

# **Empire Center for New York State Policy Survey of New York State Voters**



**Siena  
College  
Research  
Institute**

**515 Loudon Road  
Loudonville, NY 12211  
phone: 518-783-2901  
fax: 518-786-5052  
[www.siena.edu/sri](http://www.siena.edu/sri)**

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## **Survey of New York State Voters**

### **Overview:**

- 1. Generally, voters do not believe that New York will be a better place in which to live five years from now, and nearly half of them have considered – or have had a family member consider – moving out of state in the last year.**
  
- 2. Voters largely have negative views of the way state government operates in New York.**
  - 58% are dissatisfied with the performance of their state government.
  - Similarly, 58% believe that special interest groups have too much influence over state government.
  - By a four-to-one margin, voters who think that the standard of ethics of state officials have changed in the last five years believe they have gotten worse.
  - 65% believe the Governor primarily represents special interests or his own self-interests, compared to 26% who believe he represents his constituents' interests.
  - 67% believe the leaders of the State Legislature primarily represent special interests or their own self-interests, compared to 17% who believe they represent their constituents' interests.
  
- 3. There is overwhelming support for a variety of measures that would change the way state government operates.**
  - 74% of voters favor having redistricting of legislative districts carried out by an independent, non-partisan commission.
  - 72% support initiative and referendum.
  - 68% would like to see term limits for state elected officials.
  - 66% believe the state constitution should be amended to limit spending increases by state and local governments to the rate of inflation.

## **Overview, continued:**

- 4. New Yorkers want state leaders to address key fiscal issues by controlling state spending practices.**
  - Four-fifths of voters believe New York State spends enough money on education but has to spend it better.
  - Three-quarters think that the state is not doing enough to reduce fraud, waste and abuse in the Medicaid program.
  - Nearly two-thirds believe that the best single way to close large state deficits is to reduce spending.
  
- 5. Voters consistently have a better view of the way their local governments operate vs. the way state government operates.**
  - While 46% think the quality of public schools in New York generally is excellent or good, 59% feel that way about the quality of their local public schools.
  - More than half (54%) believe they pay too much in state taxes for the quality and quantity of services provided, however, only 36% believe they pay too much in property taxes for the quality of services provided by their local school districts.
  - While approximately two-thirds believe that the Governor and legislative leaders primarily represent special or their own self-interests, less than half (46%) feel that way about their local elected officials.

*This survey was conducted by phone calls to 620 registered New York State voters in December 2005. The margin of error is +/- 3.9 percent for the total sample.*

Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_ from the Siena College Research Institute. We are talking with people like yourself today about important issues in your area, and would like to ask you a few questions on a confidential basis.

Thinking about the future, do you think New York State will be a better place to live five years from now, a worse place, or will it be about the same as it is now?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E*	Up-W*		Dem	Rep	Ind
Better place	20%	26%	20%	23%	14%		22%	18%	22%
Worse Place	23%	16%	16%	29%	35%		22%	23%	26%
About the same	48%	49%	57%	40%	43%		46%	52%	44%
Don't know/no opinion	8%	9%	7%	7%	8%		10%	7%	8%

Have you personally considered moving from New York State in the past year? (IF NO, ASK :) Has a family member?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Respondent has considered moving	41%	39%	41%	39%	44%		37%	40%	54%
Family member has considered moving	8%	4%	10%	4%	11%		8%	8%	5%
Nobody has considered moving	50%	56%	48%	51%	43%		54%	49%	39%
Don't know/no opinion	2%	2%	1%	6%	2%		1%	3%	2%

Looking at the performance of New York State government, would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the performance of state government?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
<b>TOTAL SATISFIED</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>23%</b>		<b>40%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>42%</b>
Very satisfied	5%	6%	7%	5%	1%		4%	5%	5%
Somewhat satisfied	36%	46%	45%	23%	22%		36%	36%	37%
<b>TOTAL DISSATISFIED</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>77%</b>		<b>58%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>58%</b>
Very dissatisfied	21%	18%	10%	26%	32%		23%	18%	23%
Somewhat dissatisfied	37%	28%	34%	44%	45%		35%	39%	35%
Don't know/no opinion	2%	2%	3%	2%	0%		2%	2%	0%

\* See List of Counties Included in Upstate-East and Upstate-West on Page 18

In the last 10 years, do you think the standard of ethics of officials in New York State government has gotten better, gotten worse, or has stayed the same?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Better	9%	14%	13%	7%	2%		9%	11%	10%
Worse	39%	34%	30%	46%	49%		38%	40%	37%
Stayed the same	49%	49%	56%	44%	46%		51%	46%	52%
Don't know/no opinion	3%	3%	1%	2%	3%		2%	4%	1%

