

JANUARY
2016

GETTING AHEAD

An **Upward Mobility** Agenda
for New Yorkers in 2016

Findings from a survey of New York City residents

**Community
Service
Society** | Fighting Poverty
Strengthening
New York

THE UNHEARD
THIRD 2015

The Community Service Society of New York (CSS) is an informed, independent, and unwavering voice for positive action representing low-income New Yorkers. CSS addresses the root causes of economic disparity through research, advocacy, and innovative program models that strengthen and benefit all New Yorkers.

www.cssny.org

See inside back cover for how the survey was conducted.

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Getting Ahead

The 2016 State Legislative Agenda

In New York City, the idea that hard work and perseverance can lead to a better life is losing ground. The signs are everywhere you look: in the stubbornly high poverty rates, the inadequate wages, and the exploding costs of housing and higher education that make it difficult for those at the bottom to work their way up. On the road to economic prosperity, most New Yorkers feel like they are stuck, or worse, falling further behind.

In 2016, candidates for elected office will fill the airways with their ideas for how to expand economic opportunity and strengthen the middle class. Thanks in part to movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Fight for Fifteen, the issues of income inequality and stagnant wages are squarely on the national political agenda and must be addressed by any viable candidate for elected office. Cynics might dismiss promises made on the campaign trail. But on the local level, real changes are being made, with significant minimum wage increases and paid sick leave requirements passing one jurisdiction after another.

In New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio has made addressing inequality the signature issue of his administration, with implementation of universal pre-Kindergarten, expansion of paid sick days, and paid parental leave for some municipal employees, as well as plans to create affordable housing. However, much of what would significantly improve the economic prospects of city residents requires state action.

At the state level, Governor Andrew Cuomo has taken some bold steps that did not seem likely just one year ago. In May, he commissioned a wage board to study the minimum wage for fast food workers; based on the board's recommendation, the state approved a gradual increase in the minimum wage for workers in that industry to \$15 an hour. In September, the Governor



announced his support for a statewide \$15 an hour minimum wage alongside Vice President Joseph Biden. Later that month, it was reported that the Governor's office was in talks with the Obama administration on how New York could offer two years of free community college under a proposal first announced by the President in January. And in November, Cuomo used his executive authority to gradually increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for New York State government employees.

With the start of a new legislative session in January 2016, New York's Assembly and Senate have the opportunity to put their own stamp on some of the most pressing issues of the day and complete unfinished business from the 2015 session. Will the legislature heed the Governor's call to extend a \$15 an hour minimum wage to all workers? Will the Senate pass a

paid family leave bill as the Assembly did last year, so that parents can take care of newborn children and workers can deal with family health crises without severe economic consequences? And will the legislature work with the Governor on a program for two years of free community college, in which 75 percent of the cost could be covered by the federal government under President Obama's free community college proposal?

We asked New Yorkers how they felt about these and other issues as part of this year's Unheard Third survey. We found that New York City residents are pessimistic about the prospects of upward mobility, but there is broad agreement—between low and higher income earners, and between Democrats and Republicans—on what it will take to get low-income New Yorkers moving up the economic ladder.



Finding One

A vast majority of low-income New Yorkers feel stuck or like they are slipping further down the economic ladder.

It has now been several years since the issues of widening income inequality, stagnant wages, and a lack of upward economic mobility seized national attention. These issues are resonating deeply with a public that has seen the highest earners reap most of the gains of the post-recession economic recovery.¹ Private sector job numbers are up and the unemployment rate is down; but there remains a sense that the doors of opportunity are not wide enough for everybody, and for those who manage to squeeze through, there is not much room to move.

These attitudes are borne out in the results of The Unheard Third survey, in which we asked New Yorkers where they felt they were on the economic ladder. A majority of

respondents—across income levels—felt like they were stuck. In addition to the 56 percent of poor New Yorkers who said they felt stuck, a quarter felt like they were slipping even further down, identical numbers from when we asked the same question in 2014. Even two-thirds of those with incomes above 400 percent of the federal poverty level felt they were either stuck or slipping down the economic ladder.

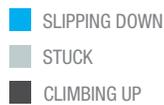
Unsurprisingly, where respondents felt where they stood economically was tied closely to employment and job quality. Nearly two-thirds of those employed full time reported feeling stuck or like they were slipping further down the ladder, but that number rises to nearly three-quarters of part-time

workers and nearly 80 percent of the unemployed. Among the employed, about half of both salaried and hourly workers felt like they were stuck but hourly workers are more than twice as likely to feel like they are slipping down the economic ladder (23 percent compared to 10 percent). And among hourly workers, 28 percent of those earning less than \$15 an hour felt like they were slipping down the economic ladder, compared to 18 percent of those earning \$15 an hour or more.

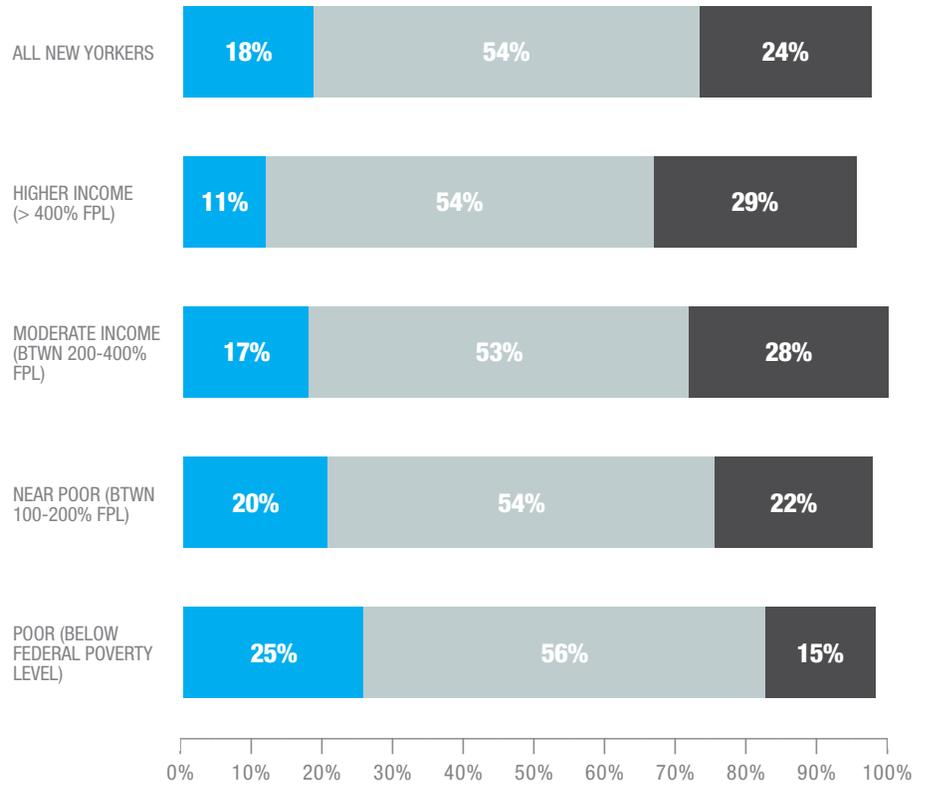
Though the idea of rising from poverty into the middle class is a hallmark of the American dream, nearly half of New Yorkers—across income levels—do not believe it is possible. Those who feel like they are slipping down the economic ladder are especially pessimistic, with 60 percent not believing it is possible for the poor to make it into the middle class. Low-income whites are also particularly discouraged: 60 percent do not believe it is possible for the poor to make it into the middle class, compared to 47 percent of low-income Latinos and half of low-income blacks.

The majority of New Yorkers feel stuck on the economic ladder, with virtually the same proportion across every income group. Eight out of ten of the poor feel stuck or like they are slipping further down.

Q: Would you say you and your family's economic situation is best described as climbing up the economic ladder, slipping down the economic ladder, or stuck on the economic ladder?*

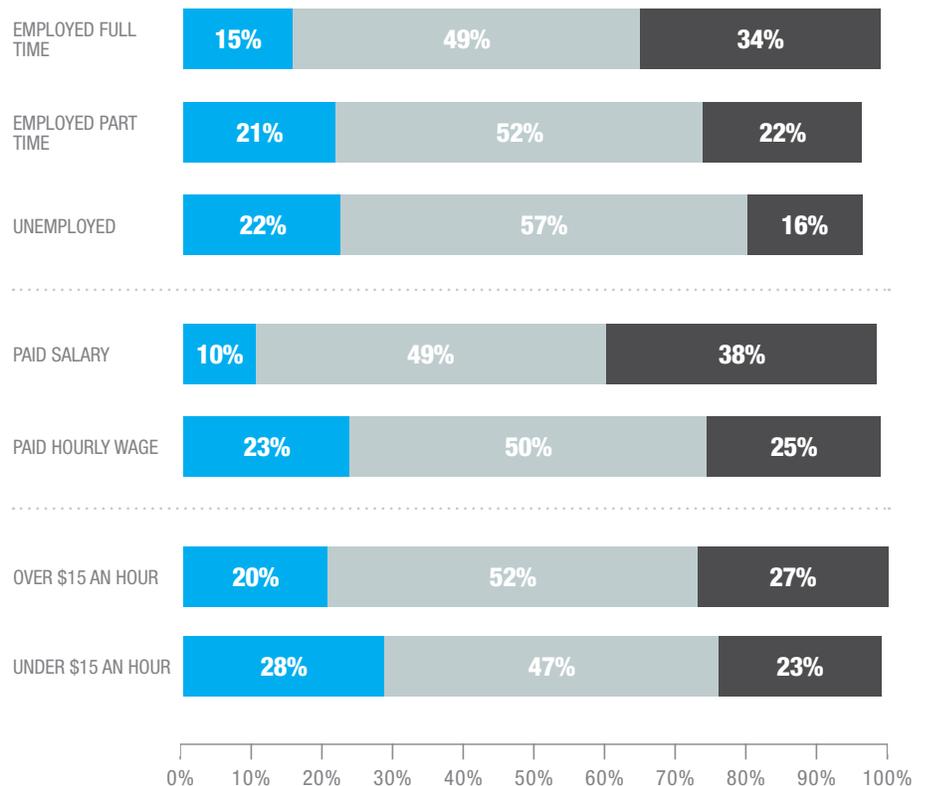
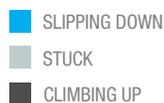


*TOTALS MAY NOT ADD UP TO 100% BECAUSE SOME RESPONDENTS ANSWERED "DON'T KNOW" OR "NOT ON THE LADDER."



Part-time and hourly workers are far more likely to report feeling stuck or like they are slipping down the economic ladder than full-time and salaried workers.

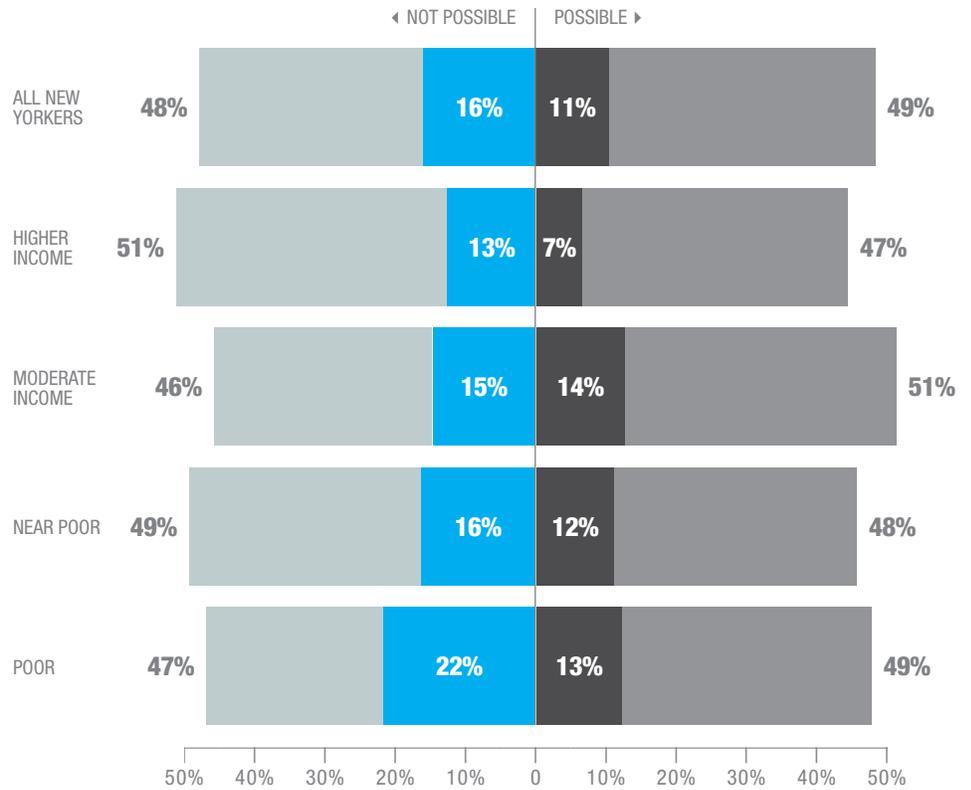
Q: Would you say you and your family's economic situation is best described as climbing up the economic ladder, slipping down the economic ladder, or stuck on the economic ladder?



Nearly half of New Yorkers—across income groups—believe it is not at all or not very possible for the poor to make it into the middle class.

Q: How possible is it for poor people to make it into the middle class these days, very possible, somewhat possible, not very possible, or not possible at all?

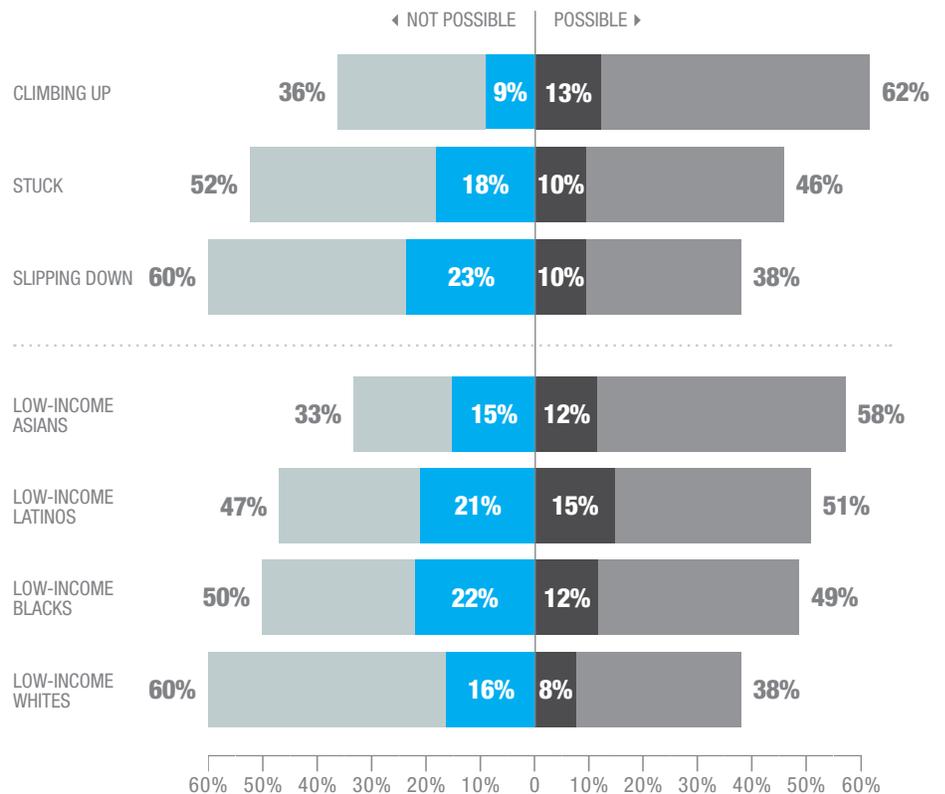
- VERY POSSIBLE
- SOMEWHAT POSSIBLE
- NOT POSSIBLE AT ALL
- NOT VERY POSSIBLE



Low-income whites are especially pessimistic about the prospects of the poor to move into the middle class.

