



**LONG ISLAND IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GREAT RECESSION:  
SOME OPTIMISM, BUT MANY STILL WANT TO LEAVE**

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**Report Prepared by  
Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research**

## INTRODUCTION

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 Long Island Index poll continues to track Long Island residents' concerns about residential life: the high cost of local housing and taxes, the desire to move from Long Island to less expensive areas of the country, concerns about young people leaving, and affordable housing. It is important to note that some of these responses may have changed in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy but trends have been very consistent in recent years and there is no reason to think that the picture looks very different for most Long Islanders even after the storm.

The current survey was conducted by the Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research during the fall of 2012 prior to Hurricane Sandy. Telephone interviews were conducted with a randomly selected sample of 812 Long Island residents. Further information on the methodology, as well as the questionnaire and responses, is available in the Appendix to the report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Things Improving Slowly but High Housing Costs Loom Large*

In the fall of 2012, Long Islanders began to see an improvement in local economic conditions; somewhat fewer mentioned economic problems, such as unemployment or foreclosures, as the most important local problem. This went hand-in-hand with a slightly more sanguine view of how things were going in general. For the first time since the 2008 recession, the number of Long Island residents who said that things were heading in the right direction in their county was roughly comparable to those who said they were heading in the wrong direction. Still local optimism has not bounced back to pre-recession levels when the optimists well outnumbered the pessimists.

A slight growth in optimism about local conditions is coupled, however, with evidence of persistent and increasing economic burden on the average Long Island household which translates into a continued desire to leave Long Island, a pervasive concern about family members leaving, and broad consternation about the exit of young people. Home values on Long Island have declined dramatically since the recession and continue to do so but this has not helped the average family budget for a number of reasons. First, median Long Island household income has also been trending downwards placing greater financial burden on local families. Second, rents have remained high, showing little or no decrease since 2008. Third, unless home owners with a mortgage refinance to take advantage of low interest rates mortgage payments remain relatively constant. For all of these reasons, a whopping 39% of Long Island households have housing costs that exceed 35% of their annual income<sup>1</sup>. With so many families struggling, perhaps it is no surprise then that the survey found there is also majority support (60%) for changes to zoning laws that would make it easier to install legal rental apartments in a single family home.

Persistently high housing costs mean that a majority (58%) of Long Islanders have at least some difficulty in meeting their monthly rent and mortgage payments. This problem is more extreme for young people, low-income households, and non-homeowners. A lack of affordable housing options also makes it difficult for young people to move out of their parents' and relatives' home. In the current poll, 24% of Long Islanders aged between 18 and 34 lived with a parent or another relative. High housing costs are also

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics about Long Island household income, rent and housing cost burden come from the American Community Survey and U.S. Census reports.

exacerbated by high local property taxes that tend to increase over time. And while the number of Long Islanders who view the lack of affordable housing as a very or extremely serious problem has declined slightly since the recession this has not cut housing costs for the majority of residents.

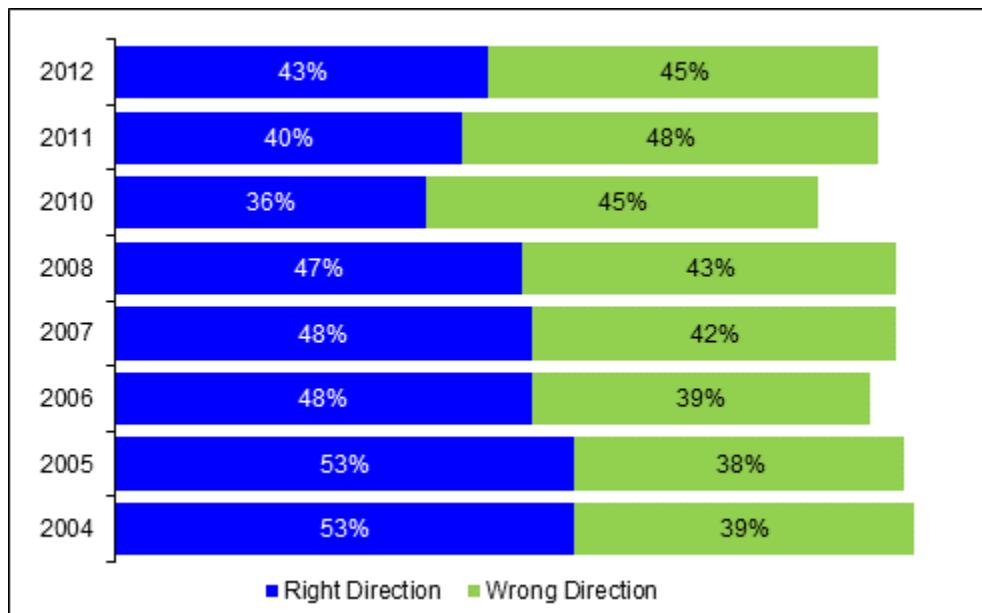
As Long Island moves slowly out of the recession Long Islanders' economic problems persist. Declining local wages have not been met by any real drop in housing costs. For the moment, the Long Island population is increasing slowly because fewer residents are leaving<sup>2</sup>. But roughly 1 in 2 say they are likely to leave Long Island in the next five years and once property values return to pre or near pre-recession levels, and in the absence of a growth in well-paying jobs, we can anticipate a renewed exodus of Long Island residents to cheaper locations elsewhere in the United States.

