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### Introduction

This report summarizes the findings of the 2010 Empire State Poll (ESP), conducted by the Survey Research Institute at Cornell University. The 2010 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

[www.sri.cornell.edu](http://www.sri.cornell.edu) (<https://sri.cornell.edu/sri/esp.reports.cfm>).

### Methodology

- In total, 800 telephone interviews were conducted between February 1, 2010 and March 29, 2010, 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. Eligible respondents must be residents of NYS and at least 18 years old.
- The cooperation rate was 74.5% 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 [www.sri.cornell.edu](http://www.sri.cornell.edu).

### 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*

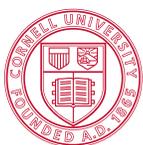
*facing your community as a whole? Responses were categorized into the following categories crime, economic growth, education, employment, environment, health care, housing, immigration land development, local government, municipal budget, people leaving the community, security/threat of terrorism, taxes, and other.*

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

| Top Issues                       | % of respondents citing... as most important issue |           |         |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------|---------|
|                                  | NYS  | Downstate | Upstate |
| Employment                       | 21   | 20        | 25      |
| Economic Growth                  | 21   | 20        | 23      |
| Taxes (local, state, or federal) | 14   | 9         | 22      |
| Crime                            | 8  | 11        | 3       |
| Education                        | 7  | 8         | 5       |
| Other Issues                     | 24   | 26        | 21      |

*Other responses mentioned by fewer than 5% of respondents include: environment, healthcare, housing, immigration, land development, local government, municipal budget, people leaving community, terrorism, and other reasons not listed.*

- Overall, New Yorkers cited both employment and economic growth most frequently as the most important issue facing local communities. Collectively, these two issues were cited by about two out of every five respondents (42%).
- The issue of taxes produced the largest regional disparity between what upstate and downstate residents felt was the most important issue facing their communities. Upstate residents were more than twice as likely to cite taxes as the most important issue compared to downstate residents (22% vs. 9% respectively).
- Conversely, downstate residents were discernibly more likely to cite crime (11% vs. 3%) as the most important community issue than were their upstate counterparts. This tendency coincides with 2009 and 2008 ESP data (13% vs. 5% in 2009 and 16% vs. 6% in 2008).
- For Democrats, the top three most important community issues were employment (23%), economic growth (21%), and crime (10%). The three most noted by Independents were employment (24%), economic



growth (21%), and taxes (19%). For Republicans, taxes (28%), economic growth (27%), and employment (15%) were the three top community issues.

- Taxes were cited as the most important community issue by 9% of Democrats, 19% of Independents, and 28% of Republicans.

Evaluating the state as a whole rather than only their communities, New Yorker residents were asked the same question (from 2004-2006, the question stated: In your opinion, what do you think is the single most important problem facing people in New York state today?). Responses were categorized 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        | % of respondents citing... as most important issue |       |            |           |             |
|-------------|--|-------|------------|-----------|-------------|
|             | Economic Growth                                    | Taxes | Employment | Education | Health-care |
| 2010        | 19   | 10    | 22         | 4         | 6           |
| - downstate | 18   | 6     | 26         | 6         | 8           |
| - upstate   | 20   | 18    | 15         | 2         | 4           |
| 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 2010, 22% of residents cited employment as the most important issue facing New York State, a 2% decrease from 2009. The second most widely cited issue was economic growth (19%).
- In 2010, upstate residents were three times as likely (18% vs. 6%) to cite taxes as the most important issue facing NYS than downstate residents. This regional split has shrunk by 6% since 2009.
- In contrast, downstate respondents were more likely to cite employment as the most important issue facing NYS than upstate respondents (26% vs. 15%).
- The three top statewide issues cited by Democrats were employment (26%), economic growth (20%), and the NYS government (accountability/efficiency, 15%). The top three cited by independents were employment (20%) while economic growth, NYS government, and

NYS budget all tied for second most frequently (18%). The three statewide issues frequently cited by Republicans were taxes (23%), NYS government (21%), and economic growth (18%).

