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Introduction

This report is an executive summary of the key findings from the Empire State Poll (ESP) 2005, 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 2005 marks the third 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 7 and March 24, 2005 and consists of 1,602 interviews with residents from both upstate and downstate New York. The overall response rate was 23.8% and cooperation rate 79.2% 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 ESP 2005 was split between two survey ballots with some topics asked to only 800 respondents and others posed to all 1,602 respondents. The margin of error for reported statewide results for 800 respondents is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points and for 1,602 respondents is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. For more detail on the background of the ESP 2005 and how the data were collected, see additional information available at www.sri.cornell.edu.

Issues of Concern to New Yorkers

What do New Yorker's care about most? Based on the two previous ESP surveys in 2003 and 2004, ESP 2005 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 the last three years of the ESP.

Employment continues to be the most important problem cited by all New Yorkers in 2005, as was the case with in 2004. However, within upstate New York, 32% of respondents cited *state taxes* as the most important problem as compared to 24% who cited employment. Furthermore, the issue of state taxes appears to be only highly salient within upstate NY with only 7% of downstate respondents citing state taxes as the most important problem. Across the three years, *healthcare* has continued to decline in saliency, while the *state economy* and *education* are also less salient in 2005 than previous years.

Table 1 Most Important Problem in New York State (n=1,602)
% of respondents citing issue

Issue	Upstate 2005	Downstate 2005	NYS 2005	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Employment	24	25	25	28	25
State Taxes	32	7	17	10	27
State Economy	8	8	8	13	12
Education	4	10	8	11	12
Healthcare	7	6	7	10	17
Security/ Terrorism	1	4	3	5	3
State Budget	3	2	3	3	6
Crime	1	3	2	3	2
Environment	0	1	1	2	2
People Leaving NYS	0	0	0	4	*
Other	20	31	27	10	4

* Not asked in 2003

Rating New York State

For the past three years, the ESP asked New Yorkers to rate their state across 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 for 2003 through 2005.

Compared to 2004, ratings of New York State remained relatively constant. The *environment* (45%) and *the quality of public education* (41%) remained the most highly rated aspects of New York State in 2005. *Mass transit infrastructure* (37%) was rated lower in 2005, but most likely this was due to a wording change from the 2004 questionnaire which asked respondents to generally rate transportation infrastructure rather than mass transit infrastructure specifically. *Employment* (19%), the *state government* (18%), *state taxes* (11%), and *state budget* (10%) remained the lowest rated aspects of the state.

Table 2 Rating NYS (n=1,602)

% of respondents who rate NYS good or excellent in:

Aspect of New York State	NYS 2005	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Environment	45	43	34
Quality of Public Education	41	40	33
Mass Transit Infrastructure*	37	53	**
Health & Human Services***	32	36	21
Economic Growth	24	23	12
Employment****	19	15	12
State Government	18	18	**
State Taxes	11	11	7
State Budget	10	11	6

* In 2004, wording was "Transportation Infrastructure"

** Not asked in 2003

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

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

The responses revealed some noteworthy regional differences. Duplicating similar patterns from 2003 and 2004, more than one-half of all upstate respondents rated the environment (55%) and public education (54%) as excellent or good compared to approximately only one-third of downstate respondents (39% and 33% respectively). Conversely, almost twice as many downstate respondents (30%) as upstate respondents (16%) rated economic growth as good or excellent in the state in 2005.

Community Satisfaction & Mobility

Beginning in 2004, the ESP annually queries respondents on their level of satisfaction with their local community across nine different topic areas. Table 3 provides an overview of how many respondents were satisfied with their community in 2004 compared to 2005, with regional breakdowns for 2005.

Table 3 Community Satisfaction (n=1,602)

% of respondents who are satisfied with local community regarding:

Aspect of Community	Upstate	Downstate	NYS 2005	NYS 2004
Safety & Crime	76	66	70	64
Public Education	74	60	65	57
Cultural Activities	55	62	60	62
Social & Human Services	58	54	56	52
City or Town Govt	52	48	50	46
Economic Growth	36	53	46	42
Land Dev & Planning	43	48	46	37
Employment	28	40	35	31
Local Taxes	32	32	32	30

As was the case in 2004, in 2005 New Yorkers are most satisfied with *safety and crime* (70%), *public education* (65%), and *cultural activities* (60%) in their local communities. ESP 2005 respondents were the least satisfied with the quality of *economic growth* (46%), *land development and planning* (46%), *employment* (35%), and *local taxes* (32%).

