

**AT THE BREAKING POINT?  
TAXATION AND GOVERNANCE  
ON LONG ISLAND**



**REGIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD  
TAXATION, GOVERNANCE  
AND SCHOOL QUALITY**



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*The history of suburban Long Island* is a history of families. Beginning in the 1940's the returning soldiers and their new brides began the migration eastward from New York City in search of inexpensive housing and a quality environment for their expanding families. By the 1950's, Long Island's growth rate was the highest in the nation, and by the 1960's, 40% of its citizens were under the age of 21. Families found good schools, safe neighborhoods, and an affordable quality of life for themselves and their children. They saw education as their children's ticket to a future even better than their own. However, this suburban dream was also a white dream, the result of both written and unwritten housing practices. Non-whites, concentrated in just several neighborhoods, accounted for less than 5% of the 1960 population of Long Island.<sup>1</sup>

Long Island today is a reflection of that history. The Island boasts some of the finest schools in the country, achieving such recent distinctions as the inclusion of eight local high schools within the 2005 Newsweek's 100 Best High Schools in America, more Intel Science Talent Search semi-finalists this year than the entire state of California, and average scores on the New York State 4th and 8th Grade Proficiency Exams that exceed the state averages by almost 15%. And, for the most part, local residents are aware of and appreciate the high quality of local services they receive, including schools.

But high quality services have come at an increasing price to local residents, adding to the financial strain created by soaring housing prices. Communities throughout the Island struggle with the combination of rising housing costs and property taxes. This creates real concern about a possible exodus of local residents. The promise of the high quality of life that once brought people to Long Island threatens to become the reason why some may be forced to leave.

The financial strain created by rising housing costs and increasing local taxes is being felt in all income groups, not just those in less affluent households. Yet low income and especially minority residents face a dual predicament.

*(continued on next page)*

<sup>1</sup> Newsday.com, Long Island Our Story. 2005

Not only do they face expensive housing costs, they are also poorly served by their local schools. This reflects residential segregation that has persisted even as the population on Long Island has diversified, with the non-white population now accounting for 26% of the Island's residents. School districts serving minority areas possess fewer financial resources, and are coping with increasing numbers of children living in poverty. This leads to vast differences in school performance across the Island.

Tension over the cost of high quality local services and schools has reached the boiling point on Long Island, fostering a tax revolt that has surfaced in voters' rejection of a near record number of school budgets in the spring of 2005. This opposition to increasing taxes points to the heart of the dilemma facing policy makers, politicians, and community leaders on Long Island: How to continue to provide the quality of services expected by local residents while holding the line on local taxes.

Since 2002, the Rauch Foundation, a Long Island-based family foundation focused on children and families, the environment, and leadership, has commissioned a series of public opinion surveys to assess the attitudes of Long Island's residents on the important issues facing them. As part of the Foundation's Long Island Index project, these surveys are intended to provide an awareness of the concerns and opinions of Long Island residents.

The current survey was undertaken to explore local opinion on taxes, housing costs and services. It was conducted by the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research during the Summer of 2005. Telephone interviews were conducted with a randomly selected sample of 1215 Long Island residents, and with randomly selected oversamples of 204 African-American and 104 Hispanic residents of Long Island. Further information on the methodology, as well as the questionnaire and responses, is available in the Appendix to the report. ■

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*Key findings of the survey include the following:*

### A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE

- **Going in the Right Direction:** A majority of Long Islanders say things are heading in the right direction in their county.
- **Satisfied with Local Services:** Most Long Island residents view local services as of high quality, including libraries, sanitation, the police, parks and gardens, and schools.
- **Schools Receive High Scores:** Long Islanders are pleased with their public schools, express satisfaction with teachers, and they rate highly the overall quality of local education.
- **Not all Served Well:** Black and Hispanic residents are satisfied with most local services, but are less content with schools in which educational achievement is much lower than in non-minority school districts.

### THE TAX AND HOUSING CRUNCH

- **Tax Woes:** Most Long Islander's view the problem of high taxes as a very serious problem, and many cite it as THE major local problem.
- **Rising Housing Costs:** Concerns over housing affordability are even greater than last year, and extend more deeply into the middle class.
- **Thinking of Leaving:** The number of Long Islanders who say they may leave in the next five years and move to an area with lower housing costs and property taxes increased dramatically over the past two years.

### THE SUBURBAN TAX REVOLT

- **The Price Tag is Too High:** Most Long Islanders prefer a cut in services in order to maintain property taxes at their current levels, and a majority believe that local services are not worth the price tag.
- **Voting Down School Budgets:** Local residents are divided over school budgets, with almost half of voters saying that they voted against their district's budget in May, 2005.
- **Sources of Discontent:** An aging population, a desire to keep the lid on local taxes, and dissatisfaction with local school boards were the key ingredients in the defeat of school budgets in 2005.
- **Lingering Ambivalence:** Despite opposition to school budgets, Long Islanders are of two minds about school spending. A majority oppose cuts to school spending, the single largest local government expenditure.

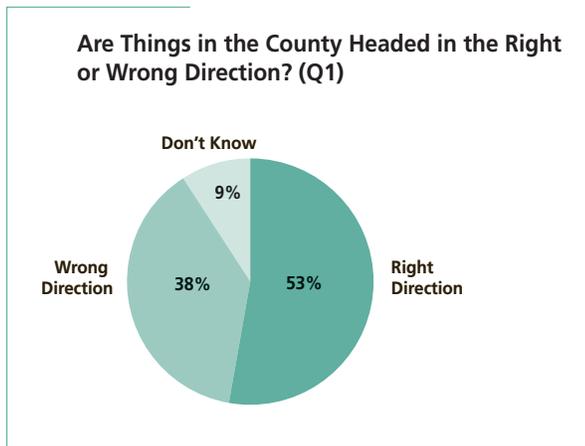
### HARD CHOICES ON SCHOOL FISCAL POLICY

- **School Consolidation Divisive:** Long Islanders are deeply divided over the consolidation of school districts as a way to cut school costs, although consolidation is more popular among residents of high need school districts.
- **Support for Pooled Commercial Taxes:** A majority of Long Islanders favor the pooling of commercial property taxes across school districts to evenly distribute that wealth.
- **Repairing Inequities; Sharing the Wealth:** A majority of Long Islanders support shifting some resources from wealthier to poorer school districts.

### Going in the Right Direction

Long Islanders believe that things are going well locally, with 53% saying that things are headed in the right direction within their county and only 38% saying they are headed in the wrong direction, as depicted below. (See Figure 1) Similar levels of satisfaction have been reported by Long Islanders since the advent of the Long Island Index Polls in 2002, with the exception of a slight dip in satisfaction noted in the Rauch Foundation's Fall 2003 Poll<sup>2</sup> that rebounded the following year.

FIGURE 1



### Satisfaction with Local Services

Long Island residents are also satisfied with the quality of local services provided by town and county government: almost three-quarters rate the quality of libraries (82%), sanitation (79%), the police (74%), and parks and gardens (73%) as good or excellent. Similar levels of satisfaction were reported in 2002 when local residents were asked to rate the quality of police, sanitation, and parks. Nonetheless, these high ratings mask some differences among local residents. Black residents were less satisfied with the police than whites or Hispanics. 55% of blacks rated the quality of police as good or excellent compared to 81% of whites and 78% of Latinos. These ratings varied little among blacks by household income; 53% of blacks in households earning under \$60,000 rated the police as good or excellent compared to 59% of blacks in households earning \$60,000 or more. In addition, income differences among blacks had little impact on ratings of other services.

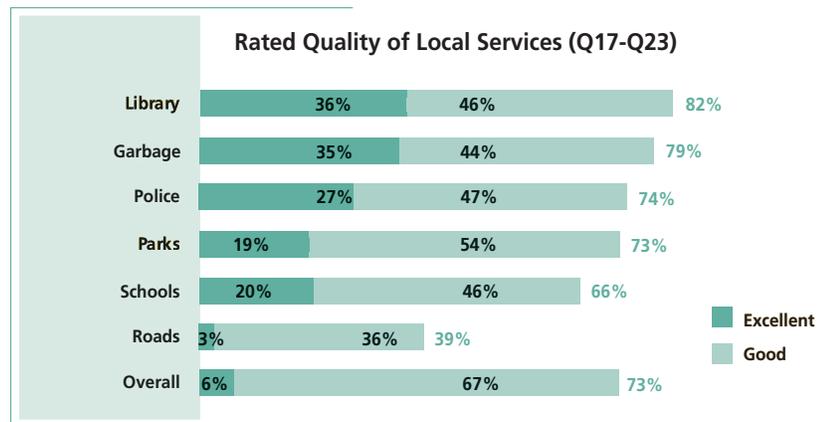
<sup>2</sup> Room For Growth: Long Island's Changing Economy, Rauch Foundation, Garden City, NY. 2004

Almost two-thirds of Long Islanders rate the quality of schools as good or excellent (65%), indicating slightly lower levels of satisfaction with schools than with other services. Moreover, public schools received lower grades in 2005 than in 2002 when 75% of residents rated public schools as good or excellent<sup>3</sup>. There is also tremendous variability in the rating of local schools by the level of need within a school district, discussed in greater detail below.

