

**1998
QUALITY OF LIFE
SURVEY**

**ORLEANS AND
JEFFERSON PARISHES**

December 1998

[The University of New Orleans Survey Research Center](http://www.uno.edu/survey)

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SUMMARY

- Perceptions of the quality of life in the City of New Orleans have improved significantly over the past four years. For the first time in twelve years, more people think life in the City is getting better than think it is getting worse.
- The change of mood in New Orleans is centered around perceptions of declining crime and improved police protection.
- For the first time in six years less than half of the voters mention crime as the biggest problem in New Orleans. Perceptions about crime as increasing or decreasing have totally reversed to the point where only 20% still believe crime is increasing.
- Evaluations of the New Orleans police are the highest they have been in twelve years, and residents are feeling safer.
- The most significant change in Jefferson also occurred in the area of crime, but the improvement is less dramatic because Jefferson voters were never as negative as the Orleans voters. Also, Jefferson voters may be reacting positively to the declining crime in the City.
- All government services, with the exception of public transportation, are evaluated more positively in Jefferson Parish, an expected result given the overall greater satisfaction in Jefferson.
- Parks and recreation and control of abandoned housing are perceived to be improving in New Orleans, as well as the overall level of local government services.

- The economic outlook in both Jefferson and Orleans has improved significantly since 1994. In both parishes voters are more optimistic about employment prospects than at any time in the twelve year series.
- The recent negative publicity about New Orleans public schools has contributed to their receiving the lowest evaluations in twelve years.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE SERIES

The UNO Survey Research Center began its Quality of Life series in 1986. Since then the quality of life and government services in Jefferson and Orleans parishes has been assessed every other year. The current 1998 survey is the seventh in the series, and in this report we pay particular attention to changes in both parishes that have occurred over the last twelve years.

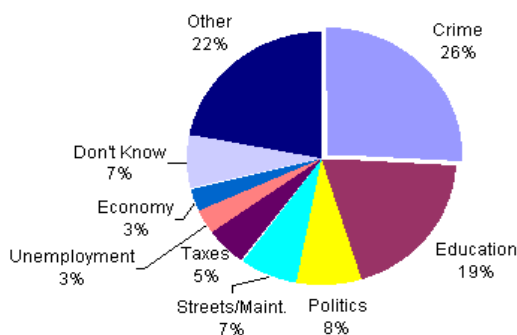
These surveys are designed to provide an ongoing picture of how voters view local government services and the general quality of life. They highlight the problems that are of greatest concern to the voters, as well as areas of satisfaction in their parish. The twelve-year time series can be used to assess the effects of events, programs, and policies. The series can also inform the public and officials about specific areas of perceived deterioration or improvement.

The results of the Quality of Life surveys represent the perceptions and opinions of the registered voters of the two parishes. The results are not objective measures of the quality of life or the quality of government services.

GENERAL QUALITY OF LIFE

(Tables 1 & 2)

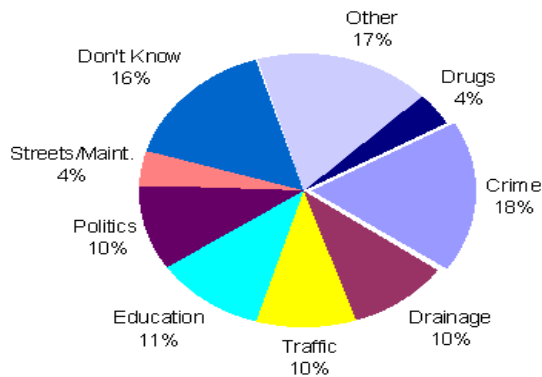
As has been the case in all of the surveys since 1986, Jefferson voters are quite satisfied with life in their parish. The high level of satisfaction in Jefferson (93%) contrasts with New Orleans where voters are less satisfied (63%). However, the current level of contentment in New Orleans is higher than four years ago when only 45% were satisfied. This pattern of an improving mood in New Orleans is repeated emphatically throughout the survey.