## Residential Satisfaction: Tracking Questions

*Direction of the County: Things are beginning to head in the right direction*

Local residents are beginning to see things improve on Long Island. For the first time since the 2008 recession, the number of Long Island residents who said that things were heading in the right direction in their county was roughly comparable to those who said they were heading in the wrong direction. Still local optimism has not bounced back to pre-recession levels when the optimists well outnumbered the pessimists. As in previous polls, those aged between 18 and 34 express the most optimism about how things are going.

**Figure 1: Right/Wrong Direction (Q1)**

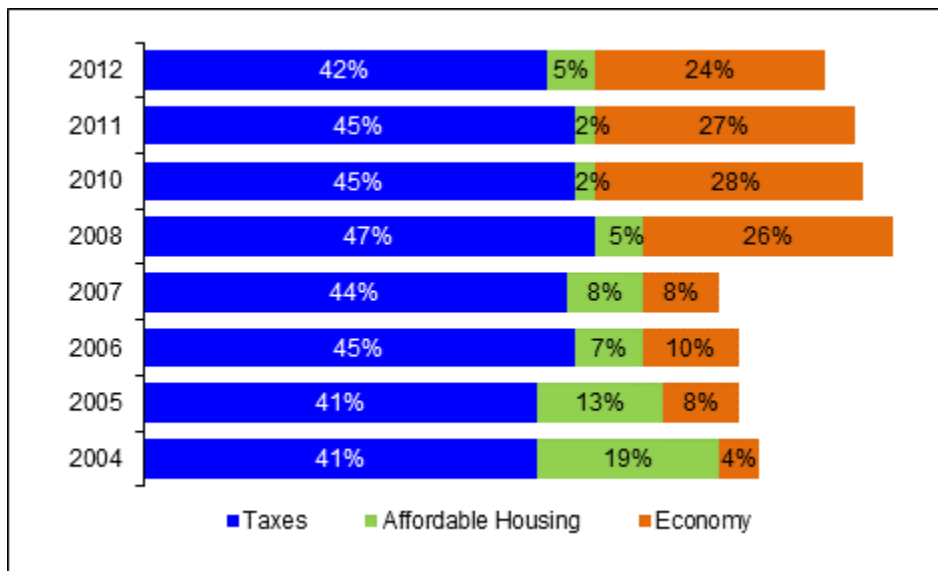


<sup>2</sup> American Community Survey and US Census data.  
*Long Island Index Survey*

### Continued Concern about High Taxes

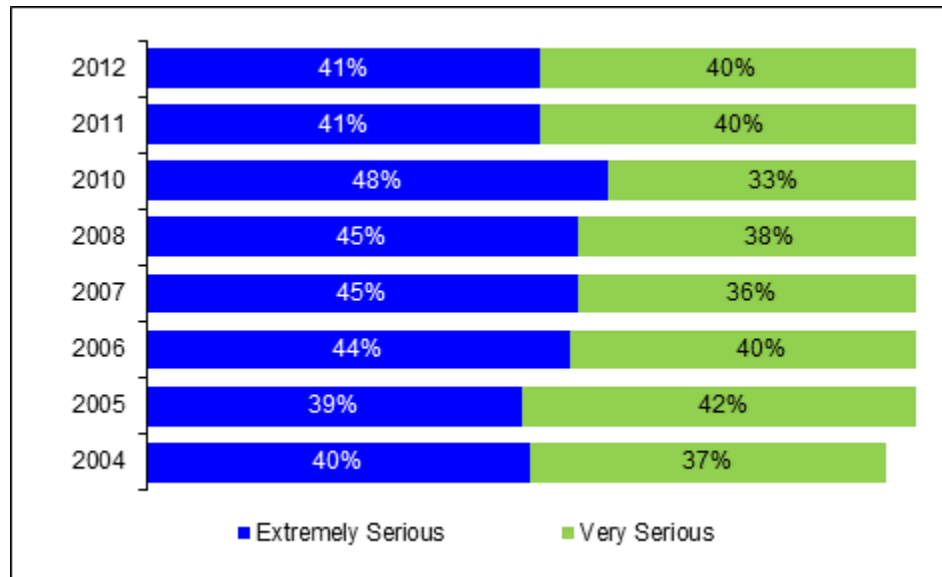
Local taxes have been the most common local problem mentioned by Long Islanders in every poll conducted over the last ten years (since 2003). This remained true in 2012 with 42% of Long Islanders naming high taxes as the most important problem facing their county. To put this into perspective, this is almost double the number of Long Islanders who mention broad economic factors such as unemployment, foreclosures, or finances as the most important local problem (24%). At the same time, there has been a slight decline in the number of residents who mention economic factors, such as unemployment and foreclosures, as the most important problem which is down to 24% from 28% in 2010.

**Figure 2: Most Important Local Problem (Q2)**



Roughly 8 in 10 (81%) local residents rate high property taxes as a very or extremely serious problem, and these numbers have changed little over time. 77% of Long Island residents rated high property taxes as a very or extremely serious problem in 2004 and 81% do so in the current poll. Home owners are more likely than non-homeowners to rate property taxes as a very or extremely serious problem (83% vs. 70%). And young people aged 18 to 34 are somewhat less likely than those older residents to rate this a very or extremely serious problem (66% vs. 83%).

