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### Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the 2011 Empire State Poll (ESP), conducted by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. The 2011 ESP queried New York State residents' opinions regarding the most important issues facing their community and New York State as a whole, community satisfaction, economic perceptions, institutional trust, resident mobility, potential new legislation, and the budget. Results of other findings can be found at <http://sri.cornell.edu/sri/esp.reports.cfm>.

### Methodology

- In total, 800 telephone interviews were conducted between February 1, 2011 and March 24, 2011, equally divided by upstate/downstate, and then weighted to reflect the actual population distribution within the state.
- For regional comparisons, “downstate” is defined as New York, Rockland, Kings, Richmond, Westchester, Suffolk, Queens, Nassau, and Bronx counties, with the remaining counties of the state defined as “upstate.”
- The ESP utilizes a random digit dial (RDD) sample of NYS households and cell phones. Eligible respondents must be residents of NYS and at least 18 years old.
- The cooperation rate was 71.4% using American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) standards.
- The margin of error (MOE) for questions with two response options among 800 respondents is 3.5% and is 4.9% for comparisons based on 400 respondents. The MOE may be smaller for some questions depending on the number of response options.

See Report 1: Introduction & Methodology for a full description at <http://sri.cornell.edu/sri/esp.reports.cfm>.

### Issues of Concern to New Yorkers

The ESP queried New York residents about issues facing their communities and the state. The question states: In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important issue facing your community as a whole? Responses were categorized into the following categories crime, economic growth, education,

employment, environment, health care, housing, immigration land development, local government, municipal budget, people leaving the community, security/threat of terrorism, taxes, and other.

**Table 1** Most Important Issue in Local Community

Top Issues	Percent of respondents citing... as most important issue					
	NYS		Downstate		Upstate	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Employment	23	21	19	20	29	25
Taxes (local, state, or federal)	18	14	15	9	23	22
Economic Growth	14	21	12	20	17	23
Education	11	7	13	8	7	5
Crime	8	8	11	11	3	3
Housing (affordability/availability)	5	4	7	5	1	2
Other Issues	11	15	12	15	11	14

Other responses mentioned by fewer than 5% of respondents include: environment, healthcare, immigration, land development, local government, municipal budget, people leaving community, and terrorism.

- Overall, employment remained the most important issue facing local communities (23%). A regional disparity was found between downstate and upstate residents (19% vs. 29%).
- Fewer residents considered economic growth as the most important issue facing local communities this year than last year (14% in 2011 vs. 21% in 2010).
- Taxes became the second most important issue facing local communities (18%). In 2010, it produced the largest regional disparity with upstate residents more than twice as likely to cite taxes as the most important issue compared to downstate residents (22% vs. 9% respectively). The gap decreased this year (23% vs. 15% upstate vs. downstate).
- There was also an increase in the perceived importance of education among NYS residents (11% in 2011 vs. 7% in 2010). Almost twice as many residents in downstate NY considered education to be the most important issue compared to those in upstate NY (13% vs. 7%).



- Downstate residents were discernibly more likely to cite crime (11% vs. 3%) as the most important community issue than their upstate counterparts. This tendency coincides with ESP data collected in previous years (11% vs. 3% in 2010, 13% vs. 5% in 2009 and 16% vs. 6% in 2008).

Evaluating the state as a whole rather than only their communities, New York state residents were asked the same question (from 2004-2006): *In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing people in New York state today?* Responses were summarized into the following categories: crime, economic growth, education, employment, environment, health care, housing, immigration, land development, NYS government, NYS budget, people leaving NYS, security/threat of terrorism, taxes, and other.

**Table 2** Most Important Issue in New York State

Year	Percent of respondents citing... as most important issue				
	Economic Growth	Taxes	Employment	Educational	Health-care
2011	17	10	23	10	3
- downstate	17	6	25	14	3
- upstate	17	17	20	3	2
2010	19	10	22	4	6
2009	31	9	24	4	5
2008	18	17	15	8	8
2007	9	14	16	5	10
2006	10	15	21	8	11
2005	8	17	25	8	6
2004	13	11	28	12	10

Other responses mentioned include: crime, environment, housing, immigration, state government, state budget, people leaving NYS, terrorism, and other reasons not listed.