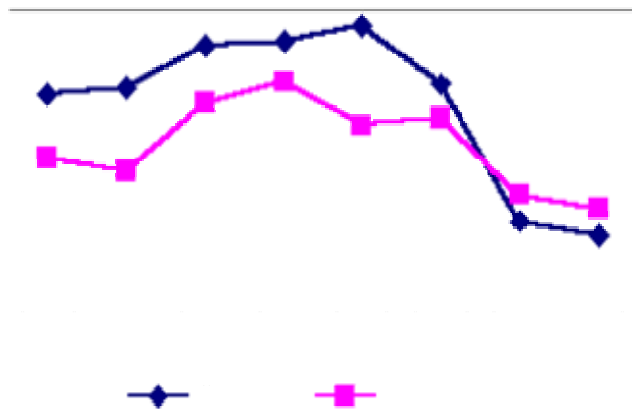
In another general measure of the quality of life, we asked voters if they thought their parish had become a better or worse place to live, or whether there has been no change in the past five years. In contrast to the past when there were huge parish differences, voters in both parishes are about equally positive about things getting better. The improvement in Orleans is particularly dramatic; compared to two years ago, the percent saying that the city is getting better has more than tripled (13% compared to 47%). For the first time in twelve years, more people think life in the city is getting better than think it is getting worse.

The recent trend in Jefferson is one of improvement, but not nearly as dramatic as in New Orleans, probably

because Jefferson never reached the extremely low evaluations seen in New Orleans in the early 90's.



Optimism about the future has increased in Orleans over the past two years, and in Jefferson over the past four years. Answers to question about the future do not vary as much as answers to questions about the past because Americans tend to be optimistic about their futures. Thus, with one exception, in all years more people think things will get better than think it will get worse.

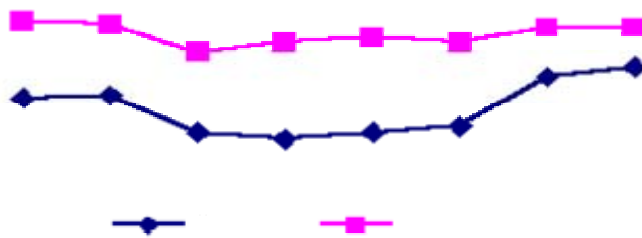


Another general measure of the quality of life is what people think is the biggest problem facing their parish. While crime is still the most commonly mentioned problem in both parishes, the prominence of this problem in Orleans Parish has dramatically decreased. For the first time since 1992, less than half of the voters spontaneously mentioned crime as the biggest problem. As will be seen later in this report, perceptions of the threat of crime in the city are undergoing considerable change.

In spite of the overall low level of violent crime in Jefferson, crime is still mentioned most often as the most important problem. But, as is the case in New Orleans, concern about crime is declining. Certainly, Jefferson's proximity to the city and its residents' exposure to the same news about declining crime in the city have decreased concern about crime in the suburb.

Biggest Problem Facing Parish, Orleans, 1998

Biggest Problem Facing Parish, Jefferson, 1998



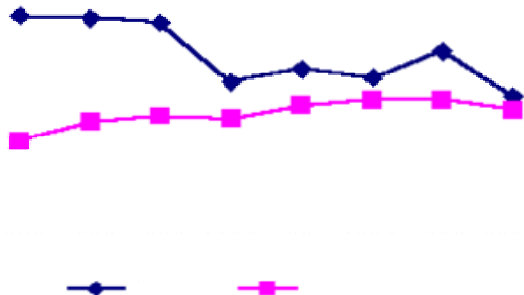
FOCUS ON CRIME

(Tables 3 through 6)



In New Orleans perceptions about crime as increasing or decreasing have totally reversed. In every Quality of Life survey from 1986 through 1996 a large majority thought that crime in the City was increasing. Today only 20% hold that view. The improvement is even more dramatic when you consider that in 1994 virtually everyone in Orleans (94%) believed that crime was increasing. Thus, belief that crime is increasing has dropped 74% in four years.

