



# New York Empire State Poll 2003 ESP Report 2: Executive Summary Part One

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## Introduction

This report is an executive summary of the key findings from the Empire State Poll (ESP) 2003, 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 2003 marks the inauguration of an ongoing survey series that will probe residents' views on a wide-range of issues. The data derived from this poll will be of particular interest to government officials, business and labor leaders, journalists, academics, and representatives from special interest groups. The data can also guide policymaking, raise issues for civic dialogue, and suggest avenues of future research.

The poll was conducted between March 10 and July 1 2003 and consists of 888 interviews with residents from both upstate and downstate New York. The response rate was 26.7% and the cooperation rate was 57.0% 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), race (white vs. non-white), and household 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 2003 and how the data were collected, see *ESP Report #1: Introduction and Methodology* available at [www.sri.cornell.edu](http://www.sri.cornell.edu).

## A Portrait of New York

The ESP 2003 includes a wide-range of issues and topics facing New York State residents. 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 core of the ESP survey remains constant, which allows for the collection of trend data over time. This executive summary report provides topline results for selected economic, social, and political topics included within the ESP 2003. Future reports will detail results for the workplace topics.

### ESP 2003 Economic, Social, Political Topics

- Issues of concern to New York State residents
- Rating New York State
- State economy and business conditions
- Community and political involvement
- Security and safety within New York State
- Support for affirmative action
- Political knowledge, interest in, and attention to, politics
- Political efficacy and institutional trust

## Issues of Concern to New Yorkers

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

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

Issue	Upstate	Downstate	All Residents
Employment	24	26	25
State Taxes	28	10	17
Healthcare	16	18	17
Education	10	13	12
State Economy	10	13	12
State Budget	6	6	6
Homeland Security	0	5	3
Crime	2	3	2
Environment	1	2	2
Other	3	4	4

Not surprisingly, one out of four respondents said *employment* was the most important problem facing people in the state today. *Health care/insurance* and *state taxes* tied for second, with 17% of all ESP respondents picking each. However, regional differences are apparent, with 28% of

upstate respondents selecting state taxes as the state's most important problem compared to only 10% of downstate respondents. *Homeland security, crime, and the environment* were not considered serious problems; none were cited by more than 3% of the respondents.

## Rating New York State

How do New Yorkers rate their state? The answer is not very highly. The ESP 2003 asked respondents to rate ten key aspects of New York using a scale of poor, fair, good, or excellent. Table 2 provides an overview of how many respondents rated each area as good or excellent.

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

Aspect of New York	%
Environment	34
Quality of Public Education	33
Health Services and Insurance	21
Business infrastructure	21
Retention of jobs in New York State	14
Ability to keep people in the State	14
Economic Growth	12
The number of suitable jobs	12
State and Local Taxes	7
State Budget	6

The responses revealed some noteworthy regional differences. Whereas almost half of all upstate respondents rated the environment (45%) and public education (44%) as excellent or good, a smaller percentage of downstate respondents (26% and 27% respectively) rate these two areas as excellent or good.

## State Economy & Business Conditions

As noted above, the ESP 2003 found that employment was the top concern for New Yorkers, while economic growth, the number of suitable jobs, job retention, and business infrastructure were all rated much lower. The ESP 2003 delved deeper by polling respondents about the economic climate in their own communities, perceptions of the state economy, and their own financial situation.

Only one in four respondents said business conditions in their communities are "good" or "excellent". In contrast, 19% rated community business conditions as "poor", while the majority, 55%, stated that business conditions were only "fair". In addition, almost seven in ten respondents states that finding

jobs in their communities had become much more difficult.

Turning to expectations, the ESP 2003 asked respondents how their personal financial situation and their perceptions of the NYS economy had fared in the past year, their expectations in the forthcoming year for both. Table 3 summarizes the results:

**Table 3** Personal & Economic Expectations: % of respondents

Issue	Worse	Same	Better
Personal Finance – Past Yr	32	50	18
Personal Finance – Forthcoming Yr	15	53	32
NYS Economy – Past Yr	79	17	3
NYS Economy – Forthcoming Yr	34	35	24

## Community & Political Involvement

How do New Yorkers regard their communities? How active are New Yorkers in volunteer or political activities? The ESP 2003 asked respondents to evaluate their communities and to gauge personal political and community participation.

Overall, four out five respondents rated their community as a "good" or "excellent" place to live. However, there were noteworthy differences between various demographic groups based on race or income. Between whites and non-whites there was a 17% gap, with more whites than non-whites rating their community as "excellent" or "good". Respondents whose annual household income was less than \$35,000 were 20% less likely to rate their communities as "good" or "excellent" than respondents whose annual household income exceeded \$75,000.

Community involvement was fairly common among New Yorkers. One in three respondents volunteered their time during the past year in one or more of the following settings: community projects, child or youth program, a church or religious group, or with the sick or elderly.

The ESP 2003 also found that within the last year New York residents have been politically active in their communities, with three fifths having signed a petition in the last year, one in four having attended a political rally or meeting, one in six having participated in a demonstration, and one in ten having volunteered to work with a political or candidate organization. All of these levels of participation are higher than comparable national averages (*2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*).

## Security and Safety in New York

Given the events of September 11, 2001 and the current deployment in the Middle East, how safe do respondents feel? The ESP 2003 asked New York residents to assess the likelihood of attack in their communities, in New York City, in the rest of the state, and in the United States within the next 12 months. The table below shows the results.

