

THE LOUISIANA EARLY CHILDHOOD PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY



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The Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families (Partnership) is a statewide child advocacy organization that works to provide “One Voice, One Vision” for Louisiana’s children and families. The Partnership, whose membership is comprised of child and family serving organizations, works to increase advocacy, promote best practices, and improve training opportunities for those working with children.

The Partnership commissioned the Louisiana Early Childhood Public Opinion Survey and worked with the Tulane University Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and the LSU Public Policy Research Lab to conduct the survey and analyze the results. Funding for the survey was provided by the Louisiana Children’s Trust Fund. The Partnership plans to annually survey public opinion about important issues that impact children in Louisiana.

Overall, the survey found that providing an array of opportunities for young children ages 0-5 is extremely important to Louisianans, and that this issue will influence how they vote in the upcoming elections. A large majority said that the state is currently doing too little to support young children, and they perceive that the existing state system for early childhood is either in need of fundamental change or does not exist and should be created. Louisianans ranked providing funding for these early childhood supports as a high priority. In fact, the vast majority said that sufficient funding for the needs of young children was a much greater priority than cutting spending and taxes. Furthermore, Louisianans were overwhelmingly supportive of a potential solution, an early childhood systems building effort known as BrightStart, a new state initiative working to ensure school readiness. Finally, likely voters in the state, including voters of all political persuasions, were clear that issues of early childhood would influence how they vote for governor and for candidates for the state legislature. The following is a summary of the key findings.

Key Findings

- **Louisianans believe the state is doing too little to ensure that our children enter kindergarten with the knowledge and skills they need.** 71% believe the state is doing too little to prepare children to succeed in school, while 18% believe the state is doing the right amount. In fact, 67% of those surveyed said that only about half or fewer of children begin kindergarten with the knowledge and skills they need to do their best in school, compared to 28% who believe most or nearly all children have these skills.
- **Louisianans expressed strong support for broad efforts to ensure children are ready for school.** On a scale of 0-10 (with 10 expressing the greatest importance), the average response was 9 or above for each of the following: ensuring all children have access to quality health care; ensuring high-quality child care and pre-k are available; ensuring that parents who want to work get needed help to afford child care; ensuring that parents have access to the parenting resources they need; and, ensuring that prevention programs exist as opposed to waiting to treat problems after they appear in the school setting. Support is also strong for specific programmatic efforts, with over 61% of respondents who said it is extremely important to fund voluntary physical and mental health screenings and treatment for young children, as well as high quality child care and pre-k classes; whereas, less than 4% said these are not important.

- **Louisianans strongly support BrightStart, an early childhood system to ensure school readiness.** BrightStart is a federally funded, early childhood systems building effort devoted to ensuring that Louisiana’s children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. 71% of respondents said this effort is extremely important, while another 25% said it is quite or somewhat important. Only 3% said that BrightStart is not that important. When asked about the existing system for serving the needs of young children, 51% said there are “some good things, but fundamental change is needed,” while an additional 27% said “our early childhood system really doesn’t exist and we need to completely build it.” In contrast, only 14% said “on the whole, the early childhood system works pretty well and only minor changes are necessary.”
- **Louisianans place a greater priority on addressing young children’s needs than cutting spending and taxes.** Given the choice between cutting spending and taxes or addressing the needs of young children, 78% of Louisianans believe it is more important to ensure sufficient funding for the needs of young children, including 69% of self-identified conservatives, 88% of self-identified liberals and 81% of self-identified moderates. This is in contrast to only 16% of respondents who said a greater priority is cutting spending and taxes and 6% saying they were unsure, don’t know or that it depends.
- **Issues of early childhood will influence how people vote for governor in 2007.** Gubernatorial candidates will accrue political benefit from supporting early childhood efforts as a large percentage of likely voters reported that early childhood will be an important issue to them when they vote for governor: 86% of likely voters said early childhood was a very or somewhat important issue, compared to 11% who said it was not very or not at all important. Support for early childhood education crosses ideological and party lines. For those who identified themselves as liberal, 90% said this is a very or somewhat important issue, compared to 6% who said it is not very or not at all important. For moderates, this is 88% and 10%, respectively, and for conservatives, this is 82% and 16%, respectively.
- **Issues of early childhood will influence how people vote for the state legislature.** Similar to the gubernatorial race, a large percentage of likely voters, 68%, were “more likely to support” candidates for the legislature who support early childhood education programs for all children. This includes 80% of self-identified liberals, 69% of moderates, and 58% of conservatives. In contrast, 6% of liberals, 4% of moderates and 10% of conservatives said they were less likely to support these candidates.