Residents expressed the highest levels of dissatisfaction with local roads and highways; 61% of local residents rated them as fair or poor. This level of dissatisfaction is higher than in 2002 when 37% rated the “streets and roads” as fair or poor. But this shift may depend to some extent on a change in wording from “streets and roads” in 2002 to “local roads and highways” in 2005. This concern is consistent with a preference among Long Islanders for greater spending to build and maintain roads (55%) than to expand and maintain public transportation (39%); the only exception is among those most likely to use public transportation – older and low income residents – who expressed a preference for greater spending on public transportation than roads.

When taken together, just under 3 in 4 (73%) local residents rated the overall quality of local services as good or excellent, with most rating them as good (67%) rather than excellent (6%). (See Figure 2)

FIGURE 2



### Schools Receive High Scores

Perceptions of local public schools have slipped in the last few years; 75% of local residents rated the quality of local schools as good or excellent in 2002 compared to 65% in the current poll. Nonetheless, Long Islanders are relatively satisfied with their public schools, expressing satisfaction with teachers (67% rated them as

<sup>3</sup> Long Islanders: Who Are We? A Survey of the Quality of Life of Long Island and the New York Metropolitan Region, Rauch Foundation, Garden City, NY. 2003

good or excellent) and the overall quality of education (65%). Parents of children in the public schools give especially high marks to teachers, with 80% rating them as good or excellent. Long Islanders also believe they get greater value from their tax dollars for schools than for services overall; 49% rated public schools as a good or excellent value, compared to 39% who gave the same rating to services more generally. But that leaves 44% who believe local residents get a fair or poor return on their tax dollars in terms of a quality education for local children.

Dissatisfaction with schools is focused more on school leadership and governance, than teachers or educational quality. A bare majority (52%) of residents rated school administration as good or excellent. And only 34% of local residents felt that school board members could be trusted most or all of the time. This was a slight improvement over the assessment of town officials; only 23% believed town officials could be trusted most or all of the time.

### **Not All Served Well**

Although levels of satisfaction with local schools and services are generally high, they also vary tremendously across Long Island. Differences in rated satisfaction are especially pronounced across school districts designated as high and low need by the State Education Department (SED). High need school districts are characterized by somewhat higher poverty rates and a much higher concentration of minority students than either average or low need districts. (A further explanation of these designations is available in the methodology section of this report.)

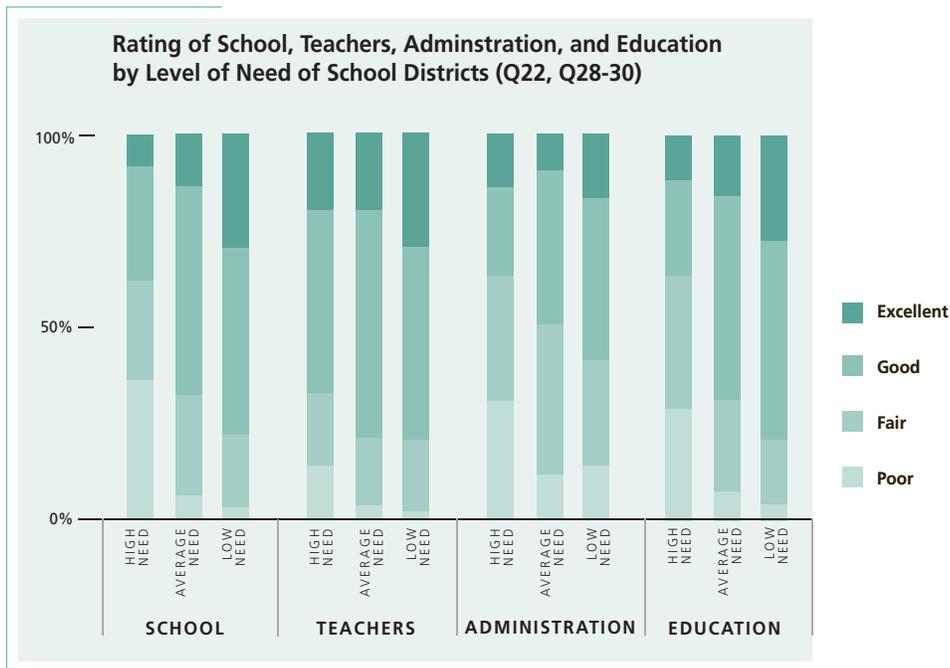
Satisfaction with local schools was less evident among residents of school districts designated by the state as high need areas. Only 39% of residents in these areas felt things were going in the right direction compared to 52% who said things were headed in the wrong direction. By comparison, 56% of residents of low need districts, and 54% of average need districts, believed that things were headed in the right direction.

Similar trends were observed for African-Americans on Long Island, many of whom live in high need school districts. Among African Americans, 45% saw things heading in the right direction, compared to 40% who said they were going in the wrong direction. Notably, blacks living in lower income households (below \$60,000) were less satisfied than blacks living in higher income households (above \$60,000). 41% of blacks in lower income households believed things were heading in the right direction compared to 51% of higher income blacks. Similar income differences are not observed among whites. The majority of whites (56%) from both higher and lower income (below \$60,000) households felt that things were heading in the right direction.

High need districts elicit especially high levels of dissatisfaction with their schools. Only 36% of residents in high need school districts rate their schools as excellent or good; 33% give the same rating to the quality of education in their school district. In stark contrast, 72% of residents in “low need” districts rate their schools as excellent or good, and 71% give the same positive rating to the quality of education. In “average need” districts, 64% of residents rate their schools as excellent or good, and 62% give that rating to the quality of education. When asked about the value they receive for their schools in return for local taxes, only 19% of residents in high need districts rate this as good or excellent compared to 59% of residents in low need districts, and 46% in average need districts. Residents of high need school districts thus stand out as particularly dissatisfied with their schools.

Residents of high need areas were more likely to blame administrators for local school woes; only 26% of residents rated the quality of school administration as good or excellent compared to 50% in low need districts. Moreover, residents of high need areas were much more inclined to view rising salaries of school administrators as the single most important reason for recent increases in school budgets. This was chosen by 50% of residents in these areas compared to only 23% in average need and 21% in low need districts. Clearly, residents of high need districts feel that school leadership has failed them to a far greater degree than residents of other school districts. (See Figure 3) However, residents of high need districts are not

FIGURE 3



unhappy with all aspects of local education. A majority (57%) rated teachers as good or excellent, only somewhat less than the percentage of residents in low need districts (67%).

Public dissatisfaction with schools in high need districts has a clear basis in reality. According to the Long Island Index 2004, students in high need districts have performed at significantly lower levels than students in other districts. While there has been a noticeable overall improvement in performance in 2002 compared to 2000, the students of high need districts are more likely to score at levels 1 and 2 (below grade level), and less likely to score at levels 3 and 4 (at or above grade level). For example, 61% of high need school districts students scored at levels 1 and 2 in 8th grade mathematics, compared to 27% of students of all districts. In the present survey, multivariate regression analyses indicate that students' test performance within a district on standardized tests such as the fourth grade English language arts and mathematics test is a good predictor of resident satisfaction with local schools. This difference emerges even after controlling for respondents' level of income, education, gender, and a variety of district factors such as average school taxes, and percentage of white students. In other words, local residents know whether their schools are performing well or not, and deep dissatisfaction with schools in high need school districts reflects that reality.

