

Jobs and the Economy In New York State

A Community-Based Survey About Economic Development

July 20, 2008

This survey project is a collaboration between the National Employment Law Project, New York Jobs with Justice, the Pratt Center for Community Development, and the Urban Justice Center. Data analysis was conducted by the National Employment Law Project. Special mention goes to Dawn Plummer, Sadaf Khatri, Gita Stulberg, and Diana Polson, who together coordinated the design, distribution and collection of the survey.

Goals of the survey

1. Develop survey tools for capturing how New Yorkers experience economic development in their communities
 - a. The nut of the problem is that the term “economic development” is useless in a survey setting – it has no clear, consistent meaning, and cannot be used in actual questions. Which means we need to develop questions that allow New Yorkers to tell us about what is happening in their communities.
 - b. As a result, we developed two sections in the survey:
 - i. The first draws on recent experiments with “community assessment tools” to generate a battery of questions that allow respondents to rate the availability and affordability of a range of community services and infrastructure.
 - ii. The second tries to tap economic development trends, by presenting narratives about concrete changes that residents may be observing in their community.
2. Identify what New Yorkers think about policies related to economic development
 - a. The survey has three sections devoted to this goal:
 - i. A section asking New Yorkers’ opinion of a specific economic development policy: IDA subsidy reform. The section tests both specific reforms that have been proposed, as well as arguments that have been made for and against those reforms.
 - ii. A section testing New Yorkers’ assessment of which stakeholders are responsible for, and able to have an impact on, job quality in New York state.
 - iii. A section asking New Yorkers’ opinion on several additional policies that advocates have proposed/are developing.

Survey overview

Data & methods

- Survey of 849 residents in New York State
- Conducted in summer and fall of 2007
- Fielding divided up into three regions, using categorization developed by the Fiscal Policy Institute:
 1. New York City: the 5 boroughs
 2. Eastern New York: the Capital District down through the Hudson Valley & Metro North Counties, and Long Island.
 3. Western New York: Western counties through the Finger Lakes, Southern Tier, Central New York, and up to the North Country.
- Community-based survey, meaning:
 1. Self-administered survey, available in English and Spanish
 2. Distributed via 45 community groups in New York City and more than 53 community groups outside New York City.
 3. Goal was to get wide participation of New Yorkers in terms of income, race/ethnicity and region
- Resulting sample was weighted to be representative in terms of income both within the three regions, and for the state as a whole (using Census data)

Assessment of resulting sample

- The New York City sample was quite representative on key dimensions (income and race) when compared with Census data. The East region sample was clearly not representative when compared with the Census; the West region sample was in between. This is partly to be expected because distribution in the East and West regions was focused on several key population centers; that said, the East region sample seemed particularly off.
- Our weighting of the final sample should help to address some of these issues. But, judging by the responses to our policy questions, my strong instinct is that we have a sample that is definitely more liberal than average, which we need to keep in mind when interpreting the results.