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* (76% vs. 66%) and *public education* (74% vs. 60%). Conversely, downstate respondents were more satisfied than upstate respondents in the areas of *economic growth* (53% vs. 36%), *employment* (40% vs. 28%), and *cultural activities* (62% vs. 55%).

In comparison to 2004, respondents expressed somewhat higher levels of community satisfaction overall in 2005, especially in the areas of *safety and crime*, *public education*, and *land development and planning*. Regionally, differences between 2004 and 2005 were more pronounced, with 60% of downstate respondents satisfied with *public education* in 2005 compared to only 48% in 2004.

In addition to community satisfaction, the ESP 2005 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 summarizes the results.

Table 4 Leaving NYS (n=1,602)

% of respondents who plan within the next five years to stay or leave local community

Projected Plans	NYS 2005
Stay in Current Community	81
Leave Community – Stay in NYS	5
Leave Community – Leave NYS	10
Leave Community – Undecided	4

Four-fifths 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 (10% vs. 5%).

Economic Perceptions

The ESP 2005 asked respondents about the employment climate in their communities, perceptions of the state economy, and their own financial situation. The reported difficulty in finding jobs within respondents' local communities continued to worsen in 2005 as nearly six out ten respondents believed that it was more difficult to find jobs in the past year. Only ten percent of respondents believed that finding jobs had become easier in the past year. Regionally, there was no variation between upstate and downstate New York. Table 5 provides the statewide results for the ESP 2003, 2004, and 2005.

Table 5 Difficulty of Finding Jobs In Your Community Over the Past Year (n=1,602)

% of respondents who replied:

Difficulty	NYS 2005	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Easier	10	7	3
Stayed about the Same	32	36	22
Harder	58	56	75

Turning to economic expectations, the ESP annually asks 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 results for 2003 through 2005.

Compared to 2004, respondents' reported personal financial situation over the last year remained remarkably consistent, with approximately half (53%) reporting that their financial situation remained the same, a quarter reporting that it had worsened and another quarter reporting that it had improved. However, personal economic optimism for the forthcoming year in 2005 was lower than 2004, with a substantial drop in the number of respondents who believed their personal financial situation would improve in the forthcoming year (35% vs. 43% in 2004), combined with increases in the number of respondents who believed that their personal financial situation would remain the same or worsen on the ESP 2005 compared to ESP 2004.

Table 6 Personal Economic Expectations (n=1,602)

% of respondents

Economic Perception	Worse	Same	Better
Personal – Past Yr (2003)	32	50	18
Personal – Past Yr (2004)	22	55	24
Personal – Past Yr (2005)	22	53	25
Personal – Forthcoming Yr (2003)	15	53	32
Personal – Forthcoming Yr (2004)	9	48	43
Personal – Forthcoming Yr (2005)	13	51	35

Turning to the state economy, perceptions of the state's economic performance over the past year in 2005 were similar to those expressed on the ESP 2004. In 2005, half of the ESP respondents believed the state economy worsened, a third believed it remained the same, and only one in six believed the state economy had improved. However, as was the case with personal economic expectations, expectations of the state's economic performance in the forthcoming year in 2005 were lower than 2004. Respondents on the ESP 2005 were more likely to believe that the state's economic performance would worsen (31%) or remain the same (45%) and less likely to believe it would improve (25%) than in 2004.

Regionally, there were significant variations in perceptions toward the state economy. On the ESP 2005, nearly six out of ten upstate residents believed the state economy worsened over the past year compared to only 45% of downstate residents. Conversely, downstate residents were twice as likely as upstate residents (20% vs. 10%) to respond that the state economy has improved over the past year.

The same trend occurs for perceptions of the state's economy in the forthcoming year. Thirty-six percent of upstate residents believe the state economy will worsen compared to only 27% of downstate residents who feel the same. Again, conversely, downstate residents are almost twice as likely as upstate residents (30% vs. 17%) to believe that the state economy will improve over the next year.

Table 7 State Economic Expectations (n=1,602)

% 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–Past Yr (2005)	50	34	16
NY Economy–Forthcoming Yr (2003)	34	25	24
NY Economy–Forthcoming Yr (2004)	27	39	34
NY Economy–Forthcoming Yr (2005)	31	45	25

Political & Civic Engagement

How politically and civically engaged are New Yorkers within their communities? The ESP 2005 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 or civic volunteerism within the past year (as listed). Approximately four in ten New Yorkers responded that they either have volunteered with an organization to help the poor, sick, or elderly, volunteered with a church or religious group, attended a public forum or meeting, volunteered with child or youth development group, or contacted a local official or politician. Only about two in ten have volunteered with a neighborhood or civic group, volunteered with an arts or cultural association, or written a letter to a newspaper or called into a radio show.