Who Was Surveyed

The Louisiana Early Childhood Public Opinion Survey is based on 658 randomly selected adult Louisiana residents. Respondents were selected using random digit dialing, and all interviews were collected from April 16 – May 12, 2007. The margin of error is approximately +/- 3.8 percentage points. Final results are weighted by gender, age, income, and education to match statewide demographics as reflected in the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Tables 1-4 detail the weighted sample that comprises the survey responses.

Table 1 – Demographics of Sampled Population

	Percent
Gender	
Male	45.3
Female	54.7
Age	
18-29	21.8
30-39	19.8
40-49	22.2
50-59	17.1
60-69	11.8
70 and over	7.4
Income Group	
Under \$10,000	8.3
\$10,000-\$19,999	10.8
\$20,000-\$29,999	10.5
\$30,000-\$39,999	16.7
\$40,000-\$49,999	14.8
\$50,000-\$74,999	12.6
\$75,000-\$99,999	13.6
\$100,000 or more	12.7
Education Group	
No high school degree	17.1
High school graduate	33.0
Some college or vocational training	26.0
College degree including post-grad work	18.4
Master's degree or more	5.4

Table 1 – Demographics of Sampled Population (continued)

	Percent
Race	
Hispanic	0.6
White	65.8
Black	29.3
Asian	0.8
Other	1.5
Refused	2.1
Marital Status	
Single	46.7
Married	52.7
Don't Know/Refused	0.6
Area Code	
225	27.4
318	25.0
337	13.9
504	22.9
985	10.8
Employment Status	
Employed, Full-time	54.1
Employed, Part-time	7.8
Retired	18.1
Unemployed, Looking for work	8.3
Unemployed, Not looking for work	10.5
Refused	1.3

Survey respondents identified more often as conservative or moderate as compared to liberal (See Table 2). Likely voters were defined as those 471 respondents who said that they had voted in all or most elections for governor and other state offices (See Table 3).

Table 2 – Thinking about your general approach to issues, do you consider yourself to be liberal, moderate, or conservative?

	Percent
Conservative	37.4
Moderate	35.3
Liberal	16.7
Refused	0.7
Don't know	1.2
Not sure	8.5

Table 3 – When it comes to elections for governor and other state offices, have you voted in all the elections for which you have been eligible, most of these elections, about half of these elections, or fewer than half of these elections?

	Percent
Voted in all	40.2
Voted in most	31.5
Voted in about half	9.3
Voted in less than half	9.2
Voted in none	8.3
Refused	0.3
Don't know	0.9
Not sure	0.2

Table 4 – Registered to Vote

	Percent
Yes	84.1
No	15.3
Don't Know	0.7

Support for Early Childhood Development and School Readiness

A primary goal of the Louisiana Early Childhood Public Opinion Survey was to ascertain Louisianans' priorities and commitment to supporting early childhood development and school readiness. Among the general population there appears to be strong support for dedicating resources, providing needed services, and building a system to ensure that children are ready for school entry.

Table 5 - Thinking about education for a moment, what proportion of children in Louisiana do you think begin kindergarten with the knowledge and skills they need to do their best in school?

	Percent
Nearly all children	13.4
Most children	14.5
About half	37.9
Fewer than half	18.6
Very few	10.4
Not sure/Don't know	5.3

Table 6 - Overall, do you think that state government in Louisiana is doing too much, about the right amount, or too little to ensure that children in the state enter kindergarten with the knowledge and skills they need to do their best in school?

	Percent
Doing too much	3.2
Doing about right amount	18.1
Doing too little	70.7
Not sure/Don't know	7.7
Refused	0.3

Table 7 – In thinking about ways to ensure that children in Louisiana begin kindergarten ready to do their best, I'd like you to rate how important you personally consider each of the following goals to be on a scale from zero to ten. On this scale, a ten means that you consider a goal to be extremely important and one of the very top priorities for ensuring that children begin kindergarten ready to do their best, and a zero means that you do NOT consider this to be an important goal. You may use any number from zero to ten, depending on how important you feel a particular goal is.

