



New York Empire State Poll 2003

ESP Report 4: Economic & Political Conditions

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Introduction

This report summarizes resident's perceptions of economic and political conditions within New York State, based upon data 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 primary goal of the ESP is to provide a yearly portrait of New York that includes a snapshot of social, economic, political, and workplace trends. 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 across New York State. The response rate was 26.7%. For reporting purposes, "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%, 4.9 % for upstate/downstate results, and 6.5% for demographic breakdowns. For more detail on the background of the ESP 2003 and how the data were collected, see *ESP Report #1: Introduction and Methodology*.

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 by region

Issue	Upstate	Downstate	All NYS
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, a quarter of respondents said *employment* was the most important problem facing people in the state today with little regional variation. However, regional differences are apparent for other issues, with 28% of upstate respondents selecting *state taxes* as the state's most important problem compared to only 10% of downstate respondents.

Besides regional differences, New Yorkers also have differing priorities based upon socio-demographic factors. Table 2 provides the percentage of respondents selecting each issue broken down by self-identified Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

Table 2 Most Important Problem in New York State: % of respondents by party affiliation

Issue	Dem	Rep	Ind
Employment	31	20	24
State Taxes	10	28	19
Healthcare	17	15	18
Education	14	7	12
State Economy	12	11	12
State Budget	6	7	6
Homeland Security	4	4	1
Crime	1	5	4
Environment	1	1	3
Other	4	3	2

As Table 2 demonstrates, Republicans and Democrats have different top priorities, with nearly a third of Democrats focused on *employment* compared to Republicans who focus on *state taxes*. There is also a significant difference between the two in the areas of *education* and *crime*. Independents appear to share both parties concerns about *employment* and *state taxes*.

Lastly, Table 3 provides the percentage of respondents selecting each issue by annual household income level.

Table 3 Most Important Problem in New York State: % of respondents by annual household income level

Issue	<\$35k	\$35k to \$75k	\$75k +
Employment	31	26	18
State Taxes	13	23	20
Healthcare	24	15	15
Education	7	13	15
State Economy	6	12	17
State Budget	7	5	6
Homeland Security	3	3	3
Crime	4	1	1
Environment	2	1	2
Other	3	2	4

Different patterns of concern emerge across the three household income categories. The two issues of *employment* and *healthcare* are the most cited problems by respondents from households with \$35k or less annual income and account for over half the respondents in that category. In comparison, the concerns of the two higher household income categories are more diffuse. Respondents from households with between \$35k and \$75k in annual income are also focused on *employment*, but also cited *state taxes*, *healthcare*, and *education* as top concerns. For the highest household income group (\$75k or more in annual income), *state taxes* were the number one concern followed by *employment*, the *state economy*, *healthcare*, and *education*.

Rating New York State

How do New Yorkers rate their state? The answer varies across several key attributes of New York. The ESP 2003 asked respondents to rate ten key aspects of New York using a scale of poor, fair, good, or excellent. Table 4 provides an overview of how many respondents rated each area as good or excellent within upstate, downstate, and all of New York. In general, respondents from the upstate region rated New York State higher than downstate respondents, especially in the areas of environment and education. The only area in which downstate respondents rated New York higher than upstate residents was in keeping people in New York State.

Table 4 Rating New York State: % of respondents who rate NYS good or excellent by region

Issue	Upstate	Downstate	All NYS
Environment	45	27	34
Public Education	44	26	33
Health Services	25	18	21
Business Infrastructure	21	22	21
Job Retention in NYS	12	15	14
Keeping People in NYS	10	17	14
Economic Growth	11	13	12
# Suitable Jobs in NYS	10	14	12
State and Local Taxes	8	6	7
State Budget	4	7	6

Again, moving beyond topline results and examining socio-demographic patterns, Table 5 provides breakdowns by self-identified party affiliation.

Table 5 Rating New York State: % of respondents who rate NYS good or excellent by party affiliation.

Issue	Dem	Rep	Ind
Environment	28	42	37
Public Education	29	44	32
Health Services	15	27	25
Business Infrastructure	16	27	25
Job Retention in NYS	11	20	12
Keeping People in NYS	14	13	13
Economic Growth	10	16	11
# Suitable Jobs in NYS	8	17	14
State and Local Taxes	8	7	5
State Budget	4	7	7

In general, Republicans and Independents rate the state higher than Democrats. The biggest gaps between Democrats and Republicans are in the areas of *education*, *environment*, *health services*, *business infrastructure*, and *the number of suitable jobs in NYS*. Democrats and Republicans tend to agree on their assessments of New York in the areas of *state budget*, *state and local taxes*, *keeping people in NYS*, and *economic growth*.

Patterns emerge as well when considering ratings of New York State by annual household income as Table 6 demonstrates. Compared to party affiliation, there is more agreement across income groups on assessments of New York, especially on the *environment*, *public education*, *taxes*, and the *state budget*. However, higher household income categories do rate New York higher in the areas of *business infrastructure* and *health services*.

Table 6 Rating New York State: % of respondents who rate NYS good or excellent by annual household income.

Issue	<\$35k	\$35k to \$75k	\$75k +
Environment	32	36	35
Public Education	31	35	38
Health Services	15	24	23
Business Infrastructure	13	21	32
Job Retention in NYS	14	10	15
Keeping People in NYS	12	12	16
Economic Growth	16	8	12
# Suitable Jobs in NYS	13	10	13
State and Local Taxes	5	5	9
State Budget	4	4	7

Economic Conditions

As noted above, the ESP 2003 found that employment and other economic factors pre-occupied most New Yorkers. The ESP 2003 delved deeper by polling respondents on whether they perceived their personal financial situation and the state economy as worse, the same, or better as last year, and their expectations for the forthcoming year. We also asked respondents whether the difficulty of finding a job in their community was worse (easier), same, or better (harder) over the past year. Table 7 provides the statewide results.