There is a parallel increase in the percent of voters who perceive that crime is decreasing in New Orleans, from <1% in 1994 to 50% today. Obviously, voters are noticing the actual decline in crime, either from media reports or personal experience.

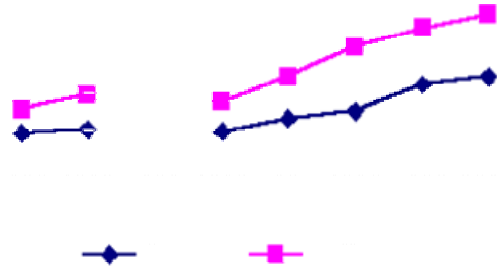


It is interesting that the trend in Jefferson roughly parallels the trend in New Orleans, even though the trends in actual crime have not been as variable as those in the City. Voters in Jefferson are probably responding to the City’s crime news, and the repeated reports of declining crime in the City have created some comfort in Jefferson that their crime, too, is declining.

Evaluations of the New Orleans police are the highest they have been in twelve years, consistent with perceptions of the trends in crime. Four years ago only 19% of voters in the city gave police positive ratings, but today that figure is 50%. The most dramatic increase occurred following the 1996 police reform program.

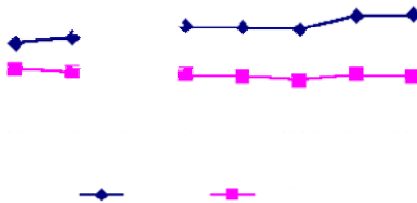
Police in Jefferson continue to enjoy a high level of confidence from the voters in that parish.

New Orleans residents are also feeling safer than they have at any other time in the quality of life series, consistent with perceptions about decreasing crime and the greater confidence in police.



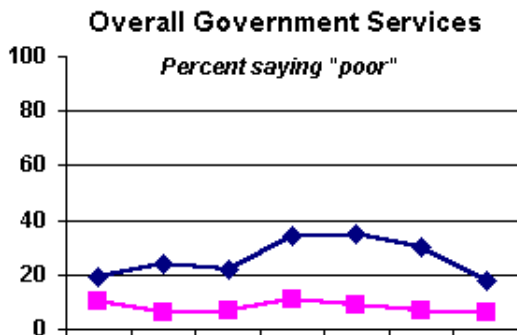
Remember that these are perceptions, so the fact that 70% now say they feel safe around their homes during the night is part reality and part a psychological reaction to the news of declining crime.

Part of the reason voters in New Orleans feel safer is that they hear less gunfire at night. Only eighteen months ago, 40% of black registered voters reported hearing gunfire on a regular basis (a few times a month or more often). Today only 24% say that they hear gunfire, a figure that is still too high for comfort, but an improvement nonetheless.



GOVERNMENT SERVICES

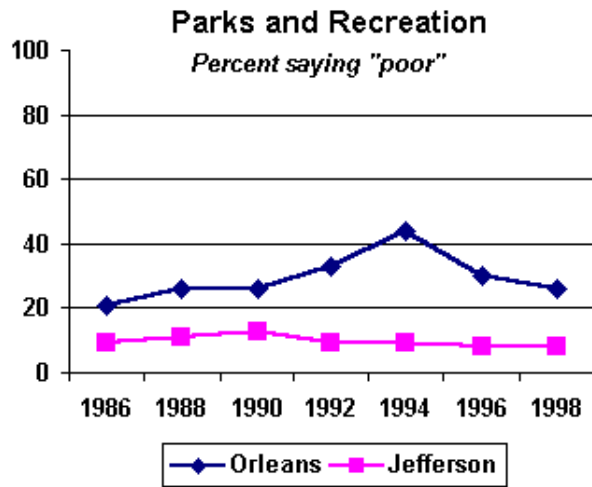
(Table 7)



Throughout the series Jefferson residents have expressed a much higher level of satisfaction with life in their parish, which extends to satisfaction with local services. Another reason for the gap in service evaluations may be that Jeffersonians have generally lower expectations of local government.