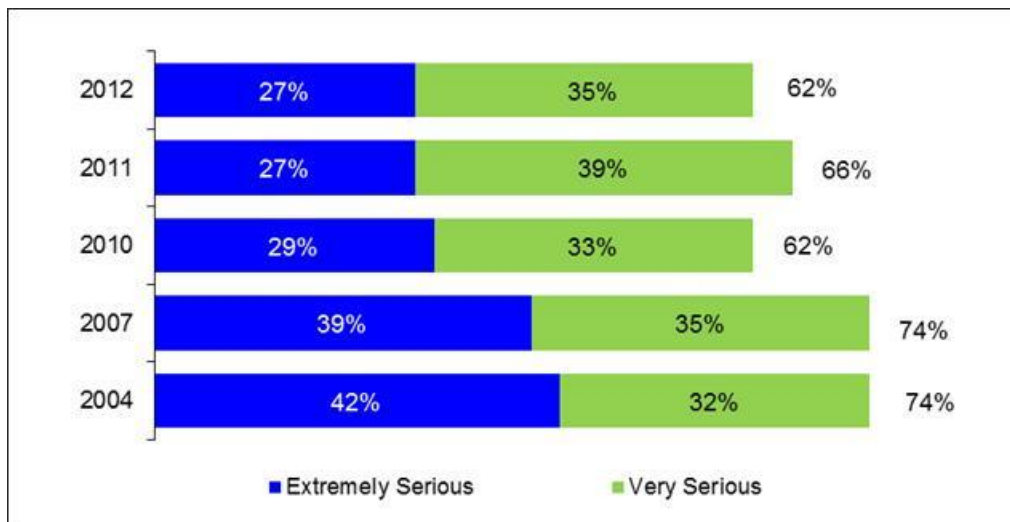
**Figure 3: In your view, how serious a problem are high property taxes in your county? (Q3)**



*Persistently High Housing Costs*

Just over 60% of Long Island residents (62%) say that the lack of affordable housing is a very or extremely serious problem in their county, representing a slight decline in concern over time. Before the recession, in 2007, 74% of Long Islanders rated the lack of affordable housing as an extremely or very serious problem. The decline is linked to fewer residents who rate the lack of affordable housing as an *extremely* serious problem (from 42% in 2004 to 27% in the current poll) and probably reflects the reality of declining home values.

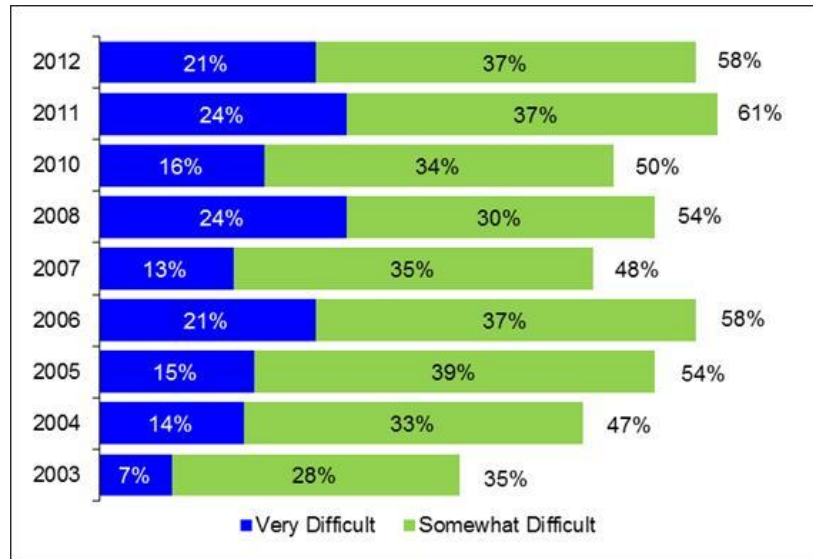
**Figure 4: In your view, how serious a problem is the lack of affordable housing on Long Island? (Q8)**



But this decline in home prices has had little impact on the finances of most residents. Roughly 6 in 10 Long Island residents (58%) have at least some difficulty paying their rent or mortgage, roughly similar to 2011 and an increase over 2010 when 50% reported this as at least somewhat difficult. Indeed, the

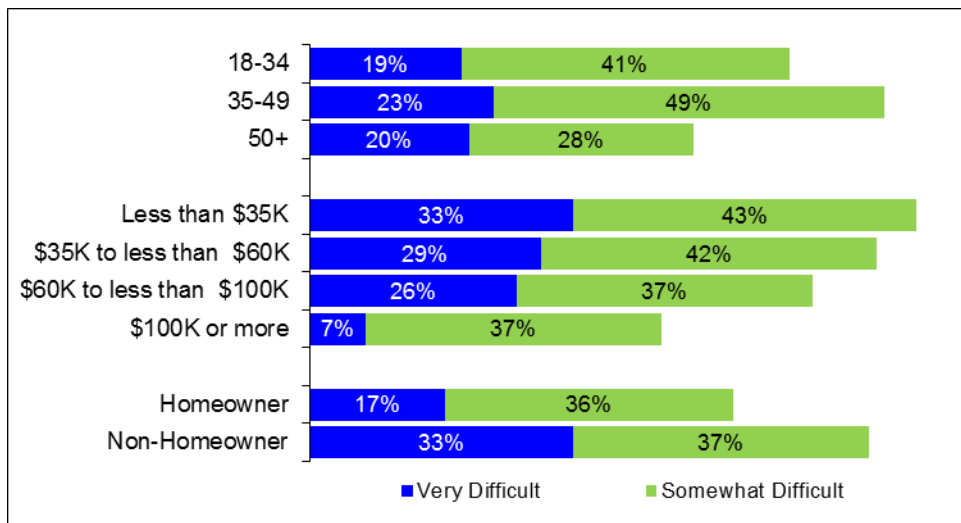
percentage of Long Islanders who say they have trouble meeting housing costs remains at an all time high of near 60%.

