

Date: April 23, 2009
To: Interested Parties
From: Democracy Corps

Tulane University / Democracy Corps Mayoral Survey

New Orleans Political Landscape

Tulane University and Democracy Corps have joined together to conduct the most comprehensive citywide survey to date on the 2010 New Orleans mayoral election. Employing a unique hybrid methodology that combines traditional voter file, random digit dialing, and cell phone research that maximizes access to those communities and individuals who are most difficult to reach through traditional survey techniques, we interviewed 1,008 registered voters in Orleans Parish who indicated that they are likely to vote in the 2010 election for mayor.¹ Prior to fielding this survey, Tulane University and Democracy Corps conducted two focus groups among likely voters in the city to help inform the design of the poll and provide deeper insight into voters' attitudes on the major issues facing the city today. The survey findings expose many myths about New Orleans politics and provide a clear path forward for the city's residents and the candidates who would lead the city into the next decade.

So much of the political discussion around New Orleans politics focuses on the deep divisions, particularly along racial lines, that have defined the city's political culture for decades. But this survey clearly demonstrates that there is much more that unites New Orleans voters than divides them, and they are desperate to move forward together, putting the conflicts of the past behind them and focusing on the common challenges that threaten all of them. Crime, local schools, local corruption, long-term economic growth – these are the issues that New Orleanians are focused on. They are looking for experienced local leaders who understand the nature of these challenges and are ready to work across partisan and racial lines to find a path forward. If this election devolves into another racially charged, divisive election, it will be because the politicians dragged it there out of selfish, short-term opportunism, not because that is the focus of New Orleans voters.

¹ The survey was conducted April 5-14, 2009 and has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent.

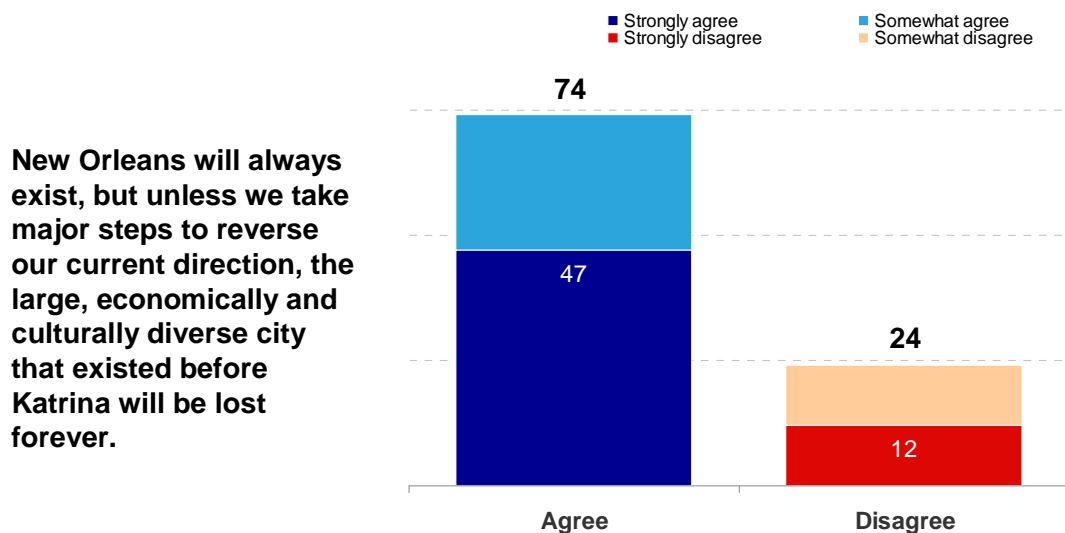


2010 Election: What's At Stake

It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of next year's mayoral election to the future of this city. We firmly believe that every election is important, but this survey makes it clear that New Orleans sits at the precipice of potentially major changes that could permanently alter the character of this great city. Residents of New Orleans express this urgency, as majorities of whites and African-Americans alike describe this as 'the most important city election in my lifetime.' In fact, the complete lack of any distinction in the responses of white and black respondents on the series of questions defining the stakes of this election provide striking evidence of the shared sense of importance this election holds.

Four years after Katrina, it is fair to ask whether the city that existed before Katrina can ever be reborn. In our focus groups, this was the most important question for long-time residents who spoke so passionately about their love for this city. While they agree that there will always be a city named New Orleans in this place, they fear that the city they love could be lost if the current challenges are not addressed.

Now let me read you some statements about current events in New Orleans. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.



The reason this election is so important is because city residents have reached a tipping point. The loyalty and attachment of New Orleans residents to this city is legendary, surviving so many crises in the past. But today that devotion to the city is being tested as never before, as more than 1-in-3 voters – white and black alike – say they may have to leave the city unless it can change its current direction. Most ominously for New Orleans' future, the two groups most likely to leave the city are its youngest residents (47 percent of those under 30) and parents with kids under 18 years of age (42 percent).



