

STRIKING ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● A BALANCE

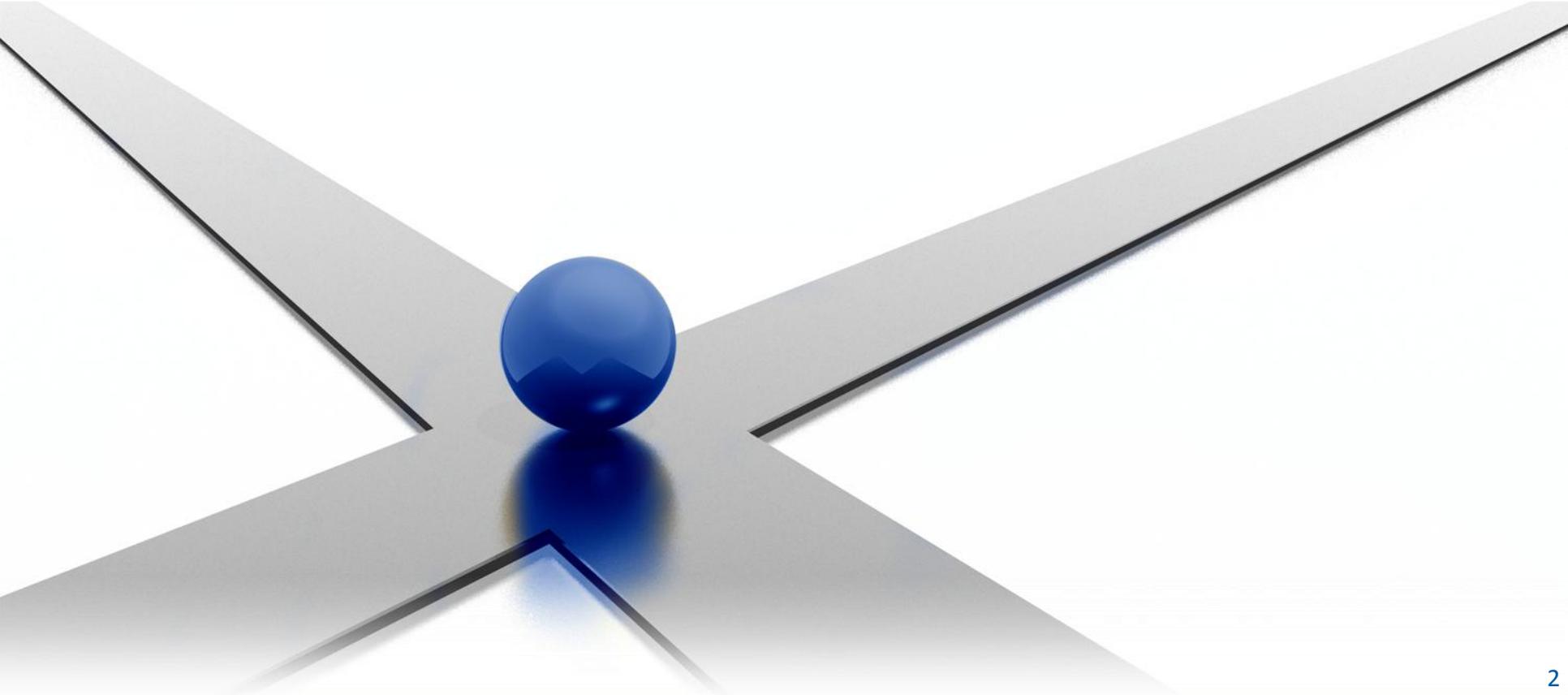
NEW YORKERS SPEAK OUT ON RIGHTSIZING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

April 2011

INTRODUCTION

Choosing a Path

Local governments in New York State are at a crossroads. Faced with high taxes, rising costs, and already strained state and federal budgets, how can local governments still provide essential services? What's next? Is rightsizing local government the answer?



Study Overview

Undertaken by The Dyson Foundation in partnership with the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion the objectives of *Striking a Balance: New Yorkers Speak Out on Rightsizing Local Government* are to:

- Quantify and report New York State residents' attitudes and opinions toward government consolidation
- Understand the similarities and differences of opinion on the issue within and across regions of the state
- Describe New Yorkers' impressions of a range of local government options for cooperation from sharing of municipal services to potential dissolution of specific districts, villages, or towns
- Identify the reasons why some residents support consolidation and the reasons why other residents oppose it
- Raise public awareness on the issue
- Inform decision-makers of New Yorkers' positions, hopes, and concerns

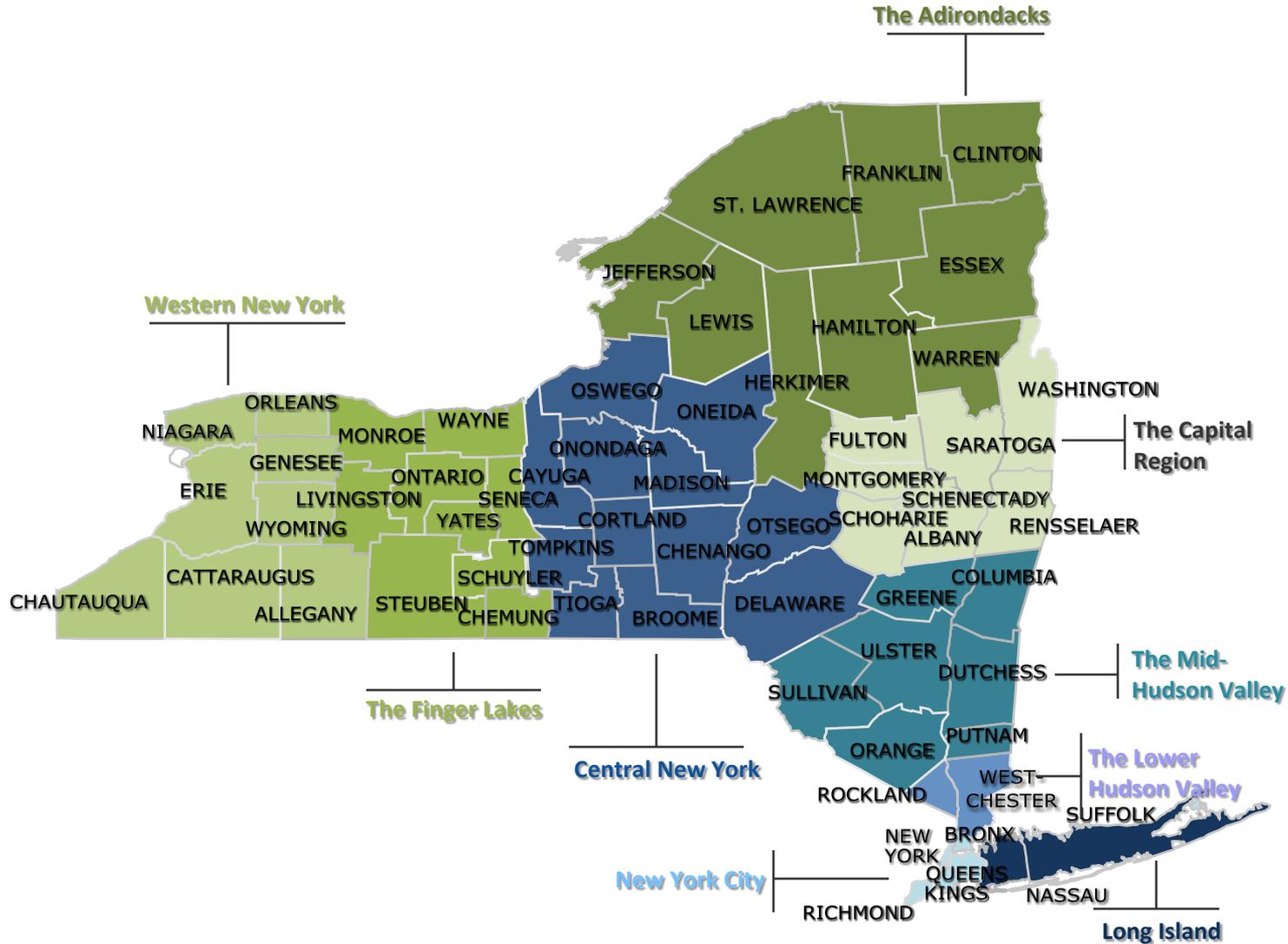
This report presents the findings for a survey of 4,520 New York State adult residents including about 500 residents from nine key geographic regions: the Capital Region, the Adirondacks, Western New York, the Finger Lakes, Central New York, the Mid-Hudson Valley, the Lower Hudson Valley, New York City, and Long Island.

Results are reported for the state, as a whole, and for each region.

Please note some totals may not add to 100% due to rounding or non-display of "unsure" responses.



Regional County Compositions



Executive Summary

The State of New York

New York State faces many challenges. But, overall, do New Yorkers think the state is traveling along the correct path? A majority of New York State residents don't think it is. In fact, 53% believe the Empire State is moving in the wrong direction. 38% disagree and say the state is on track. Those in Western New York express the strongest dissatisfaction. In this region, 68% describe the state as off course.

When it comes to the role the government should play, New Yorkers divide. 48% prefer bigger government providing more services while 47% favor smaller government providing fewer services. However, there are regional differences on this question.

What about the number of local governments in New York State? 45% believe the number of local governments is on target. However, a majority, 55%, disagree. Included in that majority are 45% who say there are too many governments and 10% who report there are too few local governments. Here, too, there are significant regional differences. More residents outside of New York City, compared with those who live in the five boroughs, believe there are too many local governments in New York State.

In contrast to other local government entities, a majority of New Yorkers perceive the number of school districts to be appropriate. 55% of residents say the number of school districts in New York is about right. The 45% of residents who disagree divide. Of those, 23% think there are too few school districts while 22% believe there are too many. Regionally, majorities in all parts of the state, except for Long Island, say the number of school districts is on the mark. On Long Island, half believe this to be the case. One-third thinks there are too many.

On the plus side, most New Yorkers, 85%, give their local government average or above average grades. 60% have confidence in their local leaders, and a majority of residents, 55%, think their taxes are a good value for the money they pay.

Restructure Government? First Impressions

Many terms are associated with the issue of restructuring government. Which words and phrases are perceived positively, and which are perceived negatively? New Yorkers have a positive reaction to *shared services* (68%), *government consolidation* (60%), *merged services* (58%), and *regionalism* (52%). However, just 31% of residents give a positive meaning to *dissolving local government*.

Executive Summary

There are dueling definitions of *government consolidation*. Half believe it refers to sharing the costs of services while 44% describe it as merging to form one larger government.

When it comes to the impact of government consolidation, pluralities expect it to decrease costs (48%) and improve efficiency (45%). However, on each question, about one in five residents are not optimistic. Three in ten do not believe it will make a difference when it comes to cost, and 37% report it will not affect efficiency.

Most New Yorkers, 86%, have heard little or nothing at all about consolidating local government in New York State. The exception is in Western New York where 36% have heard either a great deal or good amount about the issue. All but 18% have heard at least a little.

Government Consolidation: Where New Yorkers Stand

Most residents statewide, 87%, think consolidation should be considered in New York State. Included here are 40% who say that all towns or cities statewide should be considered for consolidation and 47% who think consolidation should be weighed under certain circumstances. Only 13% think no towns or cities should be considered for consolidation.

A majority of residents outside of mostly consolidated New York City, 54%, favor consolidating their own local government. Some areas outside of New York City are more polarized than others.

Government Consolidation: Getting Specific

There is consensus among New York residents for consolidating some types of public services. There is also majority support for merging others. The services New Yorkers favor for consolidation are public transportation (73%), road and highway maintenance (68%), park and recreation programs (66%), prisons (57%), and public libraries (56%). However, residents divide about whether or not to consolidate police (51%) and fire or rescue services (48%).

Residents oppose the consolidation of public schools. Only in Western New York does a majority favor consolidating them. Even here, residents closely divide. 51% in Western New York support consolidation of school districts while 48% oppose it.

While residents generally do support the consolidation of recycling (69%), garbage removal (56%), sewage services (55%), or drinking water (53%), notable proportions of New Yorkers who live outside of New York City rely on private means for these services.

Executive Summary

Government Consolidation: A Balancing Act

What influences support for consolidation? New Yorkers are more likely to support consolidation if the quality of their local services improves (83%), businesses are more interested in locating to the area (76%), property taxes are lowered (74%), or if the cost of local services decreases (68%). Improved efficiency (64%), less duplication of services (64%), and grant money (61%) also generate support for consolidation.

However, residents are more likely to oppose consolidation if they have less of a say in what happens locally (62%), if costs for their community increase (62%), or if their community loses its sense of identity (56%). There is also a concern if consolidation leads to job loss (50%).

Government Consolidation: Profiling the Positions

To understand the spectrum of opinion on government consolidation, two different aspects are examined.

One aspect looks at support or opposition for government consolidation for one's *own* local government. The second addresses support or opposition to considering consolidation for towns and cities throughout the state.

Looking at a comparison of these two aspects, a majority of those who support consolidation for their own local government also support it for all towns and cities in the state, 54%. Another 41% think it should be considered statewide only under certain circumstances. Despite supporting it for their own local government, 4% don't think consolidation should be considered throughout the state.

However, people who are against consolidation for their own community are not against considering consolidation for other localities. One in five think all towns should be considered, and the majority, 58%, say consideration for consolidation should be given under certain circumstances. Just 21% of those who oppose consolidation for their own community say no local governments in the state should be considered for consolidation.

Demography is not a predictor of support. Those who favor consolidation do not differ from people who are against the issue when it comes to gender, age, race, or education. New Yorkers who oppose consolidation are more likely to have an annual income of less than \$50,000 a year. Those who support consolidation are somewhat more likely to be employed full-time.

Executive Summary

Political party affiliation, how residents describe the place where they live, or how long they have lived there does not affect support for or against consolidation.

So, what, then, does matter? The short answer is attitude. Proponents of government consolidation are more likely to believe there are too many local governments while a majority of those against it say the number is on target. Although supporters and opponents of consolidation both express confidence in their local leaders, opponents are more likely to do so. Most supporters of local government consolidation cite reduced service costs and increased efficiency as the result of consolidation. Opponents, though, do not perceive the disadvantages of consolidation similarly. They divide over what the result of consolidation will be.

When it comes to first impressions, the term *shared services* yields a positive reaction from even opponents to government consolidation. Notable proportions of those against consolidation for their local government have a positive impression of *government consolidation*, *merged services*, and *regionalism*. *Dissolving local government* is viewed negatively regardless of whether New Yorkers support or oppose consolidation for their own local government.