**Figure 5: In an average month, how difficult is it for you and your family living with you to pay the rent or mortgage? (Q5)**



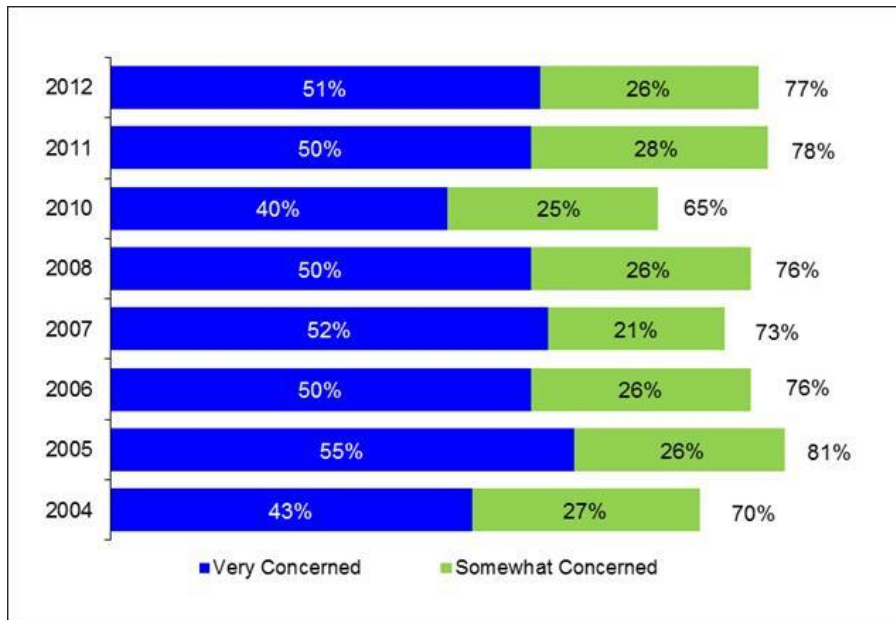
Residents who have the greatest difficulty in meeting their monthly housing costs tend to be younger, lower income, and currently do not own a home. This pattern reflects the reality of increased housing costs over time on Long Island, and persistently high rents

**Figure 6: In an average month, how difficult is it for you and your family living with you to pay the rent or mortgage? (Q5, 2012)**

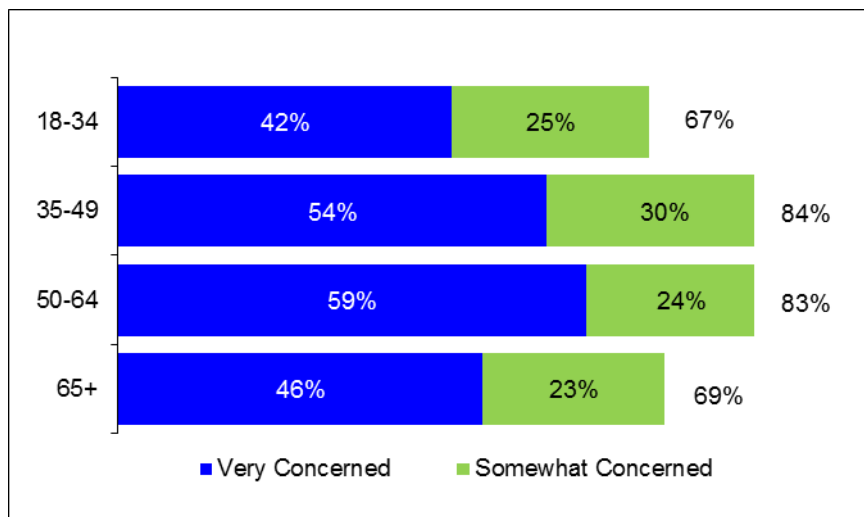


High housing costs mean that over three-quarters (77%) of Long Island residents are concerned that some family members might have to leave the area. This level of concern has existed in the polls since 2005 although it declined slightly after the 2008 recession. Concern about family members leaving is highest among those aged between 35 and 64 who are most likely to have children still living on Long Island.

