majority approves of criminal justice reforms**

Percent saying they \_\_\_\_\_ of changes Louisiana made to its criminal justice system



SOURCE: 2018 Louisiana Survey

## Support declines for move from mandatory minimum sentences

Even though Louisiana residents approve of the state's recent changes to its criminal justice system, there is at least one sign that support may be waning from 2017. This year's survey repeats a question from the [2017 Louisiana Survey](#) that measures support for a particular approach to criminal justice reform: "As you may know, mandatory minimum sentences require those convicted of certain crimes to serve a certain length of time in prison. Some people say that instead of mandatory minimums, judges should have the flexibility to determine sentences based on the facts of each case. Do you support or oppose letting judges have the flexibility to set sentences?" In 2017, 72 percent of state residents supported judicial discretion in sentencing over mandatory minimums. Today, the share is 64 percent (Figure 2). Net favorability has slipped from +47 to +33.

Support has dropped across demographic and political groups. In 2017, net support for judicial discretion rather than mandatory minimums was +50 among whites and +41 among blacks. Today, net favorability is +39 and +23 for these groups, respectively. There was no difference across partisan affiliation in 2017, but today Republicans and independents are more supportive of judicial discretion in sentencing than Democrats, whose net favorability for this policy fell by half from +46 to +22.

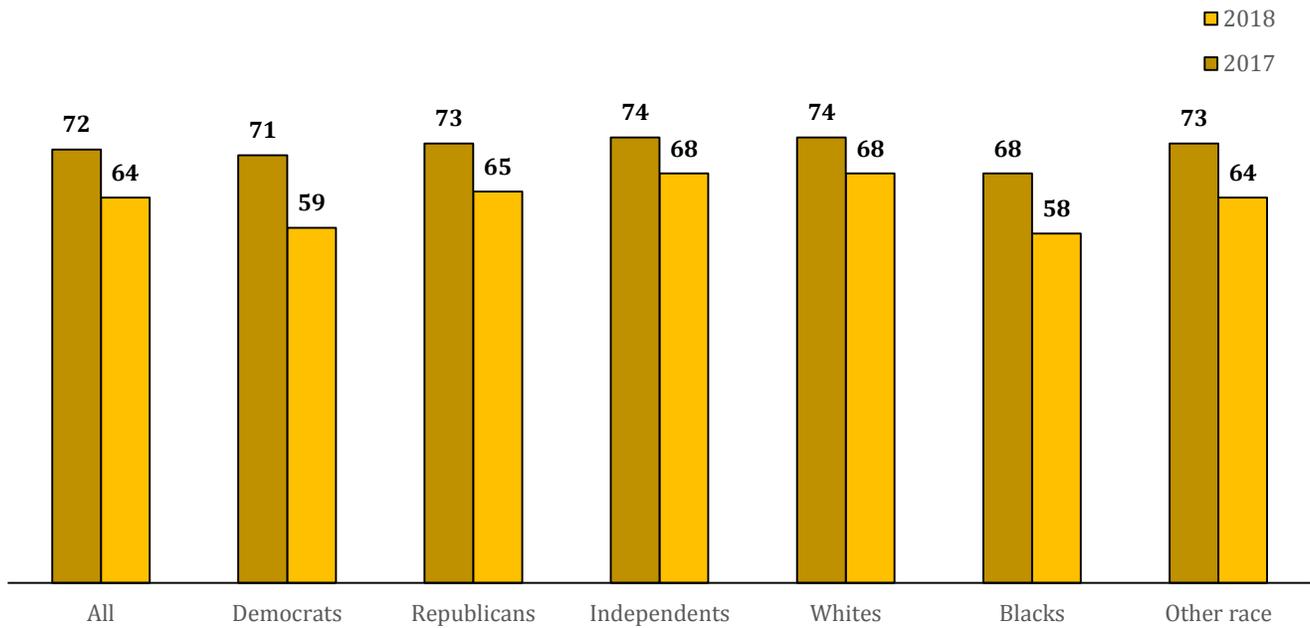
## Racial disparities in perceptions of criminal justice system's fairness continue

The changes to the state's criminal justice system have not increased perceptions of the system's fairness. A year ago, 51 percent of state residents disagreed with the statement, "Louisiana's current criminal justice system is fair." Today, 54 percent disagree that the system is fair (Figure 3). In fact, non-white residents of the state and Democrats are more likely to disagree with the statement than a year ago.