Improved quality of services, local business development, and lower property taxes are reasons those on both sides of the argument are more likely to consider consolidation for their own local government. Other positives include lowered costs for public services, less overlap of services, and improved efficiency.

Even a majority of those who favor consolidation for their own local government are less likely to support the action if it means there are no cost savings for the community or if they are left out of the decision-making process. Most opponents agree. Opponents are also concerned about their communities' loss of identity.

When looking at services, there is consensus among both supporters and opponents for consolidation of public transportation. 61% of those against government consolidation for their own local government are not against consolidating this service. The merging or sharing of road and highway maintenance or park and recreation programs is viewed favorably by nearly half of consolidation opponents. Notable support for consolidating prisons or public libraries is found among those who oppose consolidating their own local government.

Executive Summary

There are, however, services that polarize . 66% of those who support consolidation for their own local government favor consolidating police, and 61% think merging fire or rescue services is a good idea. Only about one-third of those who oppose consolidation for their local government believe these services should be considered for consolidation. There is even less support among this group for merging local school districts.

The consolidation of recycling services is viewed favorably by most proponents of government consolidation and a majority of opponents. Most residents who favor restructuring government think consolidation of garbage, sewage services, and drinking water is a good idea. Although notable, only about one-third of residents against consolidation agree.

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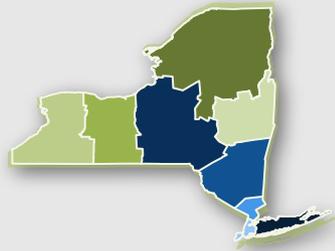
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Living with Consolidation: New York City Residents Rate Their Services

Residents of New York City give most of their services high marks. However, public schools, and road and highway maintenance do not make the grade.

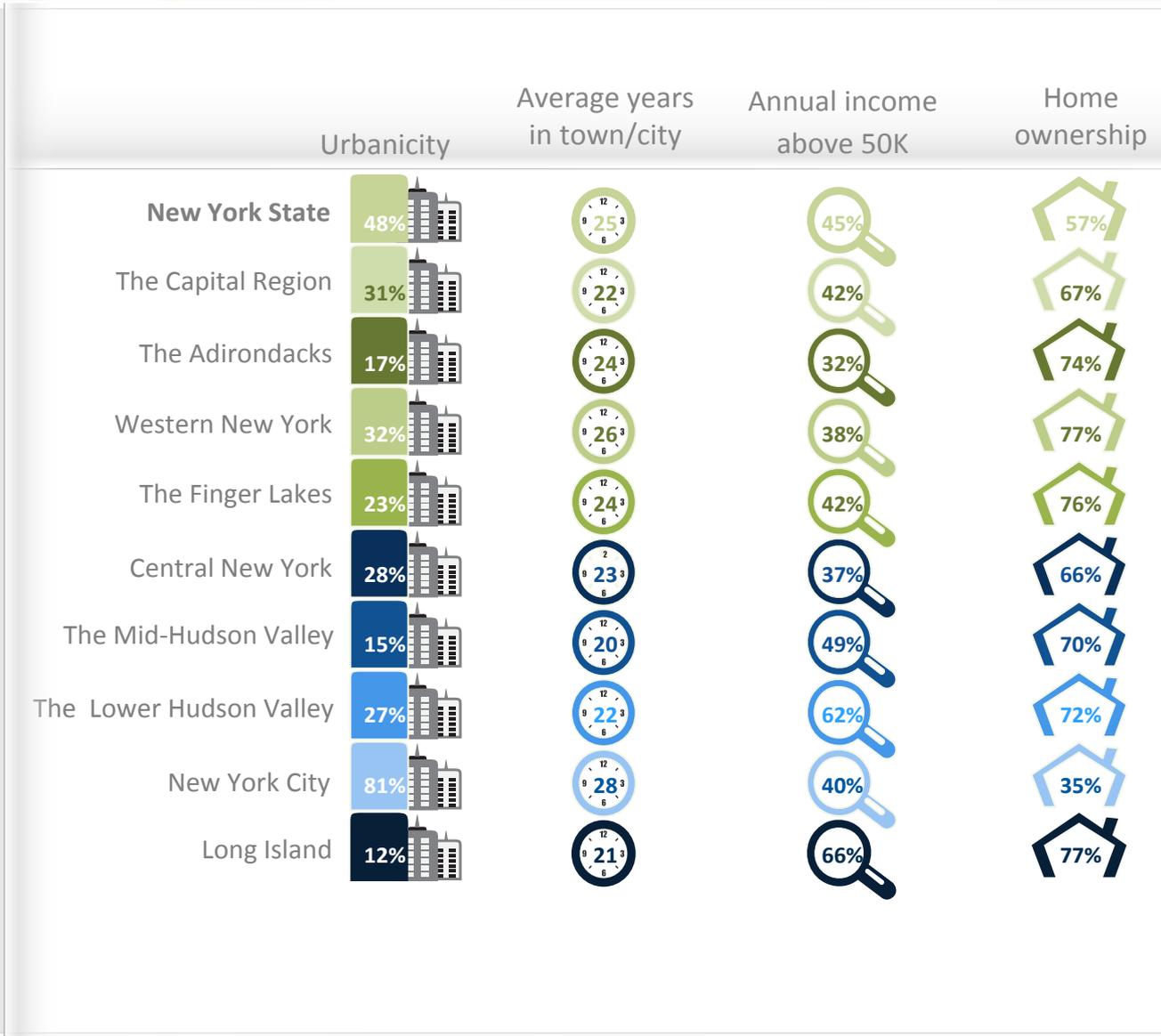
Profile of New York State and Nine Regions

New York State is often admired and characterized as home to the "city that never sleeps." However, fewer than half of the state's residents describes the place where they live as urban. Outside New York City, residents think of their communities as suburban, small towns, or even rural. A majority of New Yorkers own their own home, including about seven in ten who live beyond the New York City limits.



The average New Yorker has lived in their town or city for more than 20 years. Here, New York City residents clock the longest tenure with an average of 28 years.

The Lower Hudson Valley and Long Island boast high incomes with more than six in ten households reporting an annual income above \$50,000.





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Poll**

THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Direction of the State

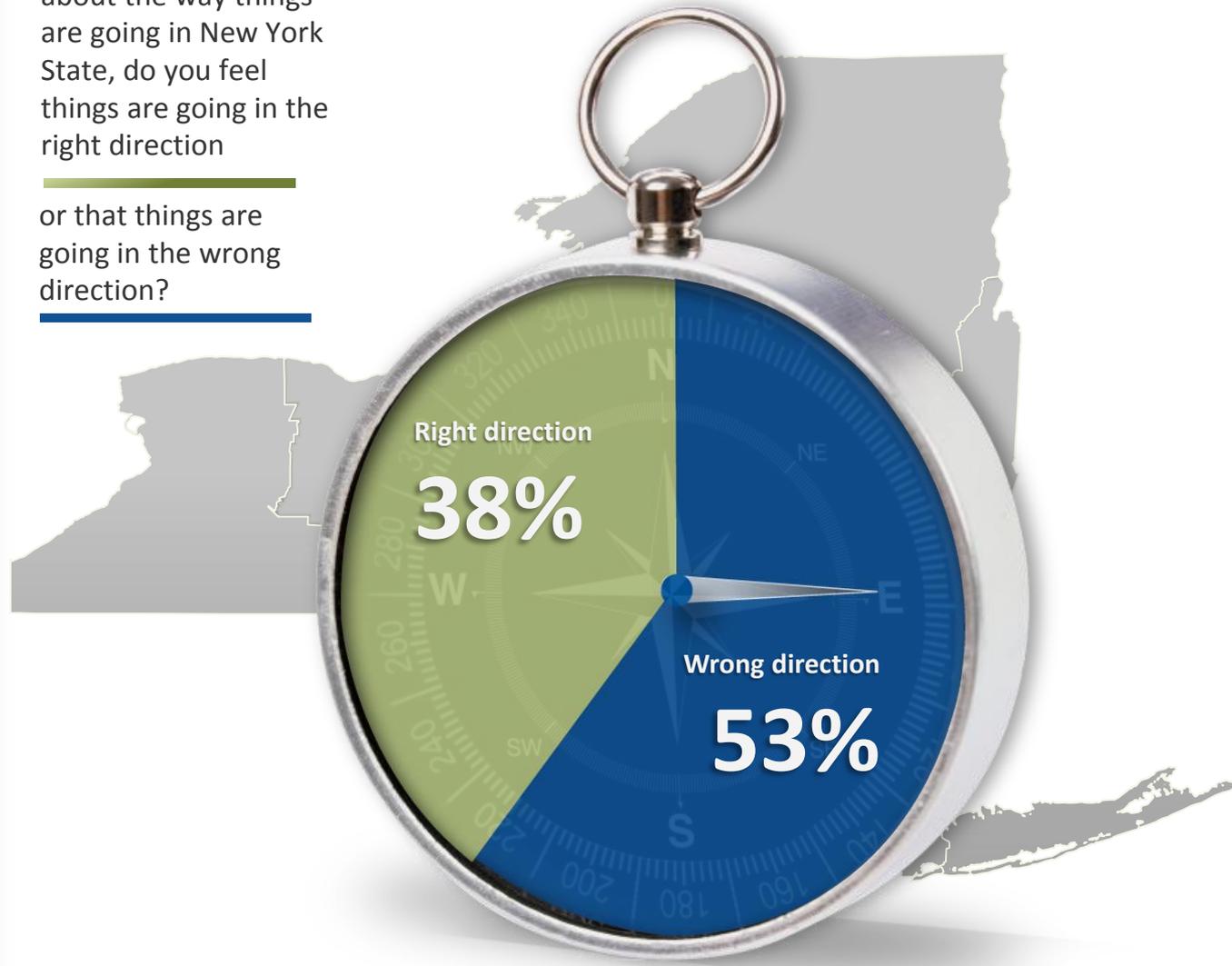
How do New Yorkers describe the current climate of the state?

A majority, 53%, perceive the state as moving in the wrong direction and in need of being redirected. 38% believe the state is on the right track.

*Digging Deeper:
The strongest current of dissatisfaction is seen in Western New York where 68% of residents describe the state as off course.*

In general, thinking about the way things are going in New York State, do you feel things are going in the right direction

or that things are going in the wrong direction?



More or Less Government?

The state as a whole closely divides over the role they envision for government. But beneath the surface, there are significant differences in opinion across the state's regions.

Digging Deeper:
In the Finger Lakes Region and Western New York, 65% and 67%, respectively, believe in smaller government. In contrast, 63% of New York City residents believe in bigger government. Residents of the Mid-Hudson Valley and the Lower Hudson Valley are more divided.

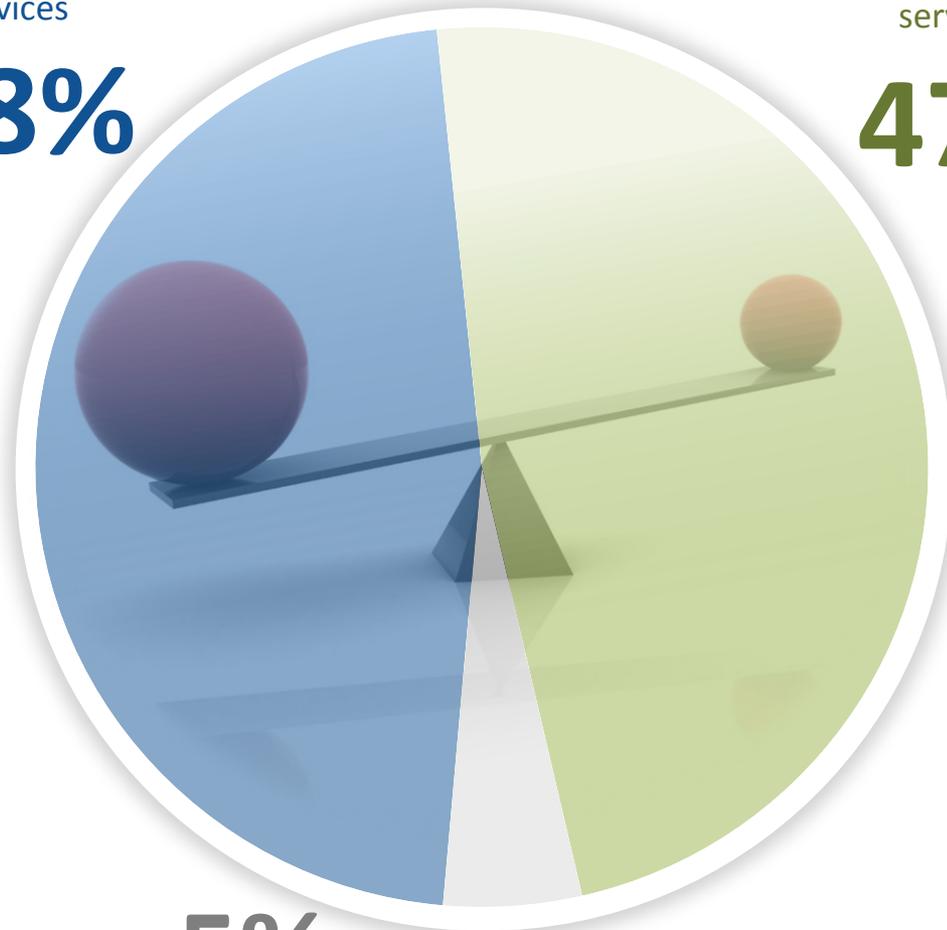
If you had to choose, would you rather have a:

BIGGER government
providing more
services

48%

SMALLER government
providing fewer
services

47%



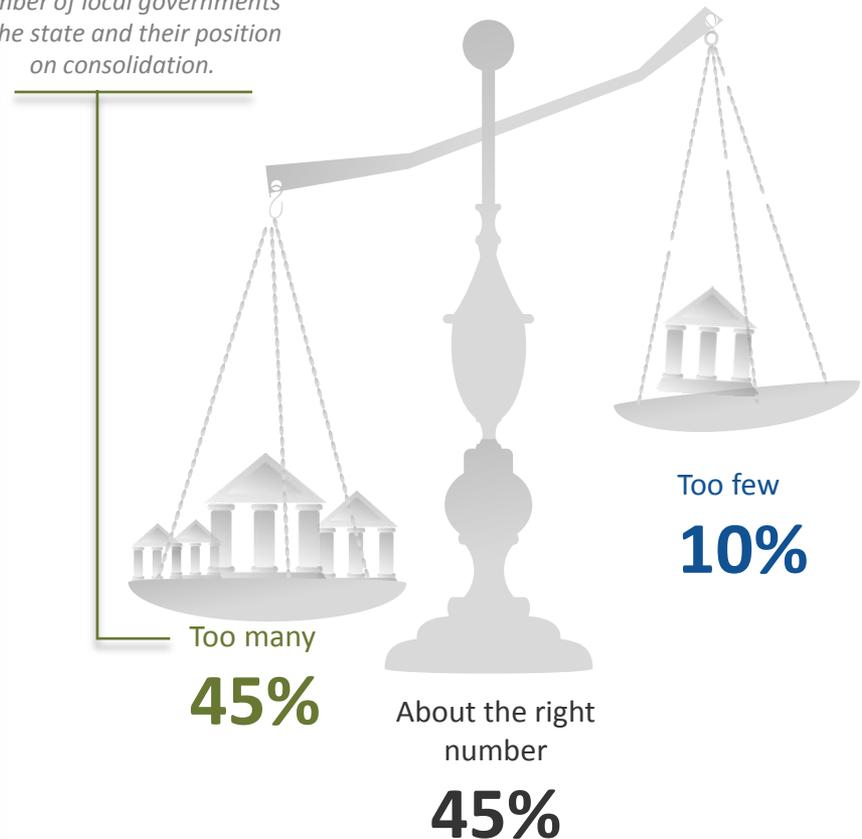
5% Unsure

Number of Local Governments

Statewide, 45% of residents believe there are the right number of local governments in New York. However, among the 55% who disagree, most believe there are too many local government entities in the state.