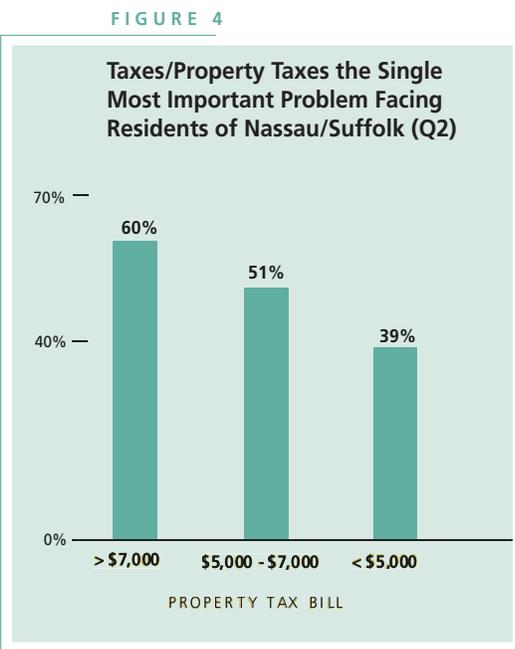
Widespread dissatisfaction with schools in high need districts greatly affects residents' perceptions of the overall quality of their local services in general. Only 44% of residents in high need school districts rate the overall quality of their local services as good or excellent. In comparison, services were rated as good or excellent by 74% of residents in average need districts and 79% of residents in low need districts. Moreover, only 18% of residents in high need districts rate the tradeoff between general services and taxes as good or excellent, compared to 41% in low need districts. Multivariate regression analyses underscore this finding. The rated quality of public schools had the single largest impact on residents' ratings of the quality of services overall. Unhappiness with schools thus accounts to a large degree for pervasive dissatisfaction with local services in "high need" school districts.

**Tax Woes**

A pervasive local concern about taxes is reflected in response to a direct question that asked local residents to rate the severity of the tax problem. Just over 80% of Long Island residents regard the problem of high property taxes as either an extremely serious or a very serious problem, a slight increase over 2004 (at 77%). There were fewer differences by socio-economic status in rating the severity of the tax problem, suggesting that all Long Island residents view taxes as a serious problem. Homeowners were only somewhat more likely than non-homeowners to rate taxes as an extremely serious or very serious problem (85% versus 70%). When asked directly, a large majority (84%) of homeowners rated their property taxes as much too high or somewhat too high and most (80%) knew how much they had paid in property taxes in 2004.

Long Island residents expressed concern over taxes in other ways as well. As in last year's Long Island Index regional poll<sup>4</sup>, property taxes were cited by a plurality (41%) of Long Island residents as the single MOST important problem facing the two counties. This is the same level of concern as expressed at roughly the same time last year.

All residents view taxes as a serious problem but the severity or degree of the problem varies. Not surprisingly, taxes were cited as the most important local problem more often by homeowners (50%) than others (23%), although taxes still remained the



most commonly mentioned problem even among non-homeowners. And among homeowners, the percentage citing taxes as the most important local problem increased with their property tax bill; 60% of those paying more than \$7,000 annually rated taxes as the major problem compared to 39% of those paying \$5,000 or less annually. (See Figure 4) Lower income households (earning less than \$35,000 per year) view taxes as a serious problem as noted earlier, but a larger percentage see other problems such as the economy and jobs (19%) as even more pressing than taxes (17%).

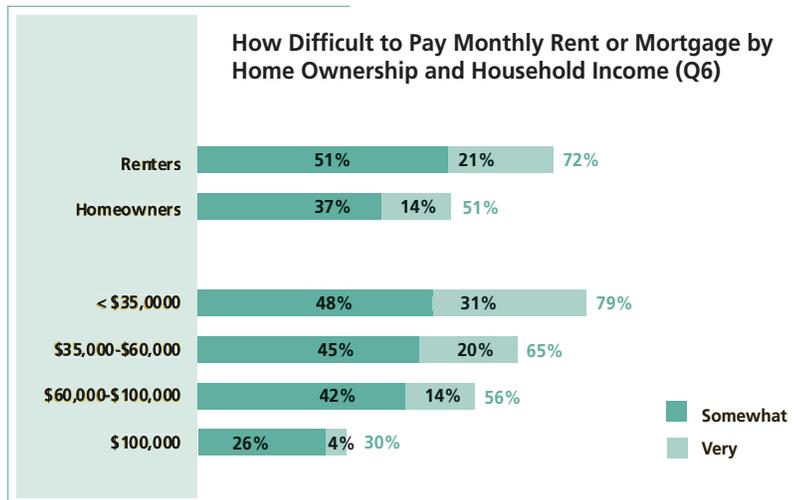
<sup>4</sup> Where Do We Grow From Here? Land Use on Long Island, Rauch Foundation, Garden City, NY, 2004

## Rising Housing Costs

Long Islanders' pervasive concern about local taxes is coupled with the growing personal impact of rising housing costs. Over the last 12 months, the percentage of residents who report that it is somewhat or very difficult to meet monthly rent or mortgage payments rose from 47% to 54%. This figure has steadily increased since the 2003 Poll, when 35% of residents reported that it was either somewhat or very difficult to meet their monthly rent or mortgage payments.

Reported difficulty in meeting housing costs rose most dramatically among middle-income households. In households with income between \$60,000 and \$80,000, reported difficulty in meeting housing costs increased from 41% of local residents in 2004 to a substantial 56% in the current poll. There was less change among members of low income households (earning less than \$35,000 per year) who had substantial difficulty meeting their payments in both years, or among those in high income households (earning \$100,000 or above) for whom the difficulty in meeting housing costs rose only slightly from 29% to 30%. *(See Figure 5 for 2005 responses)*

FIGURE 5

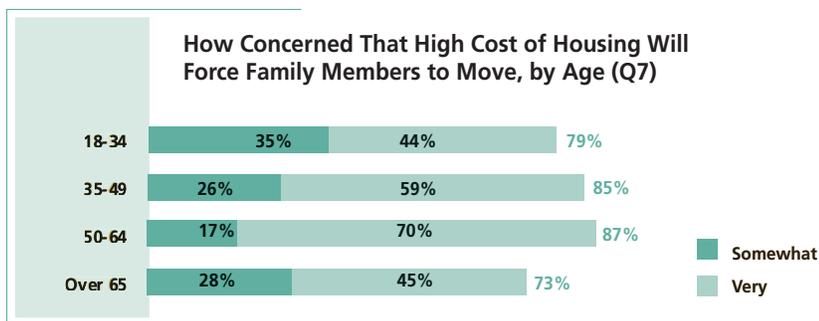


The housing squeeze is being felt increasingly by the average middle-income Long Island household. This has also produced an increase in the proportion of homeowners who report some difficulty in meeting housing costs. In 2004, 43% of homeowners said it was very or somewhat difficult; this increased to 51% in 2005. In contrast, renters experienced roughly the same level of difficulty in 2004 (70%) as in 2005 (72%).

## Thinking of Leaving

The high cost of living on Long Island produces pervasive concern over the possible flight of younger residents. Just over three in four Long Islanders (76%) rate the possible departure of young adults from their county as an extremely or very serious problem. Concern is most pronounced among residents aged between 50 and 64, the group most likely to have young adult children. Among residents in this pre-retirement age group, fully 87% rated the departure of young people as an extremely or very serious problem compared to a more modest but still sizeable 61% of those aged between 18 and 34. Pre-retirement age individuals voiced direct concern about the departure of their own family members: 70% said they were very concerned about members of their own families leaving the Island, compared to only 44% of those aged 18-34 and 45% of those aged 65 or older. *(This is further depicted in Figure 6)* A greater proportion of African-Americans (66%) also expressed concern about family members leaving the Island than did whites (56%) or Hispanics (49%).

FIGURE 6



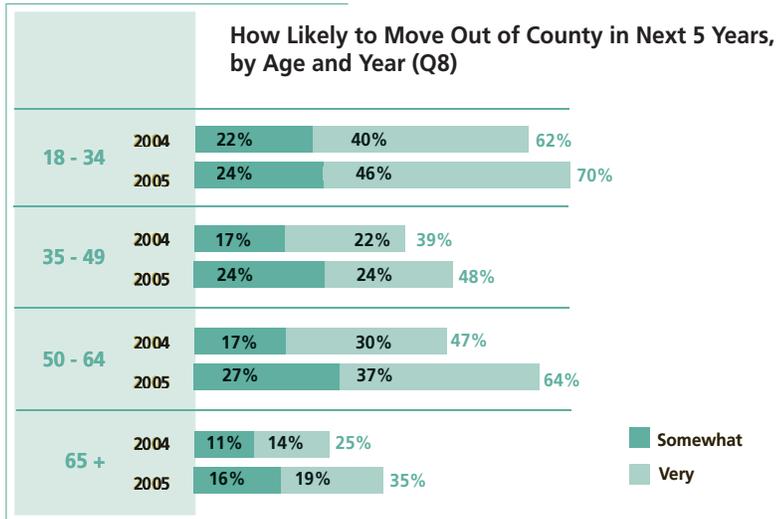
Overall, in the last year there was an increase in the percentage of Long Island residents who expressed concern about family members leaving their county. 70% of local residents were somewhat or very concerned about this in 2004; this has increased to 81% in the current poll.