Table 7 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
Finding jobs in Community–Past Yr	75	21	3

Half of New Yorkers say that their financial situation has not changed in the last year, though a third responded that their personal situation had worsened. Yet, New Yorkers are more optimistic for the future, with over half stating they believe their financial situation will remain steady and a third believing it will become better. However, New Yorker's perceptions of the state economy as are not as optimistic as their personal financial situation. Nearly 80% believe that the New York economy has worsened in the past year. Furthermore, only 24% believe it will get better with a third believing it will continue to worsen. The perceived difficulty of finding jobs also follows the same pattern as perceptions of the state economy over the past year.

However, beyond statewide results, economic perceptions and expectations do vary by regional and socio-demographic categories. Specifically considering personal finance, Table 8 provides breakdowns by key demographic categories.

Table 8 Personal Financial Situation: % respondents replying worse, same, better for past and forthcoming year.

Demographic	Per. Finance–Past			Per. Finance–Future		
	Worse	Same	Better	Worse	Same	Better
Statewide	32	50	18	15	53	32
Upstate	27	50	22	11	60	30
Downstate	35	45	15	18	39	43
Democrats	35	47	18	16	54	30
Republicans	29	51	20	13	53	34
Independents	31	53	16	18	52	31
>\$35k	38	49	13	14	57	30
\$35k to \$75k	29	55	13	16	50	34
\$75k +	28	43	29	18	49	33
White	31	49	20	14	56	30
Non-white	35	52	13	16	47	37

Comparatively, over the past year upstate residents appear to have felt less of a negative impact, as well as more of a positive gain, on their personal financial situation as compared to downstate residents. However, downstate residents are more optimistic that their personal financial situation will improve in the forthcoming year as opposed to upstate residents.

Generally speaking, there is not much variation across political affiliations for either past or future personal financial expectations. However, considering household income categories, lower annual household income groups have felt more of a negative financial impact than higher income groups with a corresponding lower positive gain. For the highest income category (annual household income greater than \$75k), the number of respondents that were worse off and better off in the past year was quite equal. Turning to expectations, all three sets of household income categories appear to have the same general set of financial expectations for forthcoming year.

Lastly, it appears that Whites and non-Whites in New York experienced similar trends in personal financial situations over the last year, though non-Whites are somewhat more optimistic for the forthcoming year.

Table 9 provides similar demographic breakdowns for perceptions of the state economy.

Table 9 Perceptions of the State Economy: % respondents replying worse, same, better for past and forthcoming year.

Demographic	NYS Economy – Past			NYS Economy–Future		
	Worse	Same	Better	Worse	Same	Better
Statewide	79	17	3	34	35	24
Upstate	71	25	3	32	47	21
Downstate	84	12	4	42	33	25
Democrats	85	12	3	44	35	21
Republicans	68	28	4	31	42	28
Independents	81	17	2	38	38	23
>\$35k	81	16	3	37	38	25
\$35k to \$75k	73	22	4	35	43	22
\$75k +	83	14	3	43	32	25
White	77	20	3	34	41	25
Non-white	84	12	4	44	33	22

Upstate and downstate respondents have different perceptions of the state economy. Fewer upstate residents perceive the state economy as worsening over the past year compared to downstate residents. This gap also exists for future expectations, with only a third of the upstate respondents believing that the state economy will continue to worsen and nearly half believing it will remain the same. Conversely, over 42% of downstate residents believe the economy will worsen and only one third believe it will remain the same.

Unlike personal financial situations, perceptions of the state economy do vary greatly by political party affiliation. Democrats and Independents are more likely to perceive the state economy as worse from a year ago compared to Republicans. Conversely, Republicans are more likely to see the economy staying the same or improving in the forthcoming year as compared to both Democrats and Independents.

Perceptions regarding the state economy also appear to vary by annual household income. The middle income grouping (\$35k to \$75k) perceiving less deterioration in the state economy over the last year, and least expecting a worsening in the forthcoming year, compared to the other two groupings. Lastly, non-Whites are more pessimistic on the state economy than Whites, with considerably more non-Whites perceiving the state economy as worse over the past year and expecting it to worsen in the forthcoming year compared to Whites.

Table 10 provides a breakdown of perceived difficulty in finding jobs by key demographic groupings. Regionally, downstate respondents have found the difficulty of finding jobs has worsened over the past year compared to upstate residents. In addition, perceptions vary by political affiliation, with Democrats and Independents perceiving jobs to be more

difficult to find in their community than Republicans over the past year. As was the case in perceptions of the state economy, fewer respondents in the middle household income group (\$35k to \$75k) perceived a worsening in the availability of jobs compared to the other two income groupings.

Table 10 Perceived Difficulty of Finding Jobs in Community: % of respondents replying worse, same, better for past year

Demographic	Worse	Same	Better
Statewide Total	75	21	3
Upstate	71	24	2
Downstate	78	20	2
Democrats	80	18	2
Republicans	66	28	5
Independents	80	17	3
>\$35k	78	19	3
\$35k to \$75k	71	27	2
\$75k +	77	20	4
White	74	22	3
Non-white	80	19	2

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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