Polarization over abortion grows as support for legal access grows substantially among Democrats

Small decline in support for death penalty, but more favor than oppose

The final in a series of six reports from the 2022 Louisiana Survey, a project of the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs

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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 2022 Louisiana Survey

The *2022 Louisiana Survey* is the twentieth in an annual series of statewide surveys beginning in 2003 and sponsored by the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication.

Reflecting the continuing evolution of survey research, we used two approaches for this year's survey. First, we used our traditional probability-sampling approach to draw landline and cell phone numbers for a live-interview telephone survey while allowing participants with cellphones to choose to reply online, rather than over the phones, through a link sent via text message. Second, in partnership with the research firm *YouGov*, we administered an online survey to a nonprobability sample of Louisiana residents who participate in the *YouGov* panel. The body of this report focuses on results from the traditional probability sample. However, interested readers can find the topline results from both samples at the end of this document. More information about our methods, including *YouGov*'s strategy for generating representative samples, is available in the survey methodology section of this report.

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 contemporary policy issues. 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 and perceptions about the most important problems facing the state.

In the *2022 Louisiana Survey*, this core is supplemented with items about the Covid-19 pandemic, access to high-speed internet, coastal issues, flooding and other natural disasters, integrity of elections, media use, the death penalty, and abortion.

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 final of six reports from the *2022 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 the death penalty and abortion. These results include:

- About half (51%) of respondents said they favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. This marks a modest dip from 58% in 2018 when the Louisiana Survey last included this question. Opposition to the death penalty (38%) remains similar to 2018 (34%).

- Louisiana residents split more closely over the issue of abortion than in 2016. Six years ago, 40% of adult residents of the state said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 55% said it should be illegal in all or most cases. Today, these shares are 46% and 49%, respectively.

- The most dramatic shift in attitudes toward abortion has been among Democrats. Although Democrats already leaned toward saying abortion should be legal in all or most cases in 2016 (51%), this share is now 74% - while the share who said abortion should be illegal in all or most cases fell by half from 42% to 19%.

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Social Issues: Death Penalty & Abortion

Support for the death penalty drops slightly, still exceeds opposition

About half (51%) of respondents said they favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder. This marks a modest dip from 58% in 2018 when the *Louisiana Survey* last included this question. Opposition to the death penalty (38%) remains similar to 2018 (34%). These shifts result in a decline in net favorability (i.e., percent favor minus percent oppose) from +24 to +13.

The shift away from the death penalty is largest among independents, but support continues to lead opposition. In 2018, 61% of independents favored the death penalty and 31% opposed it. In 2022, the share of independents who favor the death penalty fell to half (50%), and 42% oppose it. Net favorability shrunk from +30 to +8.

Democrats remain the most opposed to the death penalty, and the share of Democrats who favor this sentence has shrunk further. Today, one-third (32%) of Democrats favor the death penalty, down from 42% four years ago. As they did in 2018, a slim majority of Democrats oppose this kind of sentence (54%). Democrats' net favorability toward the death penalty declined from -11 to -22.

Republicans express the most favorable attitudes toward the death penalty (70% favor), as they did in 2018 (74%). The share of Republicans who oppose the death penalty is 20%, essentially the same as in 2018 (19%).

Table 1: Opinions toward death penalty, 2018 and 2022

Group	Favor	Oppose	Net favor
All, 2018	58%	34%	+24
All, 2022	51%	38%	+13
Democrats, 2018	43%	53%	-11
Democrats, 2022	32%	54%	-22
Republicans, 2018	74%	19%	+55
Republicans, 2022	70%	20%	+50
Independents, 2018	61%	31%	+30
Independents, 2022	50%	42%	+8

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Significant growth in Democrats' support for legal abortion, little change in Republicans' views

Louisiana residents split more closely over the issue of abortion than when the *Louisiana Survey* last asked about it in 2016. Six years ago, 40% of adult residents of the state said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, but a majority (55%) said it should be illegal in all or most cases. Today, these shares are 46% and 49%, respectively. Neither view holds the majority of state residents any longer.

Despite the shift, there continues to be less support for legal abortion in the state (49%) than in the United States as a whole (59%). What is interesting about this comparison, however, is that attitudes about abortion have shifted in Louisiana during a period when attitudes remained steady nationally. The national estimates in Table 2 are from the Pew Research Center in 2016 and 2021.

The most dramatic shift in attitudes toward abortion has been among Democrats. Although Democrats already leaned toward saying abortion should be legal in all or most cases in 2016 (51%), this share is now 74% - while the share who said abortion should be illegal in all or most cases fell by half from 42% to 19%.

