

New York Opinion Index



Empire State Poll 2011

Report 1: Introduction & Methodology

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Introduction

This report outlines the methodology used for the annual Empire State Poll (ESP), a general survey of New York State residents who are at least 18 years of age that is conducted by the Survey Research Institute (SRI). Since it was founded in 1996, SRI has grown into a premier survey research facility and now comprises more than 60 staff and 22 Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) stations.

The ESP 2011 marks the ninth annual poll in an ongoing survey series that will probe residents' views on a range of workplace, social, political, and economic issues. The data derived from this yearly poll are of particular interest to academics, government officials, business and labor leaders and journalists. The data also help guide policy making, raise issues for civic dialogue, and suggest avenues of future research.

The ESP 2011 contains two sections: the "core" survey of topics that appear annually and a series of questions that are developed by third parties ("omnibus modules").

ESP Core Instrument

The core survey instrument is a mix of questions about community, economic and government issues that reflect the specific research focus of Cornell faculty and the more general needs of policy makers. The core topics are broken down into the following categories:

- Most important issues facing communities and NYS
- Community satisfaction
- Economic perceptions
- Trust in institutions
- Political behavior
- Demographics

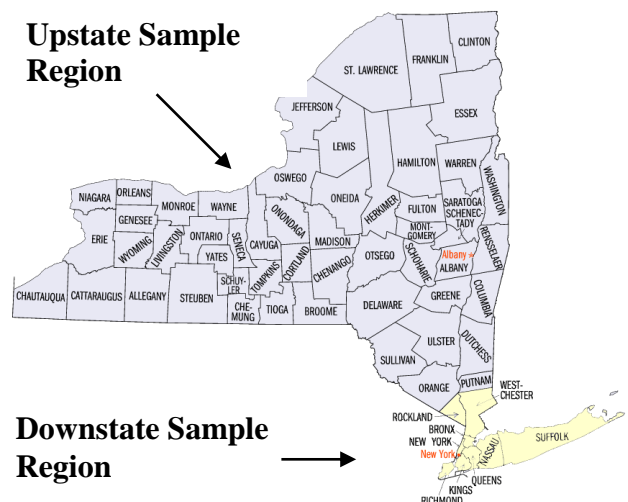
ESP Omnibus Modules

ESP is structured to allow for the inclusion of questions developed by Cornell University faculty and other researchers who are interested in surveying New York State residents on special topics. SRI charges a nominal fee for this service. The data collected from these "omnibus" modules are not reported in the general statewide poll results. For more information on the omnibus section of the poll, please contact SRI directly.

Sampling Methodology

The ESP 2011 sample consisted of randomly selected households generated by random digit dial (RDD) sampling of all telephone exchanges within New York State (with an oversample of cell phone exchanges) and included both listed and unlisted households. Genesys Sampling Systems of Fort Washington, PA (a widely used full-service sampling company that provides samples to survey research organizations) supplied the sample, which excluded known business telephone numbers, disconnected numbers, and non-household numbers. The state was divided into two regions, upstate and downstate with sampling in proportion to the population totals.

"Downstate" was defined as New York, Rockland, Kings, Richmond, Westchester, Suffolk, Queens, Nassau, and Bronx counties, with the remaining counties of the state defined as "upstate." Households from black and Hispanic neighborhoods were slightly over-sampled to ensure proper representation in the final sample of respondents.



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Selection of individual respondents came in two steps: a household was randomly selected and then a household member who was at least 18 years old was randomly selected from within the household using the “most recent birthday” selection method.¹ An additional eligibility requirement was that all respondents had to be residents of New York State.

These selection procedures ensured that every household with a telephone had an equal chance of being included in the survey; and once a household was selected, each adult in the household had an equal chance of being chosen.

¹ O'Rourke, D., Blair, J., “Improving Random Respondent Selection in Telephone Surveys,” *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. XX (November 1983), 428-32.

ESP Data Collection

Telephone data collection began on February 1, 2011 and was completed March 24, 2011. The timing of the ESP data collection is the same every year, starting in February and ending in March. All interviews are conducted using a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software system, with an average interview length of 22 minutes. A total of 800 interviews were completed – 400 upstate and 400 downstate. The survey was administered in both English and Spanish.

SRI survey interviewers are employed throughout the year. All interviewers undergo rigorous training by the SRI supervisory team and then complete four weeks of probationary interviewing and follow-up training. For each survey project, including ESP, interviewers are also given a survey-specific training session.

All interviewing staff are monitored and supervised at all times by an SRI supervisory team. SRI employs a computer-based proxy system that allows for audio and video monitoring of all interviewer stations. All supervisors regularly monitor interviewers to maintain data collection quality, provide immediate feedback, and troubleshoot issues as they arise.

SRI uses CASES (Computer-Assisted Survey Execution System) for CATI software. CASES is developed, distributed and supported by the Computer-Assisted Survey Methods (CSM) Program at the University of California, Berkeley and was commissioned by the U.S. Census Bureau. For more than 20 years, CASES has been one of the most widely used interviewing systems by survey centers in the United States. SRI employs programmers to support the CATI software and survey operations and to ensure data collection quality.