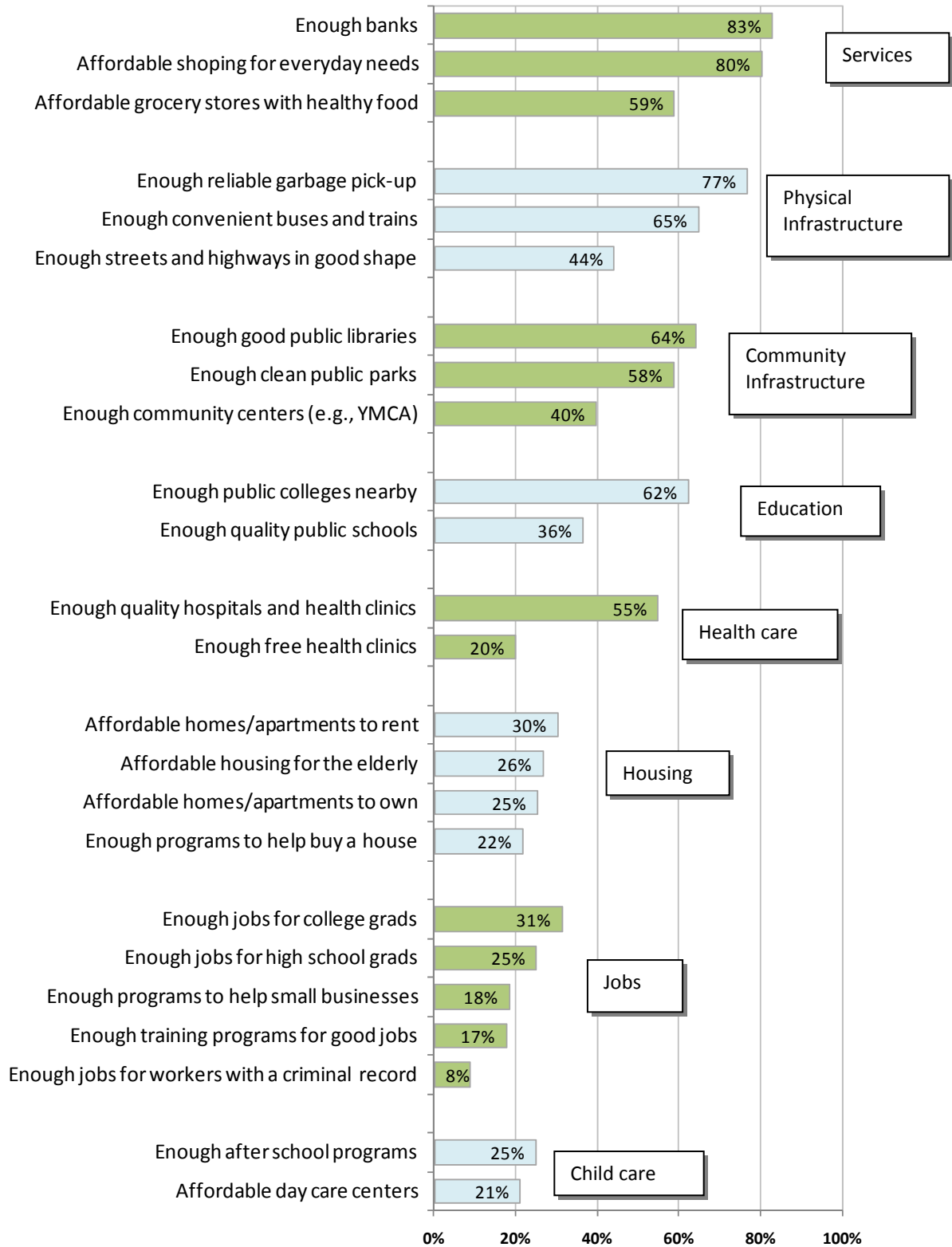
Findings

In what follows, we give findings and analysis of the main sections of the survey:

1. Tell us about your community
2. What changes have you seen in your community?
3. How do you think New York State should use subsidies?
4. Who should be responsible for helping your community?
5. What kinds of policies can best help your community?
6. Sample characteristics

Findings 1: “Tell Us About Your Community”

My community has...



Findings 1: “Tell Us About Your Community”

Analysis:

1. Housing, jobs and child care consistently emerge as the biggest problems, in terms of quality, affordability and availability – fewer than a quarter of communities are rated as strong on these dimensions.
2. Health care and education are also as identified as key problems, though access to public colleges and hospitals score somewhat better.
3. The highest ratings are given to infrastructure – like transportation, garbage collection, public libraries, and parks, as well as basic services such as banks and grocery stores.

The big surprise: answers to these questions don't vary nearly as much by personal demographics as one might have expected – whether we look at the answers by region, by income, by education, or by race/ethnicity. That's important, because it means that respondents were able to look beyond their own family, and assess their community as a whole (we had feared they'd just be answering for themselves).

That said, here are some differences that do show up:

Income:

- Low-income respondents (< \$35,000 a year) tend to rate the availability of public services and programs higher than average – i.e. day care centers, after school programs, free health clinics. This is likely a function of the fact that these programs are largely means-tested and in fact targeted at low-income families.
- High-income respondents clearly give higher ranking on availability of banks and affordability of grocery stores and shopping. But: high- and mid-income respondents were usually quite similar to low-income respondents in their assessment of jobs, housing, education, health care and childcare.

Findings 1: “Tell Us About Your Community”

Region:

- Respondents from the West region tend to rate their communities higher than East region or especially NYC respondents – for example, on housing, health care, education, infrastructure and services.
- But: on all of the *jobs* questions, East region respondents rated their communities higher than the West region or NYC.

