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## Introduction

This report is an executive summary of the key findings from the Empire State Poll (ESP) 2004, a general survey of New York State residents who are at least 18 years of age. The School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) Survey Research Institute (SRI) conducted the poll. The ESP 2004 marks the second poll of an ongoing annual survey series that will probe residents' views on a wide-range of issues. The primary goal of the ESP is to provide a yearly portrait of New York that includes snapshot of social, economic, political, and workplace trends.

The poll was conducted between February 3 and April 21, 2004 and consists of 820 interviews with residents from both upstate and downstate New York. The response rate was 25.7% and cooperation rate 56.5% according to AAPOR standards. "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." All results presented in this report have been weighted based on geography (upstate vs. downstate) to account for population distribution and are representative of other key demographic criteria (i.e. gender, race, income). The margin of error for reported statewide results is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points. For more detail on the background of the ESP 2004 and how the data were collected, see additional information available at [www.sri.cornell.edu](http://www.sri.cornell.edu).

## Issues of Concern to New Yorkers

What do New Yorker's care about most? Based on the ESP 2003 results and additional pilot testing, the ESP 2004 identified ten challenges currently facing New York State residents and asked respondents to specify which they regarded as the most critical. Table 1 provides the percentage of respondents that selected each problem for upstate, downstate, and all residents combined.

Not surprisingly, one out of four respondents said *employment* was the most important problem facing New Yorkers in 2004, the same as 2003. However, in contrast to 2003, both *state taxes* and *healthcare* were less salient issues for respondents in 2004. Beyond *employment*, the *state economy* (13%), *education* (11%), *state taxes* (10%), and *healthcare* (10%) were equally cited as the foremost concerns of New Yorkers. As in 2003, a small minority of ESP 2004 respondents cited *homeland security*, *state budget*, *crime*, and the *environment* as top concerns.

**Table 1** Most Important Problem in New York State: % of respondents

Issue	Upstate 2004	Downstate 2004	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Employment	27	29	28	25
State Economy	14	13	13	12
Education	7	15	11	12
State Taxes	17	6	10	27
Healthcare	10	9	10	17
Security/Terrorism	2	8	5	3
People Leaving NYS	5	4	4	*
State Budget	4	2	3	6
Crime	3	3	3	2
Environment	3	2	2	2
Other	11	10	10	4

\*Not asked in 2003

## Rating New York State

How do New Yorkers rate their state? The answer, as was the case in 2003, is not very highly. Nevertheless, compared to the ESP 2003, there was a noticeable increase in respondent ratings across all areas upon which the ESP 2004 queried. The ESP 2004 asked respondents to rate nine key aspects of New York using a scale of poor, fair, good, or excellent. Table 2 gives the percentage of respondents who rated each area as good or excellent.

**Table 2** Rating NYS: % of respondents who rate NYS good or excellent in:

Aspect of New York	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Transportation Infrastructure	53	**
Environment	43	34
Quality of Public Education	40	33
Health & Human Services*	36	21
Economic Growth	23	12
State Government	18	**
Employment***	15	12
State Taxes	11	7
State Budget	11	6

\* In 2003, wording was "Health Services & Insurance"

\*\* Not asked in 2003

\*\*\*In 2003, wording was "Number of Suitable Jobs"

A new category, the *transportation infrastructure*, was the area rated highest in NYS with more than half of the ESP 2004 respondents rating the transportation infrastructure in NYS as good or excellent. As in the ESP 2003, the next two highest rated areas in New York were the *environment* (43%) and *public education* (40%). *Employment* (15%), *state taxes* (11%), and the *state budget* (11%) were again the lowest rated areas in 2004.

The responses revealed some noteworthy regional differences. Duplicating a similar pattern from 2003, more than one-half of all upstate respondents rated the environment (58%) and public education (55%) as excellent or good compared to only one-third of downstate respondents (34% and 31% respectively). Conversely, almost twice as many downstate respondents (28%) as upstate respondents (15%) rated economic growth as good or excellent in the state in 2004.

## Community Satisfaction & Mobility

A new section of the ESP 2004 poll queried respondents on their level of satisfaction with their local community across nine different areas. Table 3 provides an overview of how many respondents were satisfied with their community in each area.

**Table 3** Community Satisfaction: % of respondents who are satisfied with local community regarding

Aspect of Community	Upstate	Downstate	NYS
Safety & Crime	72	60	64
Cultural Activities	59	64	62
Public Education	73	48	57
Social & Human Services	55	49	52
City or Town Govt	50	43	46
Economic Growth	34	46	42
Land Dev & Planning	37	37	37
Employment	27	33	31
Local Taxes	29	33	30

The ESP results suggest that New Yorkers are most satisfied with *safety and crime* (64%), *cultural activities* (62%), and *public education* (57%) in their local communities. ESP respondents were the least satisfied with the quality of *land development and planning* (37%), *employment* (31%), and *local taxes* (30%).