**Figure 7: How concerned are you that the high cost of housing will force members of your family to move out of Nassau/Suffolk County? (Q6)**

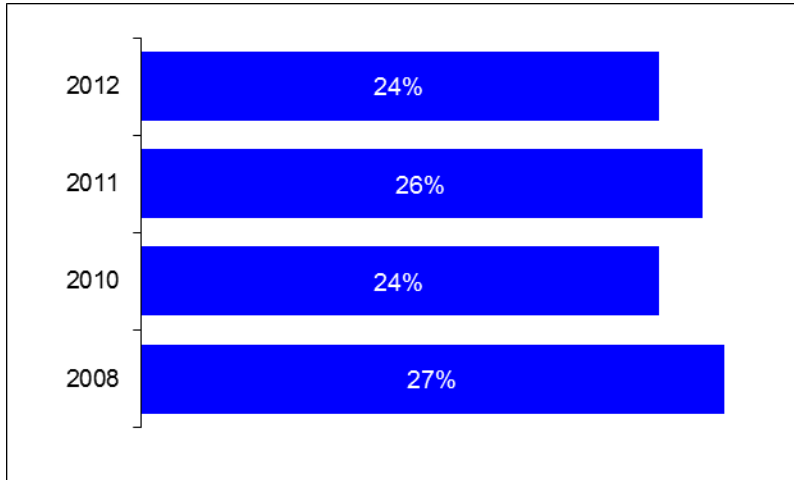


**Figure 8: How concerned are you that the high cost of housing will force members of your family to move out of Nassau/Suffolk County? (Q6, 2012)**



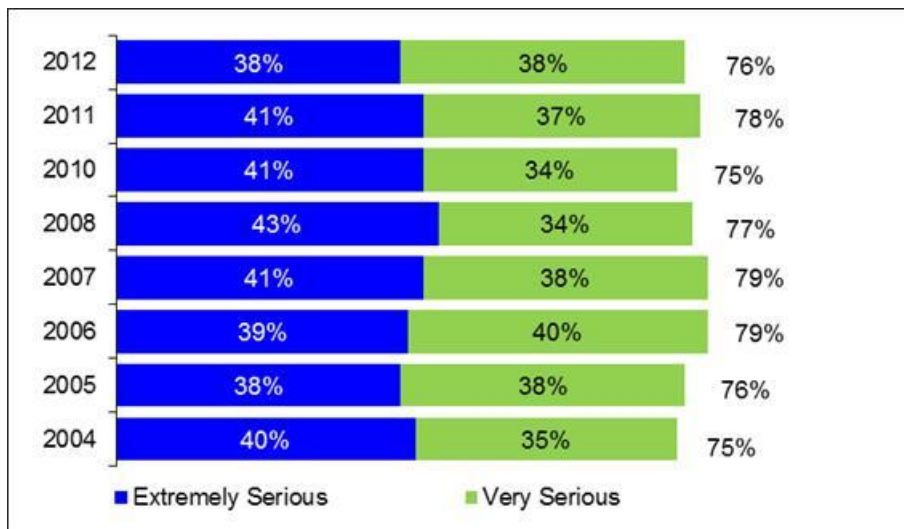
High housing costs, including high rents, mean that a sizeable percent of young people continue to live at home with their parents. This has changed little over time and has hovered around 25% over the last few years.

**Figure 9: Percent of 18-34 year olds who live with a family member (Q16B, 2012)**



Over three in four Long Islanders view young people leaving Long Island for more affordable areas as a very or extremely serious problem, reflecting the reality of an exodus of young people over the last decade. This concern is shared widely among Long Islanders of all backgrounds and has remained high throughout all previous polls (ranging from 75% to 79%).

**Figure 10: How serious is the problem of young people moving away from Long Island because of the high cost of living? (Q4)**

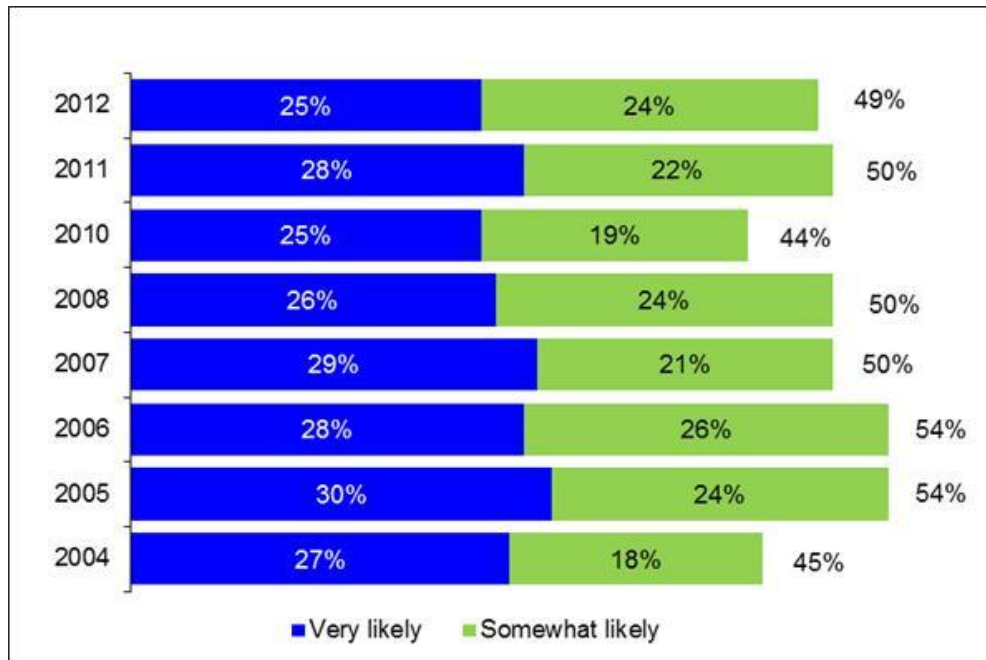


*1 in 2 Long Islanders say they are likely to leave*

In 2005 and 2006 54% of residents said they were somewhat or very likely to leave Long Island in the next five years. This dropped to 50% in 2007 and 2008 and then dropped further to 44% in 2010. Last year, this number increased to 50% and remains at a similar level in the current poll. Undoubtedly, these numbers exceed the reality of who can and will leave. Nonetheless, it is disturbing to see that half the local population thinks it at least likely that they will move off Long Island.