Race/ethnicity:

- Latino respondents are consistently a bit higher than either black or white respondents in their assessment of jobs, education and child care.
- Black respondents are sharply lower in their assessment of all the housing questions.

Finally: All of the jobs questions had high rates of “don’t know/not sure” (this comes up in other jobs-related questions later in the survey as well). There clearly is a big need for much more information and framing around jobs and wages: what the current trends are, what kinds of factors drive job quality, what the role of public policy is.

Assessment of this section of the survey:

1. The community inventory turned out to be a strong tool. There’s a lot of differentiation in how high or low respondents rank the various community services, resources and institutions. Plus, respondents do in fact seem to be assessing their community, rather than just their own family.
2. Lots of potential here for local advocates and organizing groups to take this version and modify it for their own needs when preparing for future campaigns/organizing drives.

Findings 2: “What changes have you seen in your community?”

The downtown area in my town or city:	Has become a place where more and more people shop and work	48%
	Has more and more empty office spaces and storefronts	34%
	Has not changed	18%
Large national chain stores (like Dunkin’ Donuts, Wal-mart):	Are moving into my community and driving out small local businesses	52%
	Are moving into my community, but not driving out small local businesses	27%
	Are not moving into my community	21%
In my area:	New homes and office buildings are being built on what used to be fields, forests or farms	40%
	New homes and office buildings are being built in areas that are already developed	42%
	No new homes or office buildings have been built	18%

Analysis:

- The West region is much more likely to say that: downtown has more empty office spaces & storefronts; large chains are moving in and driving out small local businesses; and new homes and offices are either being built on undeveloped land, or are not being built at all.
- In sharp contrast, the New York City region is much more likely to say that downtown is a place where more people shop and work, and that new homes and offices are being built on land that’s already developed. NYC is also more likely to say that large chains are not displacing local businesses, or that they’re not coming in at all.
- The East region lands squarely in between the two, on all three questions.

On average, jobs in my community:	Pay better now than in the past	16%
	Used to pay a living wage, but not anymore	41%
	Have stayed about the same	43%
Workers are:	Coming into my community because of the availability of jobs	13%
	Leaving my community because there aren’t enough jobs	46%
	Not sure	41%

Findings 2: “What changes have you seen in your community?”

Analysis:

- There are surprisingly few regional differences on what’s happened to wages (the first question).
- There are strong regional differences on the second question: the West region is much more likely to say that workers are leaving.
- On both questions, for all regions, there’s a high percent of “don’t knows,” – especially in New York City.

In recent years, the cost of living in my community:	Has increased, making things harder to afford	86%
	Has decreased, making things cheaper	2%
	Has stayed about the same	12%
Houses and apartments in my community:	Have become more affordable	6%
	Have become less affordable	85%
	Have not changed in price	8%

Analysis:

- Very strong consistency in answers across regions and all the other key variables (e.g. income, race/ethnicity).
- That said, the West region is somewhat more likely to say that cost of living has stayed the same, and that housing costs have not changed.

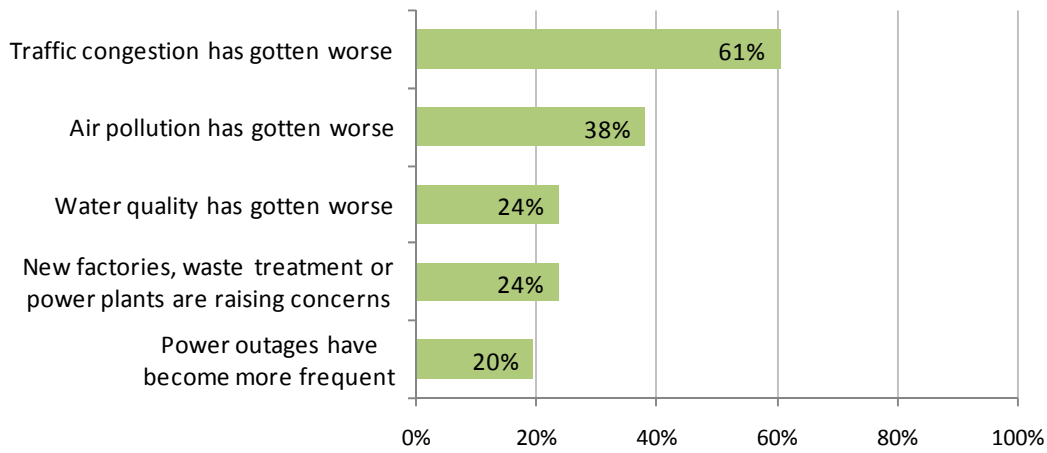
My community has become:	More racially and ethnically diverse	43
	More racially and ethnically segregated	25
	stayed about the same	32
Over the past five years:	higher-income families have been moving into my community, and lower-income families have been moving out	50
	lower-income families have been moving into my community, and higher-income families have been moving out	25
	the income level in my community has stayed about the same	25