There were also some very noticeable regional differences between upstate and downstate respondents. Upstate respondents had substantially higher levels of satisfaction on *safety and crime* (72% vs. 60%) and *public education* (73% vs. 48%) and a somewhat higher level of satisfaction with *social and human services* (55% vs. 49%) and *local government* (50% vs. 43%). Conversely, downstate respondents were more satisfied than upstate respondents in the areas of *cultural activities* (64% vs. 59%), *economic growth* (46% vs. 34%), and *employment* (33% vs. 27%).

In addition to community satisfaction, the ESP 2004 also examined community mobility. Respondents were asked whether they planned to be living within their local community in five years, and if not, where they plan on going.

**Table 4** Leaving NYS: % of respondents who plan within the next five years to stay to leave local community:

Projected Plans	%
Stay in Current Community	75
Leave Community – Stay in NYS	5
Leave Community – Leave NYS	13
Leave Community – Undecided	7

Table 4 summarizes the results. Three-quarters of all respondents replied that they plan to be living within their local communities in five years. Of those who do plan to leave, the majority plans on leaving New York State rather than moving to another community within the state (13% vs. 5%).

## Economic Perceptions

The ESP 2004 asked respondents about the employment climate in their own communities, perceptions of the state economy, and their own financial situation. These results were also compared to similar findings from the ESP 2003 and are provided below.

ESP 2004 reported a marked improvement in the availability of jobs in their communities over 2003, though a majority still responded that it was harder for people to find jobs in 2004 as compared to a year previously. Table 5 provides the statewide results for the ESP 2004 compared to the ESP 2003.

**Table 5** Difficulty of Finding Jobs In Your Community Over the Past Year: % of respondents who replied

Difficulty	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Easier	7	3
Stayed about the Same	36	22
Harder	56	75

In 2004, only 56% of respondents replied that finding a job was harder over the past year compared to 75% in 2003. In addition, a substantially larger percentage of respondents (36%) replied that the difficulty had stayed the same compared to 2003 (22%). However, the percentage of respondents who perceived that finding jobs had become easier was still rather small (7%), as it was in 2003 (3%).

Turning to economic expectations, the ESP 2004 asked respondents how their personal financial situation and their perceptions of the NYS economy had fared in the past year, and their expectations in the forthcoming year. Tables 6 and 7 compare the 2004 findings to the results from 2003.

Substantially more ESP 2004 respondents reported their personal financial situation staying the same or improving over the past year as compared to the ESP 2003. Furthermore, 43% of 2004 respondents believe their personal situation will be better in the forthcoming year compared to 32% in 2003.

**Table 6** Personal Economic Expectations: % of respondents

Economic Perception	Worse	Same	Better
Personal – Past Yr (2003)	32	50	18
Personal – Past Yr (2004)	22	55	24
Personal – Forthcoming Yr (2003)	15	53	32
Personal – Forthcoming Yr (2004)	9	48	43

This improvement in economic perceptions is also apparent when examining perceptions of the state economy as shown in Table 7 below. In 2004, five times (17% vs. 3%) as many respondents as in 2003 believed the state economy had improved over the past year, while significantly fewer (54%) 2004 respondents believed the state economy had worsened compared to 79% in 2003. Nevertheless, as in 2003 a majority of respondents believed that the NYS economy had continued to worsen over the past year and very few believed that it had improved.

**Table 7** State Economic Expectations: % of respondents

Economic Perception	Worse	Same	Better
NY Economy–Past Yr (2003)	79	17	3
NY Economy–Past Yr (2004)	54	29	17
NY Economy–Forthcoming Yr (2003)	34	25	24
NY Economy–Forthcoming Yr (2004)	27	39	34

Expectations of the state economy for the forthcoming year were also rosier in 2004 as compared to 2003. A third of ESP 2004 respondents believe that the state economy will improve in the forthcoming year compared to one-fourth from a year ago. However, overall, a large majority sees no improvement for the state economy with 39% believing the state economy will remain the same and 27% believing it will worsen in the forthcoming year.

## Political & Civic Engagement

How politically and civically engaged are New Yorkers within their communities? The ESP 2004 asked respondents a series of questions to gauge how attentive and active New Yorkers are to politics, as well as their level of community volunteerism.

Table 8 summarizes the percentage of New Yorkers who have engaged in some type of political activity (as listed) within the past year. One-third of New Yorkers responded that they either have contacted a local official or politician and/or persuaded someone to vote for or against an issue or candidate in the last 12 months. One-fifth of respondents reported attending a political rally or meeting in the last 12 months. Very few respondents reported writing a letter to a newspaper or calling a public affairs radio show (14%), speaking at a public meeting or forum (12%), or working for a political campaign or organization (8%).