Thinking about the number of **local governments** in New York State, do you think there are too many, too few, or about the right number?

Digging Deeper: There is a strong relationship between people's perception of the number of local governments in the state and their position on consolidation.

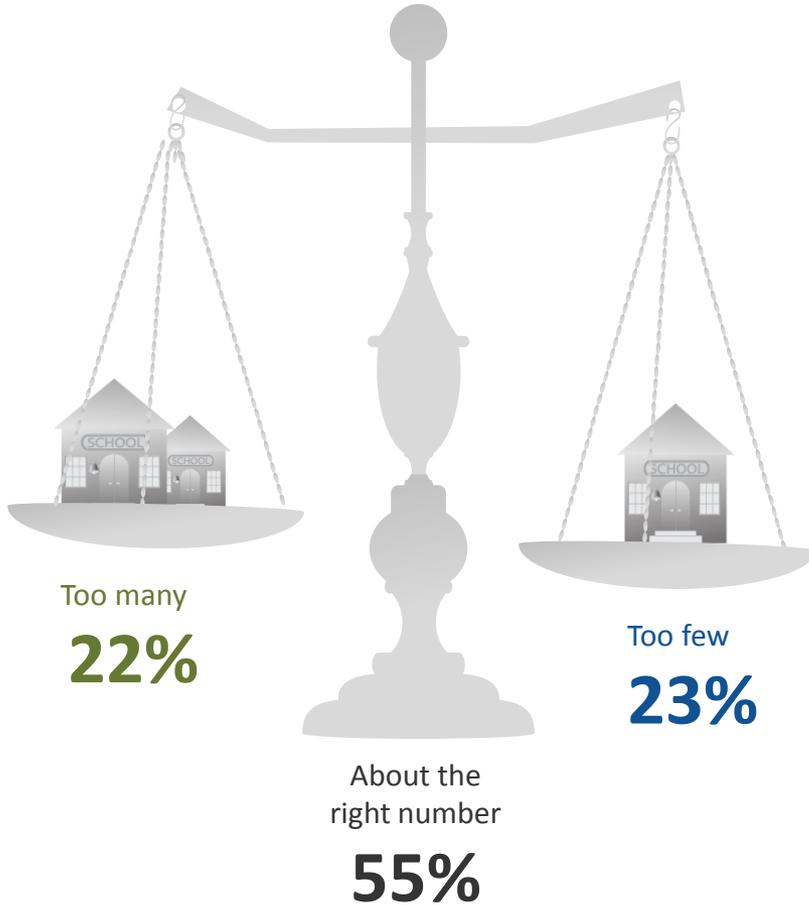


Digging Deeper:

There are significant regional differences. In fact, a majority of residents, 54%, who reside outside New York City believe there are too many local governments. This includes 66% of people who live in Western New York and majorities in the Capital Region, the Lower Hudson Valley, Long Island, and Central New York who share this view.

Number of School Districts

Thinking about the number of **school districts** in New York State, do you think there are too many, too few, or about the right number?



School districts are a different story from other local government entities. 55% of New Yorkers believe the number of school districts in the state is on track. Even the 45% of people who believe otherwise, divide between residents who think there are too many school districts and people who believe there are too few. 22% of New Yorkers describe the number of school districts as above and beyond what is needed. Nearly one in four state residents, 23%, think the number should be increased.

Digging Deeper:

A majority of people in most regions believe the number of school districts in the state is on target. The exception is Long Island where half shares this view and one-third thinks there are too many.

On the Plus Side

Most New Yorkers have a good deal of positive things to say about their local government. 85% give their town or city average or above average grades, and 60% have confidence in their local leaders to do what's best for their community. In fact, a majority of residents believe they get good value for the taxes they pay.

Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

85%



You have **confidence** in your local decision-makers to do what's best for the area where you live

60%



The services your local government provides are a good **value** for the taxes you pay

55%



For each of the following, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

***Presents percentage reporting "Strongly agree/agree"**

DF

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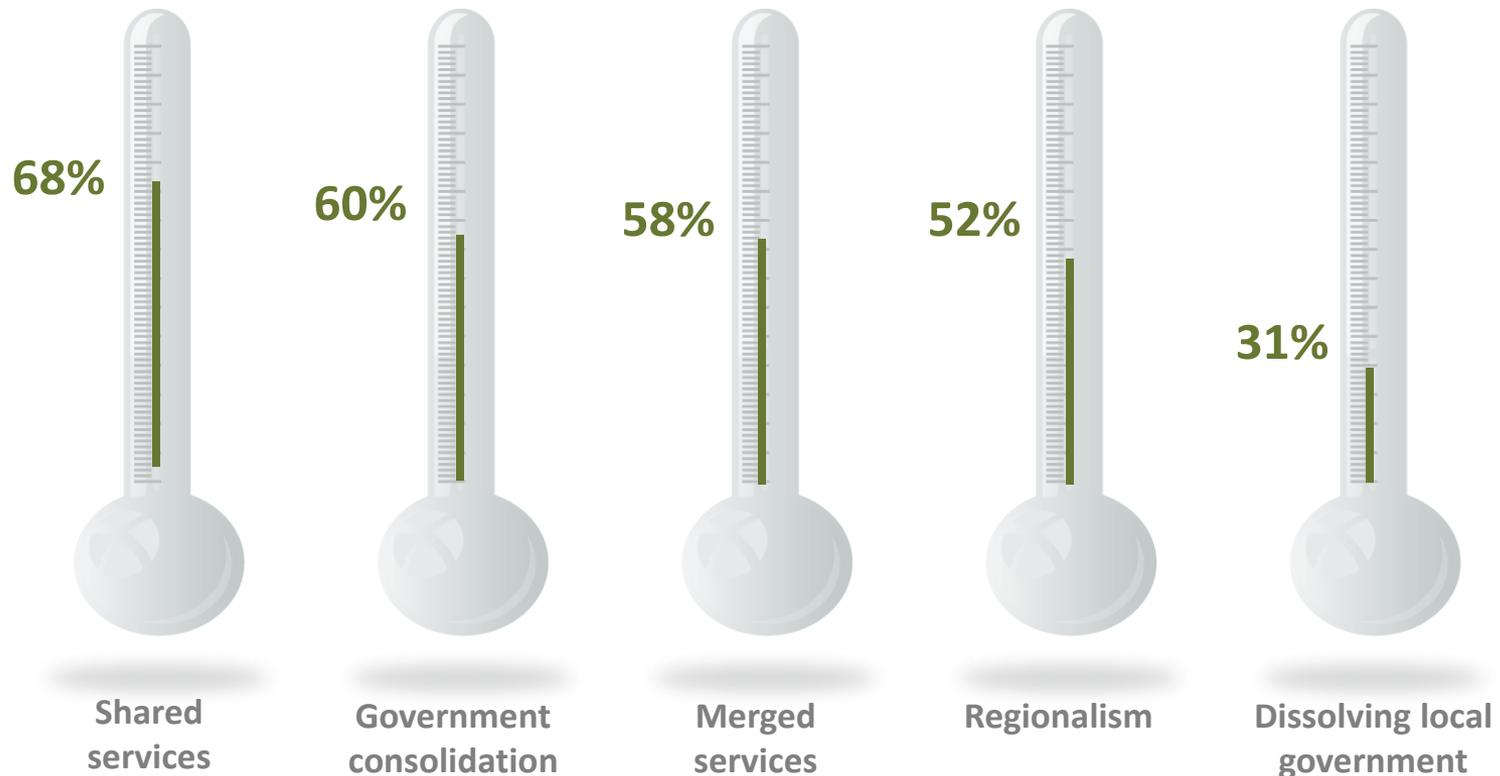
RESTRUCTURE GOVERNMENT? *FIRST IMPRESSIONS*

Positive First Impressions

There are many reasons and many approaches to restructuring government and it seems there are just as many ways to refer to it. Words convey ideas and trigger reactions. The most positive characterization of restructuring government is *shared services*. 68% of state residents have a favorable impression of this description. About six in ten people in the state are open-minded about the phrases *government consolidation* and *merged services*. A majority gives a positive meaning to the word *regionalism*. Most state residents have a negative reaction to the idea of *dissolving local governments*.

For each of the following, please tell me if you give a positive or negative meaning to the word or phrase.

***Presents percentage reporting "Positive"**



Dueling Definitions

There is little consensus when it comes to the definition of government consolidation.

Regardless of where you live, when you think of government consolidation, do you think of towns, cities, and counties:



50%

SHARING the costs of services, but still having many small governments

While half of state residents thinks of government consolidation as sharing the costs of services, a notable proportion associates the term with merging smaller entities to form one larger government.



44%

MERGING to form one larger government



6%

Unsure

Is Consolidation Opportunity or Risk?

While pluralities of New Yorkers expect government consolidation to decrease costs and improve efficiency, about one in five state residents are not optimistic. Approximately one-third do not expect restructuring to make a difference to either the cost or efficiency of their local government.

Do you think consolidation makes local government services **cost** more, cost less, or does it not make a difference?



22%
 Cost more



48%
 Cost less



30%
 Does not make a difference

Do you think consolidation makes local government more **efficient**, less efficient, or does it not make a difference?



45%
 More efficient



18%
 Less efficient



37%
 Does not make a difference

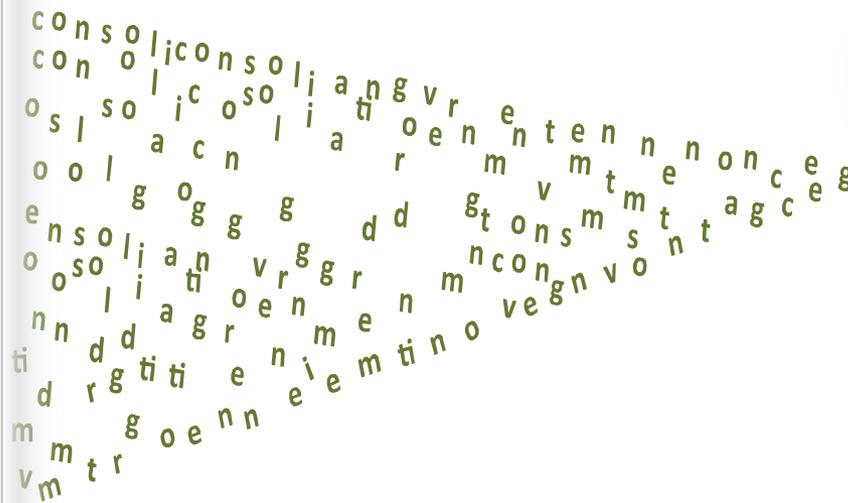
Lack of Awareness

Most New Yorkers have not heard very much about the issue of consolidating local governments in the state.

Only 15% have heard a great deal or a good amount about the issue. 48% of state residents have heard a little about it, and another 38% report they have not heard anything about local government consolidation in New York State.

Have you heard a great deal, a good amount, a little, or nothing at all about consolidating local governments within New York State?

***Presents percentage reporting "A little/nothing at all"**



86%

*Digging Deeper:
The exception is in
Western New York
where 36% have
heard a great deal or
a good amount about
the issue and all but
18% have heard at
least a little.*



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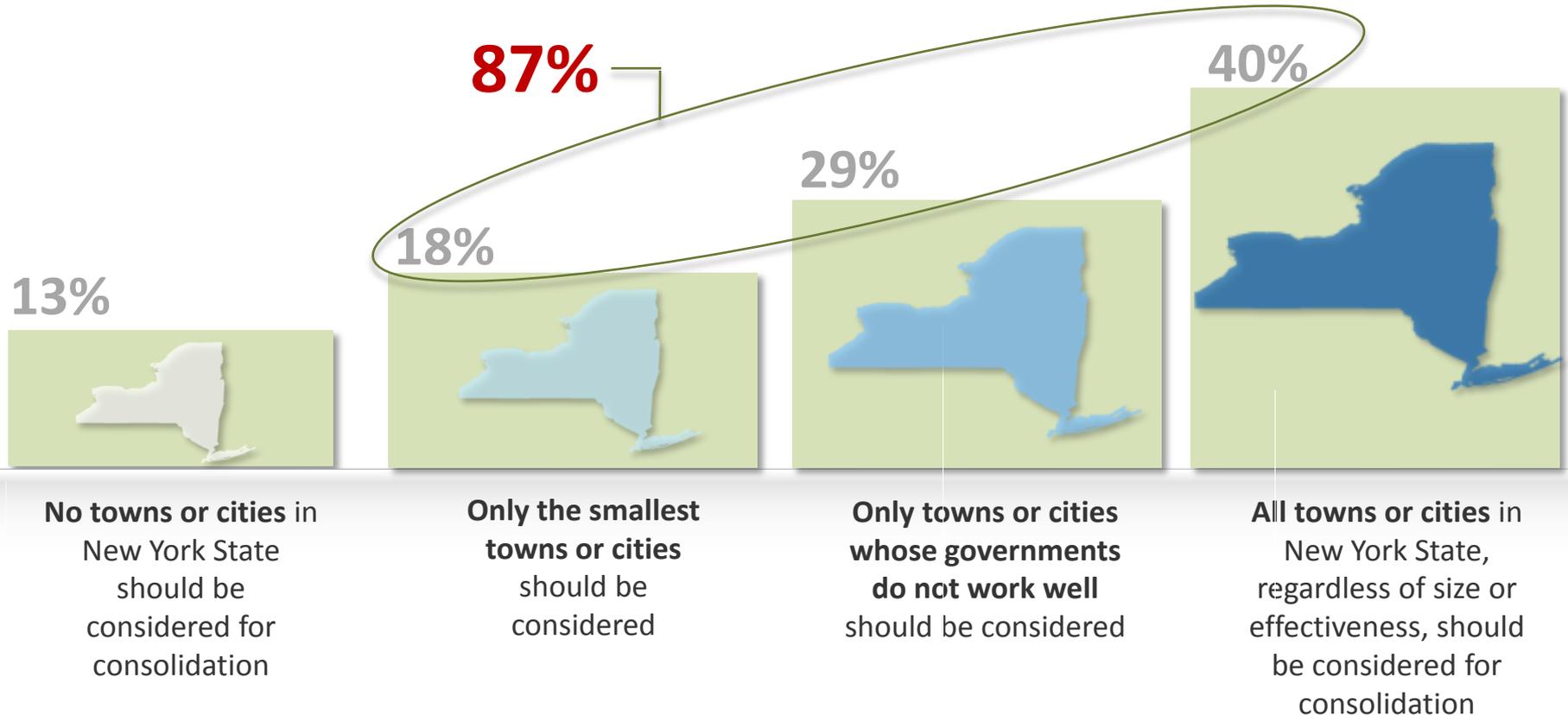


GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION: *WHERE NEW YORKERS STAND*

Considering Consolidation Statewide

People statewide were asked whether or not they think towns or cities across New York State should be considered for consolidation. Only 13% of New Yorkers say no. At the other extreme, 40% of residents feel *all* towns or cities should be considered. However, the plurality, 47%, believe towns and cities should be considered but only under certain circumstances. Specifically, 18% want only the smallest towns or cities to be included, and 29% think only those local governments that are not working well should be part of a plan for consolidation.