New Orleans Political Environment

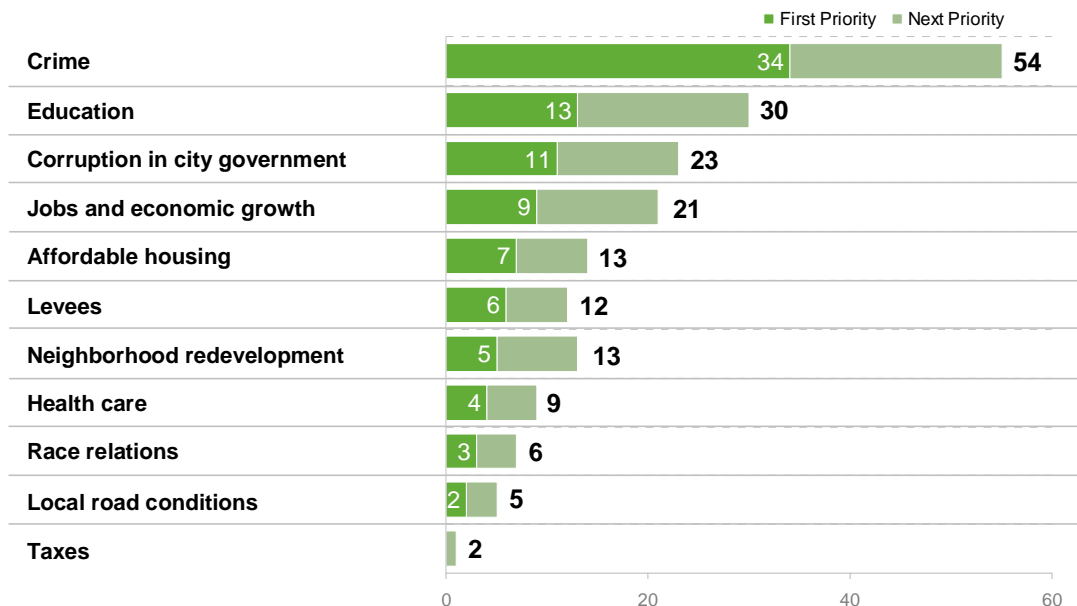
The current political environment in New Orleans is very anxious, with residents expressing pessimism about the city's current direction and deep dissatisfaction with the leadership of Mayor Ray Nagin. By a margin of more than 2-to-1, voters feel the city is off on the wrong track (26 percent right direction, 61 percent wrong track), while a remarkable 72 percent say the city needs to go in a significantly different direction than the one that the Mayor is headed. There are noteworthy similarities between the current political dynamic in New Orleans and the political dynamic we saw across the United States in the final year of the Bush administration when voters harbored little hope for any progress under the current leadership and were simply waiting for a new leader to change a tough situation.

The slow pace of post-Katrina rebuilding and the political gridlock preventing critical decisions that will determine the future course of New Orleans from being made clearly contribute to the sense of drift in the city. Asked who bears the most blame for the rebuilding headaches, more than 1-in-3 voters refused to identify one level of government who they feel deserves particular blame. Among those who did make this difficult choice, city government (31 percent) clearly led the federal government (21 percent) and state government (14 percent) as the greatest obstacle to a speedy and effective rebuilding effort.

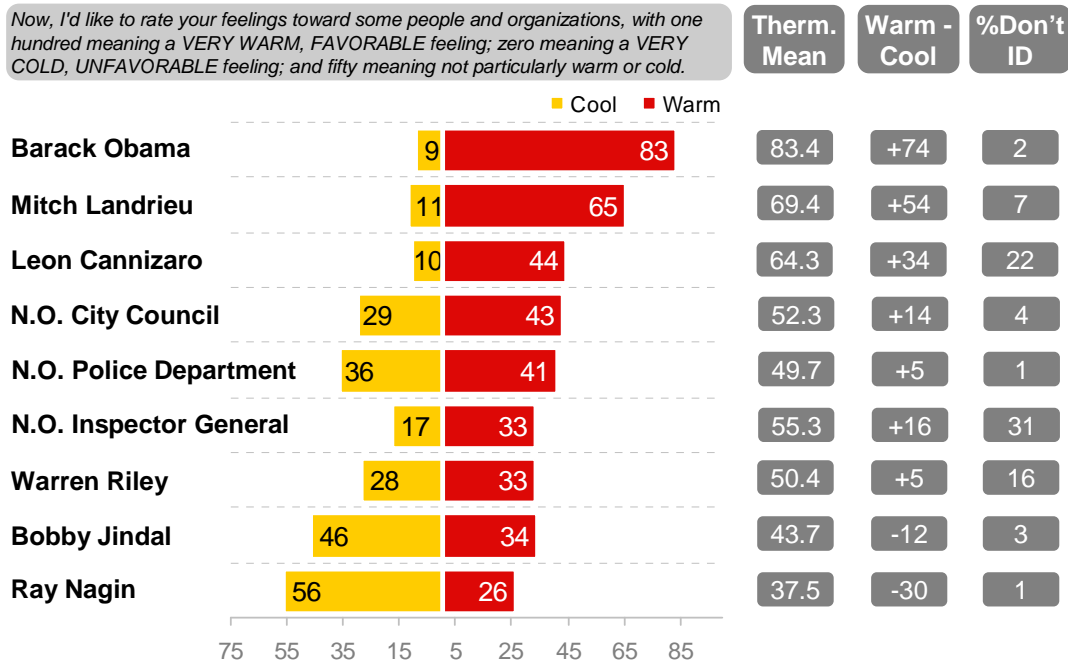
The issues driving the broad pessimism among voters are very clear, and it all starts with crime. More than half of all voters in the city identify crime as one of their top priorities for the next mayor and City Council, and every subgroup across the city – regardless of race, age, gender, education, or section of the city – identifies crime as their number one priority. The fact that jobs and economic growth rank fourth in New Orleans, but first in virtually every other place in America these days demonstrates how important crime, education, and corruption are to New Orleans residents.