The shift among Democrats means the major political parties are further apart on this issue. Republicans, who already opposed legal abortion to a much greater extent than Democrats did in 2016, have remained largely the same. Today, the parties look more like mirror images of each other on this issue. Among Republicans, 69% of say it

should be illegal in all or most cases and 24% say it should be legal in all or most cases. Meanwhile, among Democrats, 19% of say it should be illegal in all or most cases and 74% say it should be legal in all or most cases.

Net support for legal abortion has grown among independents. In 2016, a slight majority of independents said abortion should be illegal in all or most cases (54%), and 40% said it should legal in all or most cases. Today, like the state as a whole, independents split nearly evenly – 50% say illegal and 47% say legal.

It is also worth noting that only one quarter (23%) of Louisiana residents think that abortion should be legal in *all* cases. Likewise, a similar share (22%) think it should be illegal in *all* cases, that is, it should never be legal. A much larger share (50%) support some mix of access and restrictions (i.e. that it should be legal in most cases or illegal in most cases) though some lean more toward the latter while others lean more toward the former.

Finally, changes in aggregate opinion among groups do not necessarily mean individuals are changing their opinions. It may be that many Louisianans have changed their mind on this issue. However, these aggregate shifts could also arise if individuals are changing their parties to fit their attitudes on abortion. The shifts might also reflect other changes in the composition of the parties as younger adults have different political attitudes than older generations. Most likely, these aggregate trends across parties reflect a combination of these changes.

Table 2: Trends in opinions about abortion in Louisiana and the United States

Response	Louisiana 2016	Louisiana 2022	United States 2016	United States 2021
Legal in all cases	13%	23%	24%	25%
Legal in most cases	27%	23%	33%	34%
Illegal in most cases	29%	27%	24%	26%
Illegal in all cases	26%	22%	16%	13%
Total legal all/most	40%	46%	57%	59%
Total illegal all/most	55%	49%	40%	39%
Net (total legal – total illegal)	-15	-3	+17	+20

Table 3: Trends in opinions about abortion in Louisiana by party identification

Response	Dems 2016	Dems 2022	Reps 2016	Reps 2022	Inds 2016	Inds 2022
Legal in all cases	17%	42%	3%	10%	15%	23%
Legal in most cases	34%	32%	20%	14%	25%	24%
Illegal in most cases	22%	14%	41%	38%	31%	31%
Illegal in all cases	20%	5%	32%	31%	25%	19%
Total legal all/most	51%	74%	23%	24%	40%	47%
Total illegal all/most	42%	19%	73%	69%	56%	50%
Net (total legal – total illegal)	+9	+55	-50	-45	-16	-3

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Survey Methodology

The *2022 Louisiana Survey* includes two distinct efforts to sample residents of the state and conduct interviews.

Survey 1: Probability sample of landline and cellphone numbers

The results discussed in this report come from interviews of a probability sample of adult Louisiana residents contacted via telephone (landline or cell phone), administered by the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs' Public Policy Research Lab (PPRL) at Louisiana State University. This sample was stratified across Louisiana parishes proportionally to their adult population ensuring geographic representation. The design of the landline portion of this sample ensures representation of both listed and unlisted landline numbers by use of random digit dialing. Similarly, the cellphone portion of this sample is randomly drawn from known, available phone number banks dedicated to wireless service in the state. Both portions, landline and cell phone, were provided by Marketing Systems Group. For landline numbers, interviewers called landline numbers to conduct interviews. For cellphone numbers, the PPRL first sent a text to these numbers inviting recipients to complete the questionnaire online and, if the recipient did not use the online option, interviewers followed up with a call to conduct interviews over the telephone. Of the 508 respondents in this sample, 105 were interviewed via a landline telephone, 290 were interviewed over a cellphone, and another 113 cellphone owners elected to complete the questionnaire online. Interviews for this survey were conducted from February 21 to March 14, 2022.

The combined landline and cellphone sample (including cellphone owners who completed the questionnaire online via the link sent to them by text) 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 2020 five-year estimates. Weighting cannot eliminate every source of nonresponse bias. However, proper administration of probability sampling combined with accepted weighting techniques has a strong record of yielding unbiased results.

The sample has an overall margin of error of +/- 5.8 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.

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This version of the *2022 Louisiana Survey* has a response rate of 6%. 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.

Survey 2: Non-probability sample administered online

As the technology and science of the survey industry continues to evolve – especially in the face of declining response rates among traditional probability-based telephone surveys – the *2022 Louisiana Survey* included a second design: An online survey administered by the survey firm *YouGov* to a nonprobability sample of adult Louisiana residents. *YouGov* recruits individuals online to join its panel of survey respondents and periodically answer online questionnaires.

For this survey, 623 adult Louisiana residents in the *YouGov* panel completed the questionnaire. *YouGov* then matched 500 respondents to a sampling frame representing the adult population of the state on gender, age, race, and education. *YouGov* constructed this frame by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file). The frame reflects, on average, what probability samples of adult Louisiana residents would look like in terms of these demographic characteristics. The 500 respondents were then weighted to this sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 and 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories), and education (4-categories), to produce the final weight.