The percentage of local residents who said that they were somewhat or very likely to move in the next five years to an area with lower housing costs and property taxes increased from 45% to 56%. This represents a dramatic increase over the previous year and is especially striking for a relatively short, one-year time period.

When examined more closely, the desire to leave is most common among younger people aged 18-34, 70% of whom say they are somewhat or very likely to leave in the next 5 years, and those in the pre-retirement age group (64%). The desire to leave is also especially apparent among African-Americans, 73% of whom say they are somewhat or very likely to leave.

The desire to leave has intensified in all age groups but it is especially pronounced among those aged 50 to 64, the age group most concerned about family members leaving the Island. In 2004, 47% of the pre-retirement age group said they were likely to leave in 2004; this increased dramatically to 64% in 2005. (See Figure 7)

FIGURE 7

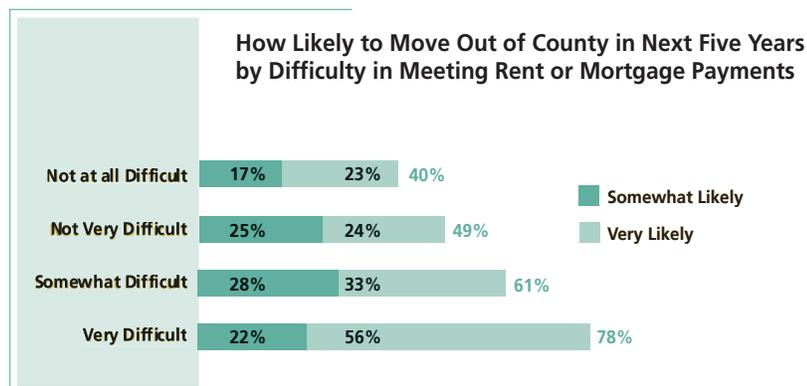


There was also a marked increase in the desire to leave among members of lower income households (with a combined income of \$60,000 or less). Among residents of households with an annual income of less than \$35,000, the percent of residents saying they are somewhat or very likely to move in the next five years increased from 43% to 60%. Among those in households earning between \$35,000 and \$60,000 there was an increase from 50% to 68%.

One of the single largest factors in driving a desire to leave is reported difficulty in meeting rent and mortgage payments. Among those who said they found it very difficult to meet their monthly housing payments, an overwhelming 78% said they were likely to leave compared to 39% of those who had no difficulty meeting their

payments. (See Figure 8) Other factors influencing the desire to leave Long Island include perceived difficulty in paying property taxes, as well as a general dissatisfaction with services. Not surprisingly, all these factors are significantly interrelated. Those who report difficulty in paying their rent or mortgage also report difficulty in paying the property tax and report less satisfaction with services.

FIGURE 8



There was also a modest but noteworthy increase between 2004 and 2005 in the percentage of Long Island residents who reported neither renting nor owning, but rather who live with another family member. This increased from 10% in 2004 to 15% in 2005. The percent of renters dropped in tandem with this shift, from 19% of all residents in 2004 to 16% in 2005. This shift was greatest among younger residents aged between 18 to 34, where home ownership dropped slightly from 38% to 31%, renting declined slightly from 30% to 24%, and living in some “other” situation, primarily with a family member, went up from 31% to 45%.

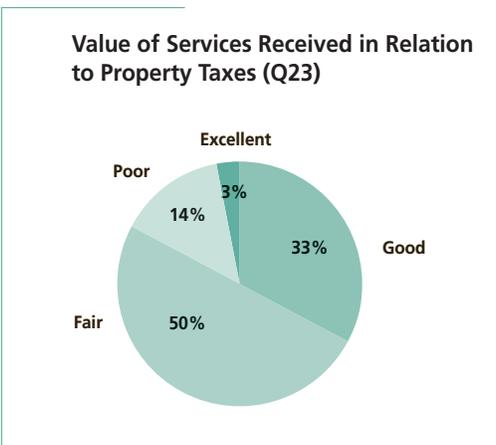
**Dissatisfaction with the Price Tag**

Widespread satisfaction with local services does not mean that residents are satisfied with the price tag. A majority of homeowners view their taxes as too high, most Long Islanders rate high taxes as a very or extremely serious problem, and a plurality regard taxes as the single most important problem confronting the Island (as noted earlier). Moreover, dissatisfaction with taxes is not due to any misperception on how taxes are spent. Over 7 residents in 10 (72%) correctly listed public schools as the single largest item in local budgets.

Dissatisfaction with high property taxes translates into the view that local services are not worth the price tag in terms of property taxes. Just over 6 in 10 (64%) rated the value local residents get back in services from property taxes

FIGURE 9

**Value of Services Received in Relation to Property Taxes (Q23)**



as fair or poor, a sentiment shared across the political spectrum by both liberals and conservatives. (See Figure 9) When asked outright, a majority of local residents (76%) preferred a cut in services in order to maintain property taxes at their current levels, rather than a tax increase to maintain the current level of services (16%).

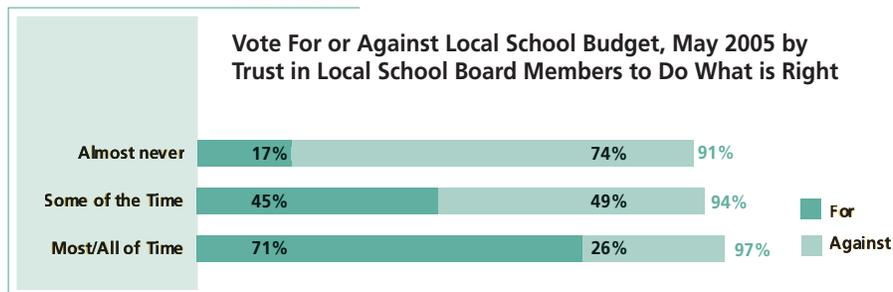
**Voting Down School Budgets**

School budgets did not fare well on Long Island in 2005. Of local residents included in the poll who reported voting in the election, roughly 50% said they voted for their school budget. This is comparable to the actual (49.5) percentage of voters who supported budgets across all school districts on the Island.

Voters who said they supported budgets in the first round of voting were more likely to be female, have a college degree, have a household income of \$60,000 or more, pay their property taxes as part of their mortgage, live in a low need school district, and live in Nassau county. Voters who said they opposed budgets were more likely to be aged 65 or older, have no children in the public schools, and be homeowners who pay their property taxes directly to their town.

As noted earlier, trust in local school boards was not especially high in this poll, perhaps as a consequence of reports of school board graft in several districts. And a lack of trust in local school boards had a powerful impact on the rejection of local budgets. Of those who said they trusted school board members most or all of the time, 71% said that they voted for the school budget. Among those who said school board members could be trusted some of the time, 45% of those who voted said they supported the budget. And among those who said school board members could be trusted almost never, only 17% said they voted in favor of their school budget. (See Figure 10)

FIGURE 10



In addition, budgets were opposed by voters who believed current services should be cut back in order to keep property taxes at their current level. As noted earlier, a majority (76%) of local residents believed taxes should be kept at current levels and 48% of these individuals said they voted against school budgets. In contrast, those who supported an increase in taxes rather than a cut in services responded that they voted overwhelmingly (74%) for local school budgets. Even some residents who believed school funding should be a priority in the future said they voted against school budgets. Opposition to rising taxes packed a powerful political punch in the 2005 school board elections.

When taken together, the rejection of school budgets depended on a number of factors in 2005, some enduring, others more fleeting. An aging local population without school-age children, and rising property taxes that produce a preference for reduced services over increased taxes are enduring factors that fuel opposition to school budgets. Both suggest continued difficulty in obtaining support for future school budgets in coming elections. Opposition also rests on short-term factors that are more transient, such as dissatisfaction with local school boards that may have been heightened in 2005 by concern over high-profile cases such as graft in

the Roslyn school administration. In addition, procedural factors such as homeowners' direct payment of local property taxes, also play a role in heightening awareness of property taxes and driving opposition to school budgets.