However, evaluations of local government in New Orleans are improving, and beyond merely crime control. The greatest change is in percent of voters who give several services a

"poor" rating. For example, the percent rating overall government services poor in 1994 was 35%, but today that number is only 18%.



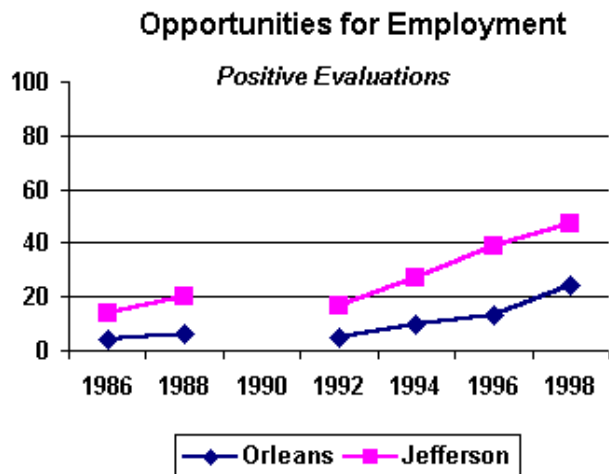
Also, the improvements to parks and recreation in New Orleans are reflected in improved evaluations. Four years ago almost half of the voters gave parks and recreation a poor rating, but today only 26% have that negative perception.

Control of abandoned housing is also perceived to be improving, but it remains the lowest rated service in New Orleans. Over the last four years, the percent of voters rating this service as poor has decreased from 85 to 71.

Ratings of all other services are relatively stable as far as public perceptions, with *fire protection, public transportation, and police* the highest rated in Orleans; and *fire, police, and parks* the highest rated in Jefferson.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

(Table 8)

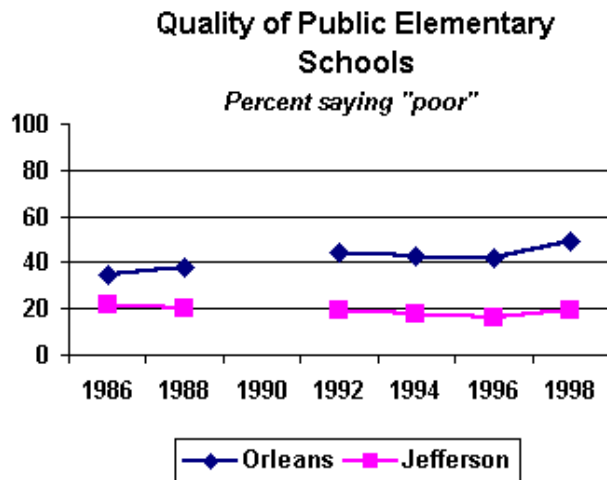


The economic outlook has improved dramatically in both Jefferson and Orleans. Voters in both parishes are more optimistic about employment prospects than they have been at any time in the twelve year series, reflecting the actual economic growth.

Improvement can also be seen in the other two indicators of economic outlook, prospects for new industries/jobs and likelihood of increased family income. On the issue of employment, however, a predictable gap between Jefferson and New Orleans remains with New Orleans residents less positive about employment opportunities.

EDUCATION

(Table 9)



Public schools are the only area examined in the survey where evaluations in New Orleans are slowly worsening. Public elementary schools, the heart of the public school system, are now rated as "poor" by half of the voters, a figure that represents a twelve year high.

Almost certainly, the negative publicity Orleans public schools have received in the past year has contributed to these negative perceptions.

While evaluations of the public schools are not very high in Jefferson, those evaluations have been very stable across the last twelve years.