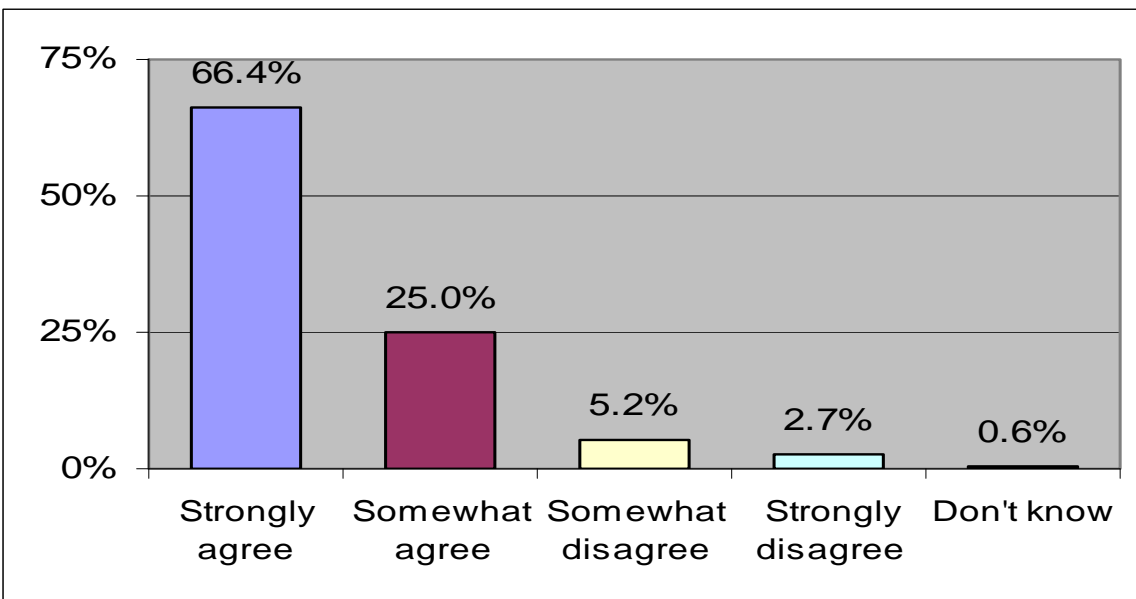
	Mean (on a scale of 0-10)	Standard Deviation
Making sure that all children have access to quality health care.	9.42	1.57
Making sure that parents who want to work but who cannot afford child care get the help they need.	9.06	1.80
Making sure that the parents of children age five and under have access to information and resources that can help them parent.	9.07	1.78
Making sure high-quality early care and education are available to all children five years old and under whose parents want to send them.	9.03	1.92
Making sure that prevention programs are funded that are designed to ensure children are ready to begin school rather than treat problems only after they appear once in school.	9.12	1.76

In addition, questions about specific programmatic efforts were asked. Table 8 and Chart 1 summarize the responses to questions regarding how important these types of specific programs are and whether or not they should be funded.

Table 8

How important are the following programs – do you think they should be funded?	Voluntary physical health screening and treatment for children under age six (%)	Voluntary mental health screening and treatment for children under age six (%)	High quality child care and pre-k classes for all children under age six (%)	Access to quality parenting education and family support for parents of children under age six (%)
Extremely Important	63.2	61.1	65.0	66.1
Quite Important	23.5	18.2	19.3	16.0
Somewhat Important	10.7	15.8	11.5	13.1
Not that Important	1.5	4.2	2.9	3.4
Not sure/ Don't know	1.0	0.6	1.2	1.4

Chart 1 – It makes sense for the state to provide services to address young children's personal mental and emotional health as it will make our communities and schools safer, better places.