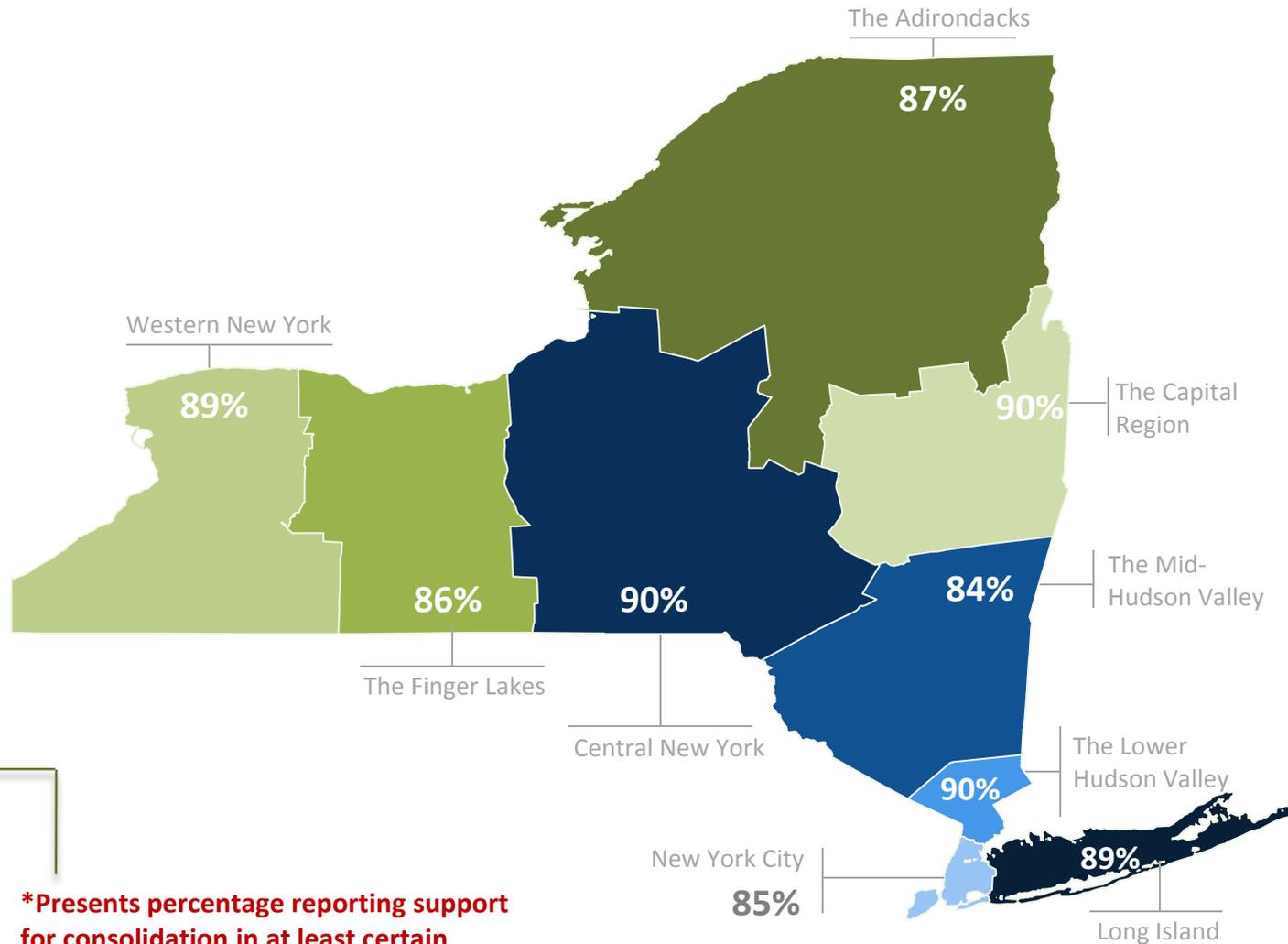
Which one of the following statements comes closest to your view:



Considering Consolidation Statewide (cont'd)

Which one of the following statements comes closest to your view:

1. No towns or cities in New York State should be considered for consolidation
2. Only the smallest towns or cities should be considered
3. Only towns or cities whose governments do not work well should be considered
4. All towns or cities in New York State, regardless of size or effectiveness, should be considered for consolidation



***Presents percentage reporting support for consolidation in at least certain circumstances**

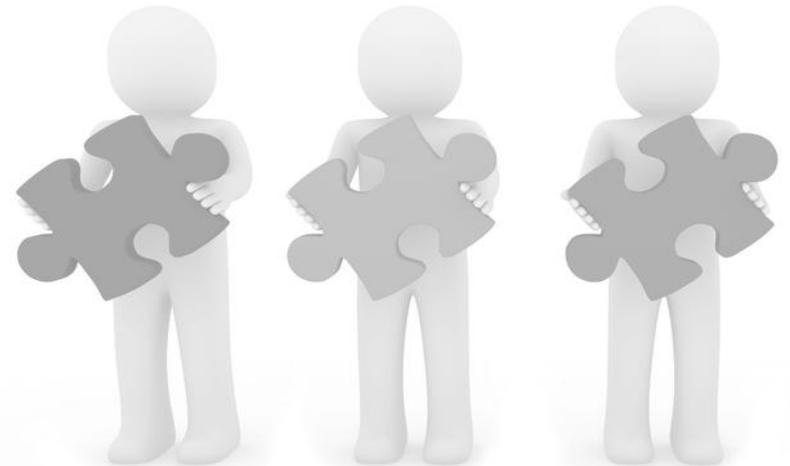
Consolidation for *Own* Local Government

People across New York State, except residents of New York City where many citywide services are already consolidated, were asked specifically about whether or not they favor or oppose their own local government consolidating with another town, city, or county. 54% of adults outside New York City support consolidation for their local government. 43% do not.

Overall, would you be for or against **your** local government consolidating with another town, city, or county?*

For
54%

Against
43%

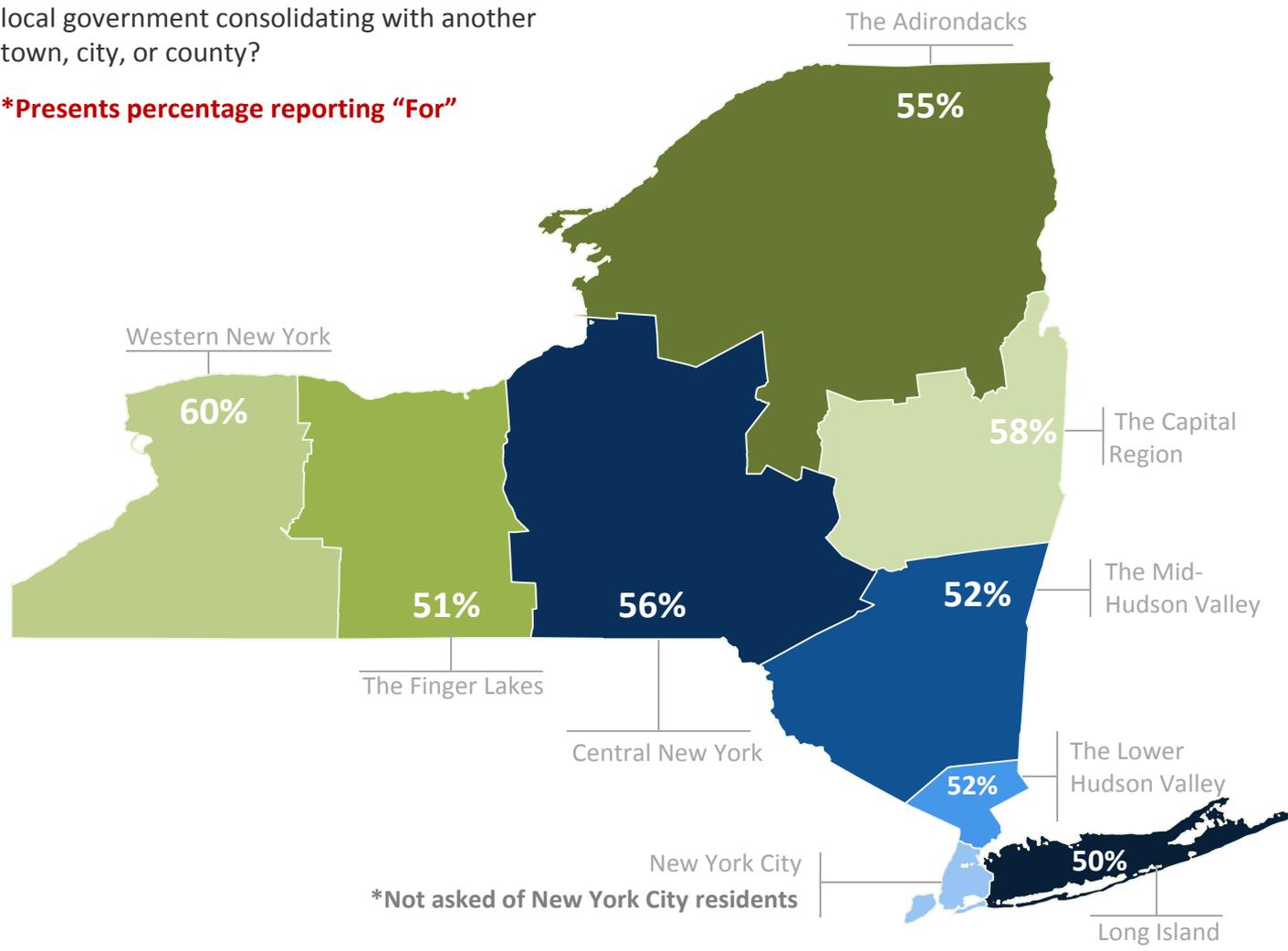


*Question not asked of New York City residents

Support Consolidation for *Own* Local Government

Overall, would you be for or against **your** local government consolidating with another town, city, or county?

***Presents percentage reporting "For"**



Although more residents in each region outside New York City favor consolidation for their local government than oppose it, some areas are more polarized on the issue than others.

Digging Deeper:
 The strongest support for government consolidation is found among people in Western New York and in the Capital Region. Residents of the Finger Lakes and Long Island are more divided.



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GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION: *GETTING SPECIFIC*

Support For Consolidation

Many New York residents favor consolidating several types of public services, and there is majority support for merging others. Public transportation, road and highway maintenance, and park and recreational programs are areas where residents see a value in sharing or merging services with a neighboring town or city. A majority, 57%, agrees there is potential for consolidating prisons. A similar proportion, 56%, also thinks the consolidation of public libraries in their area would be worthwhile.

Public transportation



Road and highway maintenance



Park and recreation programs



Prisons



Public libraries



***Presents percentage reporting “Should consolidate”**

Please tell me if you think your local government should or should not consolidate with a neighboring town or city for each of the following services.

*Question not asked of New York City residents

On the Fence

Residents divide over whether or not their local government should consider consolidating either their police departments or their fire and rescue services. These particular services are both public services which residents value highly.

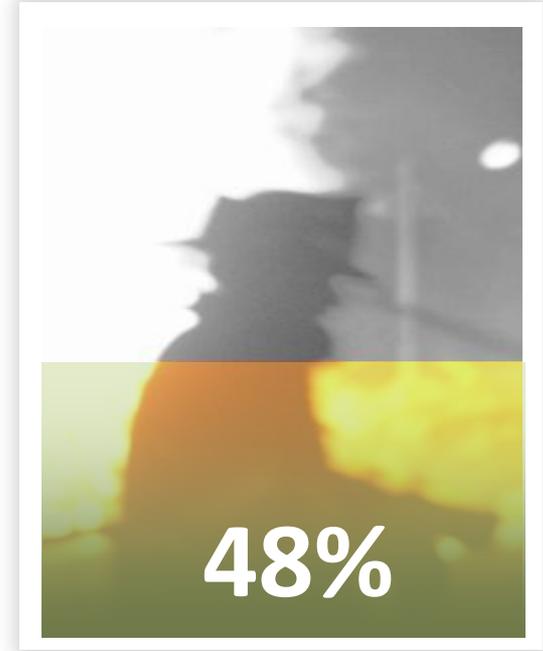
Police



Digging Deeper:

Interestingly, police and fire are among the public services which residents report are the most important services for which they rely on their town.

Fire or rescue services



***Presents percentage reporting “Should consolidate”**

Please tell me if you think your local government should or should not consolidate with a neighboring town or city for each of the following services.