Q: How possible is it for poor people to make it into the middle class these days, very possible, somewhat possible, not very possible, or not possible at all?

- VERY POSSIBLE
- SOMEWHAT POSSIBLE
- NOT POSSIBLE AT ALL
- NOT VERY POSSIBLE



Finding Two

Low-income New Yorkers face significant hardships affording every day necessities, such as housing, food, and public transportation.

While low- and moderate- to higher-income New Yorkers feel similarly pessimistic about upward mobility, they have vastly different experiences in their day-to-day lives. When asked whether or not they had experienced any of a battery of 16 hardships related to food, housing, health, and economic security, 41 percent of poor (under 100 percent of the federal poverty level) and 38 percent of near-poor (between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty level) New Yorkers reported experiencing three or more hardships such as falling behind in the rent, having trouble affording subway or bus fares, or skipping meals because there wasn't enough money to buy food. By comparison, 27 percent of New Yorkers between 200 and 400 percent of the federal poverty level (moderate income) and just 9 percent of those with incomes above 400 percent of poverty (higher income) reported experiencing three or more hardships. Over a quarter of poor and near-poor New Yorkers reported experiencing five or more hardships.

Among low-income New Yorkers, blacks, and especially Latinos, face greater challenges, particularly when looking at individuals between 100 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Thirty-nine percent of poor whites reported experiencing three or more hardships, compared to 46 percent of poor blacks and poor Latinos. However, that discrepancy increases substantially when looking at the near-poor: 22 percent of near-poor whites reported experiencing three or more hardships, compared to 45 percent of near-poor blacks and 46 percent of near-poor Latinos.

Low-income Latinos were more likely to experience food hardships such as skipping meals, while low-income blacks were more likely to experience housing related hardships such as falling behind in the rent or mortgage.



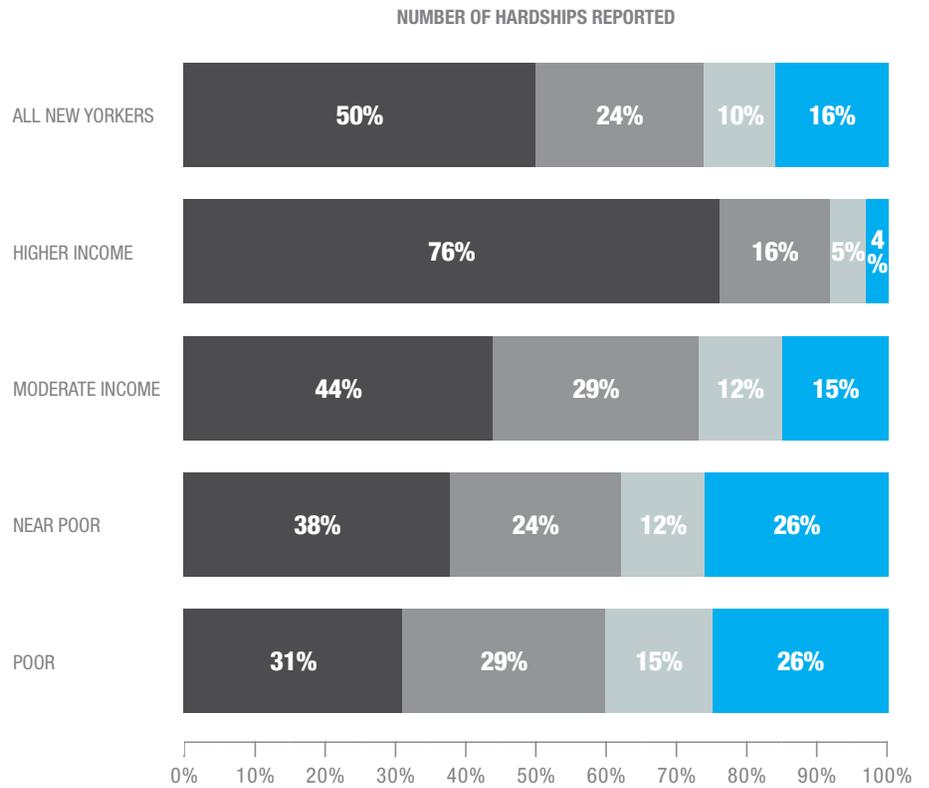
Immigrant Latinos do experience more hardships than native born Latinos, but not enough to account for the difference in hardships between low-income Latinos and low-income whites. Half of immigrant, low-income Latinos reported experiencing three or more hardships, compared to 44 percent of low-income Latinos born in the United States. And low-income Latinos—including immigrants—are significantly more likely to utilize public benefits than low-income whites and blacks, meaning their heightened hardships are not a result of being unable to take advantage of public benefit programs.

Latinos are also more likely to have little or no money in savings to fall back on in case of an emergency. Among poor New Yorkers overall, 35 percent have no money to fall back on in an emergency, and 59 percent have less than \$500. Among poor Latinos, 44 percent have no money in savings and 70 percent have less than \$500.

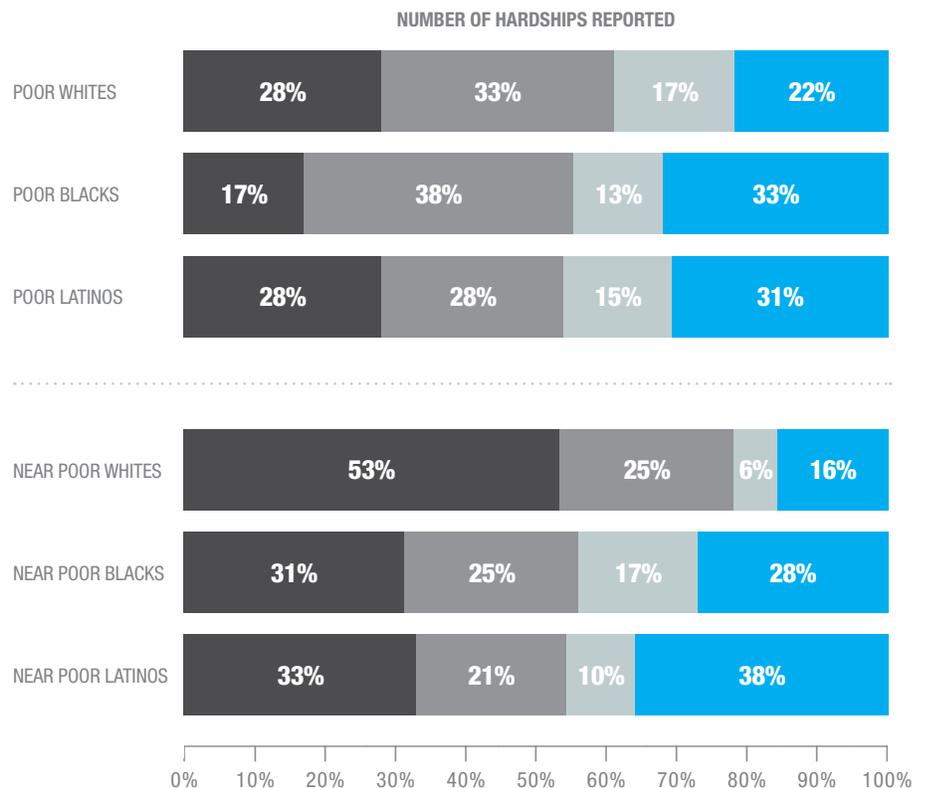
The combination of numerous hardships and little to no savings means many low-income Latinos are just one emergency away from financial catastrophe. We found that job loss triggers very high rates

of hardship among Latinos in low-income households. Nearly 80 percent of Latinos in families where a member of the household lost a job during the past year reported experiencing three or more hardships (in addition to unemployment and diminished earnings) and 57 percent reported experiencing five or more material hardships. Nearly half reported they often skipped meals because there wasn't enough money to buy food; more than a third had utilities turned off; 44 percent moved in with other people; nearly half fell behind on the rent or mortgage; and over half were often unable to afford subway or bus fares.

Over a quarter of poor and near-poor New Yorkers experienced five or more serious material hardships during the past year.

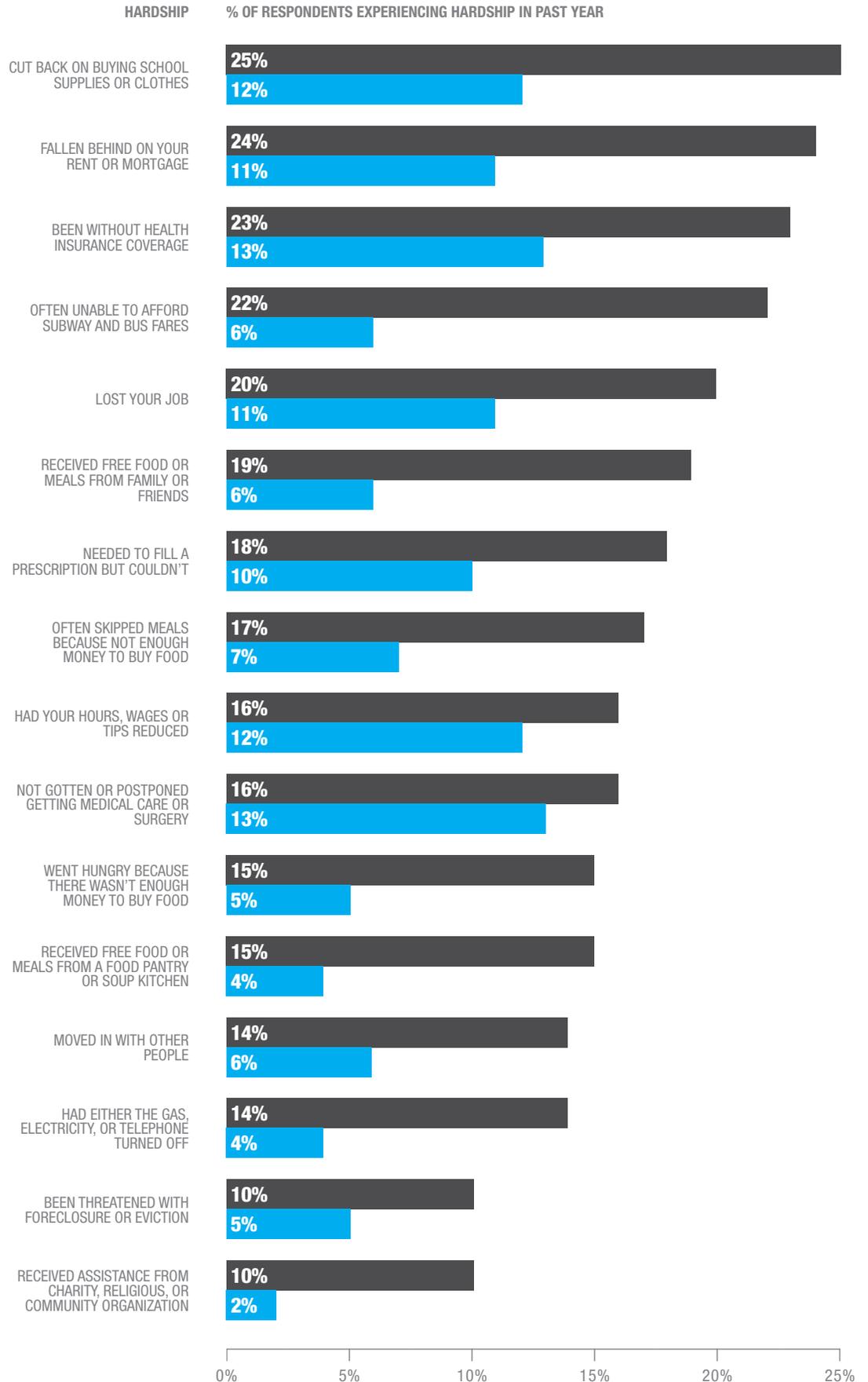


Near-poor blacks and Latinos were much more likely to report experiencing multiple hardships compared to near-poor whites.



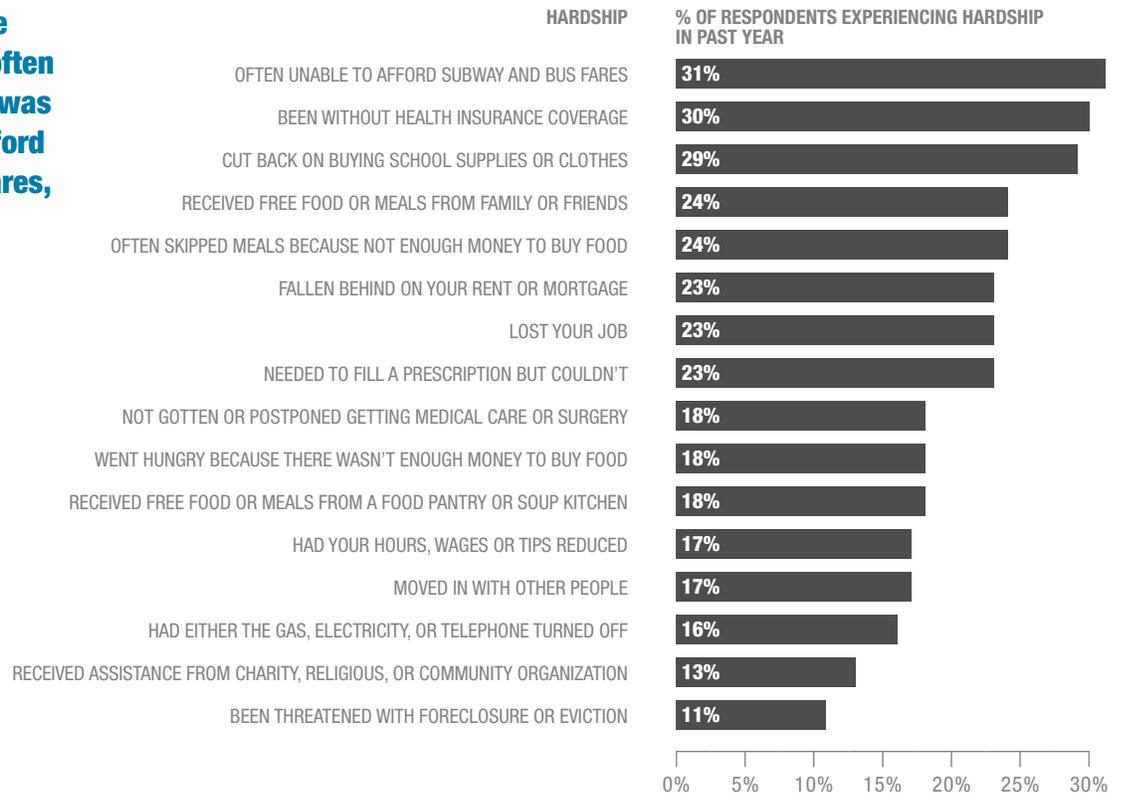
Nearly one out of four low-income respondents fell behind in their rent or mortgage; more than one in five were often unable to afford subway or bus fares.

