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# A Classic Partisan Contest: The 1996 Senate and Presidential Elections in Louisiana

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*A Classic Partisan Contest*

*The 1996 Senate and Presidential  
Elections in Louisiana*

October 16, 1996

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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
<b>Landrieu</b>	48	74	38	10	46	74
<b>Jenkins</b>	40	11	53	83	43	15
<b>Undecided</b>	11	15	9	7	12	11
<b>N</b>	711	208	492	183	171	322
<b>% of Total</b>	100	29	70	26	24	45

	Females	Males	White Republicans	White Democrats	White Independents
<b>Landrieu</b>	52	44	8	68	40

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

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

	<b>Evangelical Protestant<sup>1</sup> Whites</b>	<b>Other Protestant<sup>2</sup> Whites</b>	<b>Catholic Whites</b>
<b>Landrieu</b>	35	34	42
<b>Jenkins</b>	59	57	48
<b>Undecided</b>	6	9	10
<b>N</b>	106	91	243
<b>% of Total</b>	22	18	49

<sup>1</sup>Defined as Baptist, Assembly of God, Born-Again, Seventh Day Adventist, Fundamentalist

<sup>2</sup>Defined 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**

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

	<b>White Females</b>	<b>White Males</b>
<b>For Government Health Insurance</b>	29	29

<b>In Between</b>		
<b>Against Government Health Insurance</b>	39	57
<b>Don't Know</b>	32	14

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

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

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

	<b>White Females</b>	<b>White Males</b>
<b>Favor Handgun Ban</b>	42	26
<b>Oppose Handgun Ban</b>	54	72

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

	<b>Clinton Supporters</b>	<b>Dole Supporters</b>	<b>Approve of Congress</b>	<b>Disapprove of Congress</b>
<b>Landrieu</b>	77	12	38	57
<b>Jenkins</b>	15	83	55	31
<b>Undecided</b>	8	5	7	12
<b>N</b>	353	232	273	361
<b>% of Total</b>	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**

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

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

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

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

<b>Role of Government in Economy</b>		
	<b>Need Strong Government</b>	<b>Free Market</b>
<b>Landrieu</b>	64	25
<b>Jenkins</b>	26	65
<b>Undecided</b>	10	10
<b>N</b>	414	260
<b>% of Total</b>	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**

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

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

	<b>Evangelical Protestant Whites</b>	<b>Other Protestant Whites</b>	<b>Catholic Whites</b>
<b>Clinton</b>	36	26	38
<b>Dole</b>	46	60	40
<b>Perot</b>	8	3	11
<b>Undecided</b>	10	10	11
<b>N</b>	106	91	243
<b>% of Total</b>	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

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

**ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS "Over the Past Year"**

	United States			Louisiana		
	1988	1992	1996	1988	1992	1996
<b>Better</b>	28%	6%	32%	14%	9%	37%
<b>Same</b>	25	25	38	31	33	41
<b>Worse</b>	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%