**Table 8** Political Activities: % of respondents that engaged in political activity within the last year

Political Activity	%
Persuaded someone to vote for/against candidate or issue	34
Contacted public official or politician	32
Attended political rally or meeting	20
Wrote letter to newspaper /called radio show	14
Spoke at a public forum or meeting	12
Worked for political campaign or organization	8

*Note: Multiple responses allowed.*

Beyond political engagement, the ESP 2004 also asked New Yorkers how much they volunteer within their local communities. Table 9 provides the percentage of respondents from the ESP 2004 who replied that they had actually volunteered their time to each type of organization within the past year, as well as the national average for comparison.

**Table 9** Volunteerism: % of respondents who volunteered their time in the past year to

Type of Organization	NYS 2004	National Average*
Church or Religious Group	35	39
Child or Youth Development	31	31
Arts or Cultural Association	14	10
Neighborhood or Civic Group	24	18
Organization to help poor, sick, elderly	35	32

\* Based on data from Pew Public Life Survey conducted in March 2001.

New Yorkers exhibit a level of volunteerism across civic groups consistent with the national average, though New Yorkers may have a somewhat higher involvement in arts and cultural associations than residents in other states.

## Political Efficacy and Institutional Trust

How efficacious do New Yorkers feel toward NYS government? What key NYS institutions do they trust most? In 2004 the ESP asked respondents whether they believed that the NYS government looked out for their best interests and how complicated they found state government. The results were:

- Approximately 60% of respondents replied that they did not believe that NYS looked out for their best interests.
- Over 70% of respondents replied that they found state politics too complicated to know what is going on.

The ESP 2004 also measured New Yorkers' trust in important institutions such as state government, local government, local businesses, news media, labor unions, and large corporations as well as in their fellow New Yorkers. As was the case in 2003, local businesses and government were rated the trustworthiest and a large majority said they trusted

their fellow residents. Also consistent with the ESP 2003, state government and large corporations were the least trusted institutions in 2004. Table 10 below summarizes these results.

**Table 10** Trust in New York: % of respondents who trust

Institution	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Local Business	64	65
Other People	59	63
Local Government	43	45
Labor Unions	38	37
News Media	33	31
State Government	30	32
Large Corporations	22	20

## Special Poll Topics

Every year the ESP selects a few topical issues or questions upon which to query New Yorkers. In 2004, the ESP selected terrorism and issues in the 2004 Presidential election. The ESP 2004 asked New Yorkers about the likelihood of terrorist attack within the next 12 months within their local community and elsewhere within the United States. A similar set of questions was asked on the ESP 2003. Table 11 provides the results for both years.

**Table 11** Likelihood of Terrorist Attack: %of respondents who believe a terrorist attack is likely within:

Area	Upstate 2004	Downstate 2004	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Local Community	16	33	27	21
Elsewhere in the U.S.*	77	77	77	61

\*In the 2003, the question read "Elsewhere in the United States outside NYS".

Overall, in 2004 more than a quarter of respondents believed a terrorist attack is likely in their community over the next 12 months and is a noticeable increase over the number of New Yorkers who believed an attack was likely in 2003 (21%). Furthermore, there is a substantial difference between upstate and downstate residents, with twice as many downstate residents (33%) believing a terrorist attack is likely in their community as compared to upstate residents (16%). Substantially more New Yorkers believed a terrorist attack was likely elsewhere in the United States in 2004 (77%) as compared to 2003 (61%).

A second special topic on the ESP 2004 asked New Yorkers to identify what was the most important issue that they will take into account when deciding for whom to vote in the Fall 2004 Presidential election. Table 12 provides the results for self-identified Democrats, Independents, and Republicans as well as all respondents in the state.

**Table 12** Most Important Issue in Presidential Election: % of respondents who selected

Issue	Dem	Ind	Rep	NYS
Honesty/Integrity of Candidate	19	25	33	25
State of the U.S. Economy	21	18	16	18
National Security/Iraq	11	14	19	13
Employment & Jobs	10	9	6	9
Education	11	8	2	8
Foreign Policy	6	7	8	7
Healthcare & Insurance	9	7	5	6
Anti-Bush	4	3	2	3
Other Issues Not Listed	9	9	10	10

The foremost issue mentioned by one-in-four ESP 2004 respondents was the *honesty and integrity of the candidate*, especially for Republicans (33%), but less so for Democrats (19%). More important to Democrats than Republicans were economic issues such as the *state of the U.S. economy* (21% vs. 16%) and *employment* (10% vs. 6%). Conversely, Republicans placed more importance on *national security/Iraq* (19% vs. 11%) than Democrats. On most issues, the percentage of Independents was squarely in the middle between Democrats and Republicans.

## For More Information

If you are interested in directly accessing data from the Empire State Poll, have questions regarding the methodology, or wish to discuss other services provided by the ILR Survey Research Institute, please contact the SRI representative listed below or go to [www.sri.cornell.edu](http://www.sri.cornell.edu).

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