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Louisiana in the 2004 Presidential Election



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*Special thanks to
Ms. Daxecker's class in
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The Survey

The University of New Orleans Survey Research Center conducted a survey of 700 registered voters in Louisiana between October 13 and October 21, 2004. The sample was drawn from the listing of registered voters provided by the State and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.7%. Since Louisiana is considered a relatively safe state for President Bush, we focused on two issues that have been prominent in this year's campaign: the war in Iraq and perceptions of the national economy. The gender gap, the potential impact of new registrants, perceptions of Louisiana's economy, and Governor Blanco's approval are also examined. Some of these items have been asked in previous UNO SRC surveys, and, when available, time trends are presented.

The Presidential Race in Louisiana

As expected, President Bush enjoys a comfortable lead in Louisiana. Among likely voters he leads Senator Kerry by twelve percentage points. The usual racial polarization is evident, with over seventy percent of black registered voters saying they will vote for Kerry (the actual percent will undoubtedly be higher), and two-thirds of white registered voters supporting Bush.

	ALL	WHITES	BLACKS	LIKELY VOTERS*
Bush	48%**	66%	6%	50%
Kerry	40	27	71	38
Nader	2	1	5	2
Undecided	8	5	14	8
N	700	491	209	700

*Sample weighted based on past voting behavior.

**Numbers do not add to 100% due to a few respondents mentioning other candidates.

White Republicans and African Americans are historically the most predictable groups, so the potential swing voters are white Democrats and white Independents. Throughout this analysis we will focus on these two swing groups and how their opinions and ideologies can help account for Bush's lead in Louisiana.

In this race white Democrats are much less loyal to their candidate than white Republicans, indicating the lack of appeal that a liberal Democrat has for some Louisiana Democrats. Twenty-nine percent of white Democrats say they will defect from their party and vote for President Bush. In addition to a segment of the Democrats, Bush is favored by two-thirds of white Independents. Thus, among whites, Bush has support across the political spectrum.

	WHITE DEMOCRATS	WHITE INDEPENDENTS	WHITE REPUBLICANS
Bush	29%	66%	97%
Kerry	64	20	1
Nader	1	3	0
Undecided	6	8	2
N	146	126	187

Political Ideology

When we look at the self-described political ideologies of the swing groups, again it is apparent that a liberal presidential candidate has limited appeal in Louisiana. Even white Democrats are more likely to say they are moderate than to say they are liberal, and white Independents are moderate and conservative.

	ALL	WHITES	BLACKS
Liberal	12%	12%	12%
Moderate	31	33	26
Conservative	32	37	20
	WHITE DEMOCRATS	WHITE INDEPENDENTS	WHITE REPUBLICANS
Liberal	27%	9%	3%
Moderate	32	46	27
Conservative	15	30	62

President Bush's Approval Rating

President Bush's approval is strikingly polarized. Three-quarters of Louisiana voters express intense feelings about the President, with slightly more respondents strongly approving than strongly disapproving. This level of intensity is quite unusual, and it may be part of the reason interest is so high in this election.

	ALL
Strongly Approve	41%
Approve	10
Disapprove	9
Strongly Disapprove	36
Don't Know	4

Presidential Vote Among 2004 Registrants

We know that Louisiana has a large number of new registrants and we isolated those voters in our sample who had registered in 2004. With only 38 new voters in the sample, we have to be very cautious about conclusions, but over half say they strongly disapprove of Bush, and 60% are non-Bush voters. Kerry may slightly benefit from these new voters.

	NEW REGISTRANTS
Bush	40%
Kerry	50
Nader	5
Undecided	5
N	38

President Bush's Approval Rating Among 2004 Registrants

	NEW REGISTRANTS
Strongly Approve	24%
Approve	16
Disapprove	3
Strongly Disapprove	53
N	38

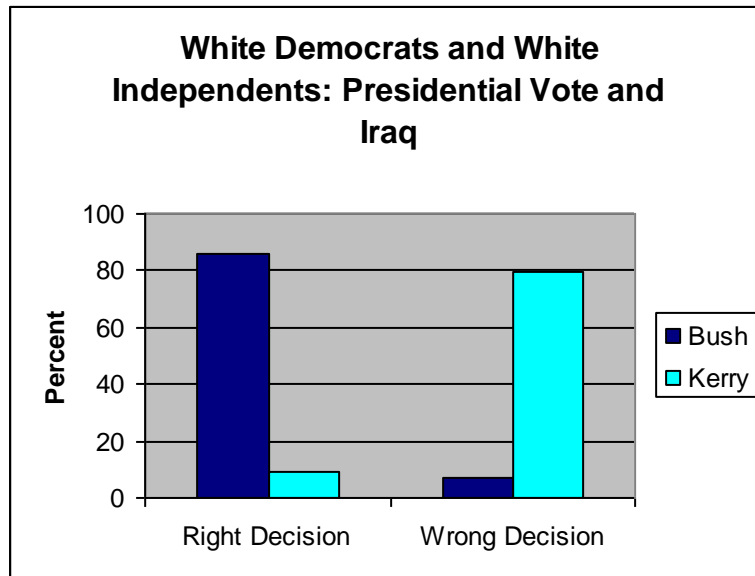
Opinion on Iraq

Opinion on the war in Iraq is similar to the vote preferences of registered voters, whites, and blacks. That is, whites believe two to one that going to war was the right decision, blacks are five to one against the war, and a slight majority of the likely voters think the Iraq war was the right thing to do.

	ALL	WHITES	BLACKS	LIKE.LY VOTERS
Right Decision	50%	65%	15%	51%
Wrong Decision	45	30	79	43
Don't Know	5	5	6	6

The swing groups also express opinions on the war that are in line with their vote preferences. One-third of white Democrats go against their party and say that the war is the right thing, and white Independents are two to one in favor of the war.