MORIAL, PENNINGTON, AND LEE JOB APPROVAL

(Table 10)

Mayor Marc Morial continues to enjoy a very high approval rating, 76%, which represents a slight increase from a year ago. Approval of the mayor has increased among both whites and blacks, but opinions about the Mayor are still very racially polarized. An overwhelming 87% of blacks approve, while 58% of whites approve, resulting in a 29% racial gap in approval. Much of this gap occurs because black voters are much more enthusiastic in their support of the Mayor, that is, they are more likely to say that they "strongly approve".

Police Chief Richard Pennington has a high approval rating of 86%, which, is not highly racially polarized. 90% of blacks and 81% of whites approve of the job that Pennington is doing. These rating are essentially unchanged since 1996.

Finally, Sheriff Harry Lee also enjoys widespread support. Lee has an overall approval rating of 86%. The racial gap (23%) that was very visible two years ago in Lee's support is considerably less today (9%); blacks have become more positive about the Sheriff, while whites have become less positive, resulting in less racial polarization.

GovSvcs								
1994	2%	13	44	35	2%	42	43	9
1996	2%	18	48	30	2%	46	39	7
1998	2%	24	53	18	5%	46	39	6
POLICE								
1994	2%	17	38	41	15%	53	24	6
1996	2%	21	41	33	20%	47	23	9
1998	7%	43	38	10	20%	49	20	8
FIRE								
1994	15%	54	24	1	19%	60	13	1
1996	11%	53	27	6	25%	57	13	1
1998	17%	57	16	1	24%	56	10	1
WtrPollutn								
1994	1%	12	32	44	2%	31	34	24
1996	2%	16	35	39	4%	29	36	21
1998	2%	21	32	32	2%	27	39	21
ZONING								
1994	1%	17	34	32	1%	28	35	20
1996	1%	16	42	27	4%	28	37	16
1998	1%	21	41	23	2%	26	43	18
DRAINAGE								
1994	4%	21	26	46	4%	32	33	30
1996	3%	26	31	38	7%	30	27	34
1998	2%	21	27	47	2%	21	36	39
SvcsPoor								
1994	2%	12	32	45	3%	19	33	19

1996	2%	16	36	40	2%	24	33	19
1998	1%	18	34	36	2%	21	36	16
Parks/Rec								
1994	3%	18	32	44	11%	50	24	9
1996	4%	26	36	30	14%	53	22	8
1998	5%	30	35	26	12%	53	23	8
	EXC	GOOD	FAIR	POOR	EXC	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
STREETS								
1994	1%	10	26	63	2%	36	39	22
1996	.2%	7	21	72	7%	33	38	21
1998	1%	9	24	65	5%	36	35	23
PubTrans								
1994	5%	40	30	13	3%	30	23	24
1996	3%	38	32	17	6%	28	24	22
1998	10%	40	27	10	4%	30	23	18
TRAFFIC								
1994	1%	23	40	34	1%	35	35	28
1996	2%	19	40	36	3%	27	36	31
1998	2%	21	40	34	2%	23	37	35
AbanHouses								
1994	1%	3	9	85	5%	31	22	24
1996	2%	2	13	79	7%	34	20	23
1998	.3%	7	18	71	6%	35	23	18

TABLE 8: ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

ORLEANS

Opportunities for Employment	1992	1993	1994	1996	1997	1998
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Excellent	0%	1%	1%	1%	3%	4%
Good	5	8	9	12	23	20
Fair	27	34	38	35	46	37
Poor	61	55	46	47	23	31
DK	7	2	6	5	5	8
	(498)	(781)	(596)	(409)	(582)	(442)

Likelihood of New Jobs and Industry Coming to the Parish	1992	1993	1994	1996	1997	1998
Excellent	1%	5%	2%	2%	3%	3%
Good	6	20	18	10	21	17
Fair	29	36	33	33	36	32
Poor	55	35	41	51	35	40
DK	9	4	6	5	5	8
	(498)	(781)	(596)	(409)	(582)	(442)