Support for a Comprehensive System for Early Childhood and School Readiness

A second goal of the Louisiana Early Childhood Public Opinion Survey was to assess Louisianans' attitudes about an ongoing state effort to build an early childhood system. This federally funded effort, known as BrightStart, is designed to build a comprehensive early childhood system that will coordinate and integrate services for children 0-5 years of age, to ensure that young children and their families have opportunities for optimal emotional, social, physical and cognitive development. The two primary goals of BrightStart are:

- 1) To develop service systems integration and partnerships to enhance children's ability to enter school healthy and ready to learn.
- 2) To build an early childhood system that addresses the following priority areas:
 - Access to Health Insurance and Medical Homes
 - Mental Health and Social-Emotional Development
 - Early Care and Education
 - Parenting Education
 - Family Support

Expansion of BrightStart, which currently operates in a limited capacity, is one solution available to address the priorities expressed by Louisianans. Among other successes, BrightStart has recently worked across state governmental entities in the development and implementation of the new Quality Rating System for child care centers. When introduced to the concept of BrightStart, respondents are overwhelmingly supportive.

Table 9 – I'm going to read you a short description of Louisiana's BrightStart Initiative and then ask you a question about it. BrightStart is Louisiana's commitment to young children and is devoted to ensuring that our children arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. Having heard this description, how important do you think it is to have such a coordinated effort available in Louisiana?

	Percent
Extremely important	70.9
Quite important	18.6
Somewhat important	6.5
Not that important	2.7
Not sure/Don't know	1.1

Chart 2 – Likely Voters only, “How important do you think it is to have such a coordinated effort [BrightStart] available in Louisiana?”

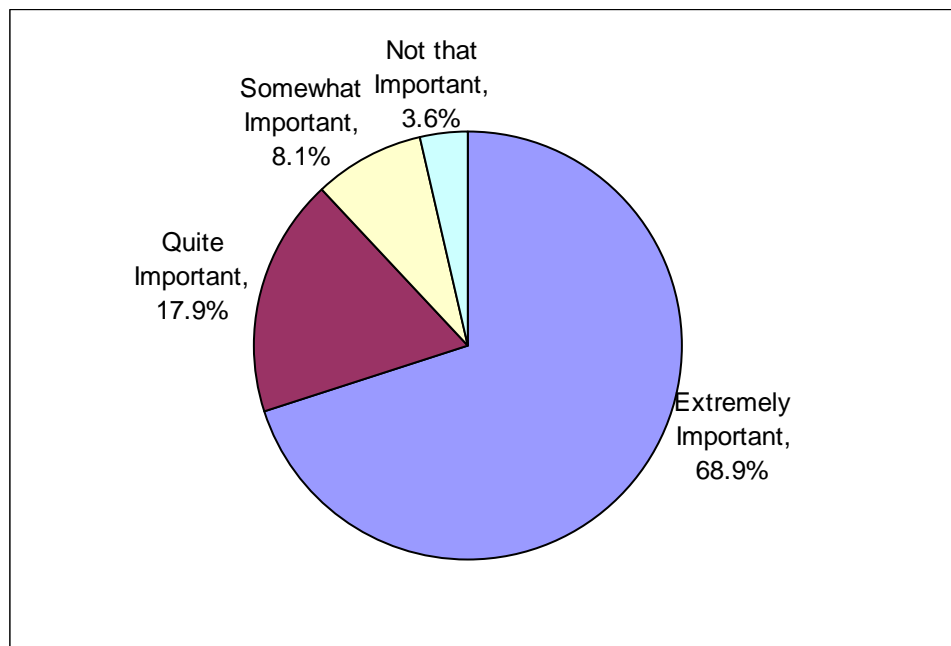


Table 10 – Likely Voters only, by Conservative, Liberal or Moderate, “How important do you think it is to have such a coordinated effort [BrightStart] available in Louisiana?”

	Conservative (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)
Extremely/Quite Important	85.7	88.6	88.3
Not that Important	5.0	2.3	3.3

Table 11 – Which of the following statements comes closest to expressing your overall view of Louisiana's current system for serving the needs of children under 6 years of age?

	Percent
On whole, early childhood system works well and only minor changes are necessary to make it work better.	13.5
There are some good things in our early childhood system, but fundamental changes are needed.	51.3
Our early childhood system really doesn't exist and we need to completely build it.	27.2
Not sure/Don't know	7.7
Refused	0.2

The results show that people prioritize committing resources to support the needs of young children as the vast majority said that sufficient funding for the needs of young children is a much greater priority than cutting state spending and taxes.

Table 12 - Which of the following do you think is a greater priority for Louisiana right now - cutting taxes and spending, or making sure that there is sufficient funding for addressing the needs of young children?