---

**Figure 2: Declining support for eliminating mandatory minimum sentences**

Percent who support letting judges have the flexibility to set sentences instead of requiring mandatory minimums

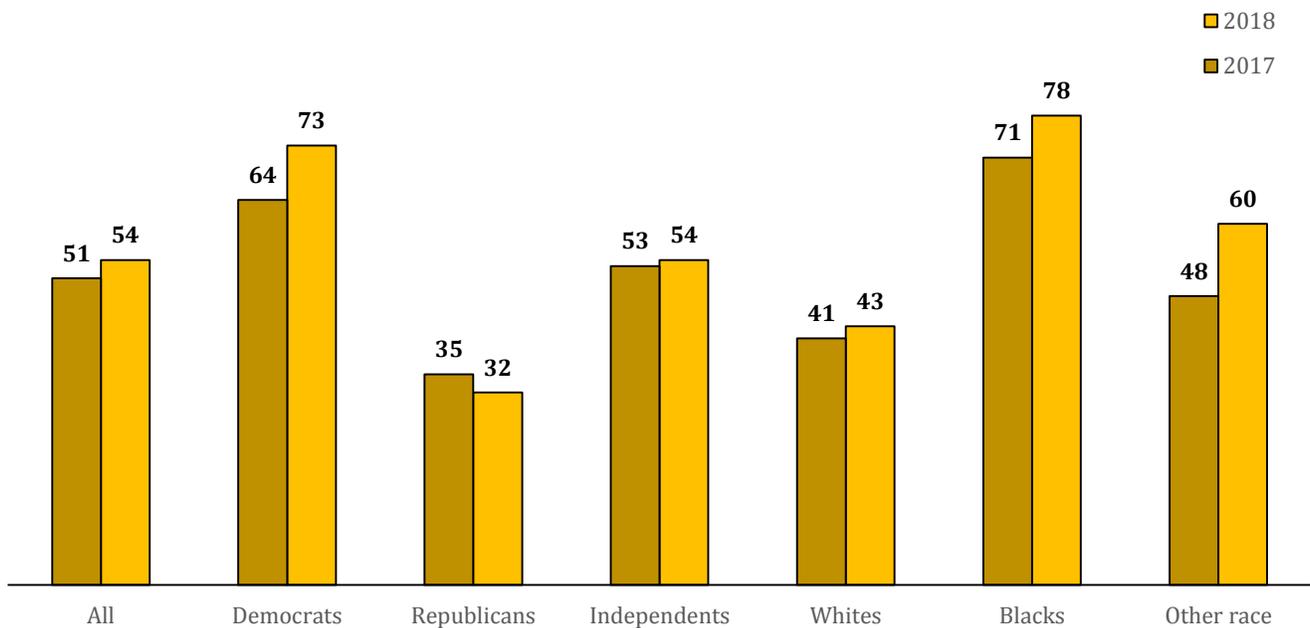


SOURCE: 2017 & 2018 Louisiana Surveys

---

**Figure 3: Rising share of non-whites do not think state's criminal justice system is fair**

Percent who disagree with statement "Louisiana's current criminal justice system is fair."



SOURCE: 2017 & 2018 Louisiana Surveys

---

## Little change in perceptions about amount of crime in state

Public perceptions of crime remain stable. In 2017, 65 percent of state residents said crime in Louisiana had increased over the previous five years. Today, 68 percent say so. These perceptions have held steady across racial and partisan groups (Figure 4).

## Majority of Louisiana residents favor death penalty

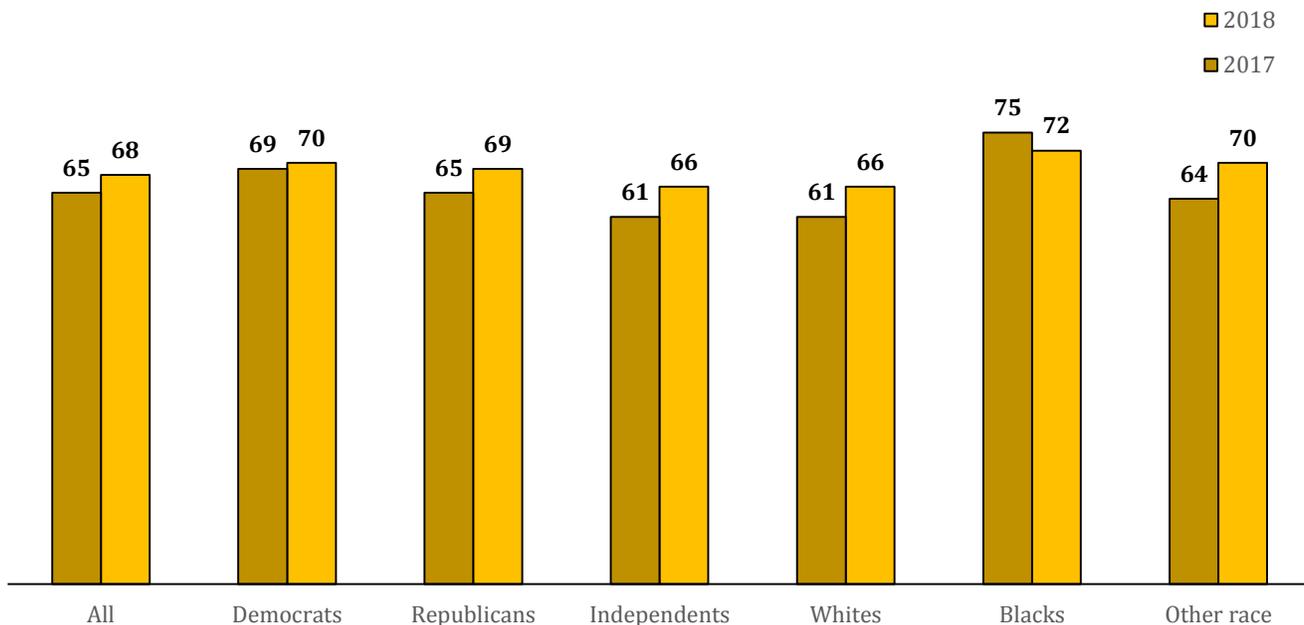
The death penalty has a net favorability rating of +24 among Louisiana residents (58 percent favor / 34 percent oppose), which is much higher than in the most recent national polling data available. In order to make this comparison, the *2018 Louisiana Survey* includes the same question about the death penalty used by the Pew Research Center and Gallup: “Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?” In the most recent polling data about