Table 8 Political & Civic Activities (n=800)

% of respondents that engaged in the activity within the last year

Political or Civic Activity	NYS 2005
Volunteered w/Organization to help poor, sick, elderly	46
Volunteered w/Church or Religious Group	44
Attended a public forum or meeting	43
Volunteered w/Child or Youth Development	39
Contacted public official or politician	38
Volunteered w/Neighborhood or Civic Group	27
Volunteered w/Arts or Cultural Association	21
Wrote letter to newspaper/Called radio show	18

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

Political Efficacy and Institutional Trust

How efficacious do New Yorkers feel toward NYS government? What key NYS institutions do they trust most? The ESP annually asks respondents whether they believed that the NYS government looked out for their best interests and how complicated they found state government. In 2005, only 41% of respondents replied that they believe that New York State government looked out for their best interests. Over seven out of ten respondents also replied on the ESP 2005 that they found NYS government too complicated to understand. These percentages are unchanged from 2004.

The ESP also annually measures 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 and 2004, local businesses and local government were rated the trustworthiest institutions and a large majority said they trusted their fellow residents. Also consistent with previous years, state government and large corporations were the least trusted institutions in 2005. However, several institutions increased in perceived trustworthiness in 2005 as compared to 2004, especially large corporations (+9pts), the news media (+9pts), and local government (+7pts). Table 9 provides the detailed results for the last three years of the ESP.

Table 9 Trust in New York (n=800)

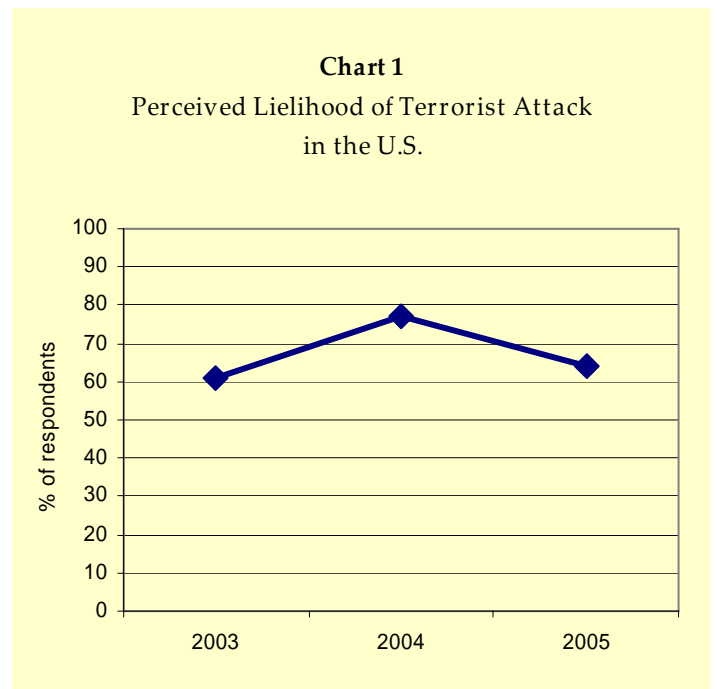
% of respondents who trust:

Institution	NYS 2005	NYS 2004	NYS 2003
Local Business	70	64	65
Other People	66	59	63
Local Government	50	43	45
News Media	42	33	31
Labor Unions	40	38	37
State Government	33	30	32
Large Corporations	31	22	20

Likelihood & Fear of Terrorist Attack

For the past three years the ESP has asked New Yorkers to assess the likelihood of a terrorist attack in the United States within the next 12 months. In addition, the ESP 2005 also asked respondents to assess whether they believed they were personally in danger from a terrorist attack. Chart 1 provides the number of respondents who believe that a terrorist attack is likely within the next 12 months for 2003 through 2005.

As the chart demonstrates, the perceived likelihood of a terrorist attack dropped among New Yorkers from 77% in 2004 to 64% in 2005. However, within New York State there are significant regional differences. Upstate New Yorkers are more likely to believe a terrorist attack is forthcoming within the next 12 months than downstate respondents (68% vs. 62%). However, downstate residents are much more likely to believe that they are in personal danger from a terrorist attack than upstate residents (33% vs. 17%).



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.

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Citing Results from the ESP

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