Now, I am going to read you a list of concerns that people have. Please tell me which ONE of these you think the next Mayor and City Council should make their first priority. And which of the following do you think should be the next priority for the next Mayor and City Council?



Looking at the dominant political figures and institutions influencing New Orleans politics, we find surprisingly strong scores overall given the deep pessimism about the city's current direction. President Barack Obama is extremely popular with virtually all New Orleans residents, but Governor Bobby Jindal is a much more polarizing figure. White voters express favorable views of Jindal by a margin of more than 2-to-1 (58 percent favorable, 27 percent unfavorable) while African-Americans view him unfavorably by a margin of nearly 3-to-1 (20 percent favorable, 57 percent unfavorable).



Of course, Mayor Ray Nagin is in some ways a mirror image of Jindal – profoundly unpopular among whites (7 percent favorable, 87 percent unfavorable) but still gets at least mixed marks among African-Americans (39 percent favorable, 36 percent unfavorable). Nagin’s frequent sparring partners in the City Council produce similarly divergent views among white voters (59 percent favorable, 17 percent unfavorable) and African-Americans (33 percent favorable, 36 percent unfavorable). Job approval marks for Nagin are no different, with whites showing almost unanimous disapproval (6 percent approve, 92 percent disapprove) and even a plurality of African-Americans disapproving of his performance as Mayor (41 percent approve, 47 percent disapprove).

Among those directly charged with fighting crime and corruption in New Orleans, District Attorney Leon Cannizaro is clearly the most popular. Like Cannizaro, the New Orleans Inspector General is also broadly popular but stronger among white voters. Police Superintendent Warren Riley and the New Orleans Police Department both receive mixed marks, with Riley more popular among African-Americans and the department as a whole more popular among white voters.

Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu, now a statewide elected official but still firmly rooted in New Orleans, stands in marked contrast to most city officials in his broad popularity. Despite his 2006 loss in a heated election that broke down sharply along racial lines, Landrieu emerges as a uniquely unifying candidate. Overall, he ranks second only to Obama among figures tested in this survey and is almost equally popular among whites (72 percent favorable, 8 percent unfavorable) and African-American voters (60 percent favorable, 12 percent unfavorable). It is important to note that overall familiarity and positive ratings of Landrieu peak



among seniors (74 percent favorable, 8 percent unfavorable) and decline consistently to those under 30 years of age (46 percent favorable, 17 percent unfavorable).

Looking Ahead: Challenges Facing New Orleans

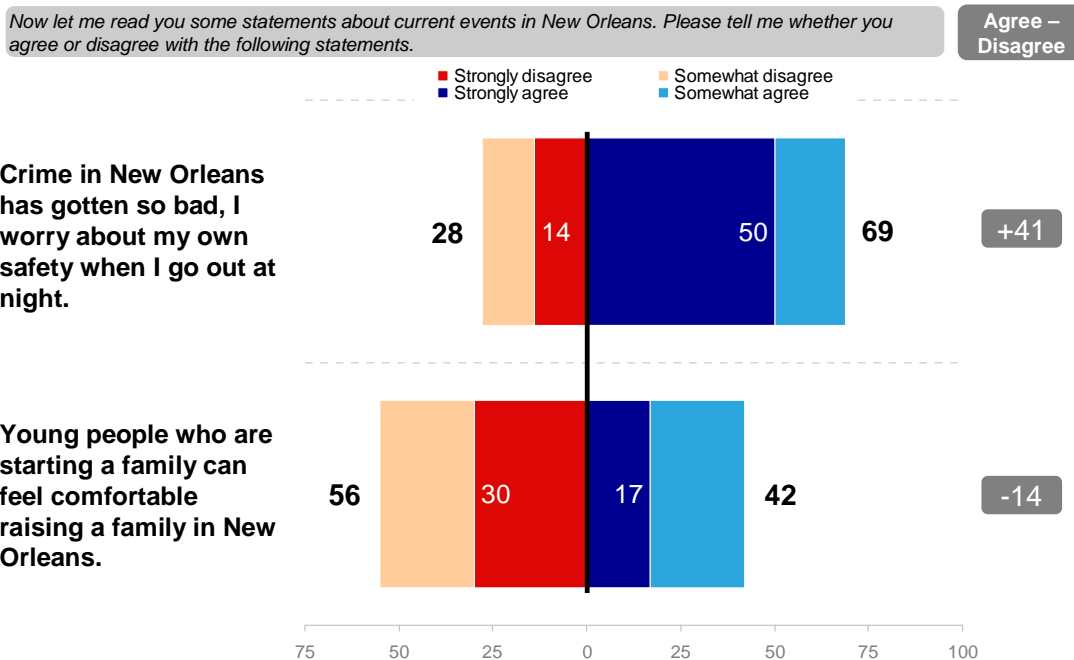
Looking at the many challenges facing New Orleans in the short term, combined with the long-term impact these problems could have on the city's continuing recovery from Hurricane Katrina, the low ratings of the city's current direction are not surprising. What is more concerning is the fact that, as bad as things are today, 2-in-3 New Orleans voters believes things will be about the same (57 percent) or even worse (11 percent) a year from now, with just 30 percent expecting things to get better over the next year. Optimism for the city's direction a year from now peaks among the oldest voters (particularly African-Americans) and the youngest (18-29 year-olds), but even among these groups, at least 60 percent see things staying the same or getting worse.