LOW INCOME
 MOD-HIGH INCOME



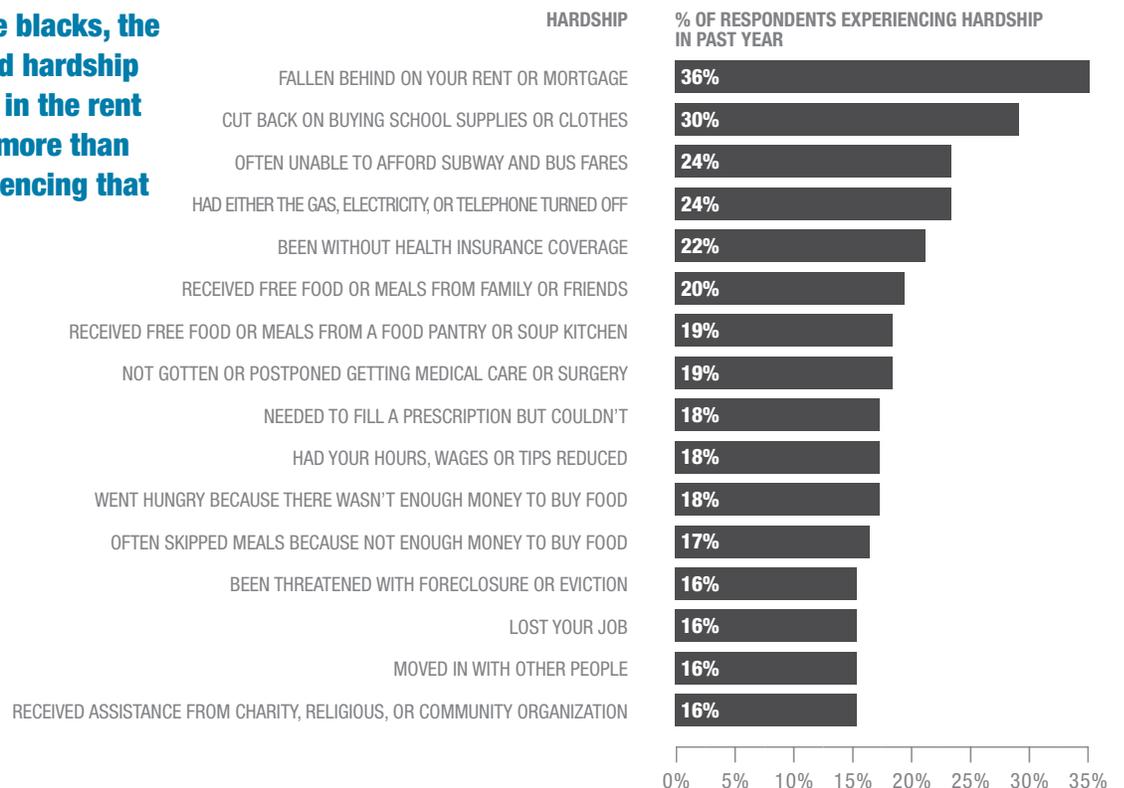
Among low-income Latinos, the most often reported hardship was being unable to afford subway and bus fares, with nearly one in three experiencing that problem.

■ LOW-INCOME LATINO



Among low-income blacks, the most often reported hardship was falling behind in the rent or mortgage, with more than one in three experiencing that problem.

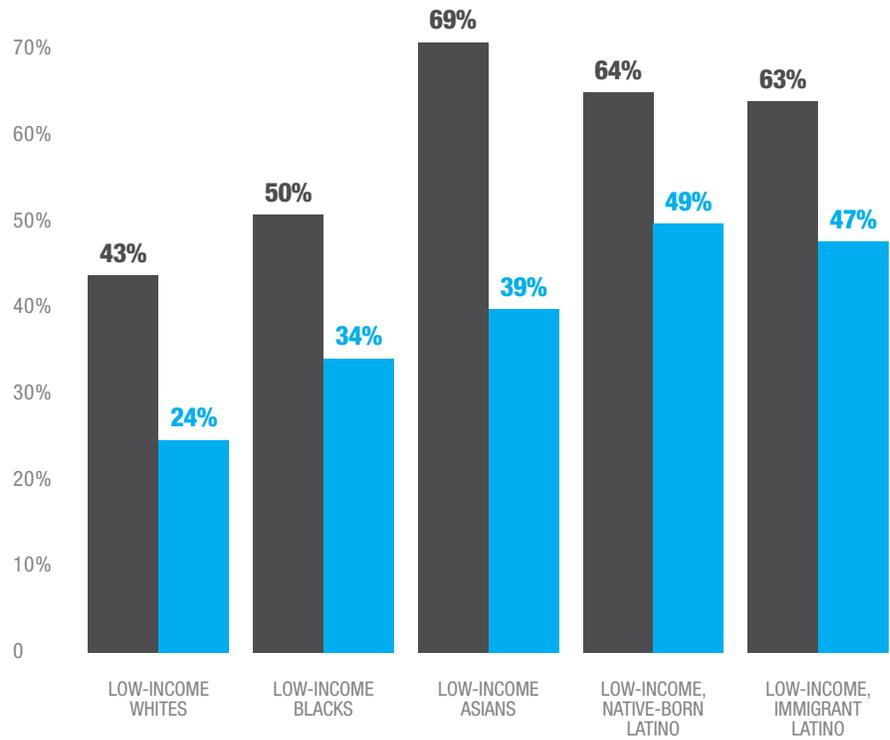
■ LOW-INCOME BLACK



Low-income Latinos—those born in the United States and immigrants—are more likely than low-income whites to utilize public benefits like Medicaid and food stamps.

■ MEDICAID FOR SELF OR CHILD
■ FOOD STAMPS

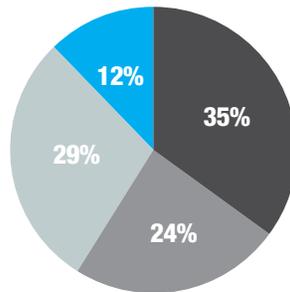
SHARE OF RESPONDENTS REPORTING PUBLIC BENEFIT USE



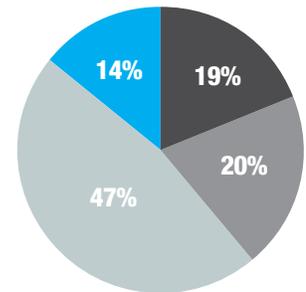
More than one-third of the poor have no money to fall back on in an emergency, and nearly 60 percent have less than \$500.

Q: If tough times were to hit you and your family, how much money in savings do you currently have to fall back on?

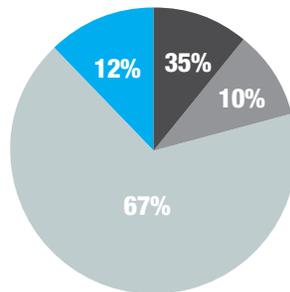
■ ZERO
■ \$1-\$499
■ \$500+
■ DON'T KNOW



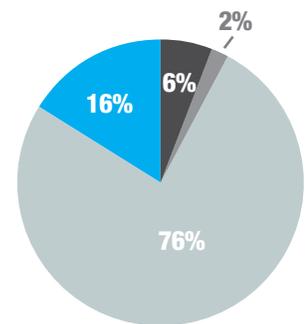
POOR



NEAR POOR



MODERATE INCOME

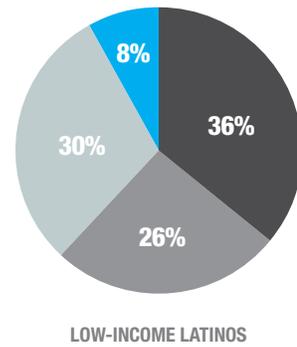
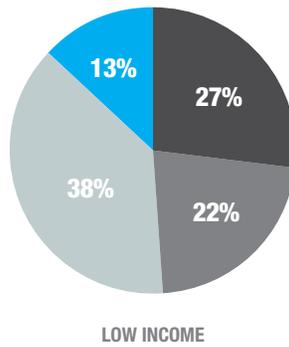
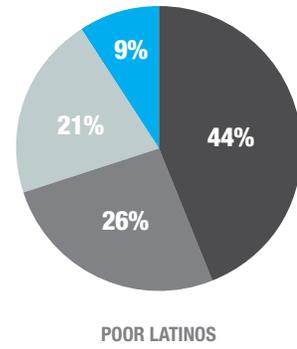
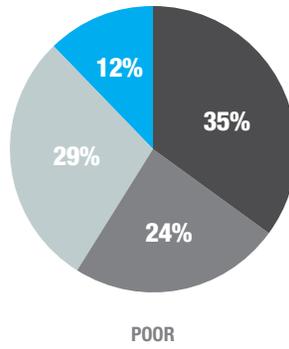


HIGHER INCOME

The savings situation is especially dire for poor Latinos; 44 percent have no money in savings, and 70 percent have less than \$500.

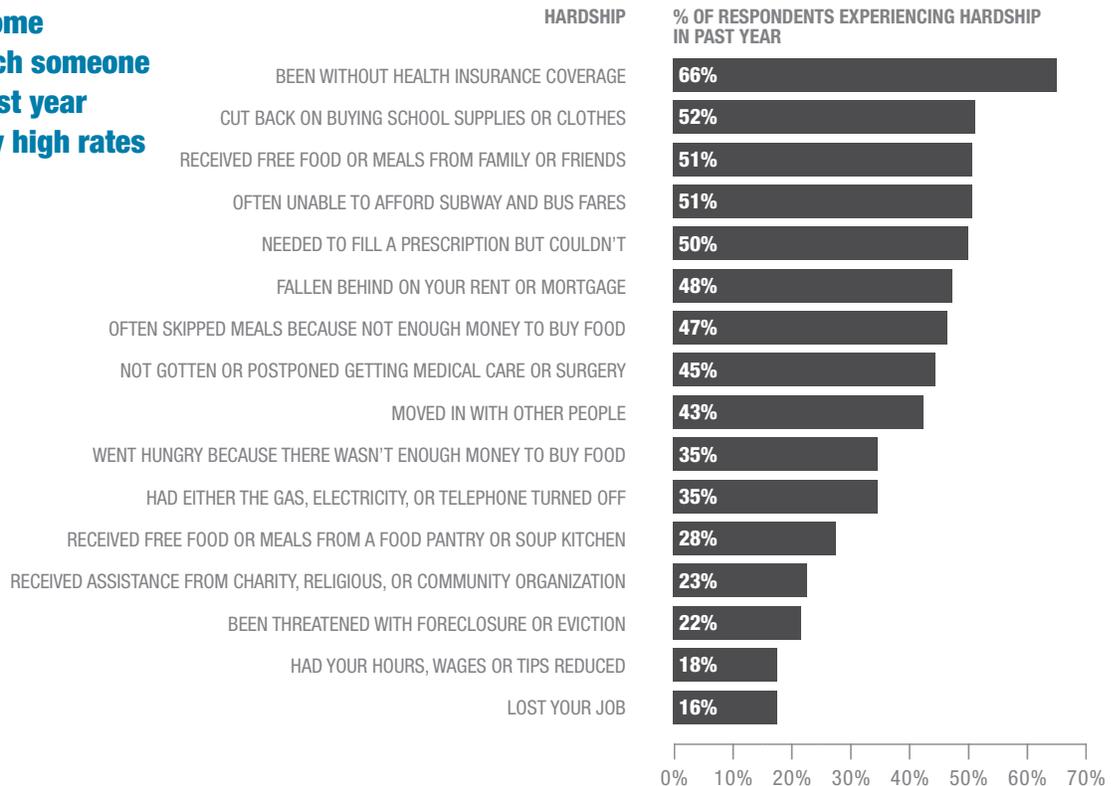
Q: If tough times were to hit you and your family, how much money in savings do you currently have to fall back on?

- ZERO
- \$1-\$499
- \$500+
- DON'T KNOW



Latinos in low-income households in which someone lost a job in the past year report dramatically high rates of hardship.

■ LOW-INCOME LATINOS IN HOUSEHOLDS WHERE SOMEONE LOST A JOB



Finding Three

We found broad agreement on the top two measures to help low-income residents get ahead: raising the minimum wage and making college more affordable.

More than five years into the recovery from the Great Recession, a majority of low-income New Yorkers do not feel like they are getting ahead and many are experiencing multiple, significant hardships. While New York City's unemployment rate of 4.7 percent in October 2015 was the lowest it has been since 2008², this has not been enough to spur upward mobility for the lowest income residents who are still stuck and struggling to get ahead. What would it take to jumpstart their stalled futures?

The answer according to New Yorkers we surveyed are two measures: raising the minimum wage and making college more affordable. These were the top two choices—by a wide margin—from a list of 10 ideas that were presented. Nearly half of low-income New Yorkers selected raising the minimum wage and 36 percent said making college more affordable were the policies that could help them get ahead. When moderate- and higher-income New Yorkers were asked what would most help low-income residents get ahead, the top responses were the same, though the order was reversed: nearly 40 percent said making college more affordable, and 36 percent named raising the minimum wage. Both income groups put increased access to job training next on their lists (22 percent of low- and 28 percent of moderate- to high-income New Yorkers).

Among low-income New Yorkers we found some differences by race and ethnicity, though raising the minimum wage and making college

more affordable are the top choices for every group. While low-income Latinos ranked increasing the minimum wage and making higher education more affordable at the top of their list, they were also more likely to say an easier path to citizenship would help them get ahead (15 percent of low-income Latinos, compared to 9 percent of low-income respondents overall. That number rises to 25 percent of low-income, immigrant Latinos). Among low-income whites, raising the minimum



wage and making college more affordable were the two most popular responses (35 percent each), though raising the minimum wage was not nearly as popular among low-income whites as among low-income blacks and Latinos. There was also more support among low-income whites for making New York more business friendly (14 percent compared to 11 percent for low-income respondents overall) and cutting taxes (28 percent

compared to 22 percent for low-income respondents overall).

Democrats and Republicans share the view that increasing the minimum wage and making college more affordable would most help low-income New Yorkers get ahead, but there are some notable differences in the level of support, as well as their backing for other ideas. Among Republicans, raising the minimum wage was the choice of 30 percent of respondents, making it tied for the second most popular response with making New York more business friendly, which was chosen by only eight percent of Democrats. Seventeen percent of Republicans selected reducing dependency on government benefits, which was chosen by just five percent of Democrats. Democrats were more likely than Republicans to say increasing the minimum wage—it was their first choice at 45

percent—and were much more likely to say family friendly work policies (12 percent compared to 4 percent for Republicans) and affordable childcare (17 percent compared to 10 percent for Republicans).