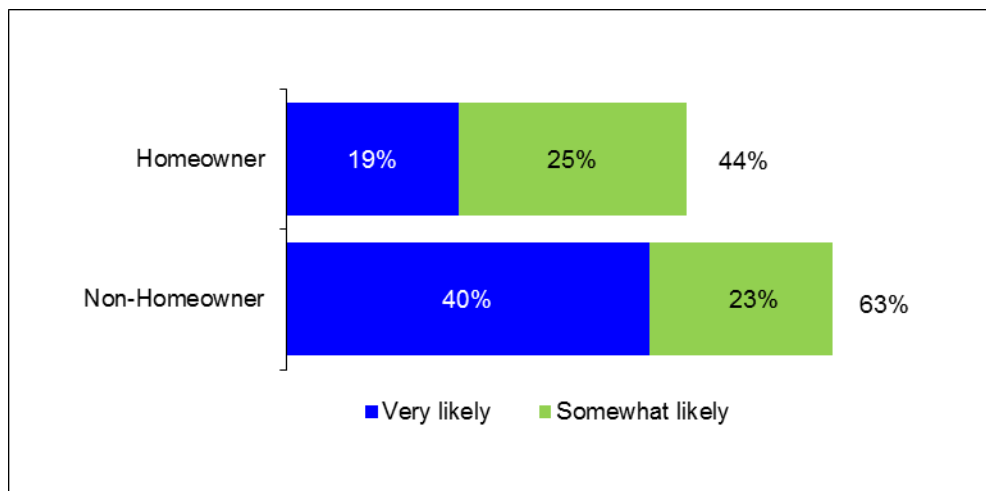


**Figure 11: How likely is it that you will move out of Long Island to an area with lower housing costs and property taxes in the next 5 years? (Q7)**



Older residents aged 65 and over and the most affluent and best educated were the least likely to say they were thinking of leaving. There was also a stronger desire to leave among non-homeowners than homeowners.

**Figure 12: How likely is it that you will move out of Long Island to an area with lower housing costs and property taxes in the next 5 years? (Q7, 2012)**

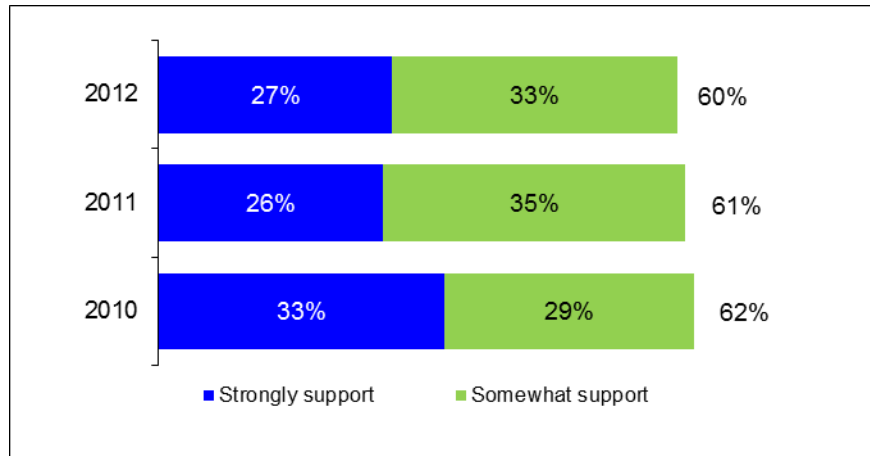


*Housing Options*

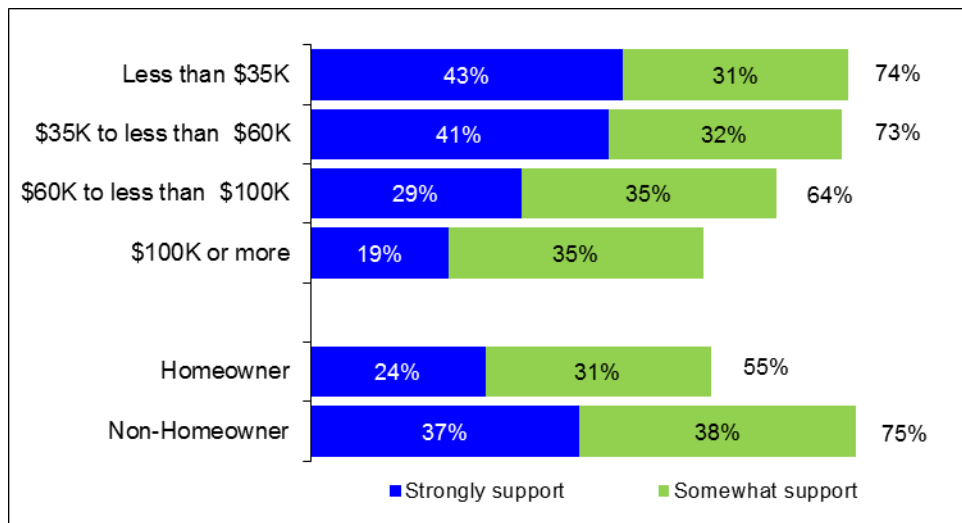
There is considerable support on Long Island for changes to zoning laws that would make it easier to install legal rental apartments in a single family home; 60% of Long Islanders support this. This support

has remained relatively constant over time. Lower income and non-homeowners are most supportive of this proposal.