One point that the vast majority of New Orleans voters can agree on is their desire to take the city in a very different direction than where it is currently headed under Mayor Nagin's leadership. As with other Nagin-related measures, sentiment among whites is nearly unanimous, but support for a new direction is extremely high among African-Americans as well. With the many challenges detailed earlier, the desire for a new direction is predictable, but the question remains how to move forward in a new direction on so many issues. The survey briefly explored most of these issues to provide a sense of where New Orleans residents want to go from here and the leadership needed to get them there.

Crime

Crime has risen to the top of voters' concerns because it has moved out of the shadows to pose a direct threat to all citizens of New Orleans. Asked to choose between two statements about the threat of violent crime in New Orleans today, 58 percent say it has become a 'citywide epidemic that affects all city residents' while only 39 percent argue that it is 'mostly concentrated in specific sections of the city and among specific groups.' This is not just a problem of rough neighborhoods or young gangs; it reaches every corner of the city and is now felt in the lives of citizens throughout the city.

In fact, more than 2-in-3 say they fear for their own personal safety, with consensus across all demographic groups and regions of the city.



Similarly, majorities of both African-Americans and whites say that a young family can't feel comfortable raising a family in New Orleans today. Among voters under 30 years of age, more than 60 percent say they wouldn't feel comfortable raising a family here. This is a critical measure of personal safety and exposes the extent to which crime has cast a shadow over not just the present but the future of this city.

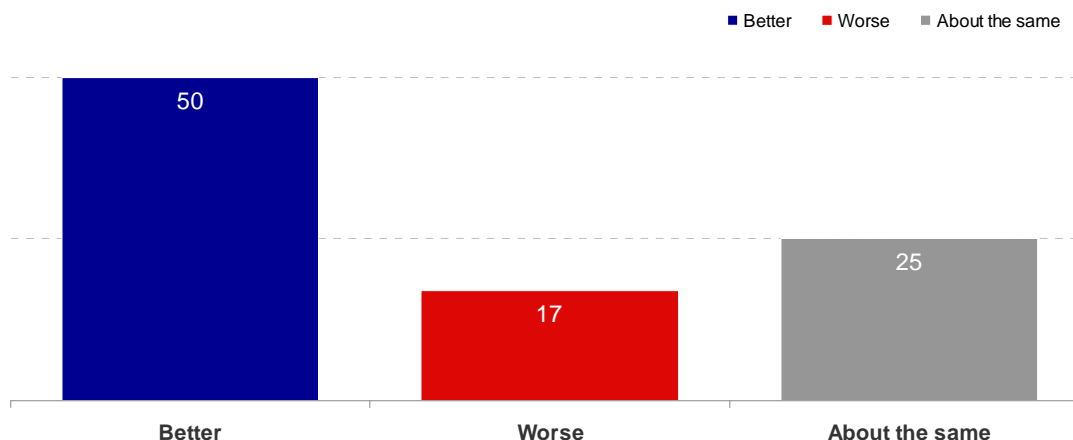
Education

New Orleans residents are very unhappy with the state of local schools. Only 22 percent give public schools in New Orleans a favorable rating while 53 percent rate them unfavorably. Among parents with school-age children, the numbers are even lower (19 percent favorable, 57 percent unfavorable). Our focus group discussions showed how inextricably linked concerns about crime and economic growth are to schools. Whether they had children or not, and regardless of whether they sent their children to private or public school, our focus group participants cited the failure of public schools as the greatest cause of the city's rising crime epidemic. And they saw a clear link between school performance and economic growth, rhetorically asking why any company would move to a city that can't offer good schools for the children of its employees or an educated workforce. But the news on education in New Orleans is not all bad.

Despite the broad pessimism about the current direction of the city and the negative overall marks for New Orleans public schools, there is a clear sense that local schools are improving in the aftermath of Katrina.



Do you feel New Orleans public schools are getting better, getting worse, or about the same since Hurricane Katrina?



Once again, there is general agreement on the improvement in local schools, with whites more positive about the changes since Katrina but a clear plurality of African-Americans concurring. Of course the most important change that has occurred in the local schools since Katrina has been the rise of charter schools, and 65 percent of voters say they would be more likely to vote for a mayoral candidate who supports the conversion of traditional public schools into charter schools. ***A key finding of this poll is that support for charter schools is markedly higher (76 percent) among African American parents with kids under 18 years of age.*** The next mayor of New Orleans may not have much direct control of local schools, but he or she can't afford to ignore this critical piece of the city's recovery.