I'm going to mention several elected officials and for each, I'd like you to tell me whether you believe they primarily represent your interests, special interests, or their own interests. (ROTATE ORDER)

#### The Governor

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Your interests	26%	23%	32%	28%	23%		22%	37%	21%
Special interests	25%	26%	27%	17%	27%		26%	22%	27%
Own self-interest	40%	40%	32%	43%	43%		42%	35%	43%
Don't know/no opinion	9%	10%	9%	12%	7%		11%	7%	9%

#### The leaders of the state legislature

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Your interests	17%	19%	20%	18%	12%		18%	16%	15%
Special interests	26%	23%	28%	23%	29%		26%	31%	24%
Own self-interest	41%	36%	40%	43%	46%		37%	40%	49%
Don't know/no opinion	16%	23%	12%	16%	13%		18%	14%	11%

#### Your local elected officials

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Your interests	45%	48%	38%	61%	42%		45%	53%	35%
Special interests	12%	15%	12%	4%	12%		12%	8%	14%
Own self-interest	34%	30%	39%	21%	39%		32%	32%	41%
Don't know/no opinion	9%	7%	12%	15%	7%		11%	7%	9%

**Do you believe that groups such as labor unions, trial lawyers, and business organizations have too much influence, not enough influence, or the right level of influence on elected officials in New York State government?**

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
<b>Too much influence</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>64%</b>		<b>49%</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>Not enough influence</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>14%</b>		<b>19%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Right level of influence</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>10%</b>		<b>19%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Don't know/no opinion</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>12%</b>		<b>12%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>

**One proposal some believe would improve the way state government operates is to have “initiative and referendum,” where citizens can place proposed laws on the ballot and voters can decide whether or not they should be approved. Do you strongly support, support, oppose or strongly oppose initiative and referendum?**

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>79%</b>		<b>70%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>77%</b>
Strongly support	27%	30%	22%	32%	27%		26%	29%	29%
Support	45%	38%	48%	38%	52%		44%	46%	48%
<b>TOTAL OPPOSE</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>19%</b>		<b>25%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>14%</b>
Strongly oppose	5%	6%	6%	4%	5%		7%	3%	3%
Oppose	17%	17%	19%	20%	14%		18%	17%	11%
<b>Don't know/no opinion</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>3%</b>		<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>

**Currently, state lawmakers draw the boundary lines for all state Senate and state Assembly districts in New York. In some other states, independent, non-partisan commissions draw legislative district lines. Who do you think should create districts for New York’s senators and assemblymembers – state legislators themselves or an independent commission?**

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
<b>State legislators</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>16%</b>		<b>15%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Independent commission</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>77%</b>		<b>74%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Don't know/no opinion</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>		<b>11%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>

**Would you favor or oppose a state constitutional amendment to limit spending increases to the rate of inflation for state and local governments in New York State?**

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
<b>Favor</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>78%</b>		<b>65%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Oppose</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>15%</b>		<b>24%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Don't know/no opinion</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>7%</b>		<b>11%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>

In general, do you favor or oppose limiting the number of terms state elected officials are allowed to serve in office?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Favor	68%	65%	70%	66%	71%		67%	71%	66%
Oppose	26%	32%	24%	28%	20%		28%	24%	26%
Don't know/no opinion	6%	3%	6%	6%	8%		5%	5%	8%

State government funds many services and programs, including education, health care, roads, and prisons. To fund programs, state government collects a variety of taxes and fees. Thinking about the balance between the taxes you personally pay and the quality of services provided by the state, which comes closer to your opinion (Rotate):

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
I pay too much in taxes for the quality and quantity of services provided	54%	47%	52%	50%	63%		52%	59%	48%
I pay the right amount of taxes for the quality and quantity of services provided	26%	25%	29%	29%	21%		20%	31%	30%
I would pay more in taxes to get increased or higher quality services	15%	21%	11%	15%	12%		20%	6%	13%
Don't know/no opinion	6%	7%	9%	6%	4%		7%	4%	8%

New York State government could face large budget deficit in the next few years. What would be the *single* best way for elected officials to close such deficit (ROTATE:) cut spending or increase taxes?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Cut spending	64%	59%	62%	68%	70%		61%	74%	66%
Increase taxes	6%	9%	7%	5%	3%		9%	4%	4%
(Both)	21%	23%	22%	18%	20%		21%	17%	23%
(Neither)	5%	5%	6%	4%	5%		4%	3%	6%
Don't know/no opinion	4%	5%	3%	5%	2%		5%	2%	1%