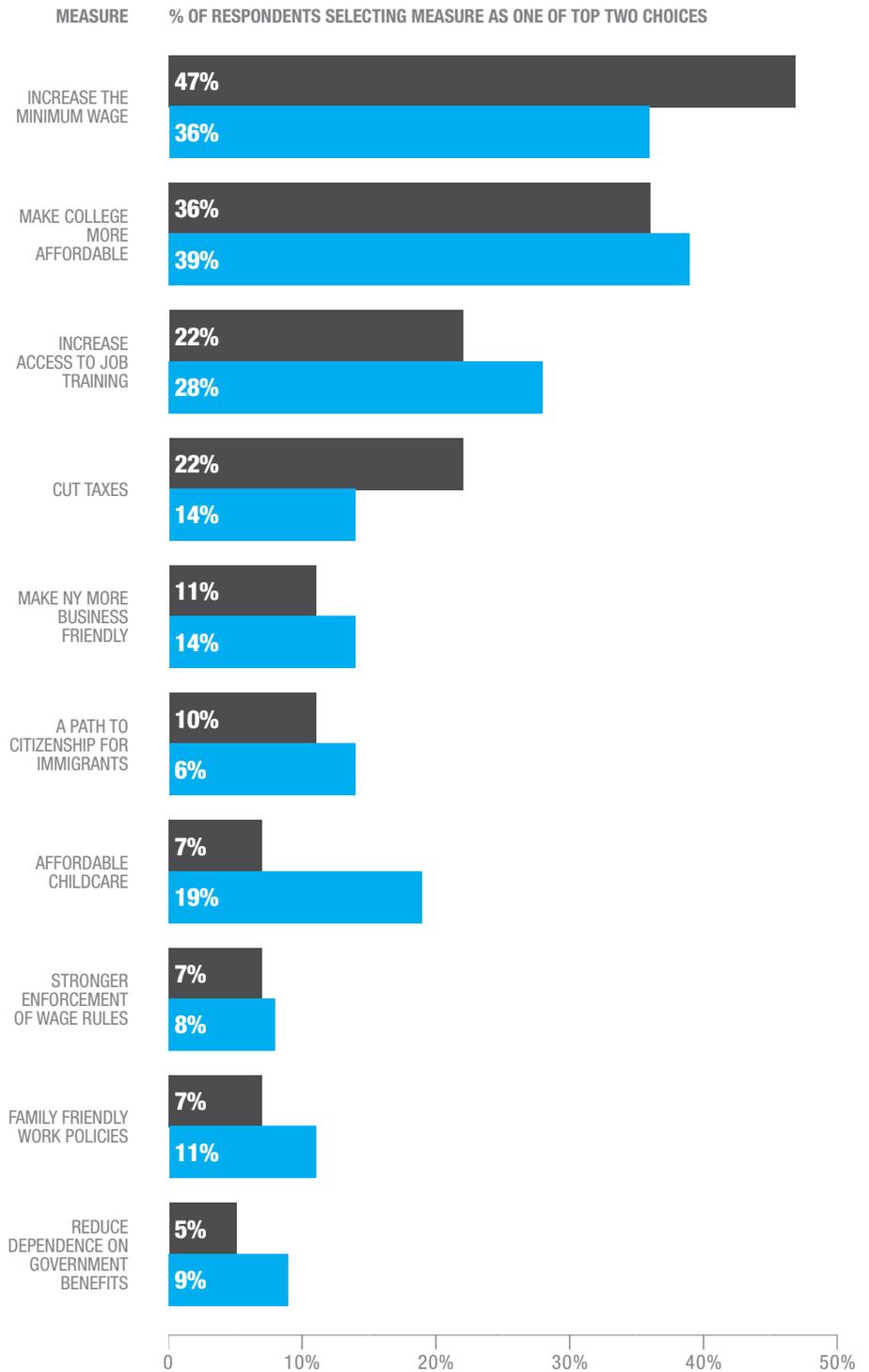
Despite these differences, raising the minimum wage and making college more affordable consistently emerge as the top two choices.

New Yorkers of all income levels feel that increasing the minimum wage and making college more affordable would most help low-income residents get ahead.

Q: Low-income respondents: Which two of the following would most increase your potential to get ahead economically? (Rank top two choices)

Q: Moderate-higher income respondents: Which two of the following would most increase the potential for low-income New Yorkers to get ahead economically? (Rank top two choices)

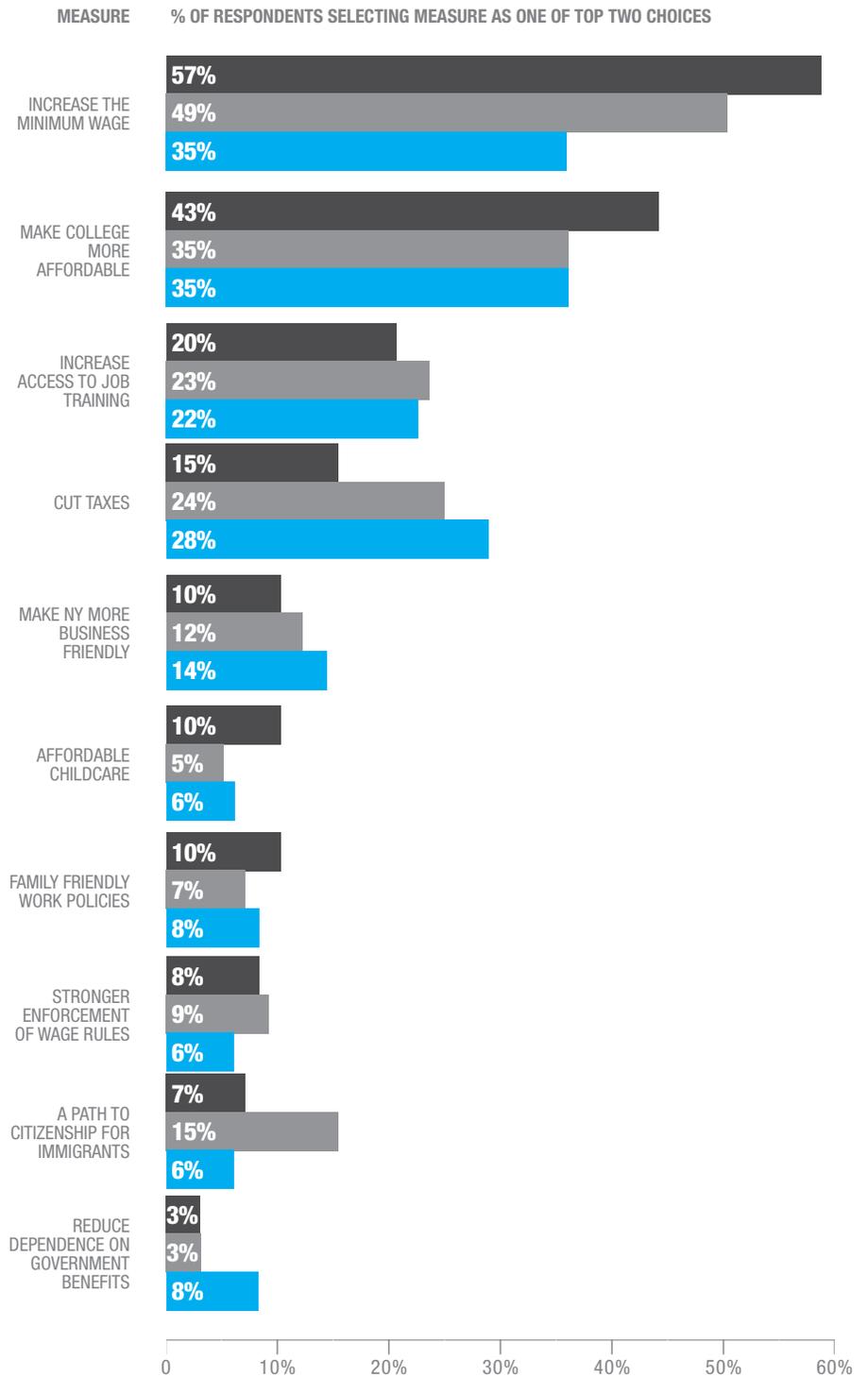
■ LOW INCOME
■ MOD-HIGH INCOME



Low-income whites say increasing the minimum wage and making college more affordable would most help them get ahead. However, raising the minimum wage was much more popular among low-income blacks and Latinos.

Q: Low-income respondents: Which two of the following would most increase your potential to get ahead economically? (Rank top two choices)

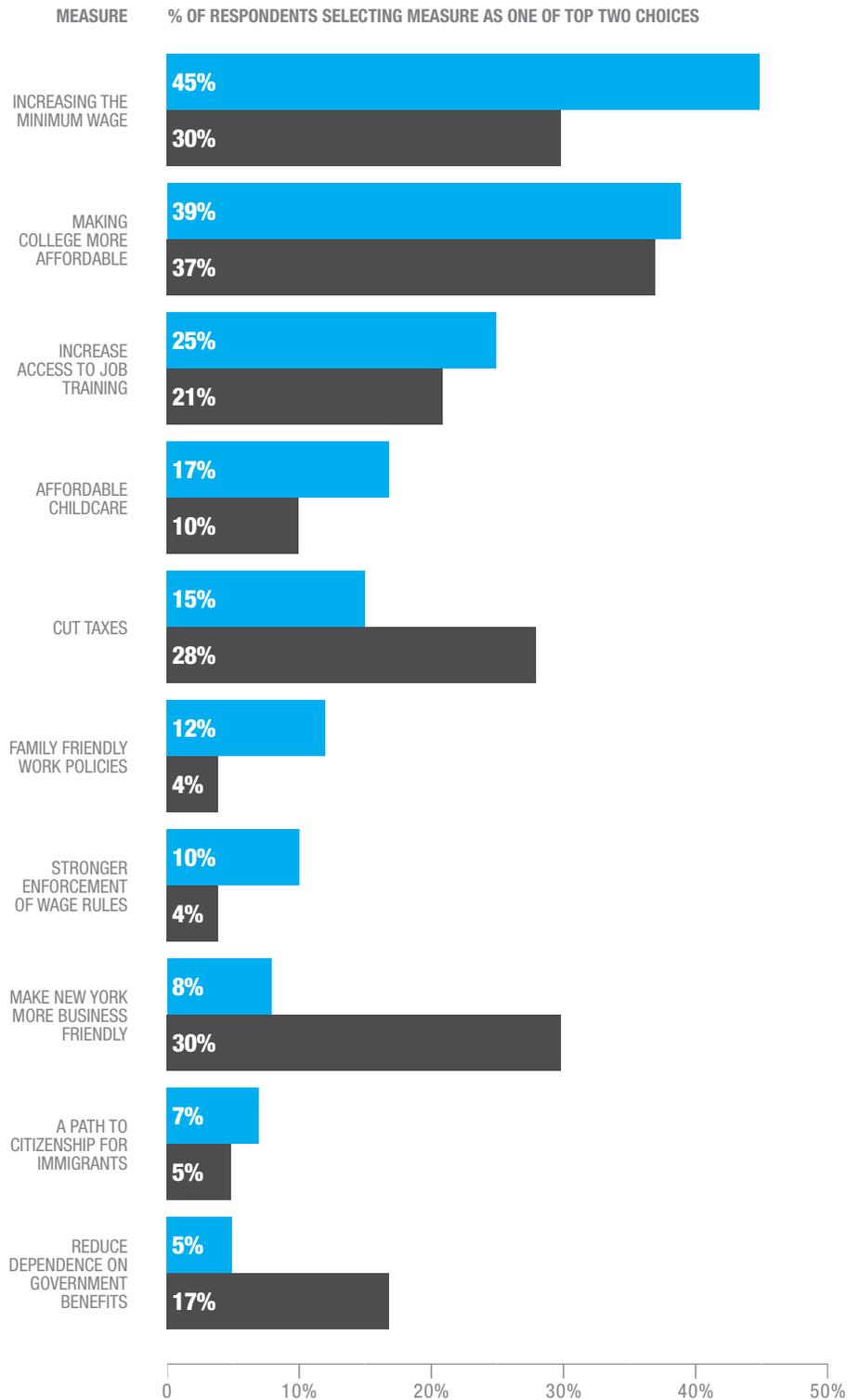
- LOW-INCOME BLACK
- LOW-INCOME LATINO
- LOW-INCOME WHITE



Democrats and Republicans agree that increasing the minimum wage and making college more affordable would most increase low-income people's potential to get ahead. But they differ greatly on other ideas.

Q: Which two of the following would most increase [your/low-income people's] potential to get ahead economically? (Rank top two choices)

■ DEMOCRATS
■ REPUBLICANS



Finding Four

New Yorkers support a 2016 state legislative agenda that includes a \$15 an hour minimum wage, paid family leave, and affordable higher education. In addition, we see support for measures to rein in the practice of unpredictable scheduling and make mass transit more affordable for low-wage workers.

In 2016, the New York State Legislature will have an opportunity to address issues that could profoundly affect the lives of its low-income residents. These include acting on the minimum wage and college costs—issues that both higher and low-income New Yorkers tell us are among their top priorities for restarting the engines of upward mobility.

CURRENT ISSUES

THE MINIMUM WAGE

The statewide minimum wage rose to \$9.00 an hour at the end of 2015, the last of three scheduled increases agreed to by legislators in 2013. Since that deal was reached, however, localities across the country have raised their minimum wage well beyond that level, and Democratic lawmakers have also called for substantially raising the federal minimum wage.

New York's minimum wage—even factoring in the scheduled increase—has fallen behind as the bar has been raised elsewhere. Cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle have already moved to phase in a \$15 an hour minimum wage—by 2018 in San Francisco, 2020 in Los Angeles, and 2021 in Seattle. While initially dismissing a similar increase for the state—as well as a higher local wage for expensive New York City—the Governor's stance has changed

dramatically in the last year. In May 2015, Governor Cuomo appointed a wage board to evaluate the minimum wage for workers in the fast food industry. After holding hearings across the state, the Board recommended and the State Labor Commissioner signed off on an increase for fast food workers to \$15 an hour by 2019 in New York City and by 2021 in the rest of the state. In September, Governor Cuomo announced his support for a statewide \$15 an hour minimum wage for all workers, and in November he announced that he would gradually increase the minimum wage for all state government employees to \$15 an hour.

The Governor's actions on the minimum wage—along with those in other parts of the country—are a recognition of how difficult it is to get by on current minimum wages. In our survey, we found that nearly 40 percent of hourly workers earning less than \$15 an hour experienced three or more hardships like falling behind in the rent or skipping meals, compared to less than 30 percent of workers who earn \$15 an hour or more.

Workers earning less than \$15 an hour are also far more likely to rely on public benefits than those earning at least \$15 an hour. Nearly half of workers earning less than \$15 an hour reported being on Medicaid, compared to 17 percent of workers earning \$15 an hour or more. And

26 percent of workers earning less than \$15 an hour reported receiving food stamps, compared to 9 percent of workers earning at least \$15 an hour. These findings underscore the point often made by proponents of increasing the minimum wage—including Governor Cuomo—that companies paying their employees low wages are being subsidized by taxpayers to pay for basic necessities such as food and healthcare for their workers³. This is especially problematic when considering many of the companies employing low-wage workers are highly profitable.

With other major cities agreeing to reach \$15 an hour in the coming years, the decision of the wage board to grant fast food workers a \$15 an hour minimum wage, the decision of Governor Cuomo to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for state employees, and the Governor's stated support of a statewide \$15 an hour minimum wage, the pressure will be on legislators to bring this new labor standard to New York.

Data from The Unheard Third shows that New York City residents are overwhelmingly in favor of a statewide \$15 an hour minimum wage. Nearly 80 percent are in favor, with nearly two-thirds strongly in favor. Support cuts across income levels, and though Democrats are more supportive than Republicans, more than two-thirds of Republicans favor a \$15 an hour minimum wage, including half who are strongly in favor.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

In 2015, the State Assembly passed a paid family leave bill that would modernize the Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program to give employees up to 12 weeks of insurance benefits to help replace lost wages when they need to care for a new baby or seriously ill family member. Currently, only a small proportion of workers—12 percent of private sector employees overall and

only five percent of those in the bottom wage quartile—have access to paid family leave from their employers.⁴ Employees who have worked for at least a year in firms with 50 or more employees are covered by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), but that only includes about 60 percent of the workforce, and since it is unpaid, even many of those who would be eligible are unable to actually take advantage of it.

