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New Partnership Aims to Combat Polarization in Louisiana, Find Common Ground

BATON ROUGE— LSU's Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs and the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (PAR) announced they are partnering on survey research and programming to understand and reduce political polarization in Louisiana, while promoting dialogue and civic thought.

The nonpartisan Common Ground Project will explore what it means to communicate in a polarized world and provide LSU students and Louisiana citizens with information and opportunities for engaging constructively across ideological lines and viewpoints.

"From the day I started at the Reilly Center, by far the most common recommendation I have received is to focus on the fundamentals that bind us together as citizens," said Michael DiResto, Director of the Reilly Center. "Through the combined strengths of the Reilly Center's academic assets and survey center access, plus PAR's public policy research and issue-area expertise, we can hopefully make a positive impact on the way Louisianans talk, walk and work with one another."

"While polarization can feel impossible to combat, there is reason for hope," said PAR President Steven Procopio. "Research shows that continued dialogue, trusted messengers and shared experiences can meaningfully reduce polarization — especially if rooted in local context and mutual respect."

The Common Ground Project will begin with the following initiatives:

The Common Ground Survey: This opinion poll of Louisiana residents, to be conducted by the Reilly Center's Public Policy Research Lab, will focus on gauging measures of polarization across the state, compared to national trends, as well as areas of shared opinion or beliefs. The poll is expected to be released later this year.

Pizza & Public Affairs: This monthly on-campus discussion series for LSU students will feature a guest speaker (such as a public official, civic leader, public affairs practitioner or expert on polarization) who, in a casual dialogue format over lunch, will share with students how they have achieved successful policy or program outcomes by building coalitions and communicating in a way that bridges division. The series begins in September.

Civic Sips: This discussion series will invite Louisiana citizens to join in casual but serious conversations about topics related to civic responsibility, media literacy, state policy issues and polarization's sources and remedies. In its early stages, Civic Sips will be hosted at establishments in or near downtown Baton Rouge. Plans for the start of the series are still in development.

Leaders of the Reilly Center and PAR are actively exploring additional opportunities to expand the partnership, including potential presentations to civic organizations and other events and programs across Louisiana.

Polarization in Louisiana reflects a national trend, but it is also shaped by unique regional dynamics — including historical disparities, political sorting and the decline of shared civic institutions.

In recent years, Louisiana has seen increased ideological clustering, especially between urban and rural communities, alongside growing distrust in the media, government and even neighbors with different views. These trends have undermined the foundations of democratic problem-solving.

The Reilly Center and PAR hope the Common Ground Project will engage communities to identify shared values, rebuild trust across divides and respond to the structural and cultural drivers of division in Louisiana's civic landscape.

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LSU's Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs

Founded in 2000, the [Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs](#) explores meaningful ways to enhance and elevate public discourse at the local, state, and national levels. The Center's mission is to generate thoughtful dialogue, research, and programming about mass communication and its many-faceted relationships with social, economic, and political issues. The Reilly Center is committed to strengthening theanship School's national leadership in media and public affairs, and to serving as an informational resource on issues important to the people of Louisiana. Follow us on Facebook [@ReillyCenter](#), X [@ReillyCenter](#), Instagram [@lsureillycenter](#), and LinkedIn [LSU Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs](#).

Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana (PAR)

Founded in 1950, PAR is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and civic engagement organization dedicated to good governance, transparency and informed policy. With a reputation for objectivity and public trust, PAR is well-positioned to lead this effort.

PAR is respected as an independent voice offering solutions to crucial issues in Louisiana through accurate, objective research and focusing public attention on those solutions. PAR is recognized as a catalyst for governmental reform and effective citizen education and believes that the soundest way to achieve political progress is through deep-rooted public understanding and support.