The majority of property taxes paid by homeowners outside New York City go to local school districts. Thinking about the balance between the property taxes you and your family pay and the quality of services provided by your school district, which comes closer to your opinion (Rotate):

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
My taxes are too high for the quality of services provided by my school district	36%	38%	42%	26%	34%		37%	36%	40%
My taxes are the right level for the quality of services provided by my school district	37%	20%	37%	51%	49%		31%	46%	42%
I would pay more in taxes to get higher quality services	10%	11%	7%	13%	10%		12%	8%	6%
I don't pay property taxes	8%	19%	6%	4%	2%		12%	5%	6%
Don't know/no opinion	8%	12%	8%	6%	5%		9%	5%	5%

Medicaid, the government program funded by federal, state and local taxes in New York, pays for health care for the poor, disabled and elderly. Do you think state government is currently doing enough to reduce the amount of fraud, waste and abuse in the Medicaid program?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Yes	14%	20%	12%	10%	10%		14%	10%	12%
No	76%	67%	75%	79%	83%		74%	83%	79%
Don't know/no opinion	11%	13%	13%	11%	7%		12%	8%	8%

Thinking about public education, do you think the quality of the public schools generally in New York State is excellent, good, fair, or poor?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Excellent	8%	4%	9%	10%	9%		8%	8%	8%
Good	38%	27%	34%	51%	46%		33%	48%	34%
Fair	33%	41%	30%	23%	32%		35%	27%	40%
Poor	14%	20%	16%	9%	8%		17%	11%	11%
Don't know/no opinion	7%	6%	12%	7%	5%		8%	7%	6%

How about your local school district – is the quality of your local public schools excellent, good, fair, or poor?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Excellent	20%	9%	27%	27%	23%		17%	25%	23%
Good	39%	29%	38%	49%	45%		33%	46%	39%
Fair	22%	28%	18%	15%	22%		26%	17%	25%
Poor	11%	20%	9%	5%	7%		14%	7%	9%
Don't know/no opinion	8%	13%	8%	5%	4%		11%	5%	4%

The statewide average spending in New York public schools is about \$12,000 per pupil. Some argue that New York State should spend more money to improve the quality of public education. Others argue we already spend enough but have to spend it better. Which view is closer to your own?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Spend more money	15%	21%	12%	11%	13%		19%	8%	12%
Spend existing money better	81%	74%	83%	85%	84%		76%	89%	86%
Don't know/no opinion	4%	5%	5%	4%	4%		5%	3%	2%

Would you favor or oppose a law to provide education tax dollars to parents to allow them to send their child to whatever school they choose – public, private or religious?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Yes	49%	54%	47%	46%	47%		47%	54%	47%
No	45%	42%	48%	46%	44%		47%	38%	52%
Don't know/no opinion	6%	4%	4%	7%	9%		6%	8%	1%

One of the fastest growing expenses for state and local governments in New York over the past few years has been the cost of pension benefits for public employees. Do you think that pension benefits provided to public employees are too high, too low, or just about right?

	Total	NYC	Burbs	Up-E	Up-W		Dem	Rep	Ind
Too high	27%	16%	26%	28%	36%		20%	36%	27%
Too low	14%	23%	13%	10%	8%		18%	8%	14%
Just about right	44%	45%	43%	50%	41%		45%	43%	43%
Don't know/no opinion	16%	16%	17%	12%	15%		17%	13%	15%

### Counties in Upstate-West

Allegany  
 Broome  
 Cattaraugus  
 Cayuga  
 Chautauqua  
 Chemung  
 Chenango  
 Cortland  
 Delaware  
 Erie  
 Genesee  
 Herkimer  
 Jefferson  
 Lewis  
 Livingston  
 Madison  
 Monroe  
 Niagara  
 Oneida  
 Onondaga  
 Ontario  
 Orleans  
 Oswego  
 Otsego  
 St. Lawrence  
 Schuyler  
 Seneca  
 Steuben  
 Sullivan  
 Tioga  
 Tompkins  
 Wayne  
 Wyoming  
 Yates

### Counties in Upstate-East

Albany  
 Clinton  
 Columbia  
 Dutchess  
 Essex  
 Franklin  
 Fulton  
 Greene  
 Hamilton  
 Montgomery  
 Rensselaer  
 Saratoga  
 Schenectady  
 Schoharie  
 Ulster  
 Warren  
 Washington