- In 2011, 23% of residents cited employment as the most important issue facing New York State, a 1% increase from 2010. The second most widely cited issue was economic growth (17%).
- The importance of education increased 6% in 2011 compared with 2010.
- In 2011, upstate residents were almost three times as likely (17% vs. 6%) to cite taxes as the most important issue facing NYS than downstate residents. This regional split has decreased by 7% since 2009.
- In contrast, downstate respondents were more likely to cite employment as the most important issue facing NYS than upstate respondents (25% vs. 20%). This regional split has decreased by 6% since 2010.

## Community Satisfaction

Over the past several years, residents have been asked to evaluate their satisfaction with the services and institutions present in their local communities. The question states: *Every community has good points and bad points about living within it. Thinking about availability, cost, quality, and any other considerations important to you, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following aspects of your community? Are you very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, very satisfied.* 1. Quality of education, 2. Your local city or town government, 3. Employment (quality and availability of jobs), 4. Local taxes, 5. Safety and crime, 6. Land development and planning. To generate binary response categories, satisfied and dissatisfied, those who responded that they were either satisfied or very satisfied were combined to form one category and the remaining responses were combined to form the other. From 2004-2005 and 2007-2011, the question asked respondents to measure their satisfaction on a ten point scale. The dimensions of the question have varied, but those mentioned in Table 3 (below) have been constant since the question was first introduced in 2004 and measure satisfaction with public education, city or town government and employment.

**Table 3** Percent of Residents Satisfied with...

Dimension	Down-state 2011	Up-State 2011	All NYS						
			2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2005	2004
Public Education	48	62	53	53	60	58	56	65	57
City/Town Govt.	39	49	43	45	54	55	49	50	46
Employment	18	14	17	20	26	40	33	35	31

Note: question was not asked in 2006.

- Across the three recurring dimensions, public education had the highest level of satisfaction (53%), followed by city or town government (43%), and employment conditions (17%).
- Satisfaction levels were slightly lower than those found in 2010, with a 2% drop in city or town government and 3% drop in employment. All three dimensions remained at their lowest levels among all surveyed years (12% lower in public education than 2005, 12% lower in city or town government than 2008, and 23% lower in employment than 2008).
- Upstate residents reported being satisfied with their local public education at a considerably higher rate (62% vs. 48%) than downstate residents, but the regional disparity has reduced by 5% from 2010 to 2011.



- Furthermore, upstate residents were more likely to report being satisfied with their city/town government (49% vs. 39%) than downstate New Yorkers.
- Upstate residents showed an 8% drop in satisfaction with employment (14% in 2011 vs. 22% in 2010), while it dropped only 2% for downstate residents.

## Evaluations of Personal Finance

Following the precedent set over the past six years, New York State residents were asked two questions concerning their recent and anticipated change in personal finances. The first question states: We are interested in how people are getting along financially these days. Would you say that you (and your household) are better off, worse off, or just about the same financially as you were a year ago? The second question states: Now looking ahead, do you think that a year from now you (and your household) will be better off financially, worse off, or just about the same as now?

**Table 4** Reported Personal Economic Conditions in NYS

Year	Percent of all respondents		
	Worse	Same	Better
<b>Perceptions of Past Year</b>			
2011	31	51	18
- downstate	31	50	19
- upstate	31	53	17
2010	38	46	16
2009	47	44	9
2008	32	46	22
2007	22	55	23
2006	22	55	23
2005	22	53	25
2004	22	54	24
<b>Perceptions of Forthcoming Year</b>			
2011	17	48	35
- downstate	15	47	38
- upstate	21	50	29
2010	15	46	39
2009	26	41	33
2008	20	47	33
2007	12	47	41
2006	15	51	34
2005	14	51	35
2004	9	48	43

Note: Due to rounding, distributions may not add up to 100.