Corruption

Concern about corruption in New Orleans politics is hardly new. But today, with the stakes so high and the attention of the country focused on New Orleans and its use of federal dollars to rebuild, frustration is boiling over. More than 3-in-4 voters agree, and more than half strongly agree, that 'the rest of America looks down on New Orleans because of our corruption and failed leadership.' This sense that the city is under a microscope since Katrina and has been made to look like a laughingstock because of the corruption and incompetence of city leaders is pervasive and undoubtedly contributes to the current mood across the city.

In our focus group discussions, corruption was repeatedly cited as one of the greatest impediments preventing the city from moving forward, whether it was Mayor Nagin funneling rebuilding contracts to friends and political allies who squander those resources while filling their own pockets or corrupt police who pose just as great a threat to local residents and businesses as the criminals they are supposed to be fighting. More than 3-in-4 whites and African-Americans alike agree that 'most police officers in New Orleans work hard to protect our citizens, but a few corrupt cops hurt the reputation of the whole force,' while a striking 1-in-

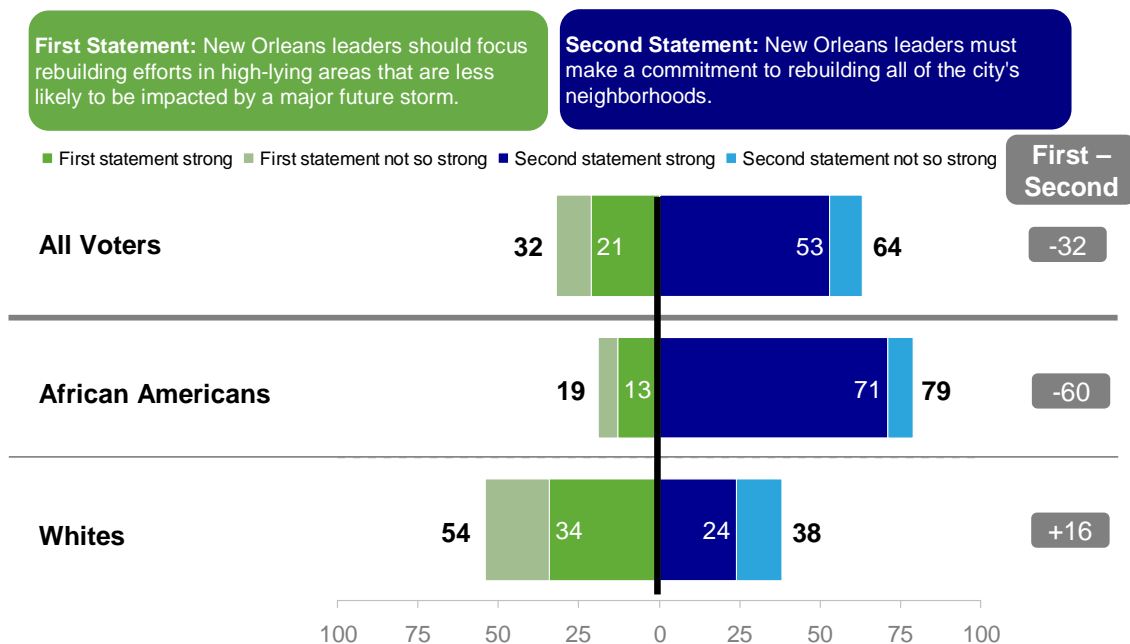


5 feel that, like violent crime, corruption in the New Orleans Police Department ‘is a widespread problem that threatens city residents.’

Rebuilding

No other issue in New Orleans today carries more symbolic power than the rebuilding effort to reclaim the city destroyed by Katrina. All New Orleans residents support the rebuilding process in general and the economic growth it spurs; they are anxious to see signs of Katrina’s devastation replaced with new signs of life and progress and hope. But the question of how far the rebuilding effort should go in replicating the physical footprint of the city that was destroyed is by far the most divisive issue in the current political debate. Among white voters, 64 percent agree (and 40 percent strongly agree) that ‘some areas of New Orleans destroyed by Hurricane Katrina should not be rebuilt as residential areas again. Among African-Americans, 74 percent disagree, including 62 percent who strongly disagree.

The intensity of feelings on this issue makes further debate on the idea of building in certain areas but not others a political non-starter for any mayoral candidate.



The good news in the rebuilding effort is that city residents overwhelmingly believe that, in sharp contrast to the neglect of the Bush administration, ‘President Obama is committed to rebuilding New Orleans and will provide the strong leadership we need in Washington’ (83 percent agree, 12 percent disagree). They are less certain about the resolve of Congress on this matter (53 percent agree, 42 percent disagree), but they will be looking for the next mayor to work closely with the Obama administration to make sure that the promises made in the wake of Katrina are actually kept this time.



Race

This survey provides powerful evidence that there is much more that unites white and black residents of New Orleans than divides them. At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the often divisive history that race has played in city politics or the continuing physical and social division that exists in parts of the city. The key is to view the issue in the context of the tremendous challenges facing New Orleans today. White and black residents agree that race remains an important issue that can't be ignored, but it also can't be allowed to overshadow the more pressing challenges that threaten the city today.