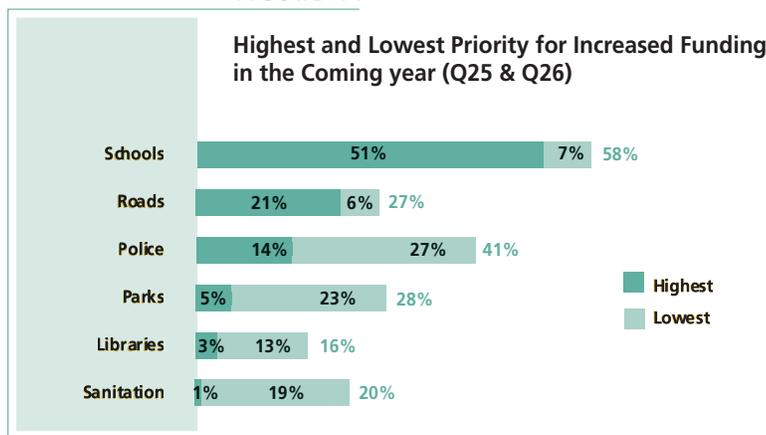
Long Islanders' negative reactions to school budgets are coupled with middling support for local officials. Only 22% of local residents believe town officials can be trusted all or most of the time; in contrast, a majority (55%) believe town officials can be trusted only some of the time. Those most unhappy with local officials are also least likely to rate services as adequate overall.

### Public Ambivalence

Local residents may appear to prefer fewer services in order to reduce local property taxes, but this picture may be overly simplistic. In reality, the tradeoff between rising taxes and high quality services fuels local ambivalence.

Schools are one area in which this ambivalence is manifested. Public school expenditure constitutes the single largest item in all town budgets. But very few residents support reduced school spending, highlighting a major dilemma: how to keep taxes under control AND maintain high quality schools? In fact, when asked their highest priority for increased funding in the coming year, a majority chose public schools. This preference for increased school spending occurred across all age groups, income levels, and racial and ethnic groups. In contrast, almost no one chose schools when asked what should have the lowest priority for funding in the upcoming year's budget. Long Islanders gave a low priority to the police (27%), parks (23%), and to a lesser extent libraries (13%), but virtually no one picked schools (7%). (See Figure 11)

FIGURE 11



Long Islanders struggle with uncertainty when addressing the issues surrounding quality and cost of services, and it is in this context that effective leadership is required. A preference for spending on specific programs, as opposed to spending on general services, further highlights local ambivalence over services and taxes. Local residents chose reduced taxes when asked in this poll about the tradeoff between spending and tax cuts, yet favored increased funding for schools and roads, as seen above. Similarly, when asked about spending on specific projects linked to housing and the purchase of open space in the 2004 Long Island Index poll, a majority supported tax increases. In that poll, 69% of Long Islanders indicated they would support an increase of \$30 per year in their property taxes in order to purchase open space to prevent future development. There is marked uncertainty over how to maintain a balance between quality services and rising taxes.

Ambivalence over this balance of quality services and rising taxes also affects residential mobility. The desire to leave the Island is greater among those who view high property taxes as a pressing problem, and lowest among those who rate local services as of greatest quality—views that are held simultaneously by many residents. Both factors drive the desire to leave in roughly equal measure even after adjusting for the obvious effects of age and income in multivariate regression analyses.

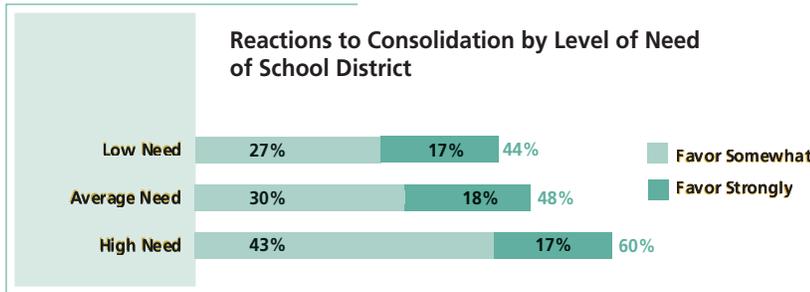
**Public Well Informed**

In general, Long Islanders are well informed about local taxes; a majority know that schools are the biggest ticket item in local government budgets. However, residents are unclear on why school budgets continue to rise. Rising teacher salaries and rising retirement costs and other benefits were widely endorsed as important factors. But residents also believed the increase was due to other factors such as the cost of new building and rising salaries of school administrators. When asked to choose which of these was most important, residents picked almost equally from each category. Local residents’ confusion over the reasons for their high taxes is not simply a product of misinformation, since even the experts have difficulty in agreeing on which factors are most responsible for the increases. Looking at the five year period from 1998-2003 (the last year for which data is available), the driving force behind rising school costs differs based on whether percentage increases in costs or absolute dollar increases in costs are highlighted<sup>5</sup>.

**School Consolidation Divisive**

Long Islanders thus face a central dilemma: how to maintain high quality schools while keeping school costs at a reasonable level. School consolidation across school districts has been raised as one way to economize on school costs. But opinion on consolidation is deeply divided. When asked how strongly they favor or oppose a consolidation of current school districts, 46% of Long Islanders indicated support and 48% opposed the option of consolidation. However, among residents of high need districts, (See Figure 12) consolidation is more popular, with 60% of residents expressing support, compared to 44% support in low need districts. There was no difference between those who did and did not vote in school board elections on this issue; registered voters were slightly less favorable towards consolidation than those who were not registered.

FIGURE 12



<sup>5</sup> In terms of percentage increases, equipment and capital outlay expenditures rose the most at a rate of 208%, an increase in absolute dollar terms of \$524,904,053. In terms of absolute dollars, increased expenditures for instructional salaries of \$764,547,579 comes out ahead, but is only 30% higher than 1998. Debt principal jumped by 69%, or \$51,603,130, debt interest increased 59%, or \$48,577,522, contractual obligations increased 42%, or \$482,657,338, employee benefits jumped by 39%, or \$298,989,915, and non-instructional salaries increased 37%, or \$228,536,067 over this same time period. These figures are based on data from the Center for Governmental Research.

Consolidation faces opposition from several different sources. Fifty-two percent of local residents believe that school consolidation would lead to a loss of local control over schools. And more local residents believe that it would reduce funds for students in their school district (35%) on balance than believed it would increase funds (22%). Long Islanders were also more likely to believe that consolidation would worsen (32%) rather than improve (22%) the quality of local education.

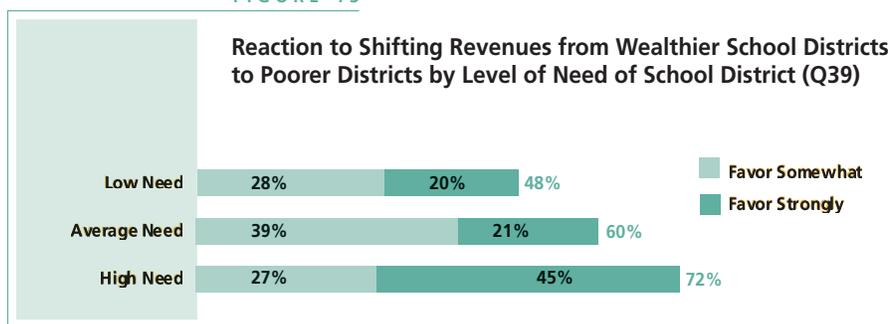
Residents of high need school districts stand out as holding very different and more positive views on consolidation. 46% of residents in high need districts believe consolidation would increase the amount of money for children in their local schools. They also believe consolidation would be more likely to improve (38%) rather than worsen (13%) school quality. In contrast, residents of low need areas expect consolidation to bring about greater deterioration (38%) than gain (16%). Overall, the strongest support for school consolidation (69%) emerged when it was described as helping to include children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in the same school district.

**Repairing Inequities: Sharing the Wealth Gains Majority Support**

Although very attached to their local districts, the poll shows support among many Long Islanders for alternatives to school funding where the goal is to provide more equal funding across school districts. A proposal to pool commercial property taxes and distribute them equally throughout the County’s school districts received the support of 76% of residents.

A majority of Long Islanders (55%) support shifting some resources from wealthier to poorer school districts. This support is most pronounced in high need school districts where it is favored by 72% of local residents. In contrast, the proposal meets an even split of 48% support and 49% opposition from residents of low need school districts. *(See Figure 13)*

FIGURE 13



Opposition to wealth sharing is highest among homeowners paying in excess of \$7,000 per year in property taxes (44% support it and 53% are opposed), who may have moved into a high tax area to benefit from an especially good school district. This support for shifting of resources is somewhat lower than the roughly 69% of white Americans who supported a similar proposal in a national poll conducted by the Henry J Kaiser Foundation and the Pew Hispanic Center, in August, 2003<sup>6</sup>.