**Figure 13: To what extent do you support or oppose changing local zoning rules in Nassau/Suffolk County to make it easier to install a rental apartment in a single-family home? (Q9)**



**Figure 14: To what extent do you support or oppose changing local zoning rules in Nassau/Suffolk County to make it easier to install a rental apartment in a single-family home? (Q9, 2012)**



## METHODOLOGY

The Stony Brook University Center for Survey Research conducted this survey by telephone between September 18 and October 28, 2012. 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 6 contact attempts at various times of the day and week were made at each household phone number. In order to assure a representative sample, all households and individuals who initially were not willing to participate in the survey were contacted again, and an attempt was made to persuade them to participate.

The study was conducted in Nassau and Suffolk County on Long Island. A total of 812 interviews were completed, with 394 completed interviews with residents of Nassau County and 418 completed interviews with residents of Suffolk County

The data is weighted to match population characteristics of Nassau and Suffolk counties on gender, age, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity, based on the 2010 U.S. Census county-level data. Weighting was done using an iterative raking process developed to estimate joint weights for any number of demographic variables for which population percentages are known only individually, not jointly. In the current sample, minority groups, males, people with a lower level of education, and younger respondents were underrepresented.

### Frequency Questionnaire

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#### INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ 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. To make sure we obtain an accurate cross-section of local residents, we need to speak to the person in your household who is 18 years of age or older, and had the most recent birthday. Is that you?

#### AFTER THE SELECTION OF THE ELIGIBLE RESPONDENT:

This survey only takes about 8 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.

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#### Question Q01

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

Generally speaking, do you think things in [Nassau/Suffolk] today are headed in the right direction or in the wrong direction?

(Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Right direction	43	61	39	36	35	51	40	41	48
Wrong direction	45	31	49	51	49	32	47	48	43
Don't know	11	7	12	11	15	14	12	10	9
Refused	1	1	1	2	1	4	1	1	1

[Note: Due to rounding, the numbers may not add up to 100%]

**Question Q02\_R**

Overall, what do you think is the MOST important problem facing residents of [Nassau/Suffolk] county today?

**[Open-ended question, with recoded responses]**

(Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Taxes/Property Taxes	42	26	45	52	45	23	44	48	48
Economy/Foreclosures/Jobs/Cost	24	28	24	22	24	27	22	21	21
Lack of adequate and affordable housing	5	7	7	3	3	5	3	9	5
Government/Corruption/Services	5	8	2	6	4	4	4	7	7
Traffic/Transportation/Roads	4	5	3	5	5	7	8	4	2
Crime/Drugs	3	5	3	1	4	3	2	2	5
Pollution/Environmental Issues	2	-	2	1	3	1	2	2	1
Health care	1	2	-	2	1	2	-	1	-
Education	1	2	2	1	-	2	-	2	1
Overcrowding/Overdevelopment	1	-	-	1	2	-	2	1	1
Immigration	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	1
Other	3	5	1	2	2	3	3	-	3
Don't know/ Refused	8	12	9	4	6	22	10	2	4

**Question Q03**

In your view, how serious a problem are high property taxes in [Nassau/Suffolk] County?

(Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Extremely serious	41	33	38	52	38	37	46	47	36
Very serious	40	32	49	37	39	37	39	38	42
Somewhat serious	15	27	11	9	16	18	13	15	18
Not very serious	2	4	1	1	2	1	1	-	3
Not at all serious	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	1
Don't know	2	2	1	1	4	7	1	1	-
Refused	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-

**Question Q04**

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

(Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Extremely serious	38	31	34	47	38	38	31	45	34
Very serious	38	38	45	33	36	38	44	37	37
Somewhat serious	16	19	16	14	17	15	21	11	18
Not very serious	4	8	3	2	5	6	2	4	7
Not at all serious	1	2	1	2	-	1	1	1	2
Don't know	3	3	2	2	4	2	2	3	2

**Question Q05**

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...

(Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Very difficult	21	19	23	22	18	33	29	26	7
Somewhat difficult	37	41	49	27	29	43	42	37	37
Not very difficult	18	18	16	18	19	11	10	20	22
Not at all difficult	21	15	10	30	31	9	12	15	33
Don't know	2	2	2	3	3	3	7	2	2
Refused	2	4	-	1	1	-	1	1	-

**Question Q06**

How concerned are you that the high cost of housing will force members of your family to move out of [Nassau/Suffolk] County?  
 (Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Very concerned	51	42	54	59	46	48	59	57	42
Somewhat concerned	26	25	30	24	23	21	26	24	28
Not very concerned	11	15	9	10	12	12	6	10	16
Not at all concerned	12	18	7	7	17	18	9	8	13
Don't know	1	-	-	1	2	1	-	1	1
Refused	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-