*Question not asked of New York City residents

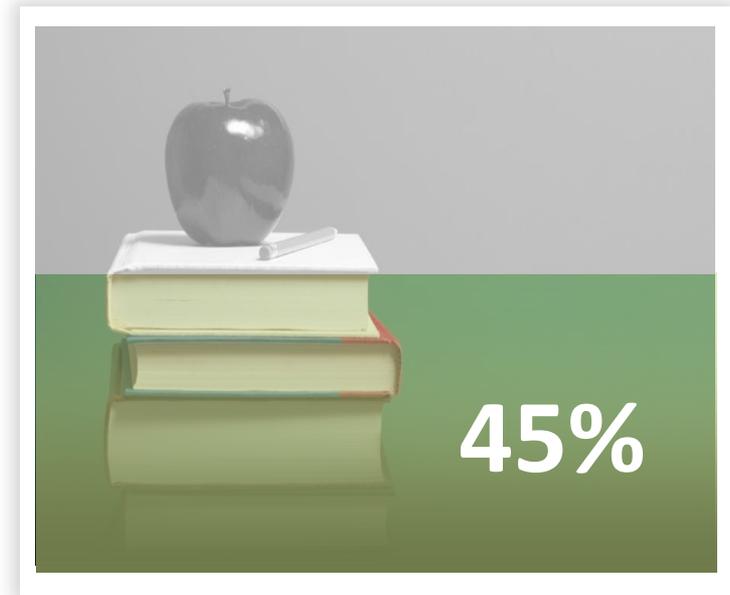
Little Support For Consolidation

Only 45% of residents want their local government to consider consolidating school districts in their area. Majorities in each region of the state, with one exception, oppose their local government taking active steps to merge school districts. 56% of people outside of New York City say the number of school districts in the state is the right number. Only 26% report there are too many.

Public Schools

Digging Deeper:

Only in Western New York does a majority favor the consolidation of schools. Even in this case though, residents closely divide, 51% support consolidation, and 48% oppose it.



***Presents percentage reporting “Should consolidate”**

Please tell me if you think your local government should or should not consolidate with a neighboring town or city for each of the following services.

*Question not asked of New York City residents

Support, But for Some Not a Public Service

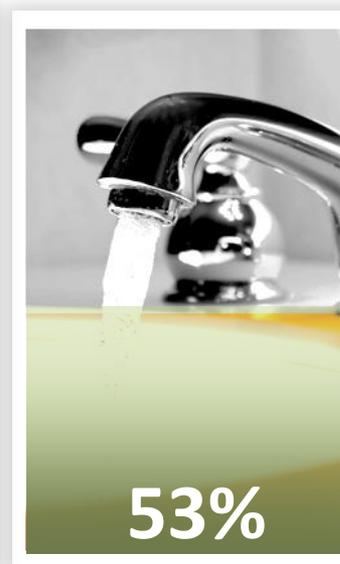
Residents generally do support consolidating services such as recycling, garbage, sewage, and drinking water. Notable proportions of New Yorkers outside of New York City rely on or pay for these services privately. 22% of residents beyond the borders of New York City have private services for recycling, and 28% use private means for garbage removal. 20% rely on wells, and 26% have a septic system.

Recycling

Garbage removal

Sewage services

Drinking water



*Digging Deeper:
 More than four in ten residents in the Mid-Hudson Valley, the Adirondacks, and the Finger Lakes regions use private sources for garbage removal. Nearly half of residents in the Mid-Hudson Valley rely on private means for drinking water and sewage.*

***Presents percentage reporting “Should consolidate”**

Please tell me if you think your local government should or should not consolidate with a neighboring town or city for each of the following services.

*Question not asked of New York City residents



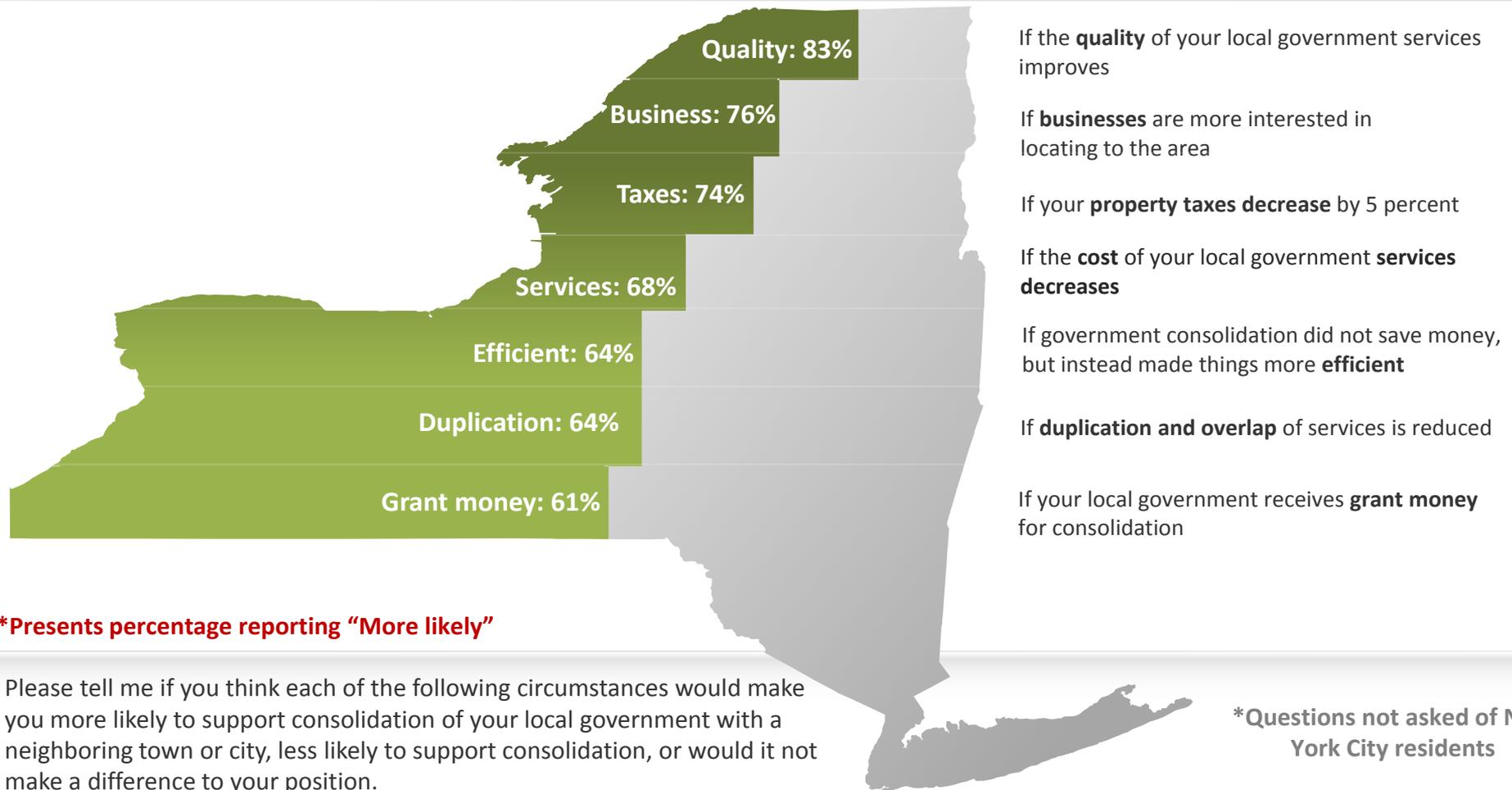
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GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION: *A BALANCING ACT*

Reasons for Support

Quality, money, and efficiency matter to New Yorkers. Residents are more likely to support consolidation if the quality of their local services improves; if it means their community will become more attractive to business; or if their property taxes are cut. Consolidation is also viewed favorably if the cost of services decreases; if it promotes efficiency; if it reduces duplication of services; or if their community receives grant money.



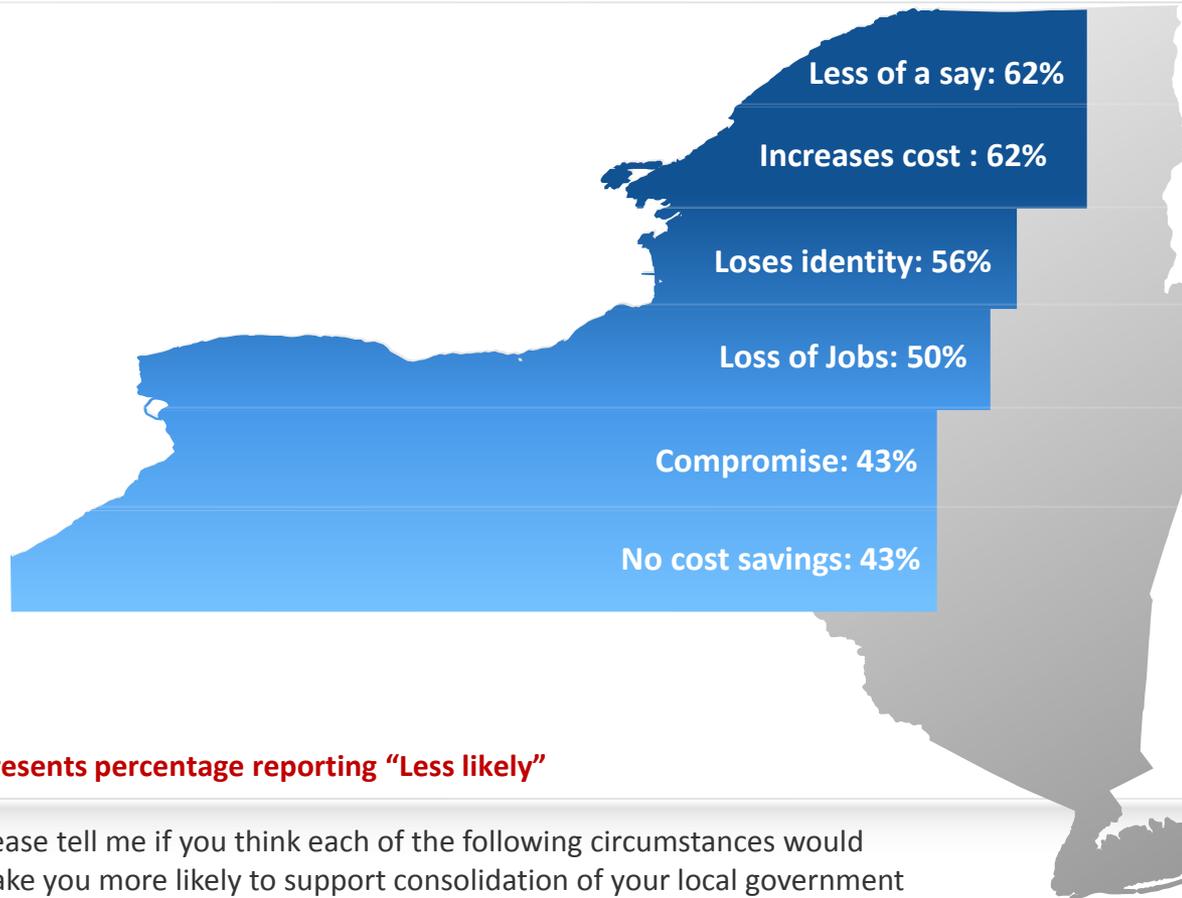
***Presents percentage reporting "More likely"**

Please tell me if you think each of the following circumstances would make you more likely to support consolidation of your local government with a neighboring town or city, less likely to support consolidation, or would it not make a difference to your position.

***Questions not asked of New York City residents**

Reasons to Oppose

Input and maintaining a sense of community are also at the heart of the issue. Residents are more likely to oppose consolidation if they have less of a say in what happens locally; if costs for their community increase; or if their community loses its sense of identity. There is also a concern about consolidation if people think it will lead to job losses.



If you would have **less of a say** in what happens in your local government

If it increases the cost for your community, but **lowers the cost for most** other communities

If government consolidation means your community loses its own **identity**

If people who work in local government **lose their jobs**

If your local government cannot make its own decisions, but has to **compromise** with neighboring towns or cities

If there are **no cost savings** for you

***Presents percentage reporting “Less likely”**

Please tell me if you think each of the following circumstances would make you more likely to support consolidation of your local government with a neighboring town or city, less likely to support consolidation, or would it not make a difference to your position.

***Questions not asked of New York City residents**



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GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION: *PROFILING THE POSITIONS*

Understanding the Spectrum of Opinion

Two aspects of opinion on the issue of consolidation are examined here. One aspect is the support or opposition for government consolidation for one's *own* local government. The second is the support or opposition to considering consolidation for towns and cities throughout the state.

What emerges from the comparison of these two aspects of opinion on the issue is revealing. A majority of those who favor consolidation for their own local government also support consolidation for all towns and cities in the state, 54%, and another 41% think it should be considered only under certain circumstances. Four percent think consolidation should not be considered throughout the state but despite supporting it for their own local government.

Yet, people who do not support consolidation for their own town or city do not mind considering consolidation for other localities in the state. 20% think all towns should be considered for consolidation. The majority, 58%, believes consideration for consolidation should be given to towns and cities under certain circumstances. Only 21% of opponents to consolidation in their own area think it should not be considered for any local governments in the state.