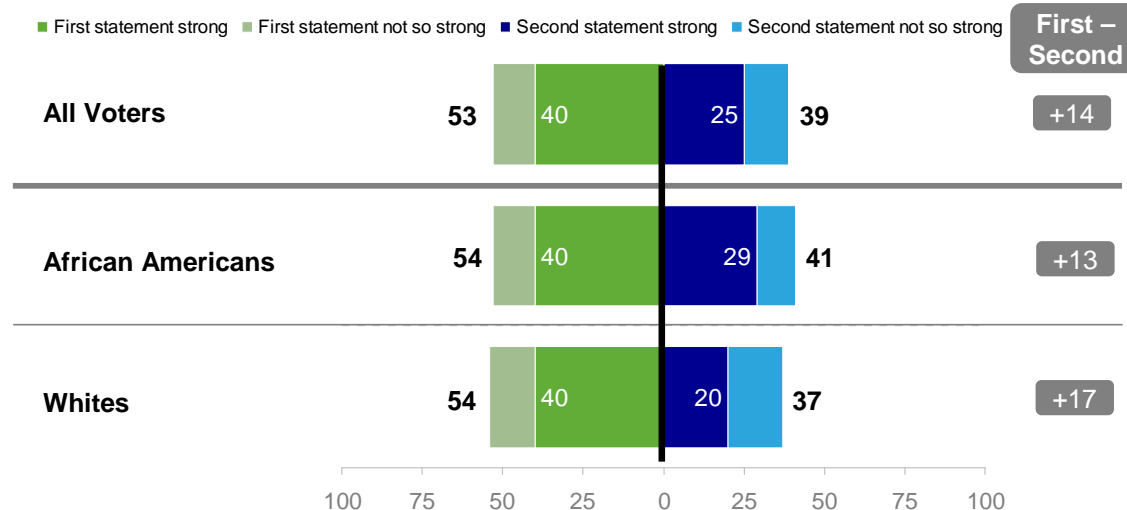
Race Relations in New Orleans			
<i>How big of a problem is the issue of race relations in New Orleans?</i>			
	Total	AfAm	White
Biggest problem facing the city	7	9	3
One of the biggest problems facing the city	19	21	16
One of several major problems facing the city	48	41	60
Not a major problem compared to other issues	20	20	19
Not a problem at all	6	8	2

In the context of the next mayoral election, it is clear that whites and African-Americans alike want the candidates to acknowledge the issue but not let it dominate the debate. They agree that race has too often prevented the city's political leaders from making progress on the issues that matter to all city residents.



First Statement: The racial divide in New Orleans prevents our political leaders from making progress on the major problems facing the city.

Second Statement: The racial divide in New Orleans is an important problem facing our city, but we can overcome our problems without directly addressing the issue of race.



The Next Mayor

The field for next year’s mayoral election is still undetermined, and it was not our goal to test the relative strength of specific candidates or potential candidates. Rather, we wanted to determine what New Orleans voters were looking for from their next mayor and what qualities would be most important in winning their trust and moving the city forward. First and foremost, it is clear that voters want a candidate who has experience in the city’s unique politics and who knows the City Council he or she will need to work with to make things happen.

New Orleans' next mayor should be an experienced political leader who knows City Council and can work closely with them. (65 percent)

vs.

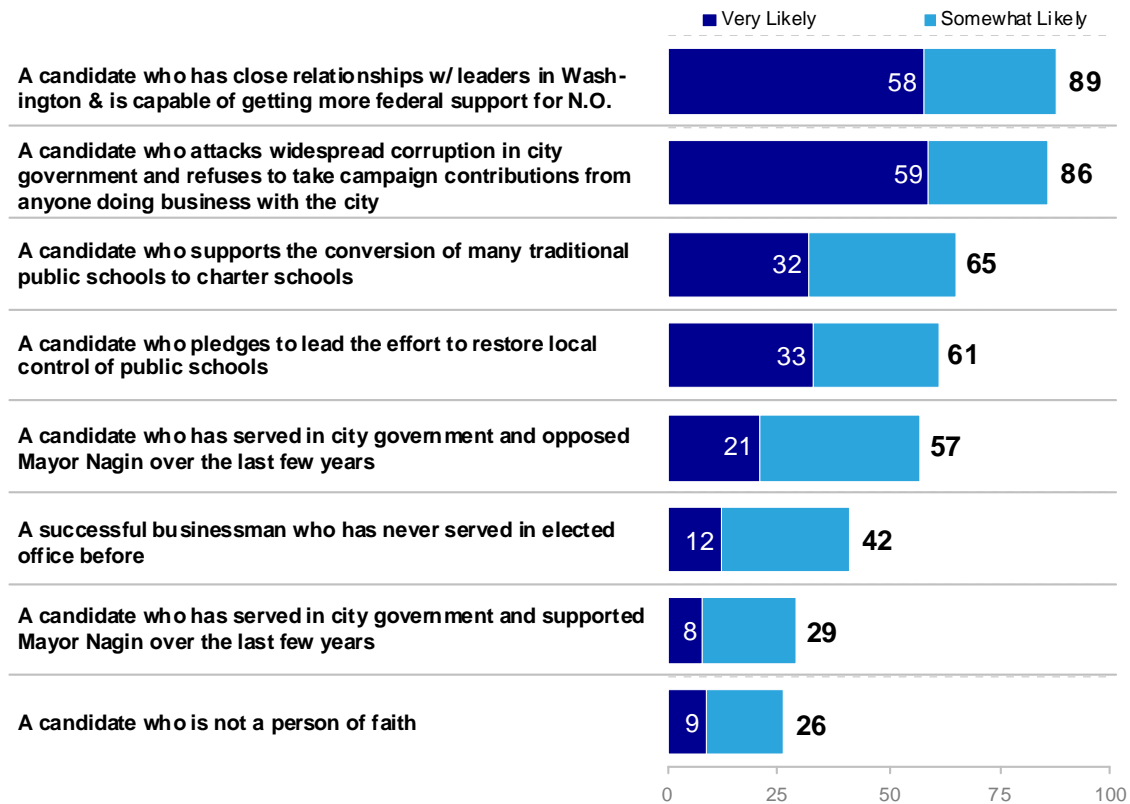
New Orleans' next mayor should be a political outsider who can challenge the city's political culture. (25 percent)

