



A Classic Partisan Contest

*The 1996 Senate and Presidential
Elections in Louisiana*

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A CLASSIC PARTISAN CONTEST

This year in Louisiana we are experiencing an election unlike most statewide elections in recent history -- **a classic partisan contest**. A classic partisan contest is characterized by a two-party system, voting along party lines, a split middle-of-the-road, groups voting according to their partisanship, and partisan issues related to voting choice. A classic partisan contest stands in contrast to an election in which voting is dominated by a personality (Duke or Edwards), racial identification (Fields), or one party.

The last election that came close to being such a contest was the 1986 U.S. Senate race between John Breaux and Henson Moore, but at that time the Republican Party was not nearly as strong as it is today, and conventional wisdom was that a Republican candidate could not win against a respectable Democrat. The 1996 U.S. Senate race may be the first classic partisan contest in a competitive two-party Louisiana.

Party and Race

Landrieu is enjoying an eight point lead due to black voters and white Democrats. However, this race is still competitive due to the turnout patterns of black and white voters. In this survey Landrieu is receiving over one-third of the white vote, which would be enough to win if black and white turnout were equal. But black turnout in statewide races is typically lower than white turnout, making the contest closer than it appears.

Both black and white voting preferences reflect their partisanship. As expected, the overwhelmingly Democratic black vote is heavily Landrieu. White preferences, on the other hand, reflect the classical partisan contest described above, with white Republicans and Democrats leaning toward their respective candidates, and Independents more divided.

The "Middle"

As in most competitive partisan contests, the struggle is for the middle of the ideological spectrum. In Louisiana this group is predominantly white Independents and self-described moderates. White Independents are leaning toward Jenkins and white moderates lean toward Landrieu, another indication of a close contest.

Religion

Contrary to some expectations, Woody Jenkins' support goes far beyond his roots among the Christian conservatives. Jenkins leads in all white religious groups, mainstream Protestants and Catholics, as well as evangelicals.

TABLE 1

U.S. SENATE PREFERENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

	All	Blacks	Whites	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Landrieu	48	74	38	10	46	74
Jenkins	40	11	53	83	43	15
Undecided	11	15	9	7	12	11
N	711	208	492	183	171	322
% of Total	100	29	70	26	24	45

	Females	Males	White Republicans	White Democrats	White Independents
Landrieu	52	44	8	68	40

Jenkins	36	45	85	23	50
Undecided	12	11	7	9	10
N	385	326	168	172	130
% of Total	54	46	34	35	26

	White Conservatives	White Moderates	White Liberals	White Males	White Females
Landrieu	13	51	71	34	42
Jenkins	80	40	21	57	49
Undecided	7	9	6	9	9
N	191	145	24	238	256
% of Total	39	29	5	48	52

	Evangelical Protestant¹ Whites	Other Protestant² Whites	Catholic Whites
Landrieu	35	34	42
Jenkins	59	57	48
Undecided	6	9	10
N	106	91	243
% of Total	22	18	49

¹Defined as Baptist, Assembly of God, Born-Again, Seventh Day Adventist, Fundamentalist

²Defined as Methodist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian

THE GENDER GAP

The gender gap is predominantly a **white gender gap** since both black males and black females support Landrieu. This gap is not a result of having a female in the race, nor is it due to the abortion issue. The gender gap is another reflection of the classical partisan contest described

above. White women in Louisiana are more Democratic and less likely to be conservative than white men, and, although they still lean toward Jenkins, his margin among white females is much smaller than his margin among white males.

There are several issues which form the basis of the gender gap in Louisiana. White women are more supportive of an active role for government, while white men tend toward the anti-government, anti-spending position. This does not mean that white women in Louisiana are liberal, just that they are more supportive of government programs than men. For example, women are more favorable toward some government role in health insurance, they favor a ban on handguns, and they are more likely to favor a role for government in guaranteeing a standard of living and managing the economy. All of these issues also separate white males and white females nationally.

Dole's 15% tax cut proposal is the only partisan issue in our survey on which white males and white females agree; they both think it is a good idea. Obviously, this issue has broad appeal across party lines. We suspect that this specific proposal, and the fact that it is Dole's idea, is not yet known to voters.

TABLE 2
GENDER GAP - WHITES

Party ID	White Females	White Males
Republican	31	37
Independent	27	26
Democrat	39	30
Don't Know	4	6
	White Females	White Males
Conservative	33	45
Moderate	32	26
Liberal	4	6
Don't Know	4	3

	White Females	White Males
For Government Health Insurance	29	29

In Between		
Against Government Health Insurance	39	57
Don't Know	32	14

Which is More Important?	White Females	White Males
Provide Services	23	18
In Between		
Cut Spending	43	61
Don't Know	32	19

	White Females	White Males
15% Tax Cut Good Idea	62	59
15% Tax Cut Bad Policy	20	28
Don't Know	26	13

	White Females	White Males
Need Strong Government	57	39
Free Market	38	58
Don't Know	5	3

	White Females	White Males
Favor Handgun Ban	42	26
Oppose Handgun Ban	54	72

Don't Know	4	1
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	White Females	White Males
Government Guarantee Standard of Living	18	14
Get Ahead on Own	59	72
Don't Know	24	14

NATIONAL INFLUENCES ON THE SENATE RACE

As is typical of the classic partisan contest, preferences in the Senate race are closely tied to preferences in the presidential election through the mechanism of party. Preferences in the Senate race are also related to voters' opinion of Congress. This particular Congress has more visibility to voters than most Congresses, and apparently many voters know that it is a Republican Congress. Thus, those who approve of the Republican Congress are mostly Jenkins' supporters, and those who disapprove favor Landrieu.