When workers are not allowed to take paid leave, new parents are left with the impossible choice between spending adequate time with a newborn child or going back to work prematurely to pay the bills and hold onto their jobs. Recent research by the Community Service Society found that low-income mothers who were pressured to return to their jobs too quickly—often just two or three weeks following childbirth—experienced harmful physical, emotional, and financial distress that put their own health and the well-being of their children at risk.⁵ As our labor force ages, more workers are also experiencing the need for paid family leave to care for elderly parents and spouses stricken by health crises. These temporary family caregiving responsibilities not only strain budgets, they can lead to job loss. And for older workers in their late fifties and early sixties it can be difficult, if not impossible, to find another job.

Paid family leave is a rising issue on the national agenda, with proposals being offered by all the Democratic presidential candidates and one of the Republicans. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) has introduced the FAMILY Act to provide paid leave nationally. As with the minimum wage, states are leading the way. Three—California, New Jersey and Rhode Island—have created paid family leave by modernizing their existing temporary disability insurance programs and legislation is currently being considered in Washington, D.C., Connecticut and around the country, including in New York. As one of two

other states with TDI programs, New York is well-positioned to become the next to provide paid family leave. The bill passed by the Assembly in March 2015 now awaits action by the Senate in the session that begins January 2016.

Since we first asked about paid family leave in *The Unheard Third* in 2005, support has skyrocketed. Today, 86 percent of New Yorkers favor paid family leave, and strong support has gone from 42 percent to 73 percent in the last ten years. Support cuts across income level, and Democrats show particularly strong support, with more than nine out of ten Democrats in favor, and more than eight out of ten strongly in favor. Support from Republicans has increased dramatically in just the past year; nearly three-quarters of Republicans now support paid family leave, up from nearly two-thirds in 2014, with 58 percent strongly in favor, up from 45 percent last year. Significantly, support for paid family leave remains high even when respondents are told they would pay for it with a paycheck deduction of up to \$1 per week.

COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

In his 2015 State of the Union address, President Obama announced his proposal for two years of free community college, and plans to significantly reduce or eliminate the cost of tuition at public colleges are now a mainstream platform for many Democrats, including presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. (Sanders's plan calls for free tuition for public higher education, while Clinton's plan enables students to attend public colleges without taking on loans for tuition, although families would still be asked to contribute based on their means.) The idea recognizes both the importance of higher education to prepare young people to compete in the labor market and the increasingly prohibitive costs of getting that college education, especially for families with low incomes. From 2002

to 2012, the cost (including tuition, fees, and room and board) of attending a private college increased 27 percent, and tuition alone at some universities now exceeds \$50,000 a year. During the same time period, the cost of attending a public college increased 37 percent.⁶ In just five years from 2010 to 2015, the tuition at CUNY community colleges increased over 70 percent, from \$2,800 per year to \$4,800 per year.

The *Unheard Third* found that New Yorkers recognize the need for making college more accessible. Across income levels, two-thirds of New Yorkers feel that a young person needs at least an Associate's degree to get a family sustaining job, and over half believe you need at least a four-year degree. When parents were asked what they wanted for their own children, more than 80 percent said they wanted their children to obtain at least a four-year degree, and 46 percent said they wanted their children to obtain a post-graduate degree. Although many low-income students are enrolled in community college—and some proposals for reducing the cost of college focus solely on two-year schools—few parents see an Associate's degree as sufficient for their children. Though moderate- and higher-income respondents have slightly higher aspirations for their children, nearly 80 percent of low-income parents want their children to obtain at least a four-year degree, and over one-third want their children to obtain a post-graduate degree.

New Yorkers across income levels also agree that the cost of tuition is the number one barrier to entering and finishing a four-year college. Compared to other obstacles such as the level of academic preparation, support from family and friends, and access to information and counseling, the cost of tuition is perceived to be the greatest barrier by a wide margin.

In his 2015 State of the Union speech, President Obama said that he wanted to make two years of community college as free and universal as high school is today. New Yorkers would go even further. Over 80 percent of survey respondents agreed that the United States should expand its commitment to a free public education to include college, with seven in 10 agreeing strongly. Democrats are particularly supportive, but 70 percent of Republicans also agree that public college should be free, including over half who strongly agree.

The reports of Governor Cuomo's interest in bringing free community college to New York offered few details and any federal funding would require an unlikely act of Congress. However, there seems to be a recognition from the Governor that college—even a public community college—is too far out of reach for many low-income New Yorkers, and that is an issue that should be addressed.

EMERGING ISSUES

UNPREDICTABLE SCHEDULING

As the practice of unpredictable and on-call scheduling has grown, the problems it creates for hourly workers, especially in retail and food services, has gained increased attention. In April 2015, New York State's Attorney General issued a letter to thirteen major retailers notifying them that their scheduling practices may violate state law. As a result, some major retailers have already committed to ending the practice in which workers are asked to be on call but not told whether or not they will be needed until their shift is supposed to begin.⁷ This is especially problematic for workers who cannot afford to waste time and money commuting to a shift they are not needed to work, and is a nightmare for workers who need to make arrangements for child care, other family responsibilities, or try to hold second jobs.

We found that lack of advance scheduling notice is a serious issue for low-wage workers in New York City. Nearly three out of ten low-income workers reported receiving three days or less notice of their work schedules, and over 40 percent say they receive less than a week's notice. Low-income Latinos are particularly likely to face unpredictable schedules; one-third of Latinos receive three days or less notice and half receive less than a week's notice. One in five only receive a day's notice.

Of workers who receive less than a week's notice, 44 percent said it was a serious problem in their ability to keep their job and manage other responsibilities such as child care. In 2014, we found overwhelming support for a law that would require employers to provide more advance notice of workers' schedules. Nearly 80 percent of New Yorkers—across income levels—favor such a law, with six in ten strongly in favor.

MASS TRANSIT AFFORDABILITY

One of the most often cited hardships among poor and near-poor New Yorkers is that they are unable to afford subway or bus fares. Expensive fares are cited by New Yorkers—especially low-income Latinos—as the biggest problem with subways in New York City, more than overcrowding and problems with service. Senior citizens can currently ride for half-fare, but our data shows that many more New Yorkers need assistance affording public transportation. Twenty-two percent of low-income New Yorkers said they often cannot afford subway or bus fares, including 25 percent of low-income New Yorkers under the age of 65. And nearly one in four of the working poor have trouble affording the means by which many residents get to work.

Problems paying for mass transit are especially prevalent for poor blacks and Latinos. Among working-age respondents (not eligible for senior

half-fare discounts), nearly one-third of poor blacks and 36 percent of poor Latinos reported they often had trouble affording fares. And working-age Latinos between 100 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level are not much better off: one-third reported having trouble affording fares, compared to 21 percent of near-poor blacks and 16 percent of near-poor whites under 65.

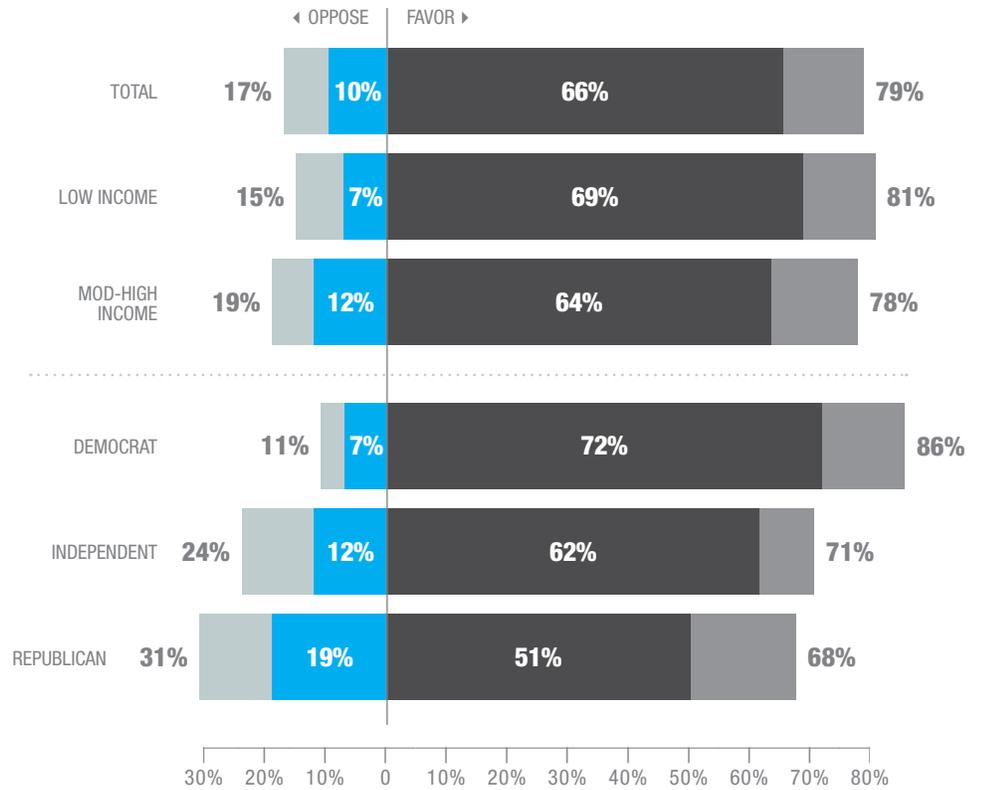
Being unable to afford subway or bus fares has real consequences for low-income New Yorkers, and for low-income Latinos in particular. Nearly 40 percent of low-income Latinos said that the cost of subway and bus fares has prevented them from taking or looking for a job farther from where they live. And 40 percent of low-income New Yorkers who are unemployed and looking for work reported that they often have trouble affording subway or bus fares. This suggests that rising fares in New York may be having significant adverse effects on upward mobility.

The MTA has struggled in the past year to gain the funding needed to meet its capital needs. In October, an agreement was reached between the City and State that would provide over \$26 billion over five years for MTA capital funding needs.⁸ This was an extremely important measure; reducing debt service helps restrain future fare increases. However, as our findings show, even the current fares are unaffordable for many low-income New Yorkers and future fare hikes are already planned. CSS has proposed exploring ways that the MTA can offer low-income residents a reduced fare, something that Seattle, San Francisco, and a handful of smaller cities have done, and that Boston and Denver are considering. In our 2014 survey, we found that a majority of New Yorkers support a reduced fare program for low-wage workers, including more than eight out of ten low-income New Yorkers.

Support is high for a \$15/hour minimum wage—a majority are in favor among every income group and political party. Nearly three-quarters of Democrats and half of Republicans are strongly in favor.

Q: Do you favor or oppose gradually raising the minimum wage for New York State to 15 dollars an hour by 2020, and tying it to increases in the cost of living after 2020?

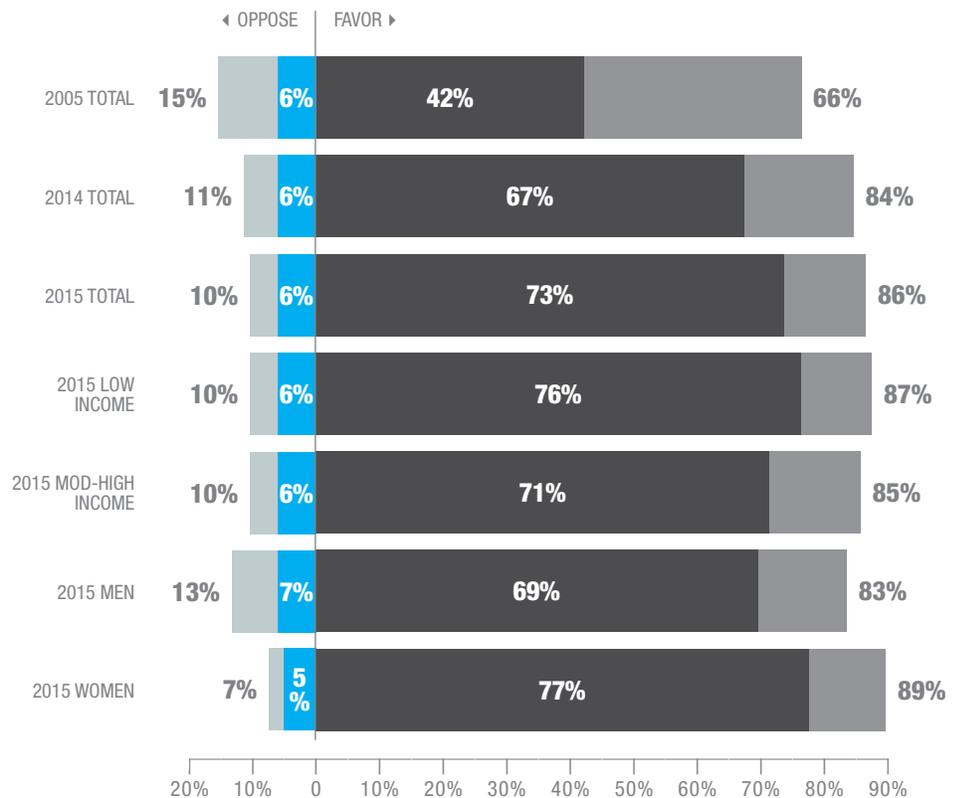
- FAVOR STRONGLY
- FAVOR NOT SO STRONGLY
- OPPOSE STRONGLY
- OPPOSE NOT SO STRONGLY



Paid family leave is an idea whose time has come. Since we asked this question in 2005, overall support has grown, and the intensity of support has skyrocketed. Now nearly three out of four New Yorkers strongly favor it.

Q: Employees in New York State are currently covered by a state disability insurance program that replaces some lost wages when someone is temporarily out of work because of a disability. Would you favor or oppose modernizing this insurance to provide up to 12 weeks in a year of paid family leave to a worker who needs time to care for a new baby or seriously ill family member, like an aging parent?

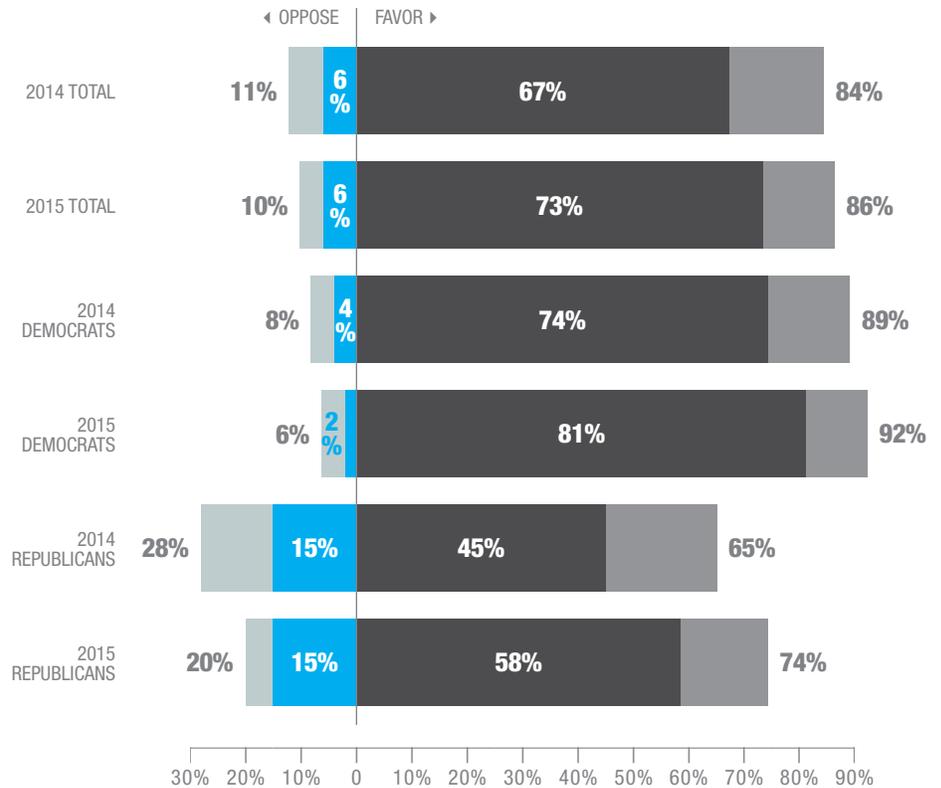
- FAVOR STRONGLY
- FAVOR NOT SO STRONGLY
- OPPOSE STRONGLY
- OPPOSE NOT SO STRONGLY



Support for Paid Family Leave cuts across party lines. Over nine out of ten Democrats and nearly three-quarters of Republicans favor the proposal.

