

# rural new york minute

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## Community Issues in New York State: What's Important?

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Community issues may shape the way we vote, our choice of where to live and work, and the way we live our daily lives. What issues are most important in the communities we live in? Using data from the 2007 Empire State Poll and the special rural survey (Survey Research Institute & the Community & Rural Development Institute at Cornell University), we provide a picture of New Yorkers' opinions about community issues that varies dramatically depending on where people live.

Among respondents who answered the question "In your opinion, what do you think is the SINGLE most important issue facing your community as a whole?", taxes, crime, education, and employment were cited most frequently. The answer to this question may partly depend on how we *define* our community (as we discussed in last month's issue (Issue 6/June 2007), and that can depend on where we live.

Upstate and downstate urbanites contrast significantly in the top community issue they identify. For example, 32% of upstate urban respondents identify taxes as the single most important issue facing their community (upstate urban dwellers are more likely to identify their village/town/city as their community), whereas only 9% of downstate urban residents do so (who are more likely to identify their local neighborhood as their community). Crime is cited most frequently among downstate urban respondents (22%), whereas 9% identify land development and 8.5% identify education as the top issue. While 8% of downstate urbanites identify housing as the most important issue in their communities, their upstate counterparts barely mention it. Upstate urban respondents are likely to identify employment (12%), crime (9%), economic growth (9%), and local

government (7%) as the most important issue for their communities.

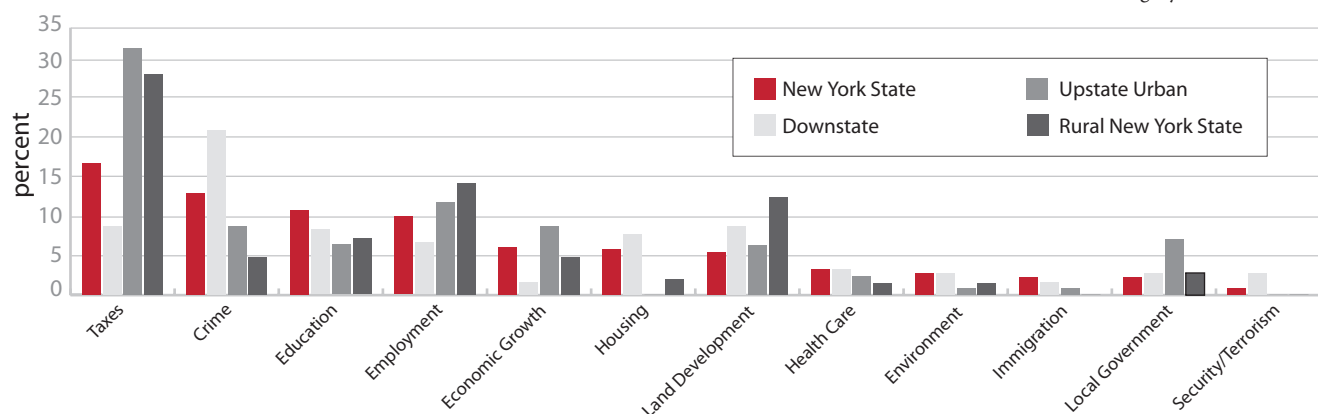
Rural New Yorkers are more like their upstate urban counterparts in the way that they describe their community (their village/town/city), and they identify top community issues similarly, to a point. As in upstate urban areas, taxes are viewed as important in rural communities, with 29% of rural respondents ranking this issue as the most critical. Likewise, employment is identified by the second largest group of rural respondents (15%). However, some interesting differences in attitudes between upstate urban and rural respondents exist. Land development is mentioned twice as often by rural residents as it is by upstate urban respondents (13% vs. 6.5%) as being the most important issue in their communities, while crime is cited only about half as much (5% vs. 9%).

What might be surprising to some is that issues such as health care, the environment, and immigration are cited so infrequently by respondents. This may be because the survey question asks respondents to identify the *single* most important issue, rather than asking for a ranking of *all* the issues listed here. It is important not to interpret these results as meaning, for example, that health care is ranked 8th in importance overall for New Yorkers. This is simply a reporting of the frequency at which issues were identified as the *most* important issue.

It is also important to keep in mind that the community issues New Yorkers identify as most important may actually be regional, national, and even global in nature. Local policies may have limited success in addressing these larger issues even though the impacts may be experienced most significantly at the local level. ♦

**Figure 1: What is the most important issue facing your community?**

\* Figures do not add to 100% due to an "other" category not shown here.



Source: 2007 Empire State Poll and Rural Survey (Survey Research Institute and the Community & Rural Development Institute, Cornell University)