the death penalty from the Pew Research Center, from mid-2016, 49 percent of Americans favor the death penalty and 42 percent oppose (net favorability of +7). In the 2017 Gallup data, 55 percent of Americans favor the death penalty and 41 percent oppose (net favorability of +14).

Democrats in Louisiana tend to oppose the death penalty (42 percent favor / 53 percent oppose), while Republicans (74 percent favor / 19 percent oppose) and independents (61 percent favor / 31 percent oppose) tend to favor it.

**Figure 4: Perceptions of crime largely hold steady**

Percent who say amount of crime in Louisiana has increased in past five years



SOURCE: 2017 & 2018 Louisiana Surveys

## Medicaid expansion remains popular, but few aware of it

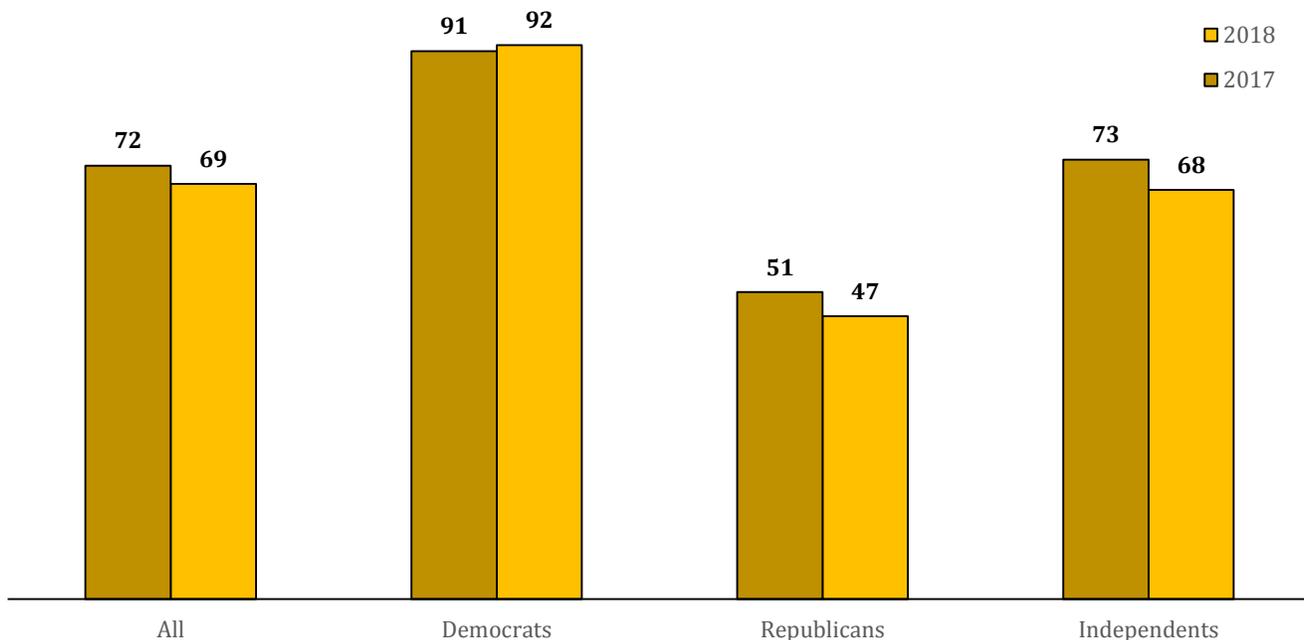
Most Louisiana residents continue to approve of the state's expansion of the Medicaid program: 69 percent approve of the expansion and 24 percent disapprove (Figure 5). Approval among the public as a whole as well as among partisans remain about where it was in 2017. Democrats overwhelmingly approve of the expansion (92 percent), as do a majority of independents (68 percent). Republicans remain divided over Medicaid expansion with 47 percent approval and 46 percent disapproval.