## Community Satisfaction

Over the past several years, residents have been asked 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 2004-2006, the question asked respondents to measure their satisfaction on a ten point scale. The dimensions of the question have also varied but those mentioned in the table below have been constant since the question was first introduced in 2004. Table 3 contains the three constant dimensions, public education, city or town government and employment.

**Table 3** Resident Satisfaction with...

| Dimension        | Down-state | Up-state | 2010 | All NYS |      |      |      |      |
|------------------|------------|----------|------|---------|------|------|------|------|
|                  |            |          |      | 2009    | 2008 | 2007 | 2005 | 2004 |
| Public Education | 46         | 65       | 53   | 60      | 58   | 56   | 65   | 57   |
| City/Town Govt.  | 41         | 51       | 45   | 54      | 55   | 49   | 50   | 46   |
| Employment       | 20         | 22       | 20   | 26      | 40   | 33   | 35   | 31   |

Note: question was not asked in 2006. Due to rounding, percents may not add up to 100.

- Across the three recurring dimensions, public education had the highest level of satisfaction (53%), followed by city or town government (45%), and employment conditions (20%).
- In aggregate, satisfaction levels among each of the three dimensions declined by 22% since 2009. Resident satisfaction with city/town government fell the most (9%), followed by public education (7%), and then employment conditions (6%).
- Overall in 2010, upstate respondents were more satisfied in each dimension than their downstate



counterparts.

- Upstate residents reported being satisfied with their local public education at a considerably higher rate (65% vs. 46%) than downstate residents.
- Furthermore, upstate residents were far more likely to report being satisfied with their city/town government (51% vs. 41%) than downstate New Yorkers.

## 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                                   | % of all respondents |      |        |
|--|----------------------|------|--------|
|  | Worse                | Same | Better |
| <b>Perceptions of Past Year</b>        |                      |      |        |
| 2010                                   | 38                   | 46   | 16     |
| - downstate                            | 40                   | 44   | 16     |
| - upstate                              | 36                   | 49   | 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> |                      |      |        |
| 2010                                   | 15                   | 46   | 39     |
| - downstate                            | 13                   | 43   | 44     |
| - upstate                              | 19                   | 51   | 30     |
| 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.

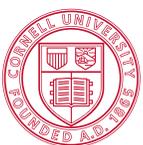
- Over the past three years, reports of no change in respondents' personal financial situation have been steady around 45%. However, reporting of worsening and improving finances has fluctuated significantly. In 2009, almost half of respondents reported being financially worse off. These reports declined to 38% in 2010. Those reporting being better off financially increased from 9% in 2009 to 16% in 2010, moving closer to the response rate realized in 2008 (22%).
- In 2009, 33% of respondents anticipated being financially better off. Unfortunately in 2010, only 16% of respondents reported better personal finances.
- For 2010, Democrats, Independents, and Republicans generally agreed in how they reported their personal economic condition over the past year. All three major political groups had response distributions that were not only within a 5% margin of the overall averages, but also with each other.

### Forthcoming Year

- Since 2009, personal economic optimism for the forthcoming year has increased noticeably. The percentage of New York State residents who believe their financial situation will improve over the coming year increased by 6% (33% in 2009 to 39% in 2010) and the percentage of those projecting a decline in their financial situation decreased by 11% (26% in 2009 to 15% in 2010).
- Envisioning the year to come, downstate residents were much more optimistic that their personal financial conditions would improve compared to upstate residents (44% vs. 30%, respectively).
- Over the next year, only 12% of Democrats expect their personal economic situation to worsen versus 17% of Republicans and 19% of Independents. Additionally, 43% of Democrats forecasted an improved economic situation over the coming year versus only 34% of Independents and 30% of Republicans.