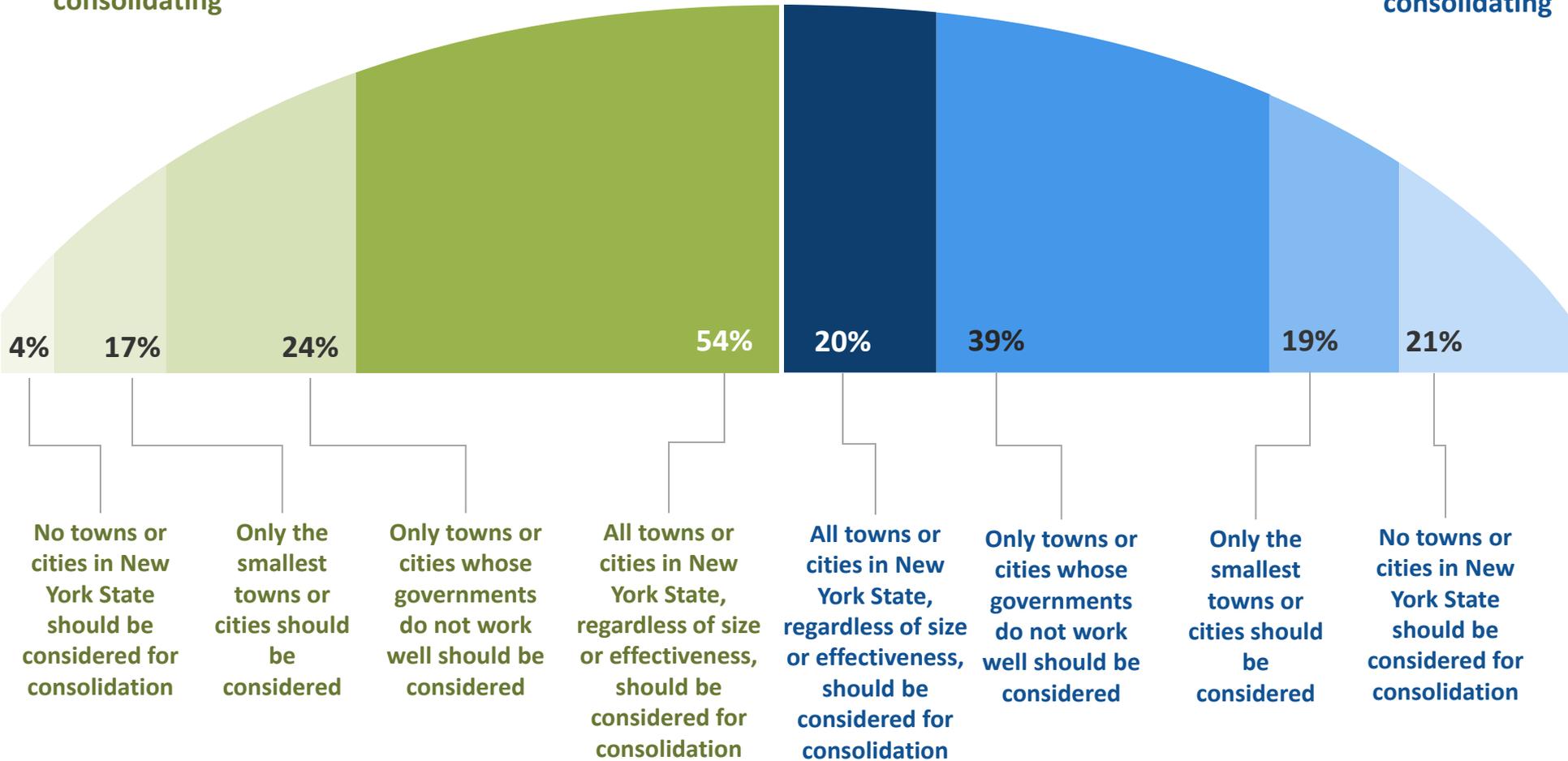
***Note: The For and Against positions represent New York State residents excluding New York City.**

Understanding the Spectrum of Opinion (cont'd)

Which one of the following statements comes closest to your view:

People who are “For” their local government consolidating

People who are “Against” their local government consolidating

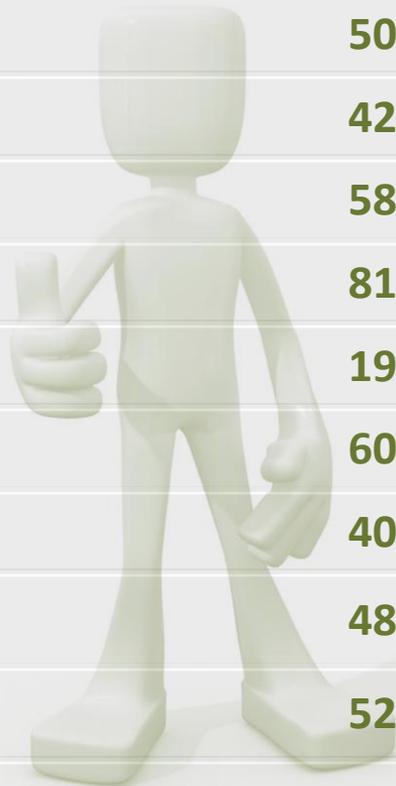


Profile: Demography Is Not a Predictor

People who are “For” government consolidation

Digging Deeper: People who favor government consolidation do not differ in gender, age, race, or education in any meaningful way from people who are against the issue. People who oppose consolidation are somewhat more likely to have an annual income under \$50,000. People who support consolidation are somewhat more likely to be employed full-time.

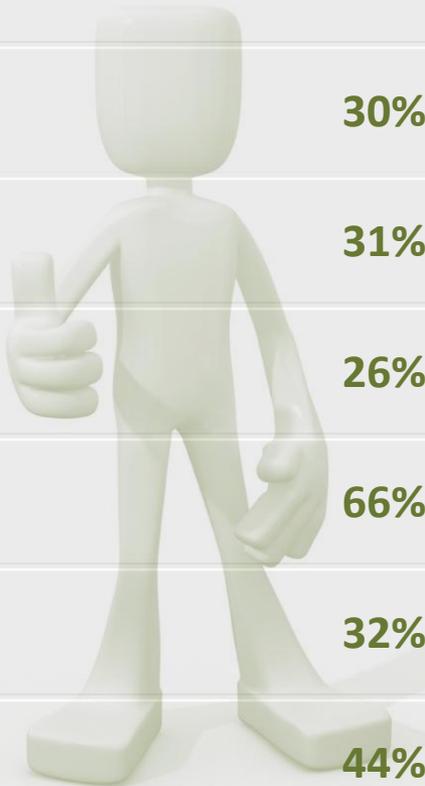
People who are “Against” government consolidation



| | | |
|------------|--|------------|
| 50% | Gender: Men | 46% |
| 50% | Gender: Women | 54% |
| 42% | Age: Under 45 | 45% |
| 58% | Age: 45 or older | 55% |
| 81% | Race: White | 84% |
| 19% | Race: Non White | 16% |
| 60% | Education: Not college graduate | 61% |
| 40% | Education: College graduate | 39% |
| 48% | Income: Less than 50K | 55% |
| 52% | Income: 50K or more | 44% |
| 52% | Employment: Employed full time/Self-employed | 46% |
| 47% | Employment: Employed less than full time or not employed | 54% |

Profile: There is Little Political Polarization

People who are “For” government consolidation



Digging Deeper: People who are for government consolidation are no different in their party registration from people who are against the issue. In fact, proponents of consolidation are just as likely as opponents to be Tea Party supporters. There is little ideological divide, as well.

People who are “Against” government consolidation



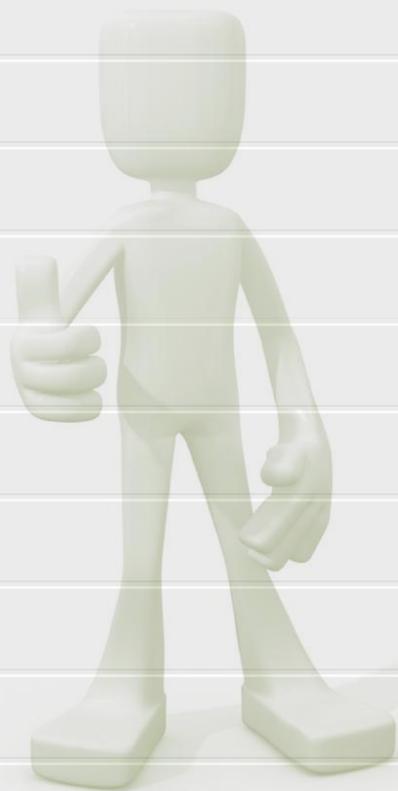
| | | |
|------------|--|------------|
| 37% | Party registration: Democrat | 35% |
| 30% | Party registration: Republican | 33% |
| 31% | Party registration: Non-enrolled | 29% |
| 26% | Tea Party: Supporter | 27% |
| 66% | Tea Party: Not a Supporter | 65% |
| 32% | Political ideology: Very conservative/Conservative | 35% |
| 44% | Political ideology: Moderate | 38% |
| 24% | Political ideology: Very liberal/Liberal | 27% |

Profile: Home or Hamlet Makes Little Difference

People who are “For” government consolidation

Digging Deeper: People who support government consolidation are no different in how they describe the place where they live or in how long they have lived there than people who oppose the issue.

People who are “Against” government consolidation



| | | |
|------------|---|------------|
| 8% | Area: Big city | 7% |
| 16% | Area: Small city | 14% |
| 29% | Area: Suburban | 33% |
| 33% | Area: Small town | 33% |
| 14% | Area: Rural | 13% |
| 24% | Locality: City | 22% |
| 51% | Locality: Town | 52% |
| 25% | Locality: Village/Hamlet/Other | 26% |
| 74% | Homeownership: Homeowner | 72% |
| 26% | Homeownership: Renter | 28% |
| 31% | Length of residence: 10 years or less | 32% |
| 69% | Length of residence: More than 10 years | 69% |

Profile: What Makes a Difference?

Attitude Matters

Proponents of government consolidation are more likely to believe there are too many local governments in New York State than are opponents. 65% of people who favor consolidation think there are too many local government entities.

In contrast, the majority of people who are against consolidation, 52%, feel the number of local governments in the state is on track.

Although proponents and opponents are both confident in their local leaders, those who are against government consolidation are more likely than supporters to be so.

Is it Worth It?

Most supporters of government consolidation believe it will result in reduced costs for local government services, 67%, and increased efficiency, 65%.

Most opponents do not share this view. Only 33% of people who are against government consolidation think it will reduce costs and just 26% think it will improve efficiency.

But, the views of opponents do not coalesce around the disadvantages of government consolidation. Rather, they divide between thinking consolidation will cost more or be less efficient and not being sure what the results of consolidation will be.

Profile: Attitude Matters

People who are “For”
 government consolidation

People who are “Against”
 government consolidation

65%

Believes there are **too many** local governments in New York State

40%

29%

Believes there are the **right number** of local governments in New York State

52%

6%

Believes there are the **too few** local governments in New York State

7%

85%

Gives an overall grade of **A, B, or C** to their local government

90%

14%

Gives an overall grade of **D or F** to their local government

10%

63%

Strongly agrees or agrees that they have **confidence** in their town’s decision-makers to do what’s best for their area

71%

37%

Strongly disagrees or disagrees that they have **confidence** in their town’s decision-makers to do what’s best for their area

29%

58%

Strongly agrees or agrees that the services in their town are a **good value** for the taxes paid

65%

43%

Strongly disagrees or disagrees that the services in their town are a **good value** for the taxes paid

34%



Profile: Is it Worth It?

| People who are “For” government consolidation | | People who are “Against” government consolidation |
|---|--|---|
| 52% | Thinks government consolidation means sharing the cost of services, but still having many small governments | 54% |
| 45% | Thinks government consolidation means merging to form one larger government | 41% |
| 11% | Believes consolidation makes local government services cost more | 32% |
| 67% | Believes consolidation makes local government services cost less | 33% |
| 65% | Believes consolidation makes local government more efficient | 26% |
| 7% | Believes consolidation makes local government less efficient | 38% |
| 22% | Has heard a great deal or good amount about consolidating local governments within NYS | 18% |
| 79% | Has heard a little or nothing at all about consolidating local governments within NYS | 82% |

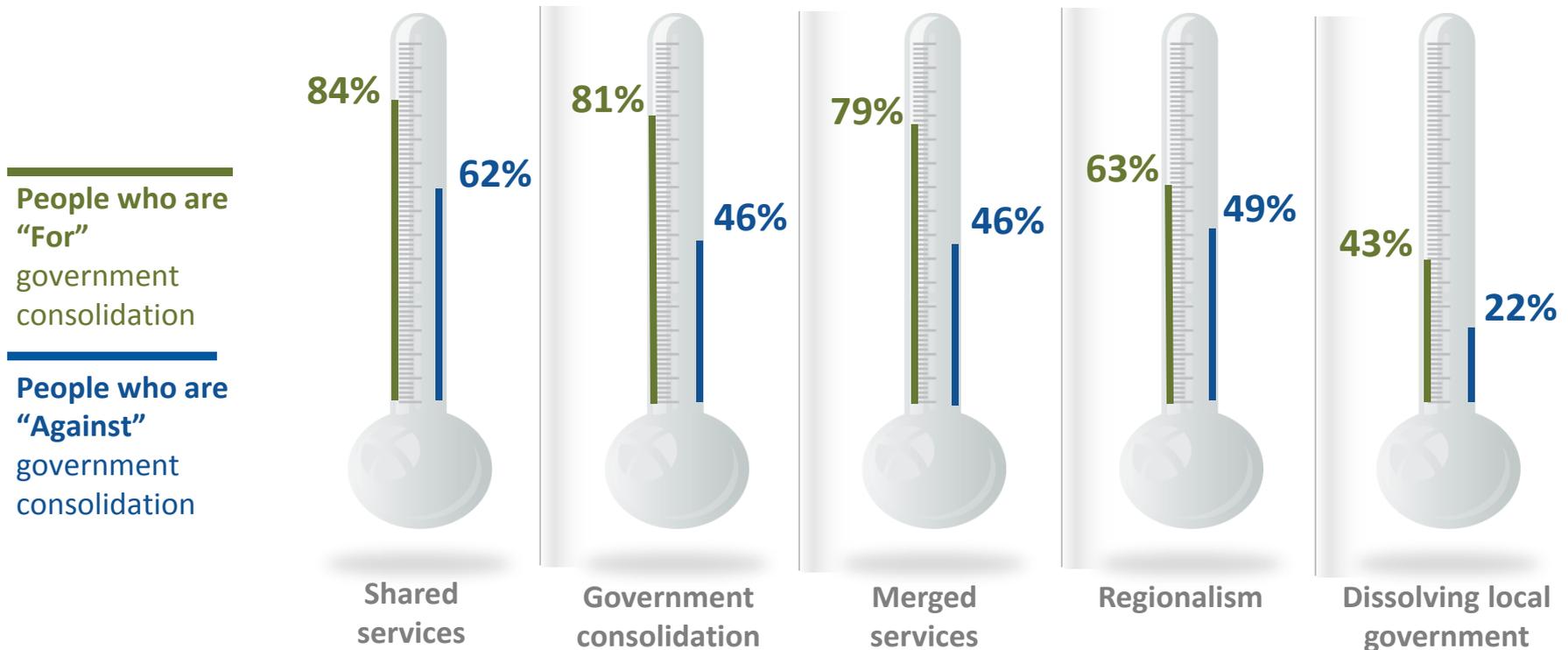


Profile: Positive First Impressions

Words makes a difference. In fact, even those who are against government consolidation associate a positive meaning to the term *shared services*. Notable proportions of people who oppose consolidation for their local government have a positive impression of the terms *government consolidation*, *merged services*, and *regionalism*. Proponents and opponents alike describe the idea of *dissolving local government* negatively.

For each of the following, please tell me if you give a positive or negative meaning to the word or phrase.