TABLE 3

NATIONAL INFLUENCES

	Clinton Supporters	Dole Supporters	Approve of Congress	Disapprove of Congress
Landrieu	77	12	38	57
Jenkins	15	83	55	31
Undecided	8	5	7	12
N	353	232	273	361
% of Total	50	33	38	51

ISSUES AND THE SENATE RACE

Many standard liberal/conservative issues are related to the Jenkins/Landrieu contest, another reflection of a classic partisan contest. Indeed, across the five issues measured here, there is amazing similarity of results; the voters who give the Democratic/liberal response to these issues

tend to be Landrieu supporters and the opposite is true of those who give the Republican/conservative response.

One of the advantages of a strong two-party system is that voters can make a clear choice (some would say a more rational choice) between two different directions for government. They can make that choice because the alternatives are defined by party instead of by personality. The parties are a cue for a whole host of issue positions.

TABLE 4

ISSUES

Abortion			
	Always Legal	Sometimes	Never Legal
Landrieu	58	50	38
Jenkins	31	40	49
Undecided	10	9	14
N	142	349	192
% of Total	20	49	27

Government Health Insurance Program		
	For	Against
Landrieu	67	46
Jenkins	21	40
Undecided	12	14
N	220	143
% of Total	37	39

	For Handgun Ban	Anti-Handgun Ban
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Landrieu	60	40
Jenkins	28	50
Undecided	11	10
N	282	403
% of Total	40	57

Which is More Important?		
	Provide Services	Cut Spending
Landrieu	66	24
Jenkins	21	64
Undecided	13	12
N	158	224
% of Total	30	42

Role of Government in Economy		
	Need Strong Government	Free Market
Landrieu	64	25
Jenkins	26	65
Undecided	10	10
N	414	260
% of Total	58	37

PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCES

Clinton continues to hold his substantial lead over Bob Dole in Louisiana due to support from black voters, white Democrats and white moderates. Clinton's support in the presidential election

is very similar to Mary Landrieu's in the Senate race, but Bob Dole is running behind fellow Republican Woody Jenkins.

Dole's support is particularly low compared to Jenkins' among white Independents and white evangelical Protestants. Evangelical Protestants, the largest of the two Protestant groupings, probably do not perceive Dole as staunchly conservative on the abortion issue, thus, they are less enthusiastic about him than about Jenkins. White Independents, ungrounded by a party identification, are the group most likely to support Ross Perot, as was the case in 1992. It seems that Perot is hurting Dole in Louisiana in 1996 in the same way he hurt Bush in 1992. The difference between 1992 and 1996 is that, if all of Perot's vote went to Dole, he would still be trailing.

TABLE 5

PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

	All	Blacks	Whites	White Republicans	White Democrats	White Independents
Clinton	50	84	36	11	63	34
Dole	33	3	45	79	17	38
Perot	7	2	9	4	9	15
Undecided	11	11	10	6	10	13
N	711	208	494	168	172	130
% of Total	100	29	70	34	35	26

	White Conservatives	White Moderates	White Liberals	White Males	White Females
Clinton	11	49	67	34	38
Dole	77	32	12	49	41
Perot	5	10	17	9	9
Undecided	7	9	4	8	13
N	191	145	24	238	256
% of Total	39	29	5	48	52

	Evangelical Protestant Whites	Other Protestant Whites	Catholic Whites
Clinton	36	26	38
Dole	46	60	40
Perot	8	3	11
Undecided	10	10	11
N	106	91	243
% of Total	22	18	49

CONGRESS AND THE ECONOMY

Attitudes toward the new Republican Congress seem to have an impact on how voters in Louisiana view the presidential election. Although typically voters disapprove of Congress, that disapproval normally does not have a clear partisan tone. This year, however, the Republican majority in Congress (and possibly Newt Gingrich) is more visible to the electorate, so that approval of Congressional performance reflects voters' party leanings and is related to presidential preference in a predictable way.

Voters' perception of both the national and the state's economy are helping the incumbent president. Only 26% of registered voters think the national economy has gotten worse, and only 18% think the state's economy has gotten worse. This contrasts to perceptions during the past two presidential elections, when perceptions were far more negative. This feeling of economic well being can also be seen in answers to a question about personal finances; over half of the voters said that their personal financial situation had improved over the past year.

TABLE 6

CONGRESS AND THE ECONOMY

	Approve of Congress	Disapprove of Congress
Clinton	37	60
Dole	50	22
Perot	6	8
Undecided	7	11
N	273	361
% of Total	38	51

ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS "Over the Past Year"

	United States			Louisiana		
	1988	1992	1996	1988	1992	1996
Better	28%	6%	32%	14%	9%	37%
Same	25	25	38	31	33	41
Worse	30	67	26	52	57	18

Sample Characteristics:

Total N: 711

% Black: 29.3 (State Registered Voters: 28.8%)

% Female: 54.1 (State Registered Voters: 54%)

Dates of Interviewing: Oct. 5-13, 1996

Error = 3.6%