A majority (58%) of local residents believe that it is a good idea to shift funds from wealthier to poorer school districts in order to spend roughly the same amount per student in all public schools in Nassau/Suffolk County. This view is coupled with the belief that spending roughly the same amount per pupil across school districts would increase the quality of education in poorer areas. In addition, a majority of residents believe that spending the same amount per student would have no impact on the quality of education for children in their school district.

Some residents also see a down side to this equalization of wealth, however, with almost a third believing it would reduce funds for children in their own school district. This perception was most pronounced among members of affluent households earning \$100,000 or more per year, 48% of whom said it would reduce funds for children in their school district. Just fewer than 1 in 4 residents of low need areas thought that the quality of education in their school district would decrease.

In contrast, a majority (57%) of residents in high need school districts believed that spending the same amount per student would increase funds for children in their local schools. A majority (59%) of residents in high need school districts also thought school quality would increase in their district if spending was equalized across school districts.

Overall, Long Islanders express support for some level of wealth equalization across school districts. This support is especially strong among residents of high need school districts. Of course, it is difficult to gauge how residents would react to a specific proposal in which costs were detailed with greater specificity. Poll respondents were simply asked about “shifting some resources” or “spending roughly the same amount per student.” Residents may be supportive of wealth equalization in the abstract, but less supportive in response to a specific proposal. Nonetheless, in a region deeply concerned about taxes, the willingness of residents to share resources among school districts is noteworthy.

<sup>6</sup> Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation National Survey of Latinos: Education. <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/25.pdf>. 2004.

## C O N C L U S I O N

Long Island's challenge is to find creative ways to maintain the high quality services that have long represented the region's strengths, while bringing under control the costs that threaten to uproot residents from the area. The majority of Long Islanders still believe that their county is headed in the right direction. Overall they are satisfied with the services provided by their local government, but feel burdened by the high price tag of those services. An increasing number of people report difficulty in meeting monthly housing costs, and are concerned that they, or members of their family, may have to leave the Island for a more affordable area. Housing prices and taxes are rising at a more rapid rate than wages, making the dream of home ownership unattainable for many on Long Island.

As much as local residents appear to prefer fewer services in order to reduce local property taxes, this tradeoff between rising taxes and high quality services fuels ambivalence. The dilemma is particularly manifested in the area of school spending. While the region's public schools represent the largest portion of all town budgets, very few residents support reduced school spending. This highlights the dilemma – how to keep taxes under control, maintain the high quality schools and services that residents have come to expect, and insure that this high level of quality services is extended to adults and children in every town on Long Island.

School consolidation across districts has been raised as one possible way to economize on school costs. Opinion on consolidation is deeply divided between those who believe that better quality and lower costs might result, and those concerned with possible loss of local control over schools, reduction of local funding and school quality. Poll results suggest that local residents may be willing to consider alternatives to school funding if the goal is to provide more equal funding across school districts. A majority of Long Island residents support shifting some resources from wealthier to poorer districts.

The objective of this survey, together with the 2006 Long Island Index, is to provide an understanding of the concerns and needs of local residents, and a focus for future discussion of the issues. Strong leadership can help to insure that these difficult choices are made, so that the reasons the families of the 1940's and 50's settled on Long Island remain the reasons the families of the 21st Century stay here.

## M E T H O D O L O G Y

The Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research conducted this survey by telephone between June 7 and August 1, 2005. A list-assisted method of random-digit-dialing (RDD) was used to obtain phone numbers in the sample. Within selected households, individuals 18 years and over were selected at random for participation. Up to 7 contact attempts were made at each household phone number. In order to assure a representative sample, all households and individuals who were initially unwilling to participate in the survey were contacted again, and an attempt was made to persuade them to participate. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish depending upon the preference of the respondent.

A total of 1215 interviews were conducted in the general population of Long Island, with 606 completed interviews with residents of Nassau County and 609 completed interviews with residents of Suffolk County. In addition, two separate oversamples were drawn, and interviews were conducted with 204 African-American and 104 Hispanic residents of Long Island.

The results for Nassau and Suffolk Counties were tabulated both separately and jointly. The oversamples of African-American and Hispanic Long Island residents were included in all comparisons of responses by race and ethnicity.

Margin of error for the Long Island sample is +/- 2.8%.

The results were weighted on gender, age, educational attainment, Hispanic/Latino origin and race/ethnicity, based on the 2003 U.S. Census American Community Survey county level data. Weighting was done using an iterative process that has been developed to estimate joint weights for any number of demographic variables for which population percentages are known only individually, not jointly. Percentages of respondents within categories of variables used for weighting in two counties are presented in Table 1.

Multivariate ordered probit regression analyses were conducted to better understand the determinants of the desire to leave Long Island, rated quality of local schools, and the overall quality of local services. Multivariate logit regression analyses were used to examine the determinants of vote choice in school budget elections. In these regression analyses, each of the dependent variables was regressed onto a series of demographic and attitudinal variables (depending on the specific analysis). Details of the specific analyses can be obtained from the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research.

Level of school district need is calculated by dividing a district's estimated poverty percent by its combined wealth ratio. School districts are then divided into 6 categories, three of which are relevant to Long Island (high need suburban, average need, and low need). Wealth statistics are based on a combination of property values and household income weighted by the number of pupils, which is also adjusted for students with special needs; poverty is based on the number of school-age children living below the federal poverty level (State Education Department 2004 *New York: The State of Learning, Statistical Profiles of Public School Districts*). There are nine high need districts on Long Island (Hempstead, Roosevelt, Freeport, Westbury, Amityville, Wyandanch, William Floyd, Brentwood and Central Islip).

*(continued on next page)*

TABLE 1

They are majority black /Hispanic districts (with one exception), have somewhat higher poverty rates, and a higher incidence of limited English proficiency students than average or low need districts. Among poll respondents, 36% of blacks and 24% of Latinos lived in high need school districts compared to 5% of whites.

Weighted Demographic Characteristics by County (%)		
	Nassau	Suffolk
<b>Age</b>		
18-34	25	27
35-44	21	23
45-54	20	20
55-64	15	15
65+ 1	19	15
<b>Education</b>		
No High School	4	5
Some High School	6	5
High School	27	33
Some College	18	18
Associate Degree	8	9
Bachelors Degree	21	17
Graduate/Professional	16	13
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	48	49
Female	52	51
<b>Hispanic/Latino Origin</b>		
Hispanic	12	12
Non-Hispanic	88	88
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
White	80	86
Black/African-American	11	7
Asian	6	3
Other	3	4

Funding for the study was provided by the Rauch Foundation. This report was written by Dr. Leonie Huddy, Linda Pfeiffer, and Inna Burdein of the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research, with the assistance of Dr. Craig Charney, Senior Research Fellow at the Milano Graduate School of Urban Policy at the New School University. Thanks are due to Dr. Nancy Douzinas, President of the Rauch Foundation, Carrie Meek Gallagher, Director of the Long Island Index Project, and Lori Andrade, Research Associate, for their constructive support throughout the project. We also wish to thank Dr. Lee Koppelman, Executive Director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board, and members of the Technical Committee of the Long Island Index Project, for their feedback.

**AT THE BREAKING POINT?  
TAXATION AND GOVERNANCE  
ON LONG ISLAND  
REGIONAL ATTITUDES  
TOWARD TAXATION, GOVERNANCE,  
AND SCHOOL QUALITY**

**A P P E N D I X**

**QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

*Introduction*

Hello, my name is (interviewer's name) and I am calling from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. We are conducting a study regarding several quality of life issues here on Long Island.

Your telephone number was randomly dialed by a computer. I would like to talk to the person in your household who is over 18 and had the most recent birthday.

This survey only takes about 10 - 15 minutes to complete. We will skip over any questions you don't want to answer, and all answers will be kept confidential.

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. For your information, the study is funded by the Rauch Foundation.

With your permission, let's begin.



For the first couple of questions we would like you to think about the *OVERALL* condition of your County.