Respondents completed this survey from March 1 to March 21, 2022.

The margin of error for this survey is +/- 6.1%.

With its innovative approach to online polling, YouGov conducts surveys for a variety of business, university, and media clients, including *CBS News*, the *Economist* and the *New York Times*. Research from scholars at Harvard University and Tufts University shows that well-designed online opt-in sampling techniques, like those *YouGov* uses for its surveys, perform as well as traditional random digit dialing telephone polls.

Although the results discussed above in this report focus on Survey 1, readers can find topline results from Survey 2 below.

Comparison of samples

The following table displays demographic characteristics of each sample as well as population estimates based on the ACS.

Table: Comparison of survey samples to population benchmarks

Characteristic	Probability-based Telephone Sample	Non-probability Online Sample	Benchmark
High school diploma or less	36.3%	46.9%	47.8%
Some college	34.1%	29.1%	29.3%
College degree or higher	28.5%	24.0%	22.9%
White, non-Hispanic	62.4%	57.7%	60.5%
Black, non-Hispanic	25.5%	33.3%	31.2%
Hispanic	3.1%	4.8%	4.8%
Other	6.5%	4.1%	3.5%
18-24	8.7%	7.2%	11.9%
25-34	16.1%	17.3%	18.7%
35-44	16.2%	20.5%	16.5%
45-54	15.6%	20.0%	15.8%
55-64	17.4%	11.8%	16.9%
65+	25.6%	23.2%	20.2%
Men	47.2%	47.1%	48.2%
Women	52.0%	52.9%	51.8%
Metro BR	18.7%	19.4%	17.8%
Metro NOLA	29.8%	29.5%	31.0%
South Louisiana	23.6%	23.1%	25.2%
North Louisiana	26.5%	28.0%	26.0%

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Characteristic	Probability-based Telephone Sample	Non-probability Online Sample	Benchmark
Registered to vote	92.1%	82.7%	84.5%
Have driver's license	88.8%	84.9%	94.6%
Average size of household	2.6	3.7	2.6
Employed	52.7%	45.9%	55.4%
Married (not separated)	46.4%	44.2%	43.4%
Have cell phone	98.3%	98.4%	90.6%
Have cell phone only	72.0%	73.8%	64.0%
Have internet access at home	82.3%	88.5%	78.5%

Statistics for both Louisiana Survey samples incorporate the sample weights. All sample statistics and benchmarks are for the adult population of Louisiana. Benchmarks represent data from the following data sources:

- U.S Census American Community Survey (ACS), 2020 5-year estimates (education, race and ethnicity, age, gender, average size of household, employment, and marital status);
- U.S Census ACS, 2019 1-year estimate (region);
- Louisiana Secretary of State (voter registration count is for March 1, 2022, and divided by the adult population from the 2022 5-year ACS estimate);
- Federal Highway Administration (the number of adult licensed drivers from 2019, which is divided by the 2019 ACS population estimate)
- National Health Insurance Survey (cell phone access); and
- National Center for Education Statistics (household internet access).

These comparisons indicate that both samples are often close to the benchmark (within five percentage points) for education, race and ethnicity, age, gender, and region. The exceptions are that the probability sample underestimates the share who have no experience with college, overestimates the share with a college degree, underestimates the share of non-Hispanic Black residents, and overestimates the share who are 65 years or older. The non-probability sample overestimates the share who are 55 to 64 years old. The general similarity of both samples to population benchmarks for this set of demographics is unsurprising given that both samples are weighted to these characteristics of the population.

The comparisons to the remaining benchmarks are more interesting because they reveal whether the samples represent the population even on characteristics to which they are not weighted. Ideally, this would be the case. In most cases, the probability sample comes within five percentage

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points of the population benchmark. It overestimates voter registration, underestimates the share of adults with a driver's license, and overestimates cell phone access. The non-probability sample performs slightly less well, generally. It overestimates the share with a driver's license, overestimates the size of households, underestimates employment, overestimates cell phone access, and overestimates home internet access.

Question Wording and Toplines

Unless otherwise indicated, results are for the total sample. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Q1: Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

Response	Probability-based Telephone Sample	Non-probability Online Sample
Favor	51	60
Oppose	38	40
Don't know / Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	11	0

Q2: Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases, legal in most cases, illegal in most cases, or illegal in all cases?

Response	Probability-based Telephone Sample	Non-probability Online Sample
Legal in all cases	23	21
Legal in most cases	23	29
Illegal in most cases	27	31
Illegal in all cases	22	19
Don't know / Refused [VOLUNTEERED]	5	0

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