Q: Employees in New York State are currently covered by a state disability insurance program that replaces some lost wages when someone is temporarily out of work because of a disability. Would you favor or oppose modernizing this insurance to provide up to 12 weeks in a year of paid family leave to a worker who needs time to care for a new baby or seriously ill family member, like an aging parent?

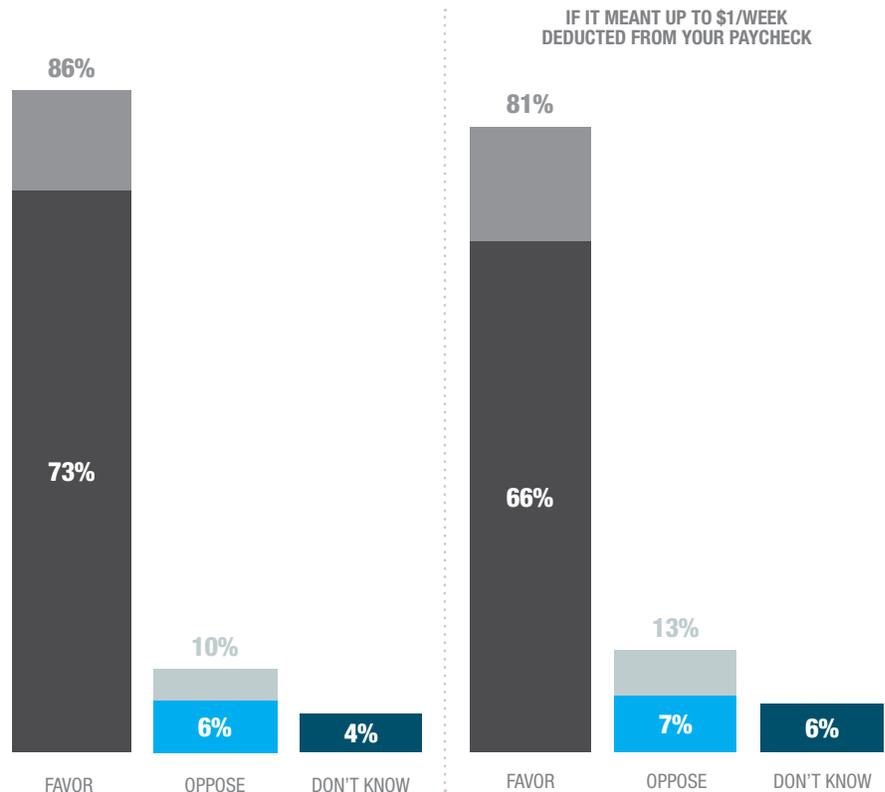
- FAVOR STRONGLY
- FAVOR NOT SO STRONGLY
- OPPOSE STRONGLY
- OPPOSE NOT SO STRONGLY



New Yorkers strongly favor expanding paid family leave even if it would impact their paycheck.

Q: Employees in New York State are currently covered by a state disability insurance program that replaces some lost wages when someone is temporarily out of work because of a disability. Would you favor or oppose modernizing this insurance to provide up to 12 weeks in a year of paid family leave to a worker who needs time to care for a new baby or seriously ill family member, like an aging parent?

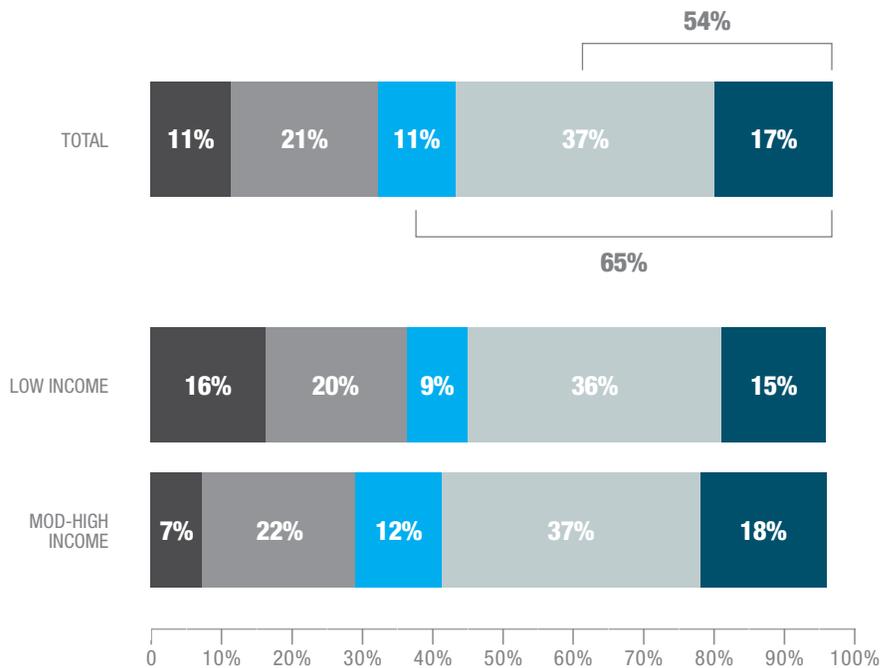
- FAVOR STRONGLY
- FAVOR NOT SO STRONGLY
- OPPOSE STRONGLY
- OPPOSE NOT SO STRONGLY
- DON'T KNOW



Nearly two-thirds of New Yorkers feel a young person needs at least an Associate's degree to get a family sustaining job, and over half believe you need at least a four-year degree.

Q: In your opinion, what level of education does a young person need to get a job that enables them to sustain a family?

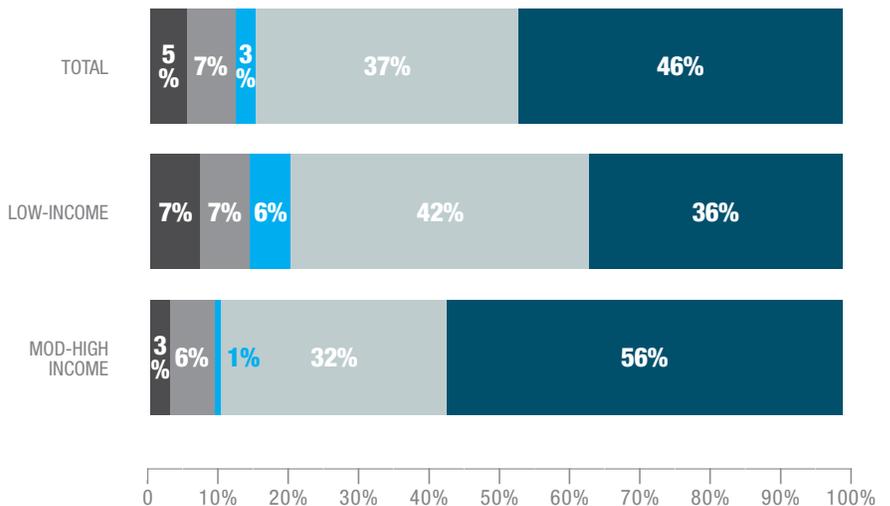
- HS OR LESS
- SOME COLLEGE OR POST HS TRAINING
- AA DEGREE
- FOUR-YEAR DEGREE
- POST-GRADUATE



Very few parents think a high school education is adequate for their children. More than eight out of ten want their children to get at least a four-year degree; more than one-third of low-income parents want their children to obtain a post-graduate degree.

Q: What level of education do you want for your own children so that they can sustain a family of their own one day? (Parents only)

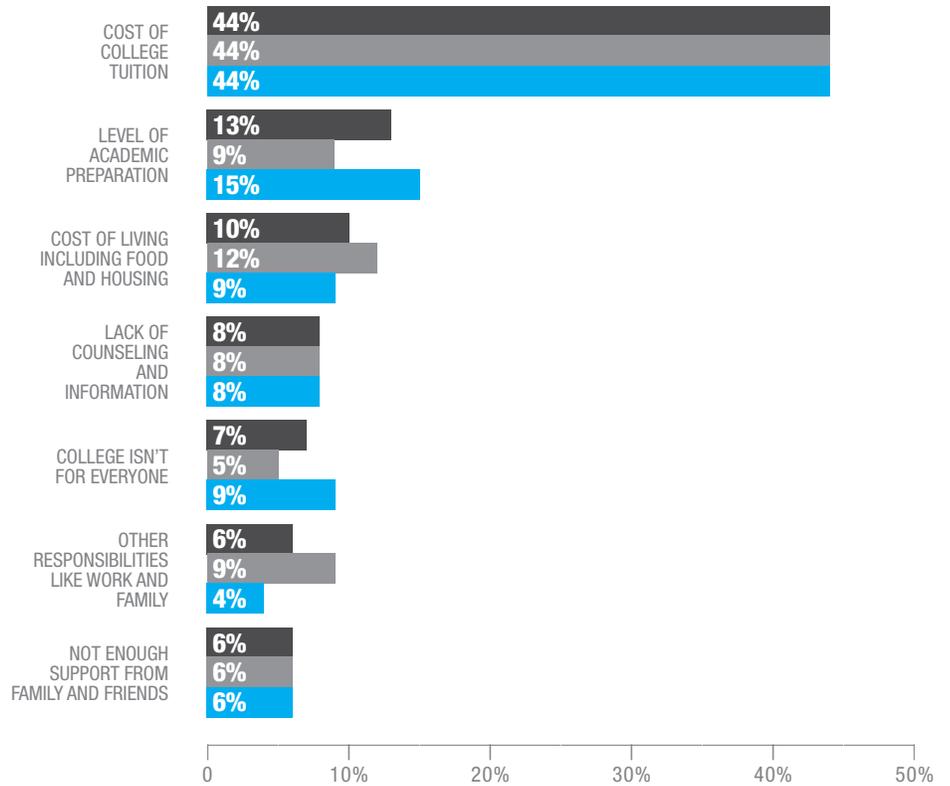
- HS OR LESS
- SOME COLLEGE OR POST HS TRAINING
- AA DEGREE
- FOUR-YEAR DEGREE
- POST-GRADUATE



New Yorkers of all income levels agree that the cost of college tuition is by far the biggest barrier to entering a four-year college.

Q: Which of the following do you think is the biggest barrier to entering a four-year college?

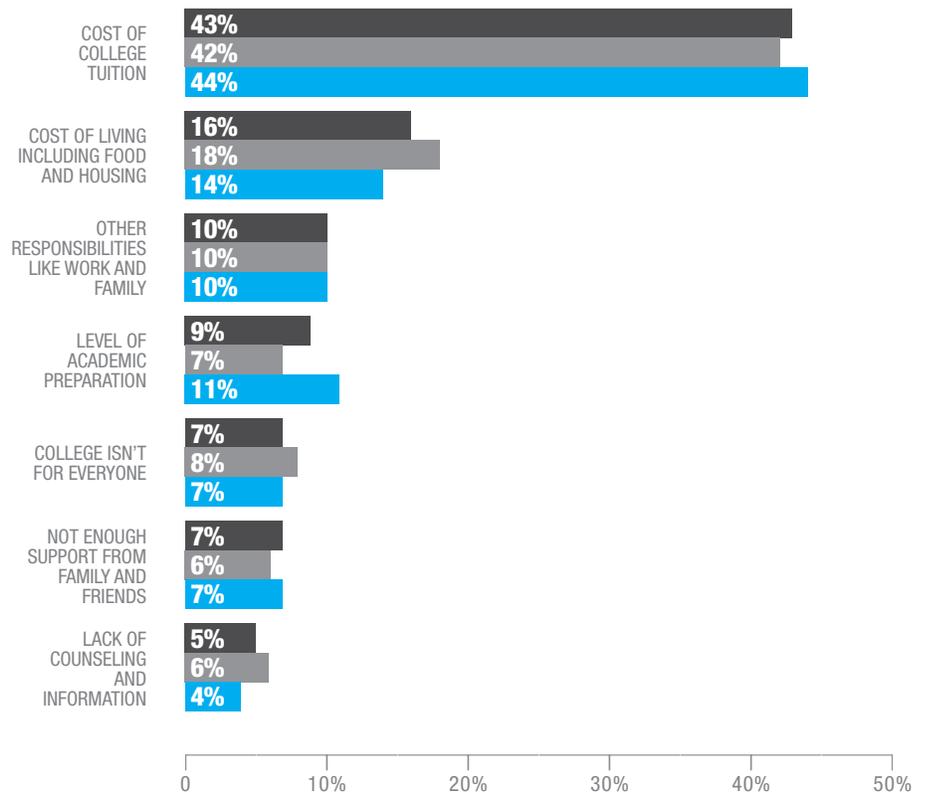
■ TOTAL
■ LOW INCOME
■ MOD-HIGH INCOME



And they also feel the cost of college tuition is the biggest barrier to finishing a four-year college.

Q: Which of the following do you think is the biggest barrier to finishing a four-year college?

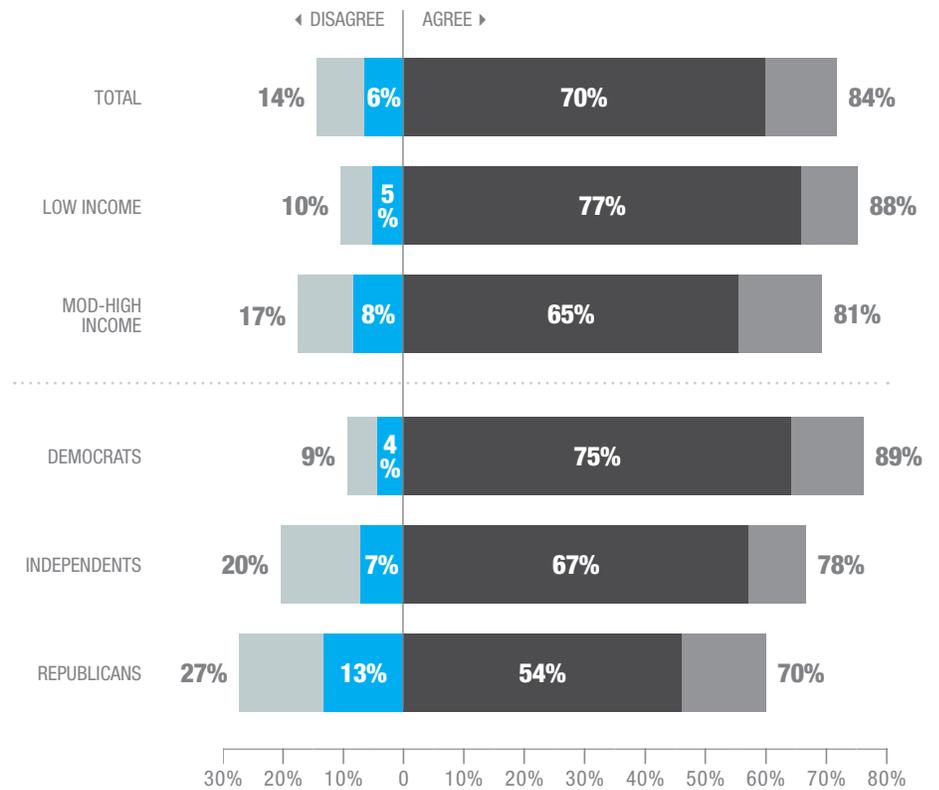
■ TOTAL
■ LOW INCOME
■ MOD-HIGH INCOME



More than eight out of ten New Yorkers—across income levels—believe that the United States should expand its commitment to free public education so that it includes college. Seven out of ten strongly agree with that idea.