For ESP 2011, 800 respondents completed the survey out of a sample list of 2,410. Overall, the cooperation rate, often referred to as the response rate, was 71.4% and the American Association of Public Opinion Research definition of response rate was 27.8%. The cooperation and response rates differed between the upstate

and downstate samples. The downstate sample was drawn from a sample list of 1,417, with a cooperation rate of 68.6% and a response rate of 23.3%. The upstate sample was drawn from a sample list of 993 and had a cooperation rate of 74.5% and a response rate of 34.3%.

These cooperation and response rates are consistent with those obtained by other research organizations such as the Pew Research Organization or CBS News, who regularly survey residents in New York State. Additional data are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Final Sample Status for ESP 2011

	Downstate	Upstate	Pooled
Completed Survey	400	400	800
Refusal	183	137	320
Active	610	347	957
Physical/Language Problem	73	18	91
Ineligible/Not a Household	151	91	242
<i>Total</i>	<i>1417</i>	<i>993</i>	<i>2410</i>
Response Rate ²	23.3%	34.3%	27.8%
Cooperation Rate ²	68.6%	74.5%	71.4%

² American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) response rate and cooperation rate calculations. The response rate is the total number of survey completions divided by the total eligible sample (total sample minus all ineligible, non-households, and estimated proportion of households where eligibility was not determined). Cooperation rate is the total number of survey completions divided by the number of potential interviews (this includes all instances where contact was made with a properly selected person, but not including those instances where the respondent was incapable of cooperating due to language or physical limitations).

Sampling Error

The sampling error for ESP 2011 assumes the traditional 95% confidence level, which is equivalent to a “significance level” of .05. This means that for questions with approximately 800 respondents there is no more than a one in twenty chance that variations in the respondent sample will cause the ESP 2011 results to deviate by more than 3.5 percentage points when respondents are asked yes/no questions and an even distribution of responses is assumed (i.e., 50% say “yes” and 50% say “no”). Furthermore, the sampling frame was split between upstate and downstate residents, allowing comparisons between the overall state and these geographic regions with a one in twenty chance of sampling error greater than 4.9 percentage points for samples of approximately 400.

Sampling error is determined by the assumed distribution of responses and by the size of the sample. An extreme distribution of question responses has a smaller error range. If the distribution



of responses were 80/20, for example, the sampling error would be 2.8% for the total sample of 800. See Table 2 for additional distributions and sampling error calculations. The size of the sample or subpopulation is also important because the margin of sampling error increases as the sample size decreases.

The margin of error from responses of demographically distinct subgroups within ESP 2011 will vary depending on the size of the group in question. Again, Table 2 provides some standard sampling errors for groups of different size.

Table 2 Sampling Error Margins by Question Response Distribution and Sample Size³

Question Response Distribution (%)	Size of Sample (N)				
	800	600	400	200	100
50/50	3.5	4.0	4.9	6.9	9.8
60/40	3.4	3.9	7.8	6.8	9.6
70/30	3.2	3.7	4.5	6.4	9.0
80/20	2.8	3.2	3.9	5.5	7.8
90/10	2.1	2.4	2.9	4.2	5.9

³ Calculations made through the Survey System sample size calculator. <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>

Lastly, besides the possible sample error mentioned above, all public opinion polls may incur other sources of error associated with telephone data collection procedures, including the sampling error from the systematic exclusion of households without telephones, question wording, question order, and interviewer-induced bias.

Respondent Demographics

The accuracy of ESP 2011 can be evaluated by comparing selected characteristics of the survey respondents to data from the U.S. Census. A weight variable was developed based on geography (upstate versus downstate) in order to approximate actual population distribution within New York State. All substantive results described within any ESP 2011 report are weighted using this variable.

Table 3 compares the weighted distribution of ESP 2011 respondents' characteristics with the actual statewide distributions reported by the U.S. Census in the 2006-2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates.

Table 3 Key Respondent Demographics for ESP 2011 (% reported)

Characteristics	Downstate (N=400)	Upstate (N=400)	Pooled ⁴ (N=800)	U.S. Census/ ACS ⁵
<i>Age</i>				
18-24	9	6	8	13
25-34	11	13	12	17
35-44	21	17	20	19
45-54	24	28	25	19
55-64	19	15	17	14
65 and older	17	21	19	17
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	47	50	48	49
Female	53	50	52	51
<i>Race</i>				
White	63	94	74	68
Non-White	37	7	26	32
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
Hispanic (any race)	15	2	11	16
Non-Hispanic	85	98	90	84
<i>Employment Status</i>				
Employed	59	64	61	59
Unemployed	21	13	18	4
Not in labor force	20	23	21	37
<i>Annual Household Income</i>				
Less than \$10,000	2	2	2	8
\$10,000-49,999	37	38	37	37
\$50,000 -99,999	32	39	34	30
\$100,000 or more	30	21	27	25
<i>Education (for ages 18+)</i>				
Less than Bachelor's Degree	50	56	52	71
Bachelor's Degree or higher	50	44	48	29

⁴ Weighting applied to match actual distribution of upstate vs. downstate. Due to rounding, distributions may not add up to 100. Percentages are based upon calculations that exclude non-responses.

⁵ From the 2006-2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates. <http://www.census.gov>

For More Information:

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