Likelihood of Your Family Increasing Its Income in Next Several Years	1992	1994	1996	1997	1998
Excellent	3%	7%	6%	11%	9%
Good	21	30	29	31	34
Fair	30	28	25	32	26
Poor	34	26	31	20	23
DK	12	9	9	5	8
	(498)	(596)	(409)	(582)	(442)

TABLE 8: ECONOMIC OUTLOOK (JEFFERSON)

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Opportunities for Employment	1992	1994	1996	1998
Excellent	1%	1%	6%	9%
Good	16	26	33	38
Fair	40	39	35	28
Poor	32	24	17	12
DK	10	10	10	13
	(353)	(402)	(360)	(415)

Likelihood of New Jobs and Industry Coming to the Parish	1992	1994	1996	1998
Excellent	1%	3%	5%	4%
Good	16	26	23	28
Fair	37	29	37	35
Poor	34	31	26	19
DK	13	11	9	14
	(353)	(402)	(360)	(415)

Likelihood of Your Family Increasing Its Income in Next Several Years	1992	1994	1996	1998
Excellent	6%	5%	9%	11%
Good	23	32	31	34
Fair	33	23	30	25
Poor	29	30	22	20
DK	9	10	8	10
	(353)	(402)	(360)	(415)

TABLE 9: EDUCATION

ORLEANS

		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	DK/ Refused
Quality of Public Elementary Schools	1996	2%	13	33	42	10
	1998	2%	15	23	49	11
Quality of Public Junior High Schools	1996	2%	9	32	44	12
	1998	1%	11	27	48	13
Quality of Public High Schools	1996	1%	10	30	47	11
	1998	2%	12	24	51	11
Availability of Private Schools	1996	10%	32	32	11	15
	1998	13%	36	24	10	17
Quality of Private Schools	1996	15%	44	21	4	16
	1998	18%	43	18	2	19

JEFFERSON

		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	DK/ Refused
Quality of Public Elementary Schools	1996	7%	29	27	16	20
	1998	5%	29	27	19	20
Quality of Public Junior High Schools	1996	4%	23	33	19	22
	1998	2%	21	31	22	24
Quality of Public High Schools	1996	3%	24	30	23	20
	1998	2%	20	30	23	25
Availability of Private Schools	1996	15%	42	19	6	18
	1998	14%	40	20	6	20
Quality of Private Schools	1996	18%	43	17	3	20
	1998	20%	37	15	2	26

TABLE 10: MORIAL, PENNINGTON, AND LEE JOB APPROVAL

	All			Black			White		
	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
<i>Marc Morial</i>									
Strongly Approve	44%	38%	40%	59%	52%	58%	23%	15%	13%
Approve	33	34	36	32	33	29	36	37	45
Disapprove	8	11	10	4	6	6	14	19	17
Strongly Disapprove	9	12	9	2	7	4	20	22	18
<i>Richard Pennington</i>									
Strongly Approve	41%		45%	45%		51%	35%		36%
Approve	42		41	40		39	45		45
Disapprove	6		6	5		4	7		8
Strongly Disapprove	5		4	4		4	7		3
<i>Harry Lee</i>									
Strongly Approve	62%		47%	31%		32%	68%		50%
Approve	23		39	35		46	21		37
Disapprove	5		6	15		10	3		5
Strongly Disapprove	7		4	11		7	7		3

TABLE 11: SAMPLE INFORMATION, 1998

	ORLEANS	JEFFERSON
White	37%	84%
Black	63	16
Male	43	46
Female	57	54

Family Income		
Below \$10,000	9	6
10-25,000	23	13
26-40,000	20	19
41-60,000	15	20
61-80,000	8	12
Over 80,000	10	10
Refused/DK	15	20
Median Age	45	45
Number of Respondents	442	417
Sampling Error	±4.6%	±4.8%
Dates of Interviewing	October 14-27	October 14-27