	Percent
Cutting state taxes and spending	15.5
Making sure there is sufficient funding for the needs of young children	78.4
Depends	3.2
Don't Know	0.3
Not sure	2.6

Chart 3 – Likely Voters only, “Which of the following do you think is a greater priority for Louisiana right now - cutting taxes and spending, or making sure that there is sufficient funding for addressing the needs of young children?”

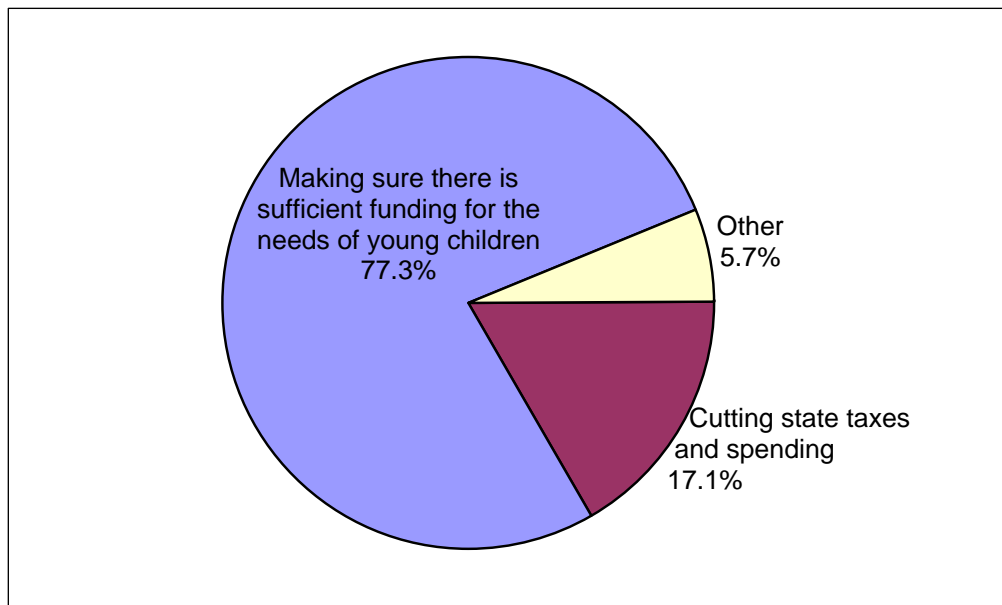


Table 13 – Likely Voters only, by Conservative, Liberal or Moderate, “Which of the following do you think is a greater priority for Louisiana right now - cutting taxes and spending, or making sure that there is sufficient funding for addressing the needs of young children?”

	Conservative (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)
Making sure there is sufficient funding for the needs of young children	69.4	87.7	80.8
Cutting state taxes and spending	24.0	9.0	15.1

Early Childhood Issues will Influence How People will Vote

The final goal of the Louisiana Early Childhood Public Opinion Survey was to ascertain how voters would feel if candidates for governor and the state legislature supported early childhood issues.

Table 14 – How important will issues of early childhood be to you when voting for governor in 2007?

	Percent
Very	59.4
Somewhat	27.3
Not very	5.8
Not at all	4.3
Not sure/Don't know	3.3

Chart 4 – Likely Voters only, “How important will issues of early childhood be to you when voting for governor in 2007?”