Analysis:

- The West region most likely to say that diversity stayed about the same, and least likely to say that community has become more diverse.
- NYC region is far more likely to say that high-income families are displacing low-income families; the West region is more likely to say the opposite.

Findings 2: “What changes have you seen in your community?”

Percent saying the following about their community:



Analysis:

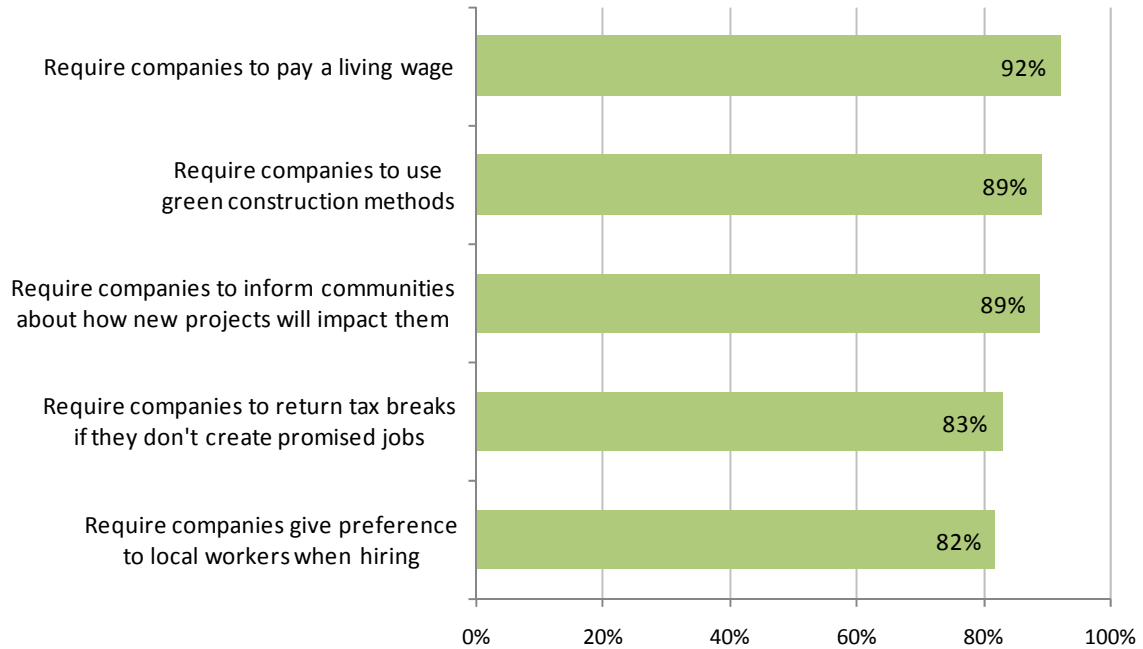
- Regional differences are actually not very strong here, with the exception that the East region stands out on concerns about traffic congestion, and that NYC has the least concern over water quality.

Assessment of this section of the survey:

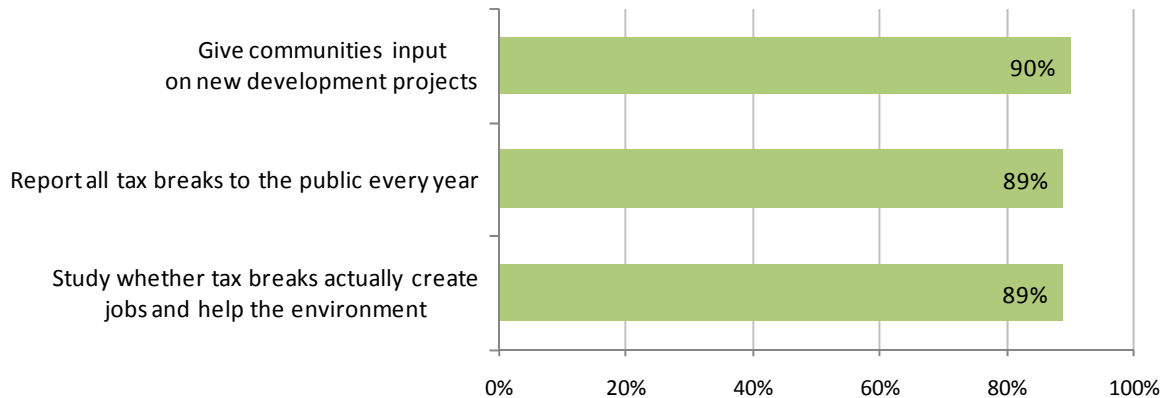
1. The “changes” inventory turned out to be a strong tool, clearly pulling apart regional differences that we know are present. We really only scratched the surface – there’s a lot of potential here in terms of developing different narratives about development-driven changes for community surveys/focus groups.
2. Writing these “either/or” scenarios also suggests that while the regions are sometimes (but not always) experiencing opposite trends, there’s potential here for framing those trends as being flip sides of the same coin. That is, the lack of community input, societal goals and coherent planning in current economic development policy means that market trends are not ameliorated and in fact are often exacerbated – whether that policy is laid on top of a growth region or a decline region.

Findings 3: “How do you think New York State should use subsidies?”

When giving subsidies to companies, New York State should:



When giving subsidies to companies, state government should:



Findings 3: “How do you think New York State should use subsidies?”

Analysis:

1. Overall, there’s very strong support for key subsidy reforms. But we should caution that this is partly due to the sample being more liberal than average and therefore not entirely representative. We should be clear that other polls have also found strong support for these reforms – but not quite as overwhelming as in this survey.
2. While overall support is strong, there were some skeptics in our sample – about 26% percent didn’t support two or more of the proposed reforms. Therefore, we did a more focused analysis of these skeptics to see if we could better understand where their reluctance is coming from.
 - a. Who are the skeptics?
 - i. Respondents from the West region
 - ii. Lower income and less educated respondents (with the exception of living wage standards, where they’re as supportive as everyone else, showing the strength of the “living wage” brand)
 - iii. Respondents from suburbs, towns and rural areas
 - iv. Latino respondents and foreign-born respondents (note: these aren’t the same effects)
 - v. In regressions, education is the strongest effect
 - b. Which reforms were they more skeptical of?
 - i. Skeptics were the most skeptical of clawback and local hiring requirements, and all of the state government reforms.
 - ii. Skeptics were the least skeptical of living wage and green construction mandates.
3. There is also a general pattern where respondents who identified lots of negative trends in their community (preceding section) were more likely to be highly supportive of subsidy reform

Findings 3: “How do you think New York State should use subsidies?”

We also tested a number of arguments for and against subsidy reform.