**1. Generally speaking, do you think things in Nassau/Suffolk County today are headed in the right direction or in the wrong direction?**

RESPONDENTS	1215	%
Right direction		53
Wrong direction		38
Don't know		8
Refused		1

**2. Overall, what do you think is the MOST important problem facing residents of Nassau/Suffolk County today? [Open-ended question, with recoded responses]**

Economy/Cost of living/Jobs/Poverty	8
Taxes/Property taxes	41
Lack of adequate and affordable housing	13
Environmental issues	7
Roads/Traffic/Transportation	6
Education/Schools	4
Other	14
Don't know	6
Refused	1

**3. In your view, how serious a problem are high property taxes in Suffolk/Nassau County?**

Extremely serious	39
Very serious	42
Somewhat serious	14
Not very serious	2
Not at all serious	1
Don't know	2
Refused	0

**4. In your view, how serious is the problem of young people moving away from Nassau/Suffolk County because of the high cost of living?**

Extremely serious	38
Very serious	38
Somewhat serious	17
Not very serious	4
Not at all serious	1
Don't know	2
Refused	0

**5. In your view, how important is it to preserve existing farmland, wildlife habitat, and other open green space in Nassau/Suffolk County and protect it from future development?**

Extremely important	39
Very important	38
Somewhat important	18
Not very important	3
Not at all important	1
Don't know	1
Refused	1

**6. In an average month, how difficult is it for you and your family living with you to pay the rent or mortgage? Would you say it is...**

Very difficult	15
Somewhat difficult	39
Not very difficult	21
Not at all difficult	21
Don't know	2
Refused	1

**7. How concerned are you that the high cost of housing will force members of your family to move out of Nassau/Suffolk County?**

Very concerned	55
Somewhat concerned	26
Not very concerned	9
Not at all concerned	8
Don't know	1
Refused	1

**8. How likely is it that you will move out of Nassau/Suffolk County to an area with lower housing costs and property taxes in the next 5 years?**

Very likely	32
Somewhat likely	24
Not very likely	20
Not at all likely	24
Don't know	1
Refused	0

**9. How much of the time do you think you can trust your town's government to do what is right?**

All of the time	2
Most of the time	20
Some of the time	55
Almost never	18
Don't know	4
Refused	1

**10. If you had to choose, would you prefer to see an increase in LOCAL government spending to build and maintain roads OR to expand and maintain public transportation, such as local buses and vans?**

Roads	55
Public transportation	39
Don't know	5
Refused	1

**11. Do you own the home you are currently living in, are you renting, or do you have some other arrangement, such as living in a parent's home, a child's home, or somewhere else?**

Own	69
Rent	16
Other	15
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**12. Do you pay your property taxes directly to the town, or are they included in your mortgage payment?**

Pays directly to the town	47
Included in the mortgage payment	51
Don't know	2
Refused	0

**13. Do you know how much you paid in property taxes last year, in 2004?**

Yes	80
No	19
Refused	1

**14. How much was that [you paid for property taxes in 2004]? [Open-ended question, with recoded responses]**

\$5000 or under	24
\$5001 to \$7000	34
\$7001 to \$9000	18
Over \$9000	17
Don't know	2
Refused	6

**15. Would you rate your current property taxes as much too high, somewhat too high, about right, somewhat too low, or much too low?**

Much too high	46
Somewhat too high	39
About right	15
Somewhat too low	0
Much too low	0
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**16. Of the following services, which one accounts for the highest percentage of property taxes paid BY LOCAL RESIDENTS?**

Public schools	72
Sanitation and garbage collection	1
Libraries	1
Police	12
Parks	0
Local roads and highways	2
Don't know	12
Refused	0

**17. I am going to read a list of services provided by your TOWN or COUNTY and ask you to rate the quality of each one. First, how would you rate the quality of the Nassau/Suffolk County police?**

Excellent	27
Good	47
Fair	18
Poor	6
Don't know	1
Refused	1

**18. How would you rate the quality of local garbage collection and sanitation services?**

Excellent	35
Good	44
Fair	13
Poor	4
Don't know	3
Refused	1

**19. How would you rate the quality of the local public parks and gardens?**

Excellent	19
Good	54
Fair	20
Poor	4
Don't know	3
Refused	0

**20. How would you rate the quality of the local roads and highways? Would you say they are: Excellent, good, fair or poor?**

Excellent	3
Good	36
Fair	45
Poor	16
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**21. How would you rate the quality of the public libraries?**

Excellent	36
Good	46
Fair	11
Poor	3
Don't know	4
Refused	1

**22. How would you rate the quality of the local public schools?**

Excellent	20
Good	45
Fair	21
Poor	7
Don't know	6
Refused	0

**23. Now thinking overall, how would you rate the quality of all of the local services we have discussed?**

Excellent	6
Good	67
Fair	25
Poor	1
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**24. Please think about the quality of services provided by your local government in return for the property taxes. Would you say that the value local residents get back from property taxes in terms of the quality of local services is:**

**[IF NECESSARY: Please think about the services we have discussed: schools, parks, libraries, roads, police, and sanitation]**

Excellent	3
Good	32
Fair	48
Poor	14
Don't know	3
Refused	0

**25. If you had to choose, which ONE of the following local services do you think should have the HIGHEST priority for increased funding in the coming year?**

Nassau/Suffolk county police	14
Local garbage collection and sanitation services	1
Local parks and gardens	5
Local roads and highways	21
Public libraries	3
Local public schools	51
Don't know	3
Refused	2

**26. If you had to choose, which ONE of the following local services do you think should have the LOWEST priority for increased funding in the coming year?**

Nassau/Suffolk County police	27
Local garbage collection and sanitation services	19
Local parks and gardens	23
Local roads and highways	6
Public libraries	13
Local public school	7
Don't know	5
Refused	1

**27. Do you think local property taxes should remain at the same level as last year even if it means cutting back on local services, or would you prefer to see an increase in property taxes to keep local services at their current level?**

[IF NECESSARY: Local property taxes residents of your town pay]

Taxes should remain the same	76
Taxes should increase to fund local services	16
Don't know	6
Refused	2

**28. Turning now to public schools, how would you rate the quality of teachers in your local school district?**

Excellent	21
Good	45
Fair	16
Poor	4
Don't know	13
Refused	1

**29. How would you rate the quality of school administration in your local school district?**

Excellent	12
Good	34
Fair	28
Poor	13
Don't know	13
Refused	1

**30. How would you rate the quality of education received by students in your local school district?**

Excellent	20
Good	44
Fair	19
Poor	7
Don't know	10
Refused	0

**31. How much of the time do you think you can trust school board members in your local school district to do what is right?**

All of the time	5
Most of the time	29
Some of the time	47
Almost never	12
Don't know	7
Refused	0

**32. What percentage of your total town property tax bill do you estimate goes toward the school taxes?**  
*[Open-ended question, with recoded responses]*

Up to 39%	20
40% to 60%	32
61% and above	13
Don't know	33
Refused	1

**33. Local school budgets have been rising faster than the rate of inflation in recent years, and are projected to rise at a rate above inflation in the coming year. To what extent is this increase in school budgets due to RISING TEACHER SALARIES?**

A great deal	35
Some	37
A little	14
Not at all	6
Don't know	7
Refused	0

**34. To what extent is this increase in school budgets due to RISING COSTS OF TEACHERS' RETIREMENT AND HEALTH BENEFITS?**

A great deal	34
Some	42
A little	11
Not at all	4
Don't know	9
Refused	0

**35. To what extent is this increase in school budgets due to the RISING COSTS OF UTILITIES, BUILDING MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION?**

A great deal	23
Some	50
A little	14
Not at all	6
Don't know	8
Refused	0

**36. To what extent is this increase in school budgets due to RISING SALARIES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS?**

A great deal	42
Some	36
A little	11
Not at all	3
Don't know	8
Refused	0

**37. As far as you know, which one of the following is the PRIMARY reason for the increase in school budgets?**

Rising teacher salaries	21
Rising costs of teachers' retirement and health benefits	20
Rising costs of utilities, building maintenance & construction	22
Rising salaries of school administrators	26
Don't know	11
Refused	1

**38. Please think about the quality of education provided by your local schools in return for the local property taxes. Would you say that the value local residents get back from property taxes in terms of quality of education is excellent, good, fair, or poor?**

Excellent	10
Good	40
Fair	35
Poor	9
Don't know	6
Refused	0

**39. The amount of money spent on public schools varies greatly across school districts because some communities are wealthier than others and have more tax dollars to spend on education. It has been proposed that some revenues from wealthier school districts be shifted to poorer districts in order to provide those places with more resources. That way roughly the same amount per student would be spent across school districts. To what extent do you favor or oppose this?**

Strongly favor	23
Somewhat favor	32
Somewhat oppose	22
Strongly oppose	20
Don't know	3
Refused	1

**40. Do you think that spending roughly the same amount per student in all schools in Nassau/Suffolk County would increase the quality of education for children in poorer school districts, decrease it, or would it stay the same?**