The relationship of opinion on the war and vote is quite strong in the swing groups. White Democrats and white Independents who think the war was the right decision are 85% Bush supporters. Support for the war seems to be a reason some white Democrats are not voting for their party's candidate.



	WHITE DEMOCRATS	WHITE INDEPENDENTS	WHITE REPUBLICANS
Right Decision	35%	63%	91%
Wrong Decision	59	30	7
Don't Know	6	7	2

The National Economy ("over past year")

Louisiana voters are more negative than positive about the direction of the national economy. But this does not translate into a majority vote for Kerry because of the significant proportion of white voters who say the national economy has "stayed the same." Voters who say the economy has "stayed the same" are probably basing their vote on something else. Among the swing group of white Democrats and white Independents, Bush is favored by those who say the national economy is "better" or "stayed the same."

	ALL	WHITES	BLACKS
Gotten Better	26%	33%	8%
Stayed Same	27	31	19
Gotten Worse	46	35	72
Don't Know	1	1	1

	WHITE DEMOCRATS	WHITE INDEPENDENTS	WHITE REPUBLICANS
Gotten Better	14%	34%	53%
Stayed Same	23	25	37
Gotten Worse	62	40	8
Don't Know	1	1	2

The Gender Gap and Presidential Vote?

There is no gender gap among whites in Louisiana. In fact, there is amazing similarity between the voting preferences of white men and white women. This finding contrasts to a recent *New York Times* poll in which women nationwide support Kerry by a 49-41 margin, and men support Bush 53-40. It also contrasts to a UNO SRC Louisiana survey prior to the 2000 election in which white women were 12 percentage points less likely to support Bush than white men.

	WHITE MALES	WHITE FEMALES
Bush	66%	66%
Kerry	24	28
Nader	1	1
Undecided	8	3
N	226	265

The Gender Gap and Opinion on Iraq?

One of the reasons for the lack of a gender gap may be that nearly the same percentage of white males and females think that military force against Iraq was the right decision. This is the most surprising finding in our study since women are typically less likely to sanction the use of force. In fact, a recent PEW Research Center poll confirms the existence of a nationwide gender gap on Iraq. According to their poll, 51 percent of men believe the “decision to use force in Iraq” was the right decision, compared to 40 percent of women who agree with that statement.

It appears that the general conservatism of white females in Louisiana, in combination with a liberal Democratic candidate and a national security threat effectively erase the gender gap seen at the national level.

	WHITE MALES	WHITE FEMALES
Right Decision	66%	65%
Wrong Decision	31	29
Don't Know	3	6

Social Issues

The conservatism of Louisiana voters on social issues can be seen in their opinions on a gay marriage amendment and abortion. Over half of the respondents favor a U.S. constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, and pro-life responses outnumber pro-choice responses two to one. These are presented as an indication of why candidates defined as liberal by national standards cannot fare well in Louisiana.

ALL	
US Constitutional Amendment Banning Gay Marriage	
Against	38%
For	57
Don't Know	6
Abortion	
Always Legal	13%
Sometimes Legal	52
Never Legal	31
Don't Know	4

Abortion Attitudes over Time in Louisiana

Opinion on abortion has become slightly more conservative in Louisiana since Bush became President. We suspect this is due to the dominance of the conservative message which is received by conservative voters.

	1992	1995	1996	1999	2002	2003	2004
Always Legal	21%	21%	21%	18%	13%	14%	13%
Sometimes Legal	52	52	49	52	47	52	52
Never Legal	23	21	26	27	33	30	31
Don't Know	4	6	4	3	7	4	4
N	725	701	711	946	700	731	700

Best Predictors of 2004 Presidential Vote Choice Among White Democrats and White Independents*

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1. | Opinion on Iraq |
| 2. | Political Ideology |
| 3. | Party Identification and National Economy |

* Based on multivariate analysis.

In order to get a clearer picture of why some white Democrats and most white Independents are voting for Bush, we conducted a type of statistical analysis that allows us to estimate the impact of various factors on vote preferences. The most important factor predicting voting for Bush in these two swing groups is opinion on Iraq, followed by political ideology, then party identification and the national economy.

The war in Iraq and its perceived connection to terrorism are more important issues in the presidential election in Louisiana than the national economy.

Governor Blanco's Approval Rating

Governor Blanco enjoys a high approval rating of 66%. What is unusual about her approval rating is that it is not very racially polarized. Racial polarization has characterized approval of Louisiana governors for at least thirty years, so Governor Blanco can take satisfaction from her biracial support.

	ALL	WHITES	BLACKS
Strongly Approve	41%	36%	51%
Approve	25	28	18
Disapprove	8	9	7
Strongly Disapprove	11	11	10
Don't Know	15	16	14

Perceptions of Louisiana's Economy

When asked about the direction of the state's economy, voters are lukewarm, with most responding that Louisiana's economy has "stayed the same" over the past year. Perceptions of the state economy have improved slightly over last year when fewer people answered "stayed the same" and more answered "gotten worse".

	ALL	WHITES	BLACKS
Gotten Better	15%	16%	15%
Stayed Same	50	52	42
Gotten Worse	32	28	41
Don't Know	3	4	2

Perceptions of State Economy over Time in Louisiana

Over the last twelve years Louisiana voters have typically been more negative than positive about the direction of the state's economy. This pattern is probably a reflection of the sluggish nature of economic development in this state. So far, perceptions of the economy of the state have not affected the Governor's high approval rating.

	1992	1995	1999	2003	2004
Gotten Better	9%	20%	44%	14%	15%
Stayed Same	33	42	39	43	50
Gotten Worse	57	33	15	40	32
Don't Know	1	5	2	3	3
N	725	701	946	731	700