**Table 4 Security & Safety: % of respondents who believe a terrorist attack is likely within:**

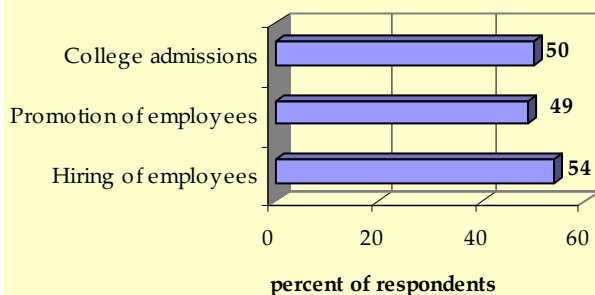
Area	%
The U.S. outside of NYS	66
New York City	61
NYS outside of New York City	30
Respondent's Local Community	21

Respondents indicated they felt the safest in their local communities, but two-thirds said they expected an attack would occur either within New York City or elsewhere within the United States.

## Support for Affirmative Action

Affirmative action was high on the public agenda during the spring and summer of 2003, partly due to the Supreme Court case involving the University of Michigan's admissions policies. The ESP 2003 asked New Yorkers to indicate their support for affirmative action programs in college admissions, and in the hiring and promotion of employees. The poll found that New Yorkers were evenly split on all three types of affirmative action, reflecting deep divisions of opinion on the topic. The results are presented below.

**Chart 1: Affirmative Action: % of respondents who support affirmative action programs in:**



## Interest and Attention Toward State Politics

How much do New Yorkers know about state politics? Are they interested in state and local politics? What catches their attention? The ESP 2003 measured all these factors.

Respondents were asked a series of four open-ended questions that tested their knowledge of state officeholders and political parties. The survey found New Yorkers had low levels of overall knowledge. Table 5 details the results.

**Table 5 Political Knowledge in NY: % of respondents who**

Question	%
Can Name One U.S. Senator from NYS	79
Can Name the Majority Party in the NYS Assembly	43
Can Name the NYS Attorney General	36
Can Name the NYS Comptroller	21
Answered All Four Questions Correctly	9

When asked about their level of interest in local and state politics, three in five respondents expressed strong interest in local politics and government, and about half expressed an interest in state politics.

This result is mirrored in what New Yorkers pay attention to in the media. According to the ESP 2003, seven out of ten respondents pay a high level of attention to local news on television or in the newspaper, compared to only one in two who pay attention to state news and politics in the media.

## Political Efficacy and Institutional Trust

Do New York State residents believe state officials care about them? How complicated do they perceive state politics to be? What institutions do they trust most? The ESP 2003 measured levels of political efficacy and institutional trust among New York State residents. The results were:

- Seven out of ten respondents said state politics are so complicated they sometimes do not know what is really going on.
- One half of respondents said state officials and politicians do not care about people like them.
- However, three in five respondents said the state government is responsive to their needs.

The ESP 2003 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. Local businesses and government were rated the most trustworthy institutions; a large majority said they trusted their fellow residents. State government, the news media, and large corporations were the least trusted institutions. Table 6 below summarizes these results.

**Table 6** Trust in New York: % of respondents who have trust in:

Institution	%
Local Businesses	65
Other People	63
Local Government	45
Labor Unions	37
State Government	32
News Media	31
Large Corporations	20

## Conclusion: NYS Economically Challenged, Community Oriented

The findings from the ESP 2003 and summarized in this report show public fully cognizant of the many challenges facing New York State, especially on the economic front. Employment, healthcare, and taxes preoccupy New Yorkers; one out of three respondents reported being financially worse off as compared to the previous year and one out of four said business conditions in their communities would get better in the forthcoming year.

The state also received low ratings on matters such as economic growth, job retention, state budget, state taxes, and business infrastructure. Respondents rated the environment and public education the highest, but even in these areas only one third of residents assigned them ratings of “good” or “excellent”.

Nonetheless, the ESP 2003 found that New Yorkers were actively engaged in their communities and trusted their local governments, businesses, and fellow New Yorkers. Four out of five respondents said their communities were a “good” or “excellent place to live”. Furthermore, as previously noted, one out of three New Yorkers reported volunteering to work on a community project or with a community organization.

New York residents indicated they were also politically active in their communities. Three out of five respondents said they had a high interest in local politics and government, while seven out of ten residents pay a high level of attention to local news on television or in the newspaper. This interest translates

into action, with three fifths of respondents having signed a petition in the last year, one in four having attended a political rally or meeting, one in six having participated in a demonstration, and one in ten having volunteered to work with a political or candidate organization. All of these levels of participation are higher than comparable national averages (2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey).

Overall, the ESP 2003 found a New York State public with many worries and concerns, about the present and the future. And yes, the survey also depicted an actively engaged citizenry focused on their communities and working to make a difference. It is in this last finding that potential solutions to the problems and concerns articulated by New Yorkers in the ESP 2003 may yet be found.

## For More Information

If you are interested in directly accessing data from the ESP 2003 or have questions regarding the methodology, please contact the ESP representative listed below or go to [www.sri.cornell.edu](http://www.sri.cornell.edu). In addition, the ESP 2004 is also currently in development with a launch date of February 2004. If you are interested in participating the next ESP, please contact the representative listed below immediately.

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