Increase	54
Decrease	4
Stay the same	38
Don't know	4
Refused	0

**41. Do you think that spending roughly the same amount per student in all public schools in Nassau/Suffolk County would mean more money for children in your school district, less money, or the same amount of money as now?**

More	21
Less	34
The same amount	39
Don't know	6
Refused	0

**42. Do you think that spending roughly the same amount per student in all public schools in Nassau/Suffolk County would mean better, worse, or the same quality of education as now for children in your school district?**

Better	27
Worse	17
The same quality	51
Don't know	5
Refused	1

**43. Do you think that families in wealthier areas should be able to spend all of their property taxes on students in their own school district? OR Do you think that some of the property taxes paid by families in wealthier districts should also go towards the education of children in poorer areas?**

Spend all property taxes on students in own school district	36
Contribute to the education of children in poorer areas	55
Don't know	7
Refused	2

**44. Would you say that OVERALL, it is a good idea or a bad idea to shift funds from wealthier to poorer school districts in order to spend roughly the same amount per student in all public schools in Nassau/Suffolk County**

Good idea	58
Bad idea	36
Don't know	5
Refused	1

- 45. One way to spend roughly the same amount on each student in a county would be to fund public schools through an income tax, which would replace a portion of the property tax. This would mean that the property tax would be CUT by about two-thirds, and income tax would INCREASE by up to a maximum of 9% for the wealthiest households. Overall, do you think that this is a good idea or a bad idea?**

Good idea	55
Bad idea	34
Don't know	9
Refused	1

- 46. Some school districts have a greater amount of money than others to spend on students because they contain more commercial property, which is taxed at a higher rate than residences. To what extent do you favor or oppose pooling commercial property taxes, so that they are distributed evenly across all school districts in your county?**

Favor strongly	36
Favor somewhat	40
Oppose somewhat	14
Oppose strongly	6
Don't know	4
Refused	0

- 47. Economists have calculated that school property taxes could be reduced by a substantial amount if Long Island's 125 school districts were consolidated into larger ones. How strongly do you favor or oppose a consolidation of current school districts?**

Favor strongly	17
Favor somewhat	29
Oppose somewhat	24
Oppose strongly	24
Don't know	6
Refused	0

- 48. If school districts were consolidated in Nassau/Suffolk County, do you think it would mean that there would be more, less, or about the same amount of LOCAL control as now over school programs and the quality of education?**

More	13
Less	52
About the same	25
Don't know	10
Refused	0

- 49. Do you think that consolidation of school districts in Nassau/Suffolk County would mean more, less or the same amount of money as now for children in your school district?**

More	22
Less	35
About the same	33
Don't know	10
Refused	0

**50. Do you think that consolidation of school districts in Nassau/Suffolk County would mean better, worse, or the same quality of education as now for children in your school district?**

Better	22
Worse	32
The same	38
Don't know	8
Refused	0

**51. [Asked of respondents who answered “worse” to Question 50]  
Why do you think that the quality would be worse? [Open-ended question, with recoded responses]**

Loss of local control	22
Overcrowding	27
Decrease in program quality and resources	20
Other	29
Don't know	2
Refused	0

**52. Do you think that consolidation of school districts in Nassau/Suffolk County would mean that children in your school district would have more, less, or about the same opportunities as now to enroll in special programs, such as language courses, Advanced Placement courses, and other electives?**

More	26
Less	26
About the same	39
Don't know	9
Refused	1

**53. Some people think that the consolidation of school districts in Nassau/Suffolk County would be of special benefit to African-American and Latino children, many of whom are concentrated in less affluent school districts. To what extent do you favor or oppose the consolidation of school districts if it would help to include children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds in the same school district?**

Favor strongly	33
Favor somewhat	36
Oppose somewhat	14
Oppose strongly	9
Don't know	5
Refused	3

**54. How long have you lived in Nassau/Suffolk County?**

Under six months	0
Six months to a year	1
One year to two years	3
Between two and five years	4
Between five and ten years	8
Over 10 years	54
All my life	29
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**55. In general, when it comes to politics, do you think of yourself as a Liberal, a Moderate, or a Conservative?**

Liberal	27
Moderate	32
Conservative	32
Don't know	6
Refused	4

**56. Are you currently registered to vote?**

Yes	83
No	17
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**57. In the school board elections held this past May, were you able to vote, or did something come up that prevented you from voting?**

[IF NECESSARY: We are interested in the first vote, not the follow-up.]

Yes, voted	48
No, something came up	51
Was too young to vote	1
Don't know	1
Refused	0

**58. Did you vote for or against the last school budget?**

For	50
Against	45
Don't know	2
Refused	4

**59. In what year were you born? [Open-ended question, with recoded responses]**

18 to 34 years	26
35 to 44 years	22
45 to 54 years	20
55 to 64 years	14
65 years and above	17
Refused	0

**60. How many children under the age of 18 are currently living in your household?**

None	55
1 or more	45
Don't know	0
Refused	1

**61. Do any of these children attend the local public schools?**

Yes	75
No	24
Don't know/Refused	1

**62. How many people 18 years and older, including yourself, are currently living in your household?**

One	19
Two	46
Three	17
Four or more	16
Don't know	0
Refused	1

**63. What is the highest grade of school, year of college or highest degree that you have received?**

No high school	4
Some high school	6
High school graduate	30
Some college, no degree	18
Associate degree	9
Bachelor's degree	19
Graduate/Professional degree	15
Don't know/Refused	0

**64. Are you currently:**

Employed for wages full-time	45
Employed for wages part-time	11
Self-employed	9
Out of work for more than 1 year	1
Out of work for less than 1 year	1
Homemaker	6
Full-time student	6
Retired	18
Unable to work / permanently disabled	3
Don't know	0
Refused	1

**65. Are you employed by the federal government, state government, local government, public school district, private employer, or a non-profit organization?**

Federal government	4
State government	7
Local government	7
Public school district	9
Private employer	64
Non-profit organization	6
Something else	1
Don't know	0
Refused	1

**66.** *[Asked of retired and unemployed respondents]*

**For most of your working life, were you employed by the federal government, state government, local government, by local public school district, by a private employer, or by a non-profit organization?**

Federal government	4
State government	6
Local government	13
Local public school district	7
Private employer	63
Non-profit organization	4
Something else	0
Don't know	2
Refused	1

**67. What is/was your occupation?** *[Open-ended question, with recoded responses]*

Professional/Manager/Owner	30
Teachers/Librarians/Professors	9
Sales/Clerical/Service worker	40
Skilled laborer/Tradesman	9
Semi- or Unskilled laborer	9
Don't know/No answer	0
Refused	3

**68. Which of the following income categories best describes the total 2004 household income of all members of your family living there before taxes? Stop me when I reach your income group. Was it**

Less than \$35,000	13
\$35,000 to less than \$60,000	17
\$60,000 to less than \$80,000	15
\$80,000 to less than \$100,000	14
\$100,000 or more	23
Don't know / Refused	18

**69. Are you Hispanic or Latino/Latina?**

Yes	12
No	88
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**70. Do you consider yourself White, Black, Asian or something else?**

White	83
Black	9
Asian	5
Something else	3
Don't know	0
Refused	0

**71. Are you married; not married but living with a partner; separated; divorced; widowed; or have you never been married?**

Married	55
Not married, living with a partner	6
Separated	2
Divorced	6
Widowed	8
Never married	22
Don't know	0
Refused	1

**72. And finally one last question. Occasionally a news reporter needs to talk to people about some of the topics on our survey. Would you be willing to speak with a reporter, and allow us to share your responses with the reporter?**

Yes	38
No	62

P O S T - C O D E S

**Respondent's Gender**

Female	51
Male	49

**County of Residence**

Nassau	48
Suffolk	52

**Area of Residence**

Town of Hempstead	31
Town of North Hempstead	6
Town of Oyster Bay	8
City of Glen Cove	2
City of Long Beach	1
Town of Babylon	10
Town of Brookhaven	18
Town of East Hampton	1
Town of Huntington	5
Town of Islip	8
Town of Riverhead	1
Town of Shelter Island	1
Town of Smithtown	2
Town of Southampton	4
Town of Southold	2

**AT THE BREAKING POINT?  
TAXATION AND GOVERNANCE  
ON LONG ISLAND**

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**REGIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD  
TAXATION, GOVERNANCE  
AND SCHOOL QUALITY**



**A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE RAUCH FOUNDATION  
NOVEMBER, 2005**