## Evaluations of State Economic Performance

Similar to the questions concerning personal finance, New York State residents were asked their 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 |
| <b>Perceptions of Past Year</b>        |                      |      |        |
| 2010                                   | 74                   | 17   | 8      |
| - downstate                            | 70                   | 20   | 10     |
| - upstate                              | 81                   | 13   | 5      |
| 2009                                   | 92                   | 6    | 2      |
| 2008                                   | 68                   | 26   | 6      |
| 2007                                   | 43                   | 37   | 20     |
| 2006                                   | 36                   | 48   | 16     |
| 2005                                   | 50                   | 34   | 16     |
| 2004                                   | 54                   | 29   | 17     |
| <b>Perceptions of Forthcoming Year</b> |                      |      |        |
| 2010                                   | 31                   | 33   | 36     |
| - downstate                            | 25                   | 32   | 42     |
| - upstate                              | 41                   | 33   | 25     |
| 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*

- The number of residents who characterized the state economy as having been “worse” over the past year decreased significantly to 74% in 2010 from 92% in 2009. Accordingly, the number of respondents who reported that the economy remained the same increased by 11% (17% in 2010 vs. 6% in 2009) and the number who reported that the economy improved increased by 6% (8% vs. 2% respectively).
- 11% more upstate residents reported that the economic situation had worsen over the past year compared to downstate residents (81% vs. 70%). In addition, half as many upstate residents reported that the economic conditions were better (5% vs. 10%).

*Forthcoming Year*

- The number of residents who expect the state economy to worsen in the forthcoming year decreased by 19% (from 50% in 2009 to 31% in 2010). This fairly low

expectation is closer to that response rates prior to 2008 (28%) than those in 2008 and 2009 (45% and 50% respectively).

- Since the beginning of the ESP in 2003, there has never been a higher expectation that the New York State economy will improve in the forthcoming year than that in 2010 (36%).
- Downstate residents were more likely to expect (42% vs. 25%) the state’s economy to improve in the forthcoming year. Contrastingly, upstate residents were more likely to expect the state’s economy to worsen in the forthcoming year (41% vs. 25%). Notably, the proportion of downstate residents that believe economic conditions will improve is about equal to the proportion of upstate residents that believe conditions will worsen (42% vs. 41% respectively).

**Trust in Institutions in NYS**

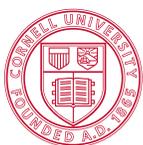
ESP 2010 measured NYS residents’ trust toward eight different institutions including large corporations, local businesses, labor unions, other people, the internet, news media, local government, and state government. Trust was measured by asking respondents on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is untrustworthy 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 | Percentage of respondents who rate the level of trustworthiness as... |        |      |
|--------------------|---|--------|------|
|                    | Low   | Medium | High |
| Large corporations | 42  | 50     | 9    |
| Local businesses   | 10  | 52     | 37   |
| Labor unions       | 39  | 46     | 15   |
| Other people       | 10  | 58     | 31   |
| Internet           | 34  | 48     | 18   |
| News media         | 30  | 50     | 19   |
| Local government   | 26  | 57     | 17   |
| State government   | 49  | 44     | 7    |

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

- The three institutions reported to have attained a high level of trust with the highest frequency were local businesses, other people, and news media.
- The three institutions reported to have attained a low level of trust with the highest frequency were the state government, large corporations, and labor



unions.

- Respondents who reported a low level of trust in the NYS government increased from 36% in 2009 to 49% in 2010. NYS government was the only dimension to experience such a significant change from 2009.
- Since 2009, the percentage of respondents reporting a high level of trust marginally decreased for every institution.

See Report 2: State of New York Over Time for more details, available at [www.sri.cornell.edu](http://www.sri.cornell.edu).

## Resident Mobility

The ESP annually examines community/residence mobility. In 2010, 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 7 below.

**Table 7 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 |
| 2010         | 76   | 16                              | 8                             | 1  |
| - downstate  | 74   | 18                              | 6                             | 1  |
| - upstate    | 80   | 11                              | 9                             | 0  |
| 2009 overall | 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.

- Those who reported that they would likely be living in their current residence in five years increased by 10% from 2009 (66%) to just over three-quarters of respondents in 2010 (76%).
- The upstate residents of New York reported slightly higher resident immobility than downstate (80% vs. 74%).
- Upstate residents were more likely to leave New York State than downstate residents (9% vs. 6%

respectively) where as downstate residents are more likely to move within NYS (18% vs. 11% respectively).

- 2010 had the lowest percent of respondents since this question was first introduced in 2004 to indicate that they would be leaving the state (8%).
- The cost of living and high taxes were cited often as reasons for leaving the state. Other common responses included the weather and moving closer to family.

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