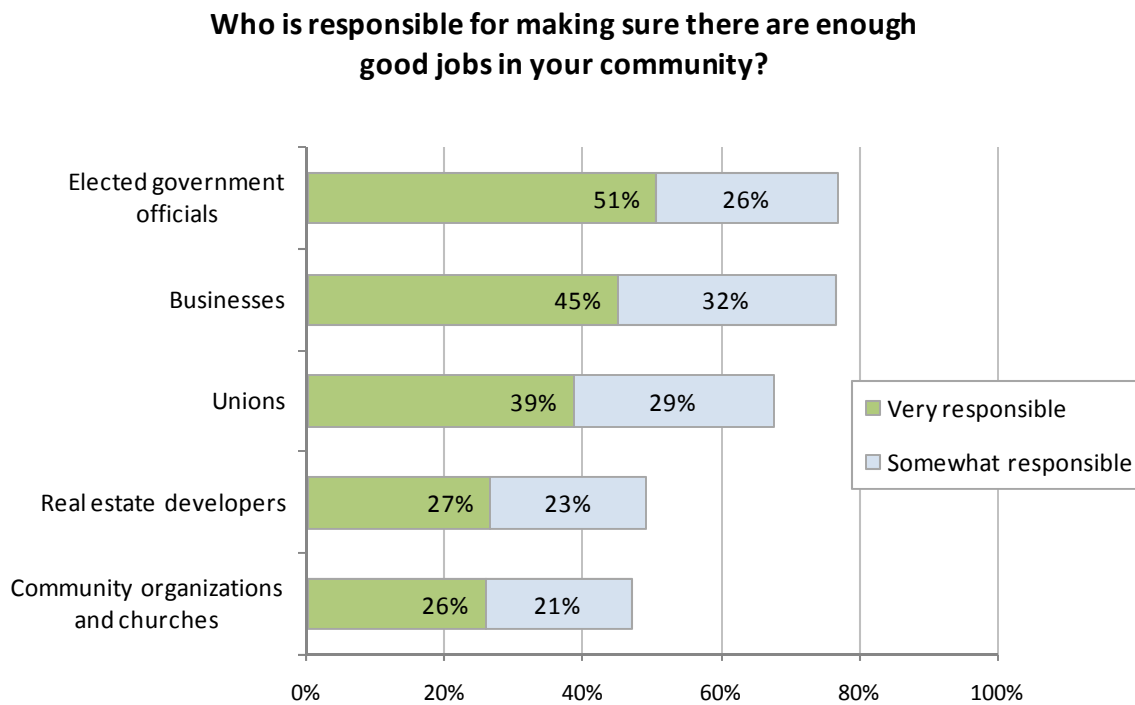
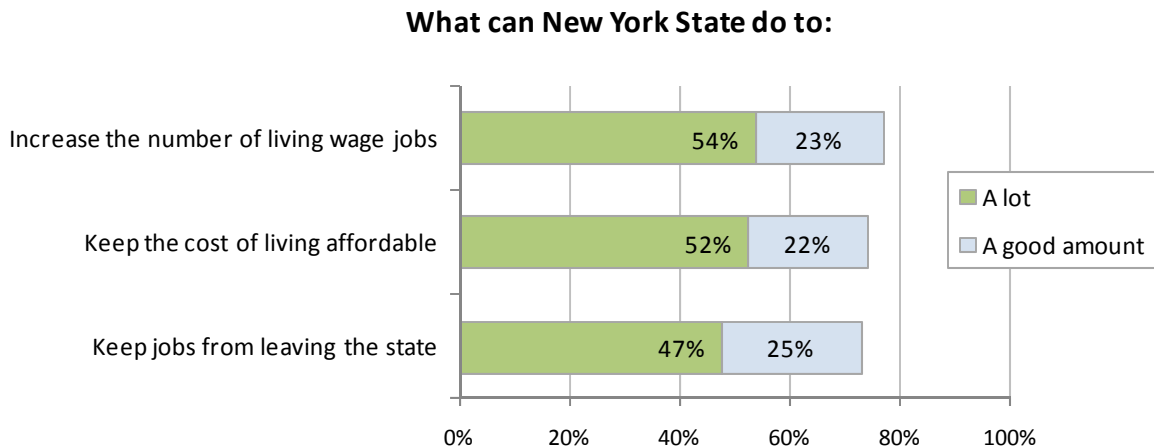
Argument	Respondents’ opinion: how convincing?
<p>Pro:</p> <p>“Many other states have requirements on companies that receive tax breaks and are still able to attract successful businesses. NY can do the same.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, 72% of respondents found this argument convincing. • Skeptics of subsidy reform found this argument less convincing (but responded better to it than the other “pro” arguments). • Similarly, low-income and less-educated respondents were less likely to find this argument convincing (and to some extent, NYC and Latino respondents)
<p>Pro:</p> <p>“NY often gives tax breaks to companies that pay low wages, or don’t create the number of jobs that they promised. This is the wrong way to use tax breaks.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, 63% of respondents found this argument convincing. • But only 37% of skeptics of subsidy reforms found this argument convincing (maybe because it sounds too ideological, unlike the one above?) • Similarly, less-educated respondents were less likely to find this argument convincing (and to some extent, NYC respondents)
<p>Pro:</p> <p>“It’s mainly big companies that get tax breaks, so small businesses won’t be hurt if we put requirements on tax breaks.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, only 30% of respondents found this argument convincing. • Skeptics of subsidy reform did not differ in their response • No other patterns
<p>Con:</p> <p>“If companies are cutting jobs it’s because they are failing. NY should not punish struggling companies by taking away their tax breaks when they most need them.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, only 29% of respondents found this argument convincing. • Skeptics of subsidy reform did not differ in their response • No other patterns
<p>Con:</p> <p>“If companies have to pay a living wage in order to get tax breaks, it will discourage them from doing business in NY. Any job is better than no job at all.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, only 21% of respondents found this argument convincing. • But skeptics of subsidy reforms responded better to this (a third found the argument convincing, double the rate of everyone else) • Black, Latino, low-income and less-educated respondents were more likely to find this argument more convincing, as were suburban respondents (these are independent effects).