Q: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: In the first half of the 20th century, the United States expanded public high school education. Now for the 21st century, we should expand our commitment to include a free public college education.

- STRONGLY AGREE
- NOT SO STRONGLY AGREE
- STRONGLY DISAGREE
- NOT SO STRONGLY DISAGREE

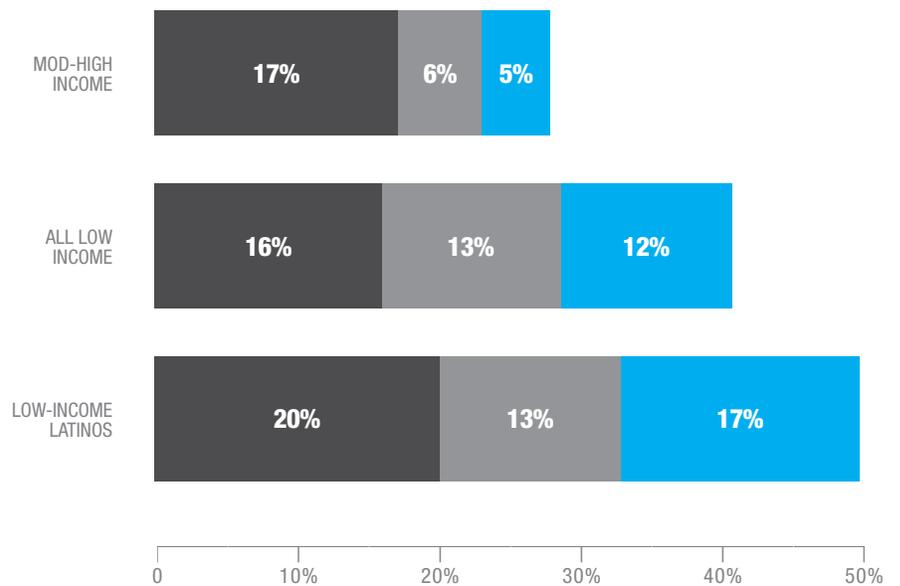


Nearly 30 percent of low-income working New Yorkers get three days or less notice of their schedule; Latinos are most affected, with half reporting less than a week's notice.

Q: Would you say you generally know your work schedule at your primary job: one day in advance, 2-3 days in advance, 4-6 days in advance, between 1 and 2 weeks in advance, between 2 and 3 weeks in advance, more than 3 weeks in advance?

- 1 DAY
- 2-3 DAYS
- 4-6 DAYS

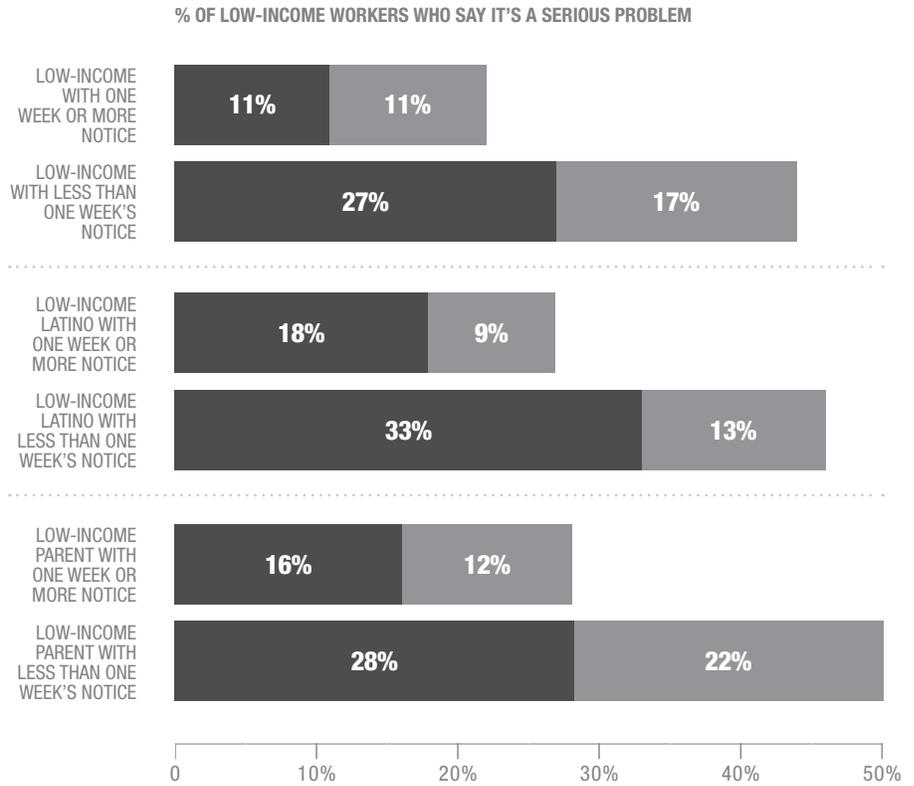
SHARE OF WORKERS RECEIVING LESS THAN ONE WEEK'S NOTICE OF THEIR SCHEDULE



Little advance notice of work schedules makes it harder for workers to hold onto their jobs and take care of children and other responsibilities.

Q: And how would you describe the impact [your work scheduling] has on keeping your job and managing other responsibilities, like children? Very serious problem, somewhat serious problem, a little serious of a problem, not a problem at all.

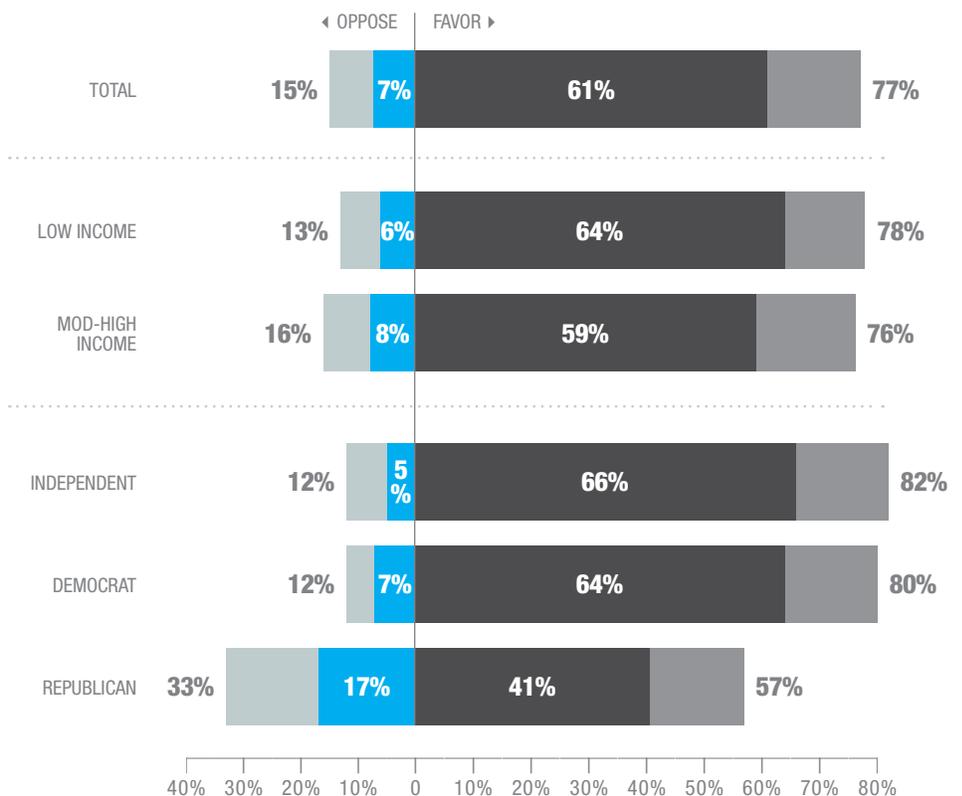
■ VERY SERIOUS PROBLEM
■ SOMEWHAT SERIOUS PROBLEM



More than three-quarters of New Yorkers favor a law that requires employers to provide more advance notice for hourly workers' schedules.

Q: Would you favor or oppose a law that requires employers to provide more advance notice or additional pay for hourly workers whose job is subject to unpredictable work schedules and being on-call? (From The Unheard Third 2014)

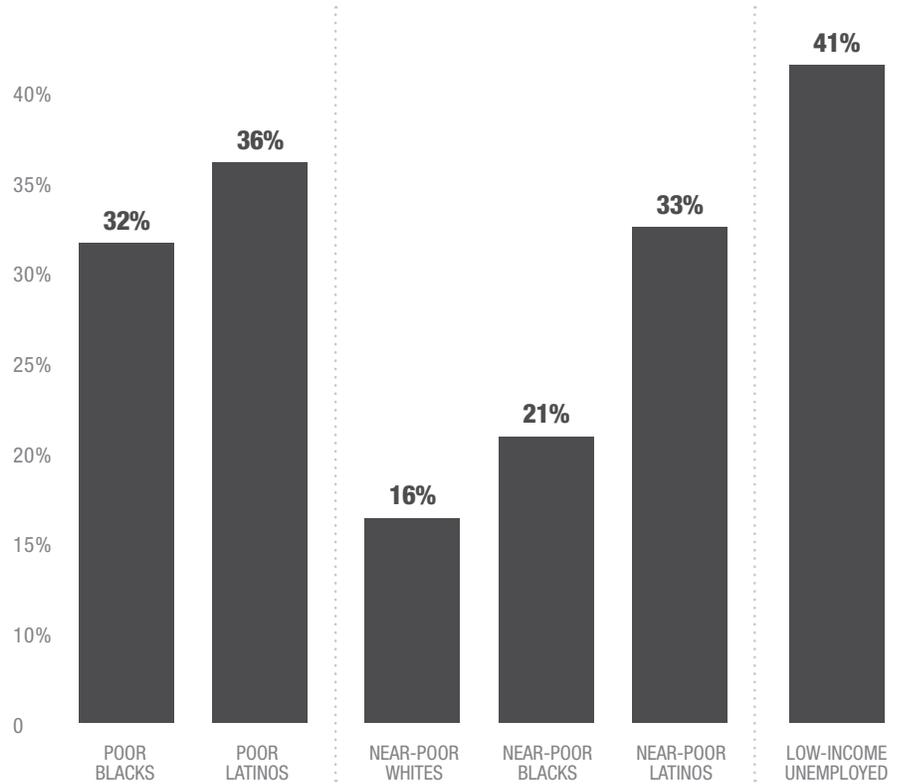
■ FAVOR STRONGLY
■ FAVOR NOT SO STRONGLY
■ OPPOSE STRONGLY
■ OPPOSE NOT SO STRONGLY



Around one-third of poor and near poor working-age Latinos have trouble affording subway and bus fares. And four out of ten low-income, unemployed working-age respondents reported having difficulty affording fares.

*Responses for those under the age of 65 only; there were not enough poor whites under 65 in the sample to include in the findings

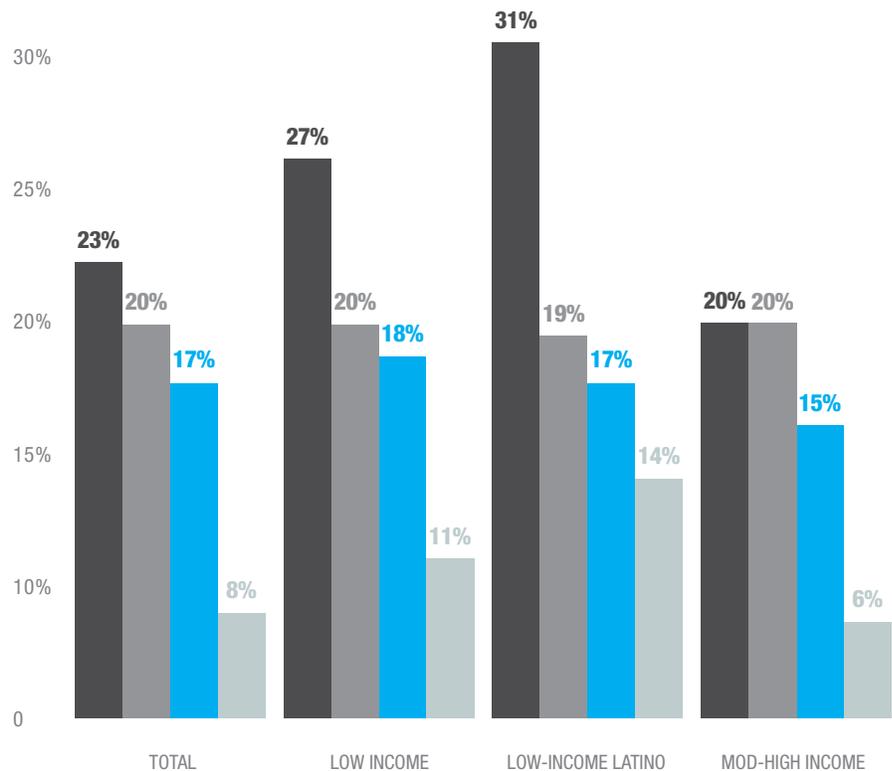
■ OFTEN HAD TROUBLE AFFORDING SUBWAY OR BUS FARE



Low-income New Yorkers—especially Latinos—think that the biggest problem with subways in New York City is that the fares are too expensive.

Q: Which of the following is the biggest problem with subways in New York City?

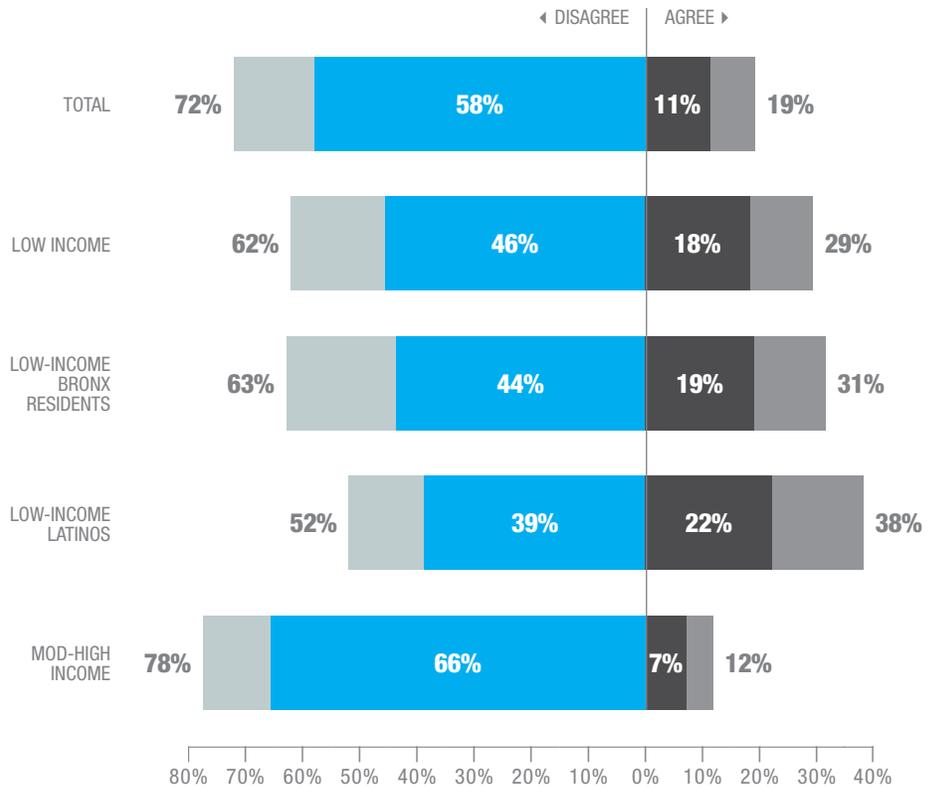
■ FARES TOO EXPENSIVE
 ■ TOO CROWDED
 ■ TOO MANY DELAYS
 ■ INFREQUENT OR LACK OF SERVICE



Three out of ten low-income New Yorkers—and nearly 40 percent of low-income Latinos—say that the cost of subway or bus fares has prevented them from looking for or taking a job further away from where they live.