***Presents percentage reporting "Positive"**



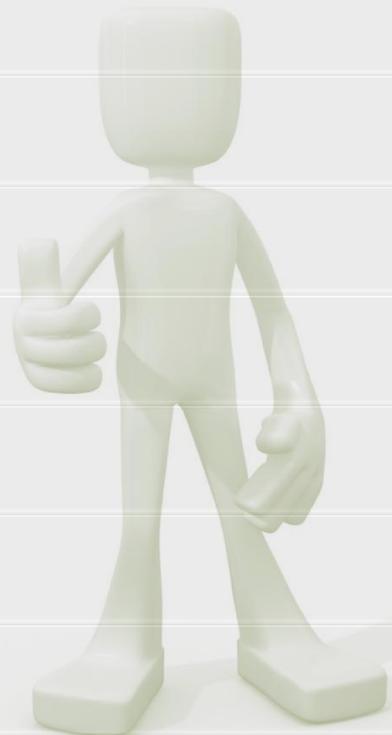
Profile: Reasons for Support

Most proponents and opponents of government consolidation are more likely to consider consolidation for their local government if such a change results in an improvement in the quality of public services, if it attracts businesses to the community, or if it lowers property taxes. Other positives for residents on both sides of the argument include lower costs for public services, less overlap of services, grant money, and improved efficiency.

People who are “For” government consolidation

*Presents percentage reporting “More likely”

People who are “Against” government consolidation



88%

If the **quality** of your local government services improves

76%

84%

If **businesses** are more interested in locating to the area

66%

81%

If your **property taxes decrease** by 5 percent

64%

76%

If the **cost** of your local government **services** decreases

58%

72%

If **duplication and overlap** of services is reduced

54%

72%

If your local government receives **grant money** for consolidation

48%

69%

If government consolidation did not save money, but instead made things more **efficient**

57%



Please tell me if you think each of the following circumstances would make you more likely to support consolidation of your local government with a neighboring town or city, less likely to support consolidation, or would it not make a difference to your position.

Profile: Reasons to Oppose

If government consolidation results in no cost savings for the community or less access for residents in the local decision-making process, even a majority of people who favor consolidation for their local government are less likely to support such a move. Opponents overwhelmingly agree. In fact, most people who are against government consolidation are also concerned about their community’s loss of identity.

**People who are “For”
government consolidation**

***Presents percentage reporting “Less likely”**

**People who are “Against”
government consolidation**

58%

If it increases the cost for your community but **lowers the cost for most** other communities

68%

54%

If you would have **less of a say** in what happens in your local government

71%

44%

If people who work in your local government **lose their jobs**

58%

44%

If government consolidation means your community loses its own **identity**

71%

37%

If there are **no cost savings** for you

50%

31%

If your local government cannot make its own decisions but has to **compromise** with neighboring towns or cities

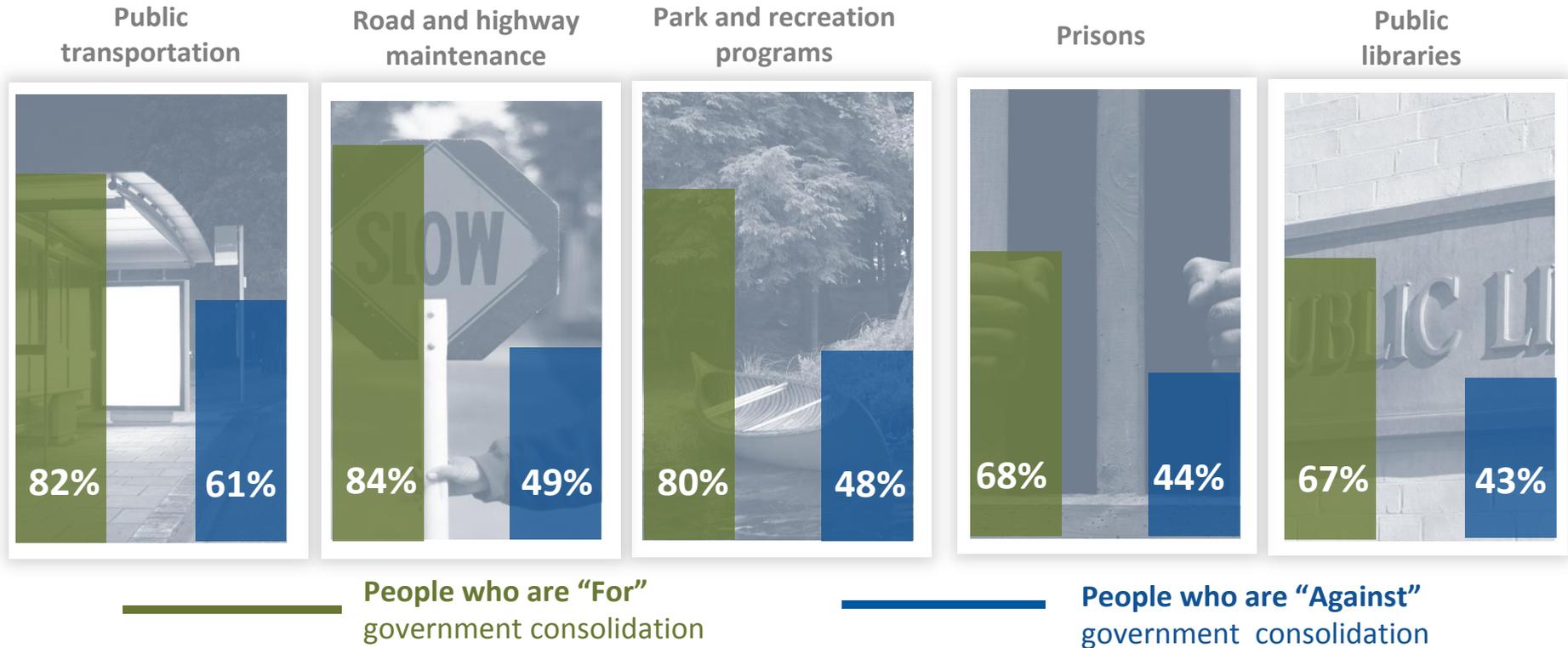
58%



Please tell me if you think each of the following circumstances would make you more likely to support consolidation of your local government with a neighboring town or city, less likely to support consolidation, or would it not make a difference to your position.

Profile: Services Supported for Consolidation

There is the most consensus for the consolidation of public transportation. Even 61% of people who oppose consolidation for their community are not against doing so for this service. In addition, nearly half of government consolidation opponents support the merging or sharing of road and highway maintenance or park and recreation programs. There is even notable support for the consolidation of prisons or public libraries among people who are against consolidating their local government.



Please tell me if you think your local government should or should not consolidate with a neighboring town or city for each of the following services.

***Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"**

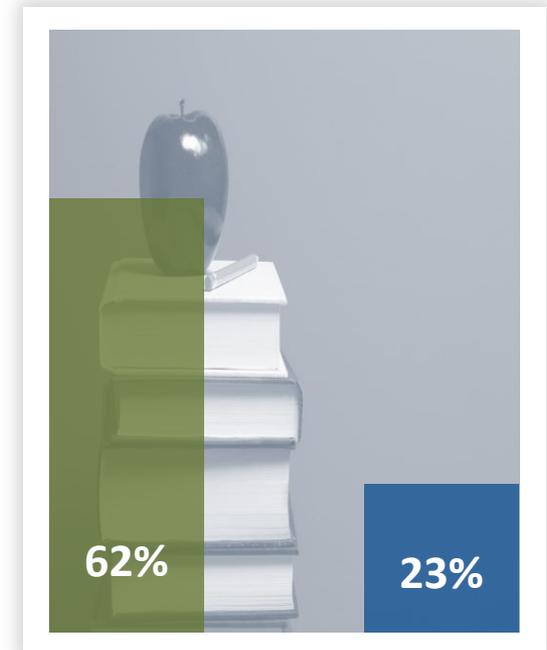
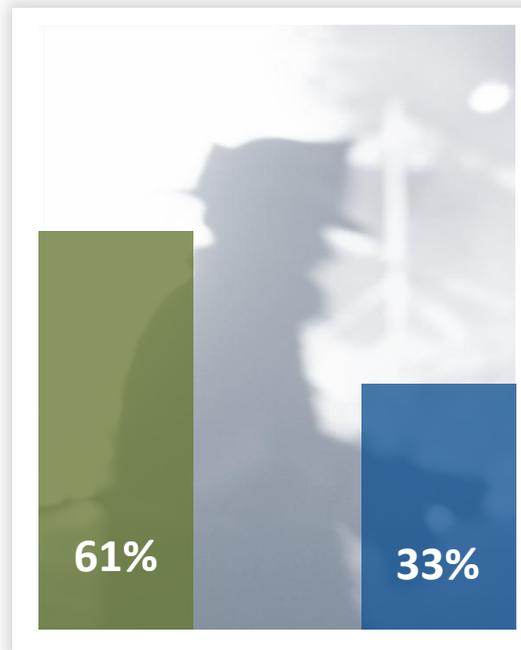
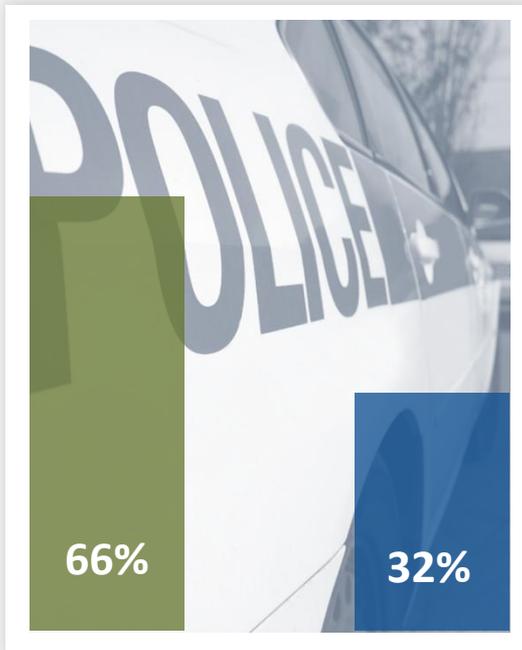
Profile: Services that Polarize

Many residents who support consolidation for their local government favor consolidating police, 66%, or fire services, 61%. Although notable, only about one-third of people who are against consolidating their own town or city agree these are public services that should be considered for consolidation. There is even less support among opponents of local government consolidation for merging local school districts in their area.

Police

Fire or rescue services

Public Schools



People who are "For" government consolidation

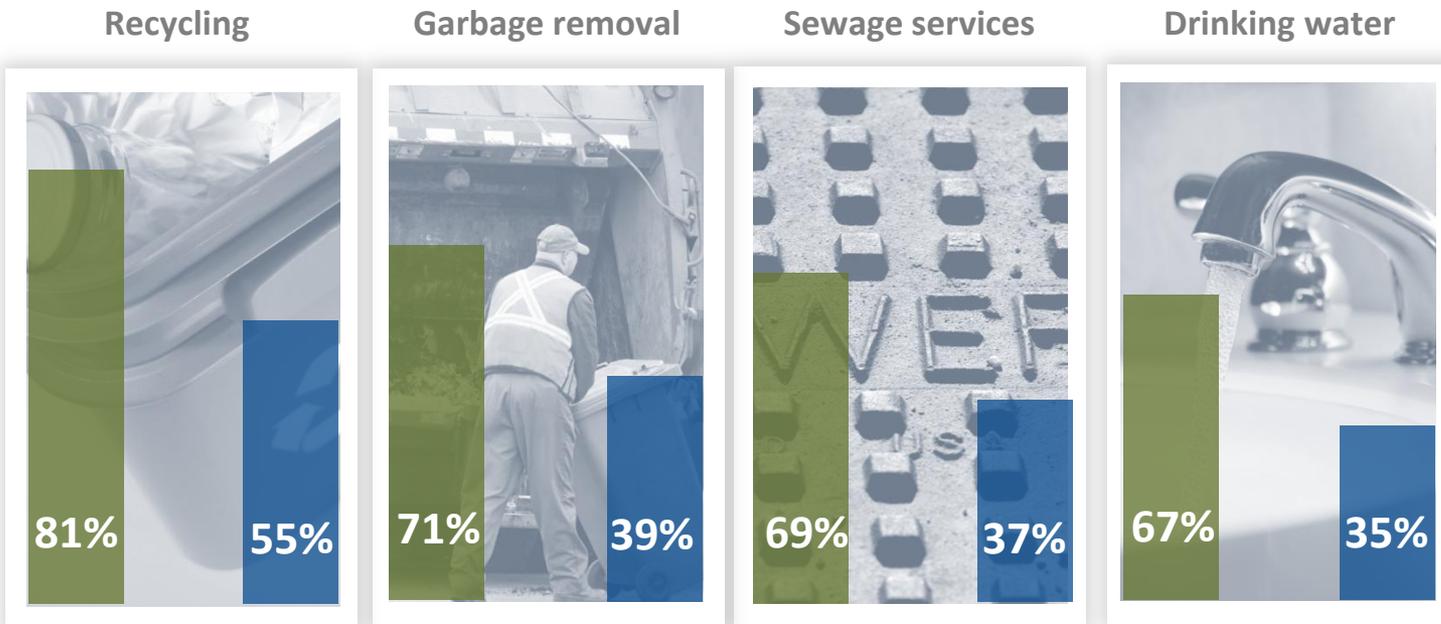
People who are "Against" government consolidation

Please tell me if you think your local government should or should not consolidate with a neighboring town or city for each of the following services.

***Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"**

Profile: Services with Support, But Now Private

Most proponents of government consolidation and a majority of opponents agree recycling services in their community should be consolidated. Most people who favor consolidation also think services for garbage removal, sewage, and drinking water should be restructured. Although notable, only about one-third of residents who are against consolidation share this view.



*Digging Deeper:
 Similar proportions
 of both proponents
 and opponents of
 local government
 consolidation rely on
 private delivery of
 each of these
 services.*

People who are "For"
 government consolidation

People who are "Against"
 government consolidation

Please tell me if you think your local government should or should not consolidate with a neighboring town or city for each of the following services.

***Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"**



DYSON FOUNDATION



**LIVING WITH CONSOLIDATION:
*NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS RATE
THEIR SERVICES***

Do New York City Services Make the Grade?

Residents of New York City, which is mostly consolidated, rate many of their public services positively. Notable exceptions include public schools, and road and highway maintenance.

Please tell me if you would rate this service in your community as excellent, good, fair, or poor.

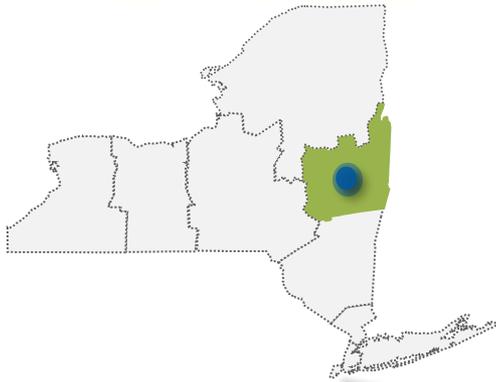
***Presents percentage reporting "Excellent/good"**



*Question only asked of New York City residents

KEY REGIONAL FINDINGS

The Capital Region



For consolidation

58%



Against consolidation

39%



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

84% **A B C**

Digging Deeper:

Many residents in the Capital Region, 62%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. The same proportion also sees the services provided as a good value for taxes paid.