**Question Q07**

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?  
 (Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Very likely	25	26	23	30	17	33	28	31	16
Somewhat likely	24	25	28	26	16	23	32	24	22
Not very likely	22	22	27	19	19	18	18	19	27
Not at all likely	28	24	22	24	46	24	22	26	36
Don't know	1	2	1	-	2	2	-	-	-
Refused	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Question Q08**

In your view, how serious a problem is the lack of affordable housing in [Nassau/Suffolk] County?  
 (Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Extremely serious	27	24	25	35	22	23	39	31	20
Very serious	35	33	40	31	36	54	33	35	29
Somewhat serious	24	24	23	23	27	14	19	21	33
Not very serious	5	6	8	4	3	-	3	5	9
Not at all serious	4	6	3	2	4	8	-	4	5
Don't know	5	6	1	5	9	1	6	4	4
Refused	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Question Q09**

To what extent do you support or oppose changing local zoning rules in [Nassau/Suffolk] County to make it easier to install a rental apartment in a single-family home.  
 (Total = 812)

	Total	Age				Income			
	%	<u>18-34</u>	<u>35-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>	<u>&lt;\$35K</u>	<u>\$35K-\$60K</u>	<u>\$60K-\$100K</u>	<u>&gt;\$100K</u>
Strongly support	27	26	32	26	22	43	41	29	19
Somewhat support	33	36	30	34	30	31	32	35	35
Somewhat oppose	16	13	16	17	19	7	10	17	23
Strongly oppose	16	12	15	19	19	13	8	12	20
Don't know	7	11	4	4	9	6	6	7	3
Refused	2	3	2	1	1	-	3	-	1

## Demographics

Now, I have some questions about your background. I want to assure you that all your responses are completely confidential and will only be used to report group averages.

### Question Q10

Are you Hispanic or Latino/Latina?  
(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Yes	15
No	84
Refused	1

### Question Q11

Do you consider yourself, White, Black, Asian or something else?  
(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
White	76
Black/African-American	7
Hispanic/Latino	9
Asian	3
Black /another category	4
Don't know	-
Refused	1

### Question Q12

How long have you lived in Nassau/Suffolk County?  
(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Under six months	-
Six months to a year	1
One year to two years	1
Between 2 and 5 years	4
Between 5 and 10 years	7
Over 10 years	61
All my life	25
Don't know/Refused	-



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**Question Q13**

In general, when it comes to politics, do you think of yourself as a Liberal, a Moderate, or a Conservative?  
(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Liberal	25
Moderate	27
Conservative	34
Don't know	10
Refused	5

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**Question Q14\_R**

In what year were you born?

**[Open-ended question, with recoded responses]**

(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
18 to 34	25
35 to 49	27
50 to 64	29
65 and older	19

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**Question Q15**

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

(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
None	58
1 or more	40
Refused	2

**Question Q16**

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?

(Total = 812)

	Total	Age	
	%	18-34	35+
Own	75	47	84
Rent	15	25	12
Live with parents, in-laws, relatives	8	24	3
Other	1	1	2
Refused	1	3	-

Q16b asked only of respondents who answered 'living with parents, in-laws or other relative' in Q16

**Question Q16b**

Are you currently living with a relative because you...

(Total = 66)

	Total
	%
Are saving up to buy a home	28
Can't afford to buy or rent right now	27
Share costs/HH responsibilities with other members	14
Another reason	28
Refused	3

**Question Q17**

Do you currently live in a single family home, semi-detached home, condominium, apartment, or townhouse?

(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Single family home	84
Semi-detached house	3
Condominium	2
Apartment	7
Townhouse	1
Other	3
Refused	-

**Question Q18**

How many people 18 years and older, including yourself, are currently living in your household?  
 (Total = 812)

	Total
	%
One	18
Two	45
Three	19
Four or more	16
Refused	2

**Question Q19**

What is the highest grade of school, year of college or highest degree that you have received?  
 (Total = 812)

	Total
	%
High school or less	37
Some college	26
Bachelor's degree	19
Graduate or Professional Degree	17
Refused	1

**Question Q20**

Are you currently...  
 (Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Employed/ wages full-time	44
Employed/ wages part-time	11
Self-employed	8
Out of work/ more than 1 year	4
Out of work/ less than 1 year	2
Homemaker	2
Full-time student	2
Retired	23
Unable to work/permanently disabled	3
Refused	1

**Question Q21\_R**

What is/was your occupation?

**[Open-ended question, with recoded responses]**

(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Professional / Manager / Owner	31
Teacher / Librarian / Professor	6
Sales / Clerical / Service Worker	39
Skilled Laborer / Tradesman	7
Semi- or Unskilled Laborer	7
Other	5
None / Retired	2
Refused	3

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**Question Q22**

Which of the following income categories best describes the total 2011 household income of all members of your family living there before taxes. Stop me when I reach your income group. Was it...

(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Less than \$35,000	11
\$35,000 to less than \$60,000	14
\$60,000 to less than \$100,000	20
\$100,000 or more	32
Don't know / Refused	24

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**Question Q23**

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

(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Married	60
Not married, living with partner	4
Separated	2
Divorced	7
Widowed	9
Never married	16
Refused	2

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**GENDER**

What is the respondent's gender?

(Total = 812)

	Total
	%
Female	53
Male	47

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