Despite the popularity of Medicaid expansion, the policy impact of the expansion for health care coverage and the political payoff for its supporters may be truncated by a lack of public awareness. Relatively few Louisiana residents (35 percent) even know the state has expanded its Medicaid program. While two-thirds of survey respondents were asked about their approval of

the Medicaid expansion, the other third was instead asked a factual question about whether the state had expanded its program: "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 are you not sure?" A majority (56 percent) said they were unsure, and another eight percent incorrectly believe the state has not expanded its Medicaid program. This lack of awareness is relatively constant across household income, indicating that even those individuals who are most likely to be eligible for the program are not aware of it. Among those in the bottom half of the distribution of household income in the state, only about one-third of individuals know Louisiana has expanded its Medicaid program.

**Figure 5: Medicaid expansion remains popular in Louisiana, but not among Republicans**

Percent who say they approve of state expanding its Medicaid program



SOURCE: 2017 & 2018 Louisiana Surveys

## **Bipartisan support for work requirements and copayments**

Most Louisiana residents support adding work requirements and copays to the state's Medicaid program. Among the total sample, 79 percent support work requirements and just 17 percent oppose them. Work requirements are popular among Democrats (57 percent support) and especially so among Republicans (90 percent). For copays, 69 percent support changing the program to require people covered by the state's Medicaid program to pay a share of the costs for

some of the health services they receive. As with work requirements, this proposal also has bipartisan support with 56 percent of Democrats and 84 percent Republicans supporting the change.

# Survey Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted among a statewide sample of 852 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 326 respondents interviewed via landline telephone and 526 respondents interviewed on a cellphone, including 344 who do not have a landline telephone. 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. 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 2016 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 +/- 3.4 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. 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 26 to March 3, 2018. Because data collection overlaps with a special session of the Louisiana Legislature from February 19 to March 3, 2018, responses to questions included in this report were analyzed for any differences between the pre-session interviews and interviews conducted during the session, controlling for mode of interview. There is no evidence for differences by date of interview for any questions in this report.

The *2018 Louisiana Survey* has a response rate of 11 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. The response rate for this survey is within the typical range for reputable live-interviewer telephone survey firms.

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

### Q1.

Would you say that the amount of crime in Louisiana has increased in the past five years, decreased, or stayed about the same?

Increased	68
Decreased	6
Stayed about the same	24
Don't know/Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	2

### Q2.

Now we would like to ask you about criminal justice in Louisiana. Please tell me whether you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statement: "Louisiana's current criminal justice system is fair"?

Agree	32
Disagree	54
Neither	10
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	3

### Q3.

Last year, Louisiana made several changes to its criminal justice system such as shortening prison sentences for some crimes. Do you approve or disapprove of these changes?

Approve	61
Disapprove	30
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	9

**Q4.**

As you may know, mandatory minimum sentences require those convicted of certain crimes to serve a certain length of time in prison. Some people say that instead of mandatory minimums, judges should have the flexibility to determine sentences based on the facts of each case. Do you support or oppose letting judges having the flexibility to set sentences?

Support	64
Oppose	31
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	5

**Q5.**

Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Favor	58
Oppose	34
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	7

**Q6. [RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO Q6 OR Q7]**

Now I have a few questions about health care. As you may know, Medicaid is a program to provide health coverage mostly to low-income individuals. Two 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	69
Disapprove	26
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	5

**Q7. [RESPONDENTS RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO Q6 OR Q7]**

Now I have a question about 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 are you not sure?

Yes, has expanded	35
No, has not expanded	8
Unsure	56
Refused [VOL.]	0

**Q8. [RESPONDENTS ASSIGNED TO Q6 ARE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO Q8 OR Q9]**

Do you support or oppose requiring adults without disabilities to work, or be looking for work, in order to get health coverage through Medicaid?

Support	79
Oppose	17
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	4

**Q9. [RESPONDENTS ASSIGNED TO Q6 ARE RANDOMLY ASSIGNED TO Q8 OR Q9]**

Do you support or oppose requiring people covered by the state's Medicaid program to pay a share of the costs for some of the health services they receive?

Support	69
Oppose	25
Don't know/Refused [VOL.]	6