### Past Year

- Prior to 2008, reporting of personal financial situations remained remarkably consistent with just over half (54%) reporting that their financial situation remained the same, nearly one-quarter (22%) reporting that it had worsened, and almost another quarter (24%) reporting that it had improved.
- Over the past three years, there has been a slight increase in the number reporting that their personal financial situation has either stayed the same (going from 44% in 2009 to 46% in 2010 and 51% in 2011) or that their personal financial situation has improved (going from 9% in 2009 to 16% in 2010 and 18% in 2011). So, despite 39% of respondents from 2010 anticipating a better year for 2011, only 18% of respondents actually reported better personal finances in 2011. While only 15% of respondents anticipated being financially worse in 2010, more than twice as many respondents (31%) reported worse personal finances in 2011.

### Forthcoming Year

- Personal economic optimism for the forthcoming year has dropped slightly. The percentage of New York State residents who believe their financial situation will improve over the coming year decreased by 4% (39% in 2010 to 35% in 2011) and the percentage of those projecting a decline in their financial situation increased by 2% (15% in 2010 to 17% in 2011).
- Envisioning the year to come, downstate residents were much more optimistic that their personal financial conditions would improve compared to upstate residents (38% vs. 29%, respectively). This regional disparity has shrunk by 5% since 2010.

## Evaluations of State Economic Performance

Similar to the questions concerning personal finance, New York State residents were asked to give their opinion on the past and anticipated performance of the NYS economy. The first question states: Thinking about the local economy as a whole, would you say that over the past year the economy of New York State has gotten better, stayed about the same, or has gotten worse? The second question states: What about the next twelve months? Do you expect the economy in New York State as a whole to get better, stay about the same, or get worse?



**Table 5** Evaluations of Economic Conditions in NYS - Residents

Year	% of all respondents		
	Worse	Same	Better
Perceptions of Past Year			
2011	59	25	16
- downstate	55	26	19
- upstate	66	24	10
2010	74	17	8
2009	92	6	2
2008	68	26	6
2007	43	37	20
2006	36	48	16
2005	50	34	16
2004	54	29	17
Perceptions of Forthcoming Year			
2011	31	33	36
- downstate	28	31	42
- upstate	37	37	26
2010	31	33	36
2009	50	23	27
2008	45	33	22
2007	28	38	34
2006	25	52	23
2005	30	45	25
2004	27	39	34

Note: Due to rounding, distributions may not add up to 100.

#### Past Year

- Over the past three years, the number of residents who characterized the state economy as having worsened has been decreasing consistently and significantly, from 92% in 2009 to 74% in 2010 and now to 59% in 2011. Accordingly, the number of respondents who reported that the economy remained the same increased steadily from 6% in 2009 to 25% in 2011. The number of respondents who reported that the economy improved also increased significantly (2% in 2009, 8% in 2010, and 16% in 2011).
- Similar to 2010, when compared with downstate residents, 11% more upstate residents reported that the economic situation had worsened over the past year (66% vs. 55%), and about half as many upstate residents reported that the economic conditions were better (10% vs. 19%).

#### Forthcoming Year

- Compared to 2010, the overall expectation of NYS residents for the forthcoming year remained unchanged.

- Downstate residents were more likely to expect the state's economy to improve in the forthcoming year (42% vs. 26%). Accordingly, upstate residents were more likely to expect the state's economy to worsen in the forthcoming year (37% vs. 28%). This regional disparity has contracted by 7% since 2010.

## Trust in Institutions in NYS

ESP 2011 measured NYS residents' trust toward eight different institutions including large corporations, local businesses, labor unions, other people, the internet, news media, local government, and state government. Trust was measured by asking respondents on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is untrustworthy and 10 is trustworthy, how they would rate the trustworthiness of each group. Ratings were categorized into low (1-3), medium (4-7), and high (8-10) trust groups. Overall percentages of respondent trust levels are provided in Table 6 below.

**Table 6** Trust in Institutions in NYS

Group/Organization	% of respondents who rate the level of trustworthiness as...		
	Low	Medium	High
Large corporations	47	46	8
Local businesses	11	56	33
Labor unions	32	50	18
Other people	12	63	25
Internet	29	55	17
News media	35	48	17
Local government	30	55	15
State government	43	50	8

Note: Due to rounding, distributions may not add up to 100.