A majority of Capital Region residents, **56%**, believe there are **too many local governments** in New York State.



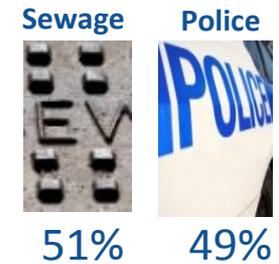
55% say the state is headed in the wrong direction.

Residents divide when it comes to defining government consolidation. **49%** say **merging**, while **48%** say it is **sharing**.

Support Consolidation*



On the Fence*

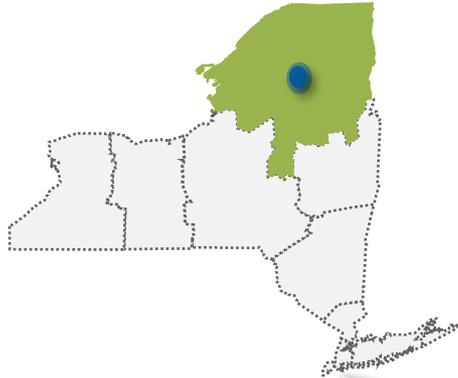


Oppose*



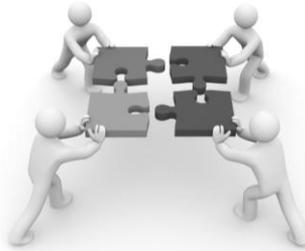
*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

The Adirondacks



For consolidation

55%



Against consolidation

44%



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

87%

A B C

Digging Deeper:

Many residents in the Adirondacks, 68%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. 62%, also think the services provided are a good value for the taxes paid.

Adirondacks residents are torn when characterizing the number of local governments. **47%**, believe there are **too many**; **45%** say it's the **right number**.



61% say the state is headed in the wrong direction.

A majority of residents define government consolidation as **sharing, 56%**. Fewer, **39%**, say it is **merging**.

Support Consolidation*



On the Fence*

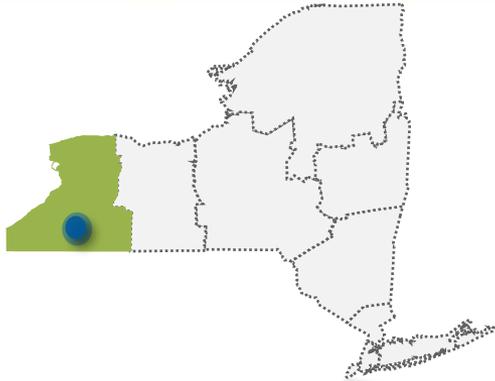


Oppose*



*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

Western New York



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

84% **A B C**

Digging Deeper:

Many residents in Western New York, 66%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. 61% see the services provided as a good value for the taxes they pay.

For consolidation

60%



Against consolidation

37%



68% say the state is headed in the wrong direction.

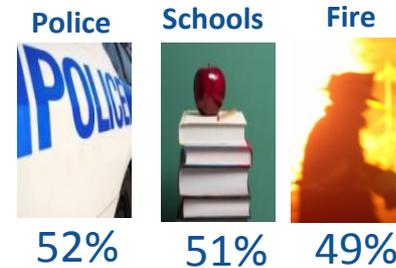
About two-thirds of Western New York residents, **66%**, believe there are **too many local governments** in New York State.

Residents divide when it comes to defining government consolidation. **48%** say **merging**, while **50%** think **sharing**.

Support Consolidation*



On the Fence*

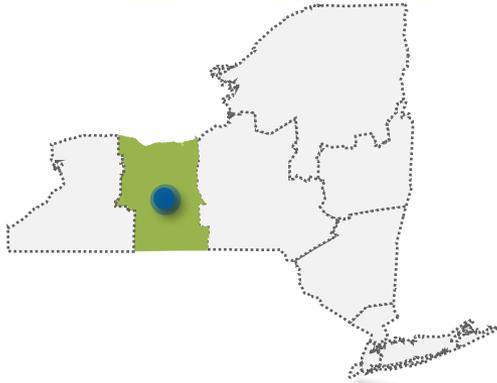


Oppose*

NONE

*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

The Finger Lakes



For consolidation

51%

Against consolidation

46%



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

89%

A B C

Digging Deeper:

Many residents in the Finger Lakes, 71%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. A similar proportion, 69%, see the services provided as a good value for taxes paid.

A plurality of Finger Lakes residents, **49%**, believe there are **too many local governments** in New York State.



56% say the state is headed in the wrong direction.

A majority of residents define government consolidation as **sharing, 51%**. Slightly fewer, **44%**, say it is **merging**.

Support Consolidation*

| Trans- portation | Roads | Recycling | Parks | Sewage | Libraries | Garbage | Water |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 72% | 70% | 66% | 64% | 62% | 59% | 58% | 58% |

On the Fence*

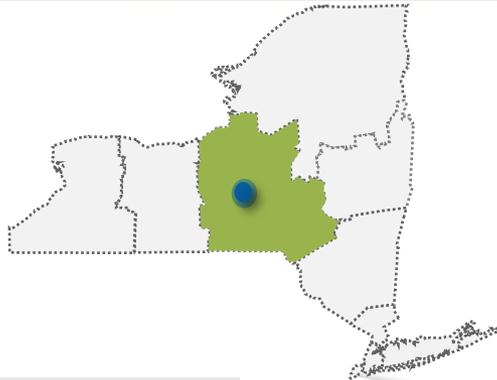
| Prisons | Fire | Police |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| 54% | 48% | 47% |

Oppose*

| Schools |
|---|
|  |
| 38% |

*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

Central New York



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

87% **A B C**

Digging Deeper:

Many residents in Central New York, 63%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. A similar proportion, 61%, also see the services provided as a good value for taxes paid.

For consolidation

56%



Against consolidation

41%



A majority of Central New York residents, **52%**, believe there are **too many local governments** in New York State.



58% say the state is headed in the wrong direction.

Residents divide when it comes to defining government consolidation. **46%** say **merging**, while **49%** define it as **sharing**.

Support Consolidation*

Recycling



68%

Transportation



67%

Roads



66%

Parks



66%

Garbage



59%

Libraries



59%

On the Fence*

Police



53%

Prisons



52%

Fire



51%

Sewage



51%

Water



47%

Oppose*

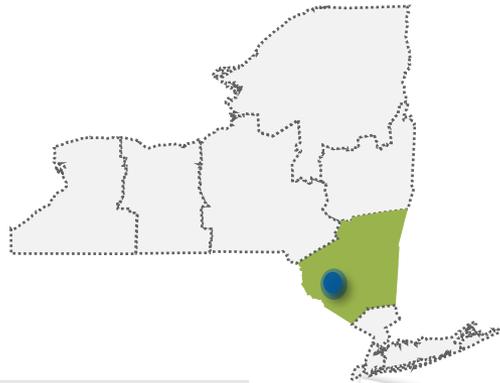
Schools



42%

*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

The Mid-Hudson Valley



For consolidation

52%



Against consolidation

42%



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

87% **A B C**

Digging Deeper:

Many residents in the Mid-Hudson Valley, 65%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. Slightly fewer, 55%, see the services provided as a good value for taxes paid.

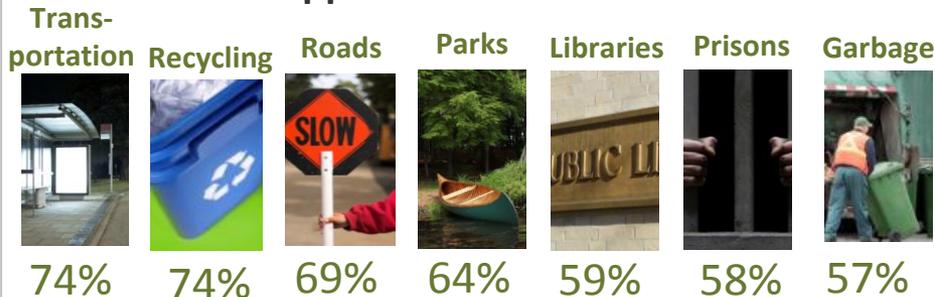
Mid-Hudson Valley residents are torn when characterizing the number of local governments. **44%**, believe there are **too many**; **46%** say it's the **right number**.



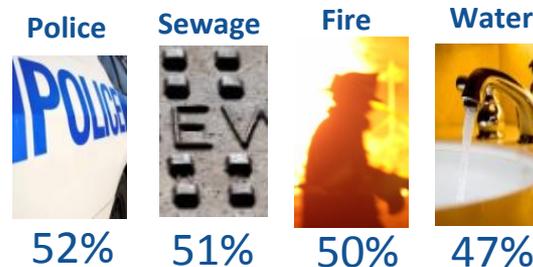
57% say the state is headed in the wrong direction.

A majority of residents define government consolidation as **sharing, 55%**. Slightly fewer, **37%**, say it is **merging**.

Support Consolidation*



On the Fence*

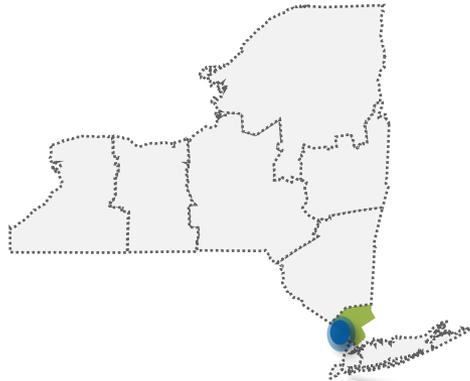


Oppose*



*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

The Lower Hudson Valley



For consolidation

52%



Against consolidation

42%



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

88%

A B C

Digging Deeper:

Many residents in the Lower Hudson Valley, 67%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. 59%, see the services provided as a good value for the taxes they pay.

A majority of Lower Hudson Valley residents, **55%**, believe there are **too many local governments** in New York State.



51% say the state is headed in the wrong direction.

A majority of residents define government consolidation as **sharing, 57%**. Fewer, **38%**, say it is **merging**.

Support Consolidation*



On the Fence*

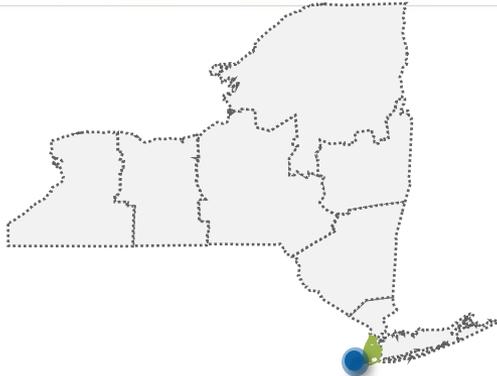


Oppose*



*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

New York City



Many of New York City's services are already consolidated. However, 85% do support consolidation of local governments throughout the state at least under certain circumstances.

Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

81% **A B C**

Digging Deeper:

Half of residents in New York City, 50%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. Fewer than half, 47%, see the services provided as a good value for the taxes they pay.

A majority, **54%**, of New York City residents say there are the **right number of local governments** in the state. **32%** say there are **too many**.



Residents divide when it comes to defining government consolidation. **45%** say **merging**, while **46%** think **sharing**.

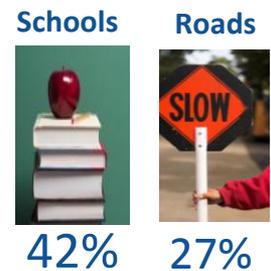
High Ratings for Services*



Moderate Ratings*

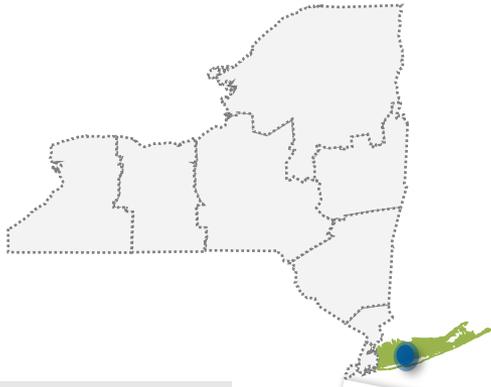


Low Ratings*



*Presents percentage reporting "Excellent/good"

Long Island



For consolidation

50%



Against consolidation

47%



Overall, what **grade** would you give your local government?

90% **A B C**

Digging Deeper:

Many residents on Long Island, 69%, are confident their local decision-makers do what's best for their area. 60%, see the services provided as a good value for the taxes they pay.

A majority of Long Island residents, **54%**, believe there are **too many local governments** in New York State.



A majority of residents define government consolidation as **sharing, 55%**. Fewer, **40%**, say it is **merging**.

Support Consolidation*

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-------|-------|---------|--------|
| Trans- portation | Recycling | Roads | Parks | Prisons | Sewage |
| | | | | | |
| 70% | 69% | 65% | 63% | 57% | 55% |

On the Fence*

| | | |
|---------|--------|-------|
| Garbage | Police | Water |
| | | |
| 54% | 53% | 53% |

Oppose*

| | | |
|---------|-----------|------|
| Schools | Libraries | Fire |
| | | |
| 46% | 44% | 44% |

*Presents percentage reporting "Should consolidate"

STUDY METHODOLOGY

How the Study Was Conducted

- This study was funded by The Dyson Foundation and conducted by the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York.
- This report presents the findings from a telephone survey of 4,520 New York State adult residents.
- It includes approximately 500 adult residents from each of nine regions in the state. The counties included in each region are detailed in the introduction of this report.
- Statewide results have a margin of error within +/- 1.5 percentage points; Results for residents outside New York City have a margin of error within +/- 2.0 percentage points; Regional findings have a margin of error within +/- 4.5 percentage points.
- Data were collected from February 7, 2011 through March 3, 2011. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.
- To increase coverage, the land-line sample was supplemented by respondents reached through random dialing of cell phone numbers.
- Analysis of sub-groups is included when noteworthy and/or statistically different. Sampling error increases for results for these sub-groups.

Contact Info



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The Dyson Foundation is a private, family-directed grantmaking foundation established in 1957 and headquartered in Dutchess County, New York. The Foundation's activities include a significant grants program in the Mid-Hudson Valley that seeks to improve the quality of life in the region, create opportunities and support for economically disadvantaged individuals and families, and strengthen the nonprofit sector. The Dyson Foundation's assets presently stand at approximately \$270 million and in the year 2010 it awarded grants in excess of \$17.5 million.



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