Findings 3: “How do you think New York State should use subsidies?”

Assessment of this section of the survey:

1. In general, this type of detailed testing of a policy proposal and effectiveness of pro/con arguments is a strong tool – we should use it for other policies.
2. Future surveys/focus groups of attitudes toward subsidy reform could test more explicitly on costs & benefits, to see where the tipping point of support is.

Findings 4: “Who should be responsible for helping your community?”

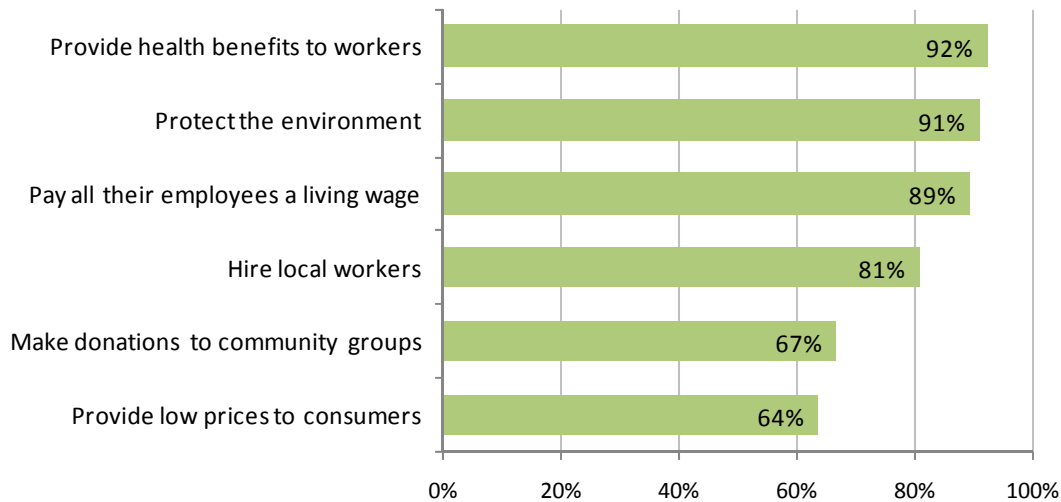


Analysis:

1. These results are surprisingly uniform, there aren't a lot of strong differences by region or other variables
2. That said, respondents of color and low-income respondents tend to score higher on these questions than white or high-income respondents

Findings 4: “Who should be responsible for helping your community?”

Percent saying that “businesses should be expected to....”