- The top institutions that have attained a high level of trust with the highest frequency were local businesses (33%) and other people (25%), followed by labor unions (18%), the internet (17%) and the news media (17%).
- Institutions with the lowest trust levels were large corporations and state government.
- Respondents who reported a low level of trust in the NYS government decreased from 49% in 2010 to 43% in 2011. On the other hand, a low level of trust in large corporations, news media and local government increased by 5%, 5% and 4% respectively.
- Since 2010, the percentage of respondents reporting a high level of trust decreased 4% for local business and 6% for other people.



## Level of Corruption

ESP 2011 measured NYS residents' opinion about the level of NYS corruption. Respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not corrupt at all and 10 is extremely corrupt. Ratings were categorized into low (1-3), moderate (4-7), and high (8-10) corruption. The percentages of NYS corruption level are provided in Table 7 below.

**Table 7** Level of Corruption in NYS

Year	% of respondents who rate the level of corruption as...		
	Low	Medium	High
2011	10	54	37
- downstate	10	53	37
- upstate	10	54	36

Note: Due to rounding, distributions may not add up to 100.

- The majority (54%) of NYS residents reported that the level of corruption in NYS is moderate. Almost four out of ten (37%) NYS residents thought the level of NYS corruption is high. Only one out of ten respondents (10%) thought the level of NYS corruption is low. There were no regional differences between downstate and upstate residents.

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question about effective ways to reduce corruption among politicians in NYS. Respondents' opinions were recorded and categorized. The summary of their responses and percentages of each category are listed in Table 8 below.

**Table 8** Ways to Reduce Corruption in NYS

Approach to Reducing Corruption	% of respondents suggesting this approach
Term limits	20
Accountability measures	18
Independent oversight	15
Campaign finance reform	14
Transparency and better communication	11
Replace current politicians with regular people	5
Reduce politicians' salary and benefits	4
Establish ethics laws	3
Background checks	3
Not possible	3
Reduce government regulation	1
Get rid of unions	1
Improve voting rates	1

Note: Due to rounding, distributions may not add up to 100.

- When asked about effective ways to reduce corruption among politicians in NYS, one out of five respondents (20%) indicated that there should be term limits. Other suggestions included holding politicians accountable for their actions with stricter penalties, having more independent oversight and monitoring, campaign finance reform (limiting corporate and special interest contributions), and better transparency and communications. Other comments included voting-in regular, honest and trustworthy people, reducing salary and benefits, establishing ethics laws, increasing background checks, and reducing government power/regulations.

## Resident Mobility

The ESP annually examines community/residence mobility. In 2011, respondents were asked the likelihood that they would be living in their current residence in five years, and if not, the likelihood of remaining in New York State. Respondents who reported that they were likely to either leave their residence or the state were asked to offer a specific reason for their choice. The percentage of those who responded "very likely" or "somewhat likely" are summarized in the Table 9, below.

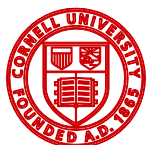
**Table 9** Resident Mobility within New York State

Year	% of respondents saying that 5 years from now they will...			
	Stay in current residence*	Leave residence but stay in NYS	Leave residence and leave NYS	Stay in residence or stay in NYS undecided
2011	76	16	7	3
- downstate	75	17	7	4
- upstate	76	14	8	2
2010	76	16	8	1
2009	66	13	17	4
2008	68	19	9	4
2007	63	26	10	1
2006	77	3	11	4
2005	81	5	10	4
2004	74	5	13	7

Note: Due to rounding, distributions may not add up to 100.

\*From 2004-2006, the wording was community, not residence.

- The vast majority of the respondents (80.7%) have stayed in their residence for five or more years.
- Three out of four respondents reported that they would likely be living in their current residence in five years (76%).



- The regional disparity in immobility between upstate and downstate residents reduced by 5% since 2010, showing nearly no difference in 2011.
- Downstate residents are more likely to move within NYS than upstate residents (17% vs. 14% respectively), although the regional disparity has decreased from 2010 (18% vs. 11% respectively).
- 2011 had the lowest percent of respondents since this question was first introduced in 2004 to indicate that they would be leaving the state (7%).
- High taxes, the cost of living and weather were cited often as reasons for leaving the state. Other common responses included job opportunities and moving closer to family.

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