Despite the frustration with corruption in city government and the current direction of the city, voters have made the clear decision that this is not the moment for a political outsider who will require more on-the-job training.

Looking at a broad range of potential attributes for a mayoral candidate, there are some clear points of consensus on qualities that any mayor should possess, starting with strong relationships in Washington, a commitment to local schools (especially charter schools), and a willingness to put their money where their mouth is on corruption by refusing campaign contributions from anyone who does business with the city.



Now let me read you some descriptions of potential candidates for Mayor of New Orleans. As I read each statement, please tell me whether you would be **VERY LIKELY** to support a candidate who fits that description, **SOMEWHAT LIKELY**, **JUST A LITTLE LIKELY**, or **NOT AT ALL LIKELY** to support a candidate for mayor who fits that description?



It is important to once again note the lack of any significant racial or demographic disparities on most of these measures. It is also important to note the strong opposition to any candidate who is not a person of faith, particularly among African-Americans. New Orleans' strong Catholic identity has always meant that religion will play a central role in the city's politics, and it is clear that faith will continue to be an important criterion for voters as they evaluate potential candidates.

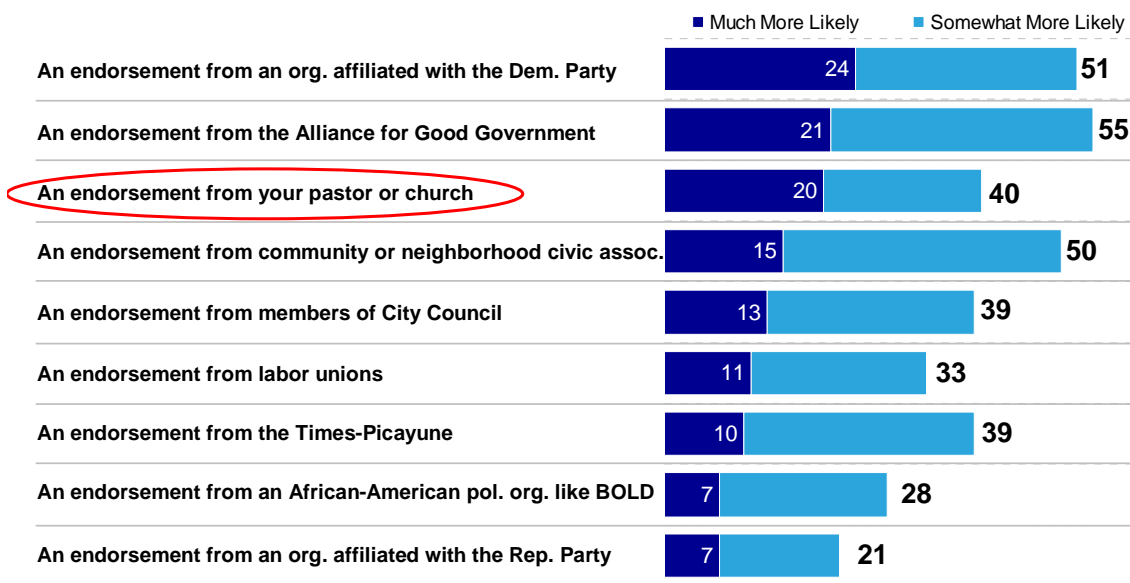
Given the strong social ties that bond so much of New Orleans' unique culture, we also felt it was critical to measure the relative impact of potential endorsements that could be given to a candidate and the impact of those endorsements on various constituencies within the electorate. The results are very informative because, while white and black voters may agree on many issues and want to move forward in the same direction, they take their electoral cues from very different sources.

- Among white voters, purportedly objective civic organizations – such as the Alliance for Good Government (63 percent more likely among whites) or a neighborhood civic association (54 percent) carry the greatest weight, followed by the Times-Picayune (49 percent) and members of City Council (43 percent).



- Among African-Americans, an organization affiliated with the Democratic Party (59 percent) or their pastor or church would be most influential (53 percent), followed by civic groups such as the Alliance for Good Government (49 percent) or their own community civic association (47 percent).
- The role of the church or pastor is particularly important among African-American women, who represent 36 percent of the entire likely electorate in next year’s mayoral race. While the majority identify themselves as Protestants, African-American women in New Orleans are three times as likely to identify themselves as Catholics as are African-American women in the rest of the country. And 69 percent of African-American women say they attend church at least once a week, an extremely high level that underscores the importance of the church in their communities.