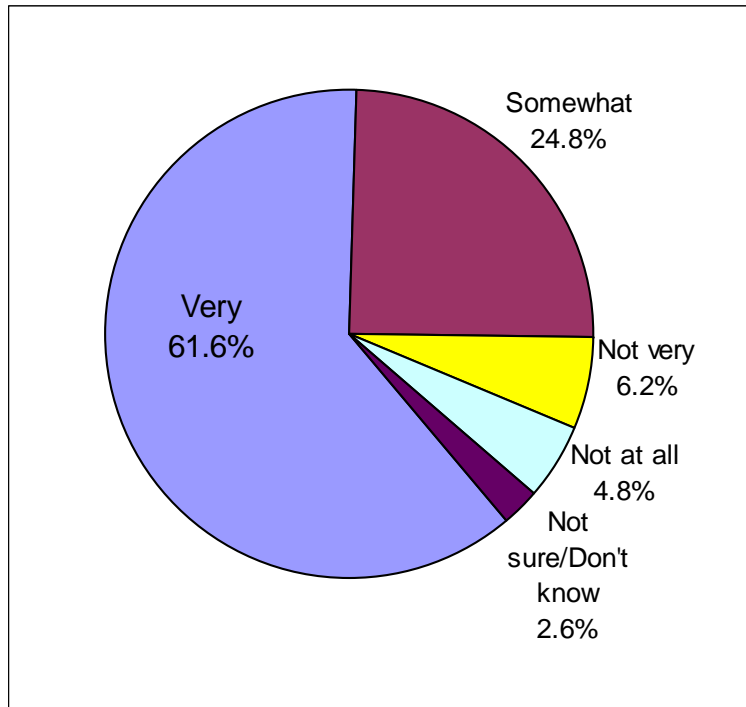


Table 15 – Likely Voters only, by Conservative, Liberal or Moderate, “How important will issues of early childhood be to you when voting for governor in 2007?”

	Conservative (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)
Very	51.3	75.6	64.5
Somewhat	31.0	14.5	23.5
Not Very	7.7	3.2	6.9
Not at All	8.0	2.3	3.4

Table 16 – “If a candidate running for state legislator supported expanding early childhood education programs to make them available to all children age five and under in Louisiana, would you be more likely to support your state legislator for reelection, less likely to support your state legislator, or would it not make a difference to you either way?”

	Percent
More likely to support	68.6
Less likely to support	6.7
No difference	20.9
Don't know	2.8
Refused	0.9

Chart 5 – Likely Voters only, “If a candidate running for state legislator supported expanding early childhood education programs to make them available to all children age five and under in Louisiana, would you be more likely to support your state legislator for reelection, less likely to support your state legislator, or would it not make a difference to you either way?”

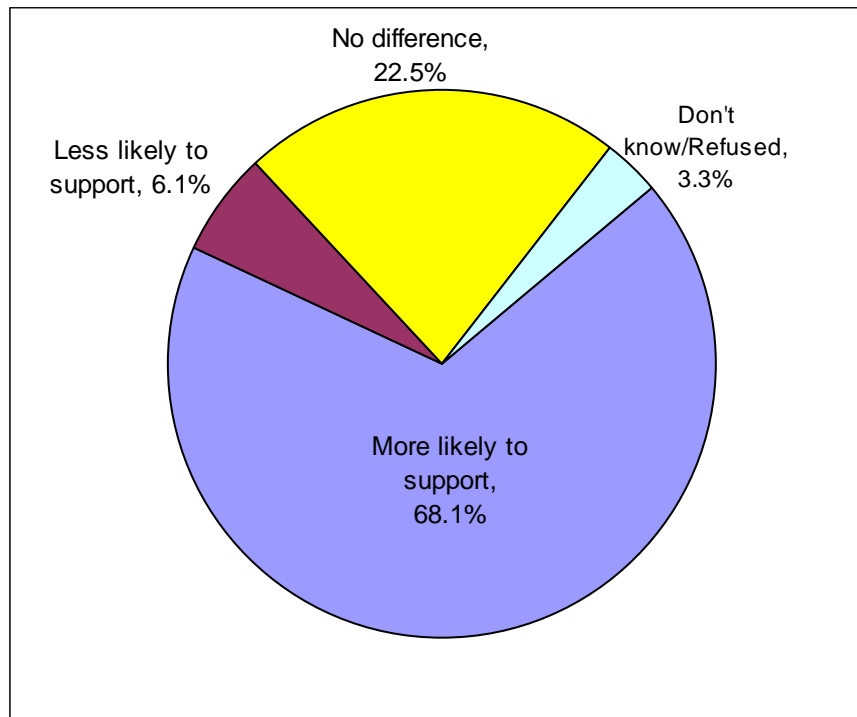


Table 17– Likely Voters only, by Conservative, Liberal or Moderate, “If a candidate running for state legislator supported expanding early childhood education programs to make them available to all children age five and under in Louisiana, would you be more likely to support your state legislator for reelection, less likely to support your state legislator, or would it not make a difference to you either way?”

	Conservative (%)	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)
More Likely to Support	57.9	79.9	68.6
Less Likely to Support	9.5	6.3	3.6
No Difference	27.8	13.8	25.2