Q: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I have not been able to look for or take a job further away from where I live because of the cost of subway or bus fares.

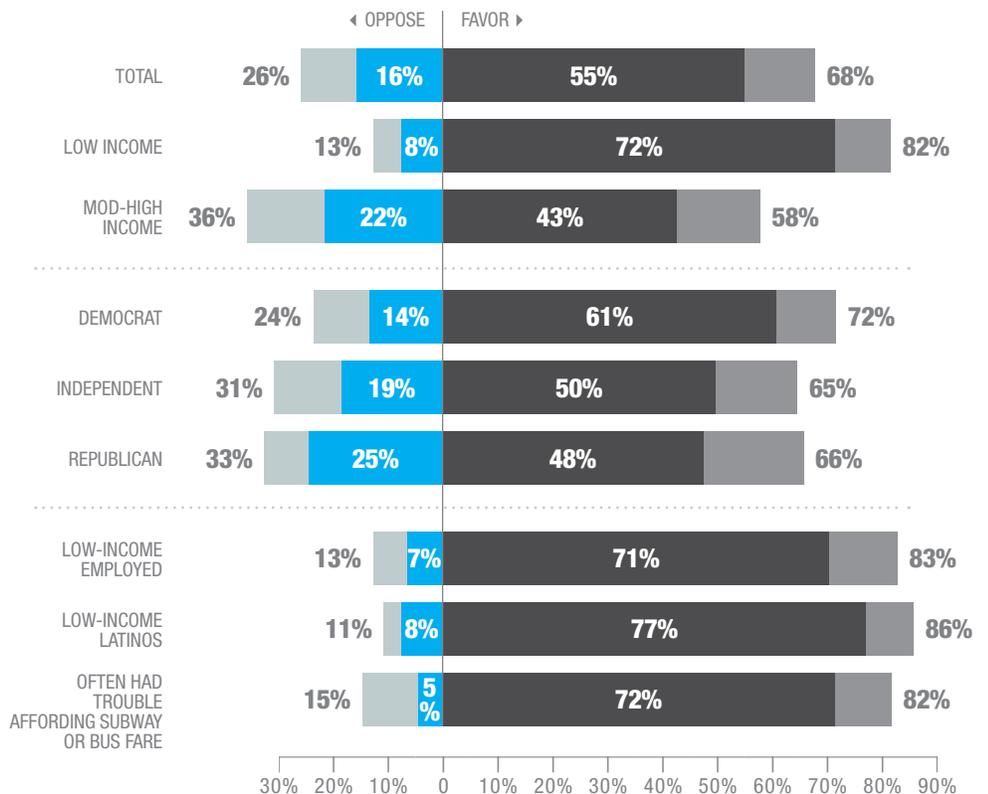
- STRONGLY AGREE
- NOT SO STRONGLY AGREE
- STRONGLY DISAGREE
- NOT SO STRONGLY DISAGREE



Eight in ten low-income New Yorkers, and over two-thirds overall, favor a reduced subway and bus fare program. Nearly 80 percent of low-income Latinos strongly favor such a program.

Q: Now I'm going to read you about a series of steps the STATE could take to help more low-income New Yorkers reach the middle class. Please tell me if you favor or oppose each idea, or if you are unsure: Reduce subway and bus fares to half-price for low-wage workers. (From The Unheard Third 2014)

- FAVOR STRONGLY
- NOT SO STRONGLY AGREE
- OPPOSE STRONGLY
- OPPOSE NOT SO STRONGLY



Conclusion

What the 2016 Legislative Session Can Do to Help New Yorkers Get Ahead

Despite the economic recovery that officially began in 2009, poverty levels for New York City have not returned to pre-recession levels. One in five New Yorkers lives in poverty, including three out of ten children. Low-income New Yorkers continue to feel like they are stuck or slipping down the economic ladder with little chance of making it into the middle class. Among the poor, eight in ten do not see themselves moving ahead, including a quarter who feel like they are losing ground. This translates into a story of daily hardships. Roughly four out of ten low-income New Yorkers in our survey reported experiencing three or more hardships such as falling behind in the rent or skipping meals because there wasn't enough money to buy food. It is a struggle that does not seem to be improving, despite private sector job growth and low unemployment.

Latinos seem to be in a particularly precarious situation because they are more likely than other low-income New Yorkers to lack savings that could provide some cushion against job loss or other life events, such as the birth of child. Sixty-two percent of low-income Latinos compared to forty-nine percent of all low-income New Yorkers had less than \$500 to fall back on. And among the poor, 70 percent of Latinos said they had less than \$500 compared to 59 percent of the poor overall. Forty-four percent of poor Latinos said they had no savings at all. Among low-income Latino households in which someone lost a job during the year, hardships skyrocketed: two-thirds went without health insurance, half could not afford mass transit or to fill a needed prescription, and

nearly half fell behind in the rent or often skipped meals. Difficulty affording a MetroCard—a problem for Latinos more than any other group—impacted their economic mobility: nearly four out of ten low-income Latinos cited the cost of a MetroCard as keeping them from looking for or taking a job further from home, compared to 29 percent of low-income New Yorkers overall. Low-income Latinos were also most likely to be affected by unpredictable work schedules, with half reporting less than a week's notice for their hours, making it challenging for them to keep their jobs and manage other responsibilities, like child care.

What will it take to promote greater upward mobility? New Yorkers recognize a college education is now needed to obtain a job that will sustain a family. But rising costs and fears of being saddled with enormous debt are putting that needed college degree out of reach. And for those in the lowest paying jobs, working full time at \$9.00 an hour—the new minimum wage beginning in 2016—brings home less than \$19,000 a year, not enough to keep a family of three out of poverty.

Our survey findings point to a clear agenda for the 2016 state legislative session that will help low-wage workers get ahead. Governor Cuomo has voiced strong support for a \$15 an hour minimum wage, but given less attention to college affordability. Paid family leave is gaining traction, and with the Assembly bill already passed seems poised to advance this session. With public opinion favoring all of these proposals, there should be no delay in moving them forward.

About The Unheard Third

The Unheard Third, the Community Service Society's annual survey of low-income New Yorkers, is the only public opinion poll in the nation to regularly chronicle issues facing low-income individuals and families. The Unheard Third tracks the concerns and hardships of New York City's low-income residents and their views on what programs and policies would help them get ahead. Developed and administered in collaboration with Lake Research Partners, a leading national polling firm, The Unheard Third also surveys middle- and higher-income New Yorkers to see where their priorities and concerns converge—and diverge—from those of low-income New Yorkers.

The findings from The Unheard Third reinforce our belief that public policy aimed at this population must, in part, be guided by the life experiences and ideas of New Yorkers living in poverty. CSS uses the survey to inform and guide our research, direct service programs, and policy recommendations.

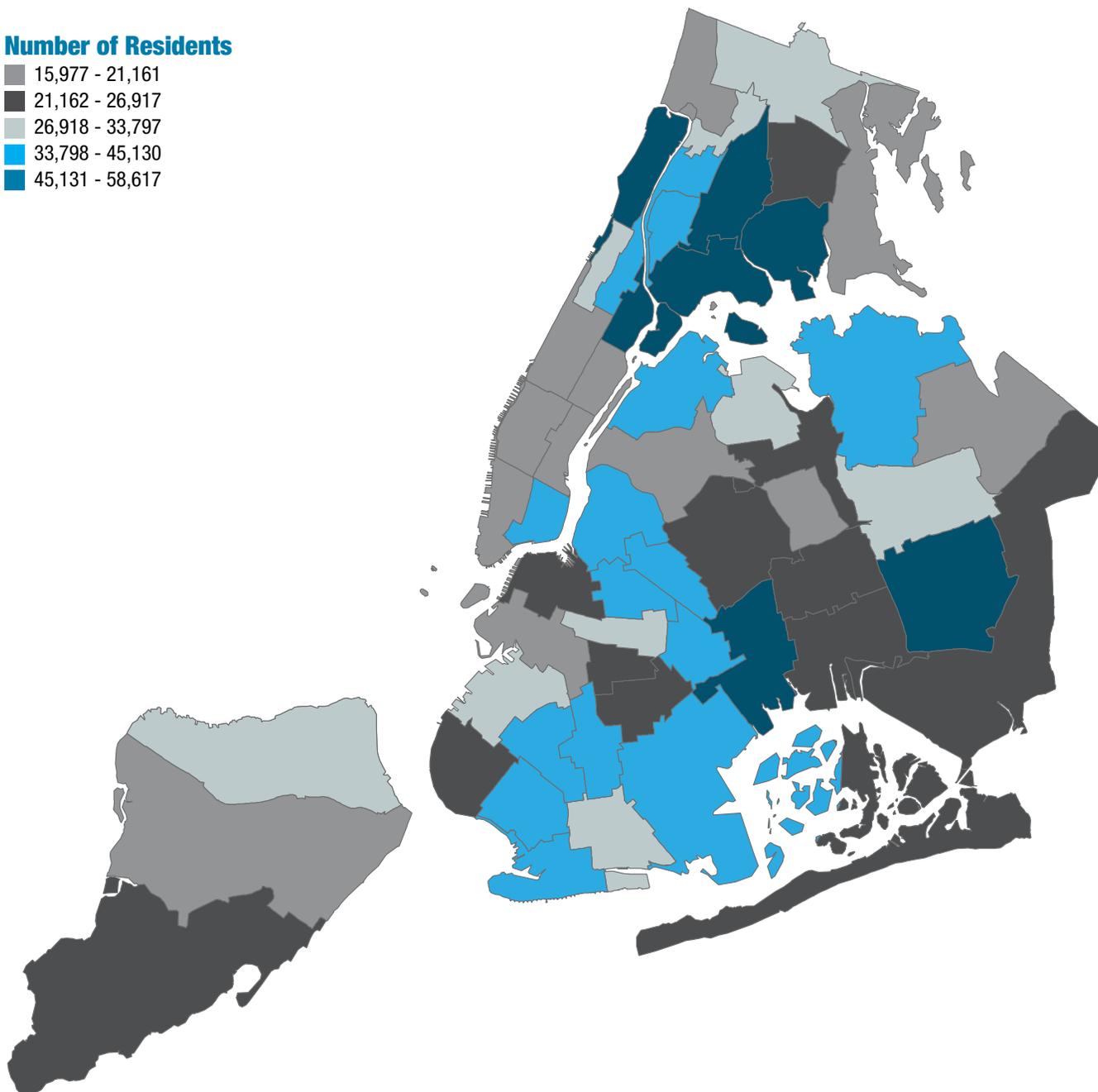
CSS aims to distribute its annual survey as widely as possible, to ensure that the voices of low-income New Yorkers are heard by politicians, community leaders, the media, researchers, and the public. CSS staff members frequently brief legislators and not-for-profit organizations about the findings from The Unheard Third. CSS staff members also seek input from labor, government, nonprofit, and civic leaders as they develop the survey each year to ensure it addresses current issues.

Where The Unheard Third Live

Geographic Distribution of voting age citizens with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level

Number of Residents

- 15,977 - 21,161
- 21,162 - 26,917
- 26,918 - 33,797
- 33,798 - 45,130
- 45,131 - 58,617



Defining Income Levels

LABEL	DEFINITION	FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINE IN 2015 FOR A FAMILY OF 3*	PERCENT OF NEW YORK CITY VOTING AGE CITIZENS	PERCENT OF ALL NEW YORKERS
Poor	Below 100% of the federal poverty threshold	\$20,090	16%	20%
Near poor	Between 100 and 199% of the federal poverty threshold	\$40,180	17%	20%
Moderate Income	Between 200% and 399% of the federal poverty threshold	\$80,360	26%	26%
Higher Income	400% of the federal poverty threshold and over	N/A	41%	34%

NEW YORK CITY STATISTICS FROM 2014 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

*FEDERAL POVERTY *GUIDELINES* ARE ISSUED EACH YEAR BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND ARE USED TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY FOR CERTAIN FEDERAL PROGRAMS. OFFICIAL POVERTY ESTIMATES ARE CALCULATED USING THE FEDERAL POVERTY THRESHOLD, WHICH IS UPDATED EVERY YEAR BY THE CENSUS BUREAU.

Endnotes

1. Emmanuel Saez. "Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States (Updated with 2013 preliminary estimates)." University of California, Berkeley. January 2015.
2. Local Area Unemployment Statistics for New York City. Available at <http://labor.ny.gov/stats/laus.asp>
3. The Governor has made this argument on several occasions, including in his announcement raising the minimum wage for State employees. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/video-transcript-governor-cuomo-announces-new-york-raising-minimum-wage-state-workers-15-hour>
4. National Compensation Survey, 2014.
5. Nancy Rankin and Margaret Mark. "A Necessity, Not a Benefit. NYC's Low-Income Moms Discuss Their Struggles without Paid Family Leave and Job Security." Community Service Society. May 2015.
6. National Center for Education Statistics. "Fast Facts: Tuition Costs of Colleges and Universities." <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=76>
7. Bouree Lam. "The End of On-Call Scheduling?" The Atlantic. October 23, 2015.
8. MTA. "Governor, Mayor, and MTA Chairman Announce Agreement on Funding for MTA Capital Program." October 10th, 2015. Available at <http://www.mta.info/news/2015/10/10/governor-mayor-and-mta-chairman-announce-agreement-funding-mta-capital-program>

How the survey was conducted

The Community Service Society designed this survey in collaboration with Lake Research Partners, who administered the survey by phone using professional interviewers. The survey was conducted from July 19 to August 17, 2015.

The survey reached a total of **1,705 New York City residents**, ages 18 or older, divided into two samples:

- **1,052 low-income** residents (up to 200 percent of federal poverty standards, or FPL) comprise the first sample:
 - ▶ **515 poor** respondents, from households earning **at or below 100 percent of FPL**
 - ▶ **537 near-poor** respondents, from households earning **101–200 percent of FPL**
- **653 moderate- and higher-income** residents (above 200 percent of FPL) comprise the second sample:
 - ▶ **452 moderate-income** respondents, from households earning **201–400 percent of FPL**
 - ▶ **201 higher-income** respondents, from households earning above **400 percent of FPL**
- This year's survey also included an oversample of **502 cell phone** interviews among adult residents at up to 400 percent of FPL.

Telephone numbers for the low-income sample were drawn using random digit dial (RDD) among exchanges in census tracts with an average annual income of no more than \$40,000. Telephone numbers for the higher-income sample were drawn using RDD in exchanges in the remaining census tracts. The data were weighted slightly by income level, gender, region, age, and race in order to ensure that it accurately reflects the demographic configuration of these populations. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

In interpreting survey results, all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error; that is, the results of a survey may differ from those which would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends on both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of responses to a particular question. The margin of error for the low income component is 3.0%. The margin of error for the higher income component is 3.8%.

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