Over the course of a campaign, many organizations or individuals endorse specific candidates. I'd like to know how these endorsements influence your thinking about a candidate for mayor. I'm going to read a list of individuals, groups, or organizations that might endorse a candidate. For each one, please tell me whether this endorsement would make you more likely or less likely to support that candidate, or if it would make no difference. If you have no opinion or have never heard of that person or organization, please say so.



A Campaign That Unites New Orleans

As the field of candidates for next year’s mayoral election takes shape, there will be a tendency to define the candidates along traditional political fault lines of race and geography. But such tendencies would represent a slap in the face to the voters, who are desperate to move beyond these old divisions to find common ground and shared commitment to addressing the tremendous challenges which threaten the future of this city.



A candidate who wishes to unite the city around an agenda for governing rather than seeking short-term electoral gains through divide-and-conquer politics could start with a message focused on addressing the city's economic and crime challenges by starting with the schools:

To ensure our economic future and reverse the crime epidemic in our city, we must make a historic investment in New Orleans' public schools. We should expand early childhood education and after school programs, reduce class sizes, increase teacher salaries, and expand access to higher education for all qualified high school graduates. (67 percent much more likely to support, 86 percent more likely)

Building on this foundation, there are two related messages that garner passionate agreement from across the spectrum that would strengthen this message and this candidate even more. The first is a direct appeal to the tremendous civic pride of New Orleans residents, strengthening the bond between the city's generations:

- *We should do more to teach our children about our city's unique history and the incredible individuals and ideas from New Orleans that have shaped the world we live in. (72 percent strongly agree, 94 percent agree)*
- *We'll never really address our failing schools and record crime rates until we do something about the cycle of teen pregnancies and kids raising kids. (51 percent strongly agree, 69 percent agree)*

Of course, any candidate for mayor must address crime directly and offer a path forward for those residents who now fear for their own safety or worry that the corruption within government makes it impossible to fight crime on the streets.

As crime increases and ordinary citizens fear for their safety, we need a police chief who can reform our police force and make our streets safe again. As mayor, I will bring in a top national police chief with no ties to politics as usual in New Orleans. His job will be to root out corruption, put more cops on the street, and work with Leon Cannizaro to ensure criminals are convicted and punished to the full extent of the law. (58 percent much more likely to support, 83 percent more likely)

New Orleans voters want an experienced political leader at the helm, but this message shows that they still appreciate the appeal of a credible outsider helping a new mayor to clean house and start over. A similar approach was tested for a professional city manager to root out corruption and direct daily operations of government, which was not as popular as the crime message but was still broadly effective and reinforces the appeal of a strong leader willing to bring in outside help to clean house:



Backroom deals among political insiders have cost New Orleans millions of dollars, held back our recovery, and divided our people. Like many other major cities across the country, we should bring in a professional city manager with no political affiliations to supervise day-to-day operations of all city departments, reduce costs, expose corruption, and demand accountability from all levels of city government. (48 percent much more likely, 73 percent more likely)

The specter of another storm similar to Katrina hangs over New Orleans at all times. While the strength of the levees does not rise to the top of a list of priorities in the same way that crime or education does, our focus groups made it very clear that New Orleans residents are extremely concerned about the strength of the levees and understand very clearly that none of these other issues – the schools, the crime, the economic development, none of it – matters if the levees are not strong enough to protect them from the next storm. That’s why connections in Washington were the single most important attribute a candidate could possess and why any candidate for mayor should address the issue directly and forcefully.

Nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina, our levees remain dangerously weak and ineffective. If we don't strengthen the levees, nothing else we do matters, yet politicians in Washington refuse to fulfill their responsibilities. We need a fighter who will work directly with the Obama administration to get what we need. If necessary, I will go to Washington to meet with every member of Congress, and I won't leave until I have the resources and a firm timeline for completion. (55 percent much more likely to support, 80 percent more likely)

In the midst of a crisis on the scale of Katrina, it is easy for government leaders to lose sight of the fundamental responsibilities of day-to-day governance, but failure to meet those responsibilities makes it impossible for city residents to ever return to a normal routine and a sense of normalcy. The condition of local streets in many sections of the city is abysmal, and basic quality of life services such as trash and utilities remain unreliable. These issues aren’t as exciting as some others, but they are essential to restoring quality of life in local communities.

It's time for New Orleans government to get back to basics. As mayor, I will make sure city government fulfills its fundamental obligations, including trash pick-up, fix-ing the city's roads, and continuing the clean-up from Katrina. (52 percent much more likely to support, 80 percent more likely)

The weakest message tested in this survey was a direct attack on Mayor Nagin and his record in office. Focusing on a theme of accountability, this message scores moderately well overall (41 percent much more likely, 64 percent more likely) but much weaker than the other messages here. This is because it is the only message that produces a sharp divide along lines of race and partisan affiliation. Potential candidates and New Orleans voters are better served with messages that focus on the challenges and the opportunities ahead.