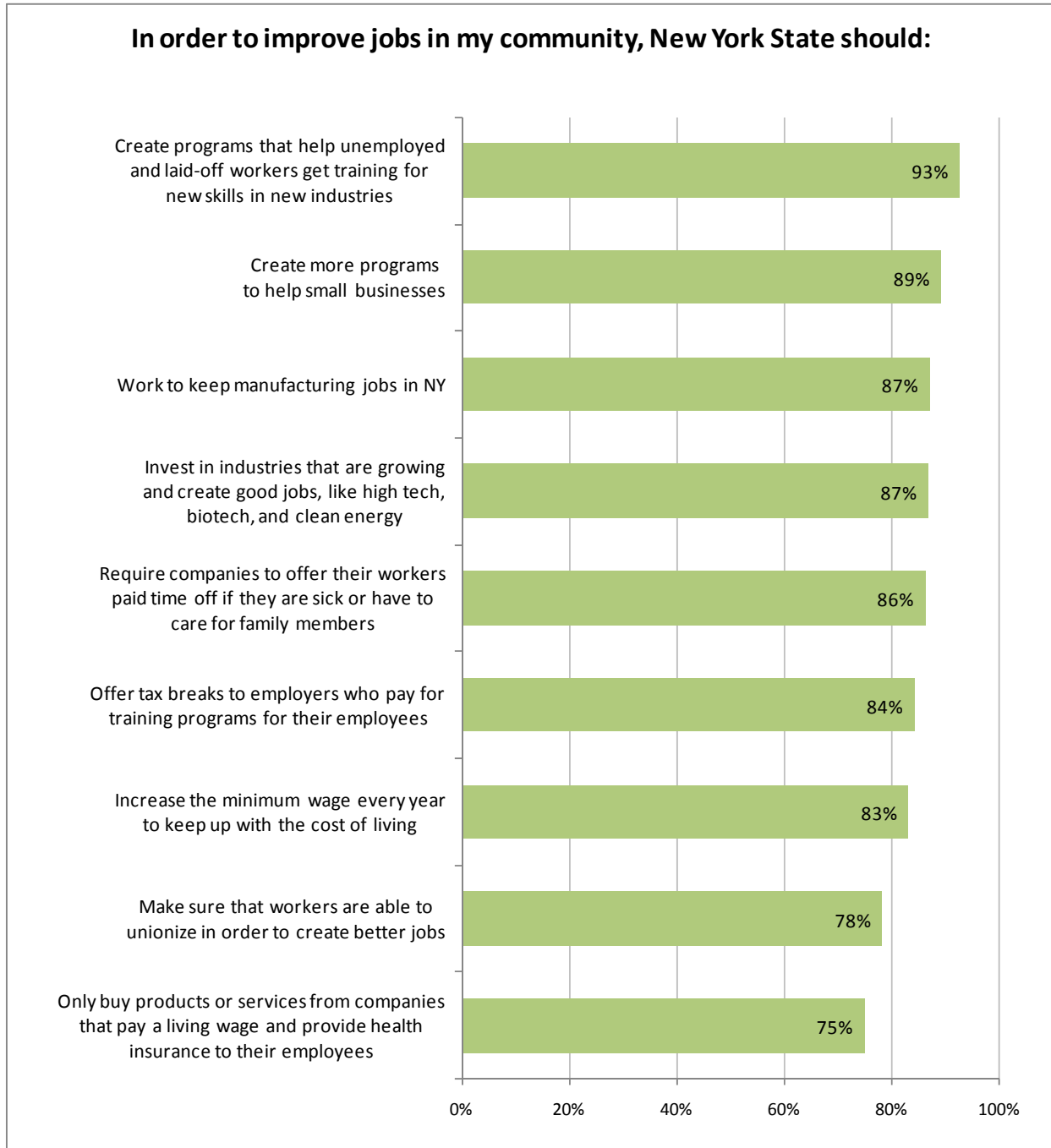
Analysis:

1. High-income and more educated respondents are skeptical of hiring local workers and providing low prices – but are as supportive of the living wage question as others
2. Black and Latino respondents are more skeptical of the environment question
3. The West and East regions are more skeptical of a number of these dimensions than NYC respondents (providing health benefits and providing low prices to consumers).
4. Respondents from cities (not just NYC) are clearly more supportive of the living wage and local hiring questions

Assessment of this section of the survey:

1. This line of questioning seems really important and useful – but feels like it needs to be refined and sharpened, with more concrete scenarios or specific actions that the various stakeholders are being evaluated on.

Findings 5: “What kinds of policies can best help your community?”



Analysis:

- This type of simplistic testing of policy proposals didn't turn out to be very useful (and there's little differentiation by region, income, race, etc.).
- In future surveys, we would recommend at least adding a scale – but even better, to focus on a small number of policies and ask the type of detailed questions as was done above with subsidy reforms.

A quick look at our sample

Are you registered to vote?	Percent
Yes	79
No	21
Sex	
Female	62
Male	37
TG/TS	1
Age	
Under 21	5
21-24	9
25-29	13
30-39	18
40-49	20
50-59	19
60 or over	16
Marital Status	
Married/in a partnership	40
Single	43
Separated or divorced	12
Widowed	4
Other	1
Residence	
City	69
Suburb	13
Town or village	14
Rural area	4
Region	
West	25
East	29
New York City	46
How long have you lived in your community?	
Less than 6 months	4
6 months to a year	6
1 to 5 years	23
6 to 10 years	15
More than 10 years	52
Race	
Black	21
Latino	17
White	46
Other	15

A quick look at our sample

Family income	
< \$35,000	44
\$35,000 - \$74,999	33
\$75,000 +	23
Highest level of education	
Did not complete HS	11
Graduated from HS/GED	23
AA or some college	24
BA	22
Professional degree or higher	21
Born in the US	
Yes	75
No	25