New Yorkers Oppose Austerity and Support Taxing the Rich

Authors: Sean McElwee, Executive Director of Data for Progress, Gustavo Sanchez, Senior Data Engineer at Data for Progress

- New Yorkers overwhelmingly prefer raising taxes on the rich to cutting public services.
- Taxes on those making over $2 million a year or on investments by billionaires are most popular.
- Protecting state aid to schools and healthcare is popular and voters feel both are important issues.
- There is majority support for measures to raise money and provide direct support to workers who were excluded from federal coronavirus stimulus.
- New Yorkers strongly support further legislative action to cancel rent.
- While Governor Cuomo is popular, voters strongly feel that the official response to the crisis has been inadequate. His proposed austerity measures are very unpopular, and may impact his popularity.

In a June poll, Data for Progress found that amid the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, voters in New York State overwhelmingly oppose austerity measures and would like to see the budget deficit met with additional taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers while keeping vital public services intact. They would also like to see the state Legislature fill in gaps in the federal response for workers who have been left behind.

Within the context of New York's multi-billion dollar budget deficit, we asked New Yorkers if they prefered cutting public services or raising taxes. We found that 80% preferred raising taxes on the rich, while only 20% preferred making cuts to public services.

Afterwards we followed up with more specific taxes and budget cuts to see which areas voters most preferred to tax or make cuts to. The most popular tax policies were on individuals making over $2 million a year (80% total support) and an additional tax on investments made by billionaires (81% total support). Other taxes we tested were popular as well including a tax on those with multiple homes (73% total support) and a tax on digital advertising platforms (79% total support). In contrast, only 29% of voters supported making cuts to Medicaid.

On the issue of state aid to schools, New York voters expressed strong support for protecting education funding. When asked to rate how important protecting funding for education was compared to other issues, 85% said it was either very important or somewhat important. The importance of protecting funding for education was even higher than raising taxes on the rich (46% very important / 30% somewhat important). Similarly, voters felt that protecting funding for hospitals and healthcare was important, with 90% saying it was either very important or somewhat important.

When asked specifically about the prospect of Governor Cuomo's proposed 20% cut to state aid to schools, 50% of voters agreed that education should be our number one priority and we should raise taxes on the rich to avoid cuts, and an additional 34% supported raising taxes to minimize cuts if they were unavoidable.

When federal coronavirus relief was first passed, it excluded many workers due to their immigration status. We tested whether voters supported creating a $3.5 Billion Excluded Workers' Fund to support New Yorkers who have not received federal relief, regardless of the recipients immigration states -- 61% of voters supported this policy.

Lastly, we asked New Yorkers about how they think the crisis of rent should be handled. In terms of importance, 69% responded that cancelling rent until the crisis passed was either very important or somewhat important. When we later asked whether they supported or opposed specific policies 79% supported disallowing rent hikes, 76% supported extending the current moratorium on evictions and 59% supported canceling rent for the duration of the crisis, including undocumented household.

We observed a disconnect between Governor Cuomo's approval ratings and the unpopularity of his proposed austerity regime. Statewide, 58% of voters feel that federal, state and local officials need to do more in response to the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. Once voters are made aware of Cuomo's preference to impose austerity on New Yorkers rather than raise revenue through additional taxes, his popularity may waiver.

Questions & Toplines

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Governor Andrew Cuomo is handling his job as Governor of New York?

    42% - Strongly approve

28% - Somewhat approve
12% - Somewhat disapprove
14% - Strongly approve
5% - Not sure

Do you feel that federal, state and local elected officials have done enough or need to do more to handle the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic crisis in your community?

58% - They need to do more
29% - They have done enough
13% - Not sure

For each of the following issues please rate how important it is to you:

a. *Cancelling rent until the crisis passes*

34% - Very important
35% - Somewhat important
16% - Not that important
9% - Not at all important
6% - Not sure

b. *Protecting funding for education*

55% - Very important
30% - Somewhat important
8% - Not that important
4% - Not at all important
3% - Not sure

c. *Raising taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers to make sure the costs of the crisis are shared fairly*

46% - Very important
30% - Somewhat important
12% - Not that important
7% - Not at all important
5% - Not sure

d. *Protecting funding for hospitals and healthcare*

69% - Very important
21% - Somewhat important
5% - Not that important
2% - Not at all important
3% - Not sure

New York faces a multi-billion dollar budget deficit due to coronavirus. How would you prefer the state close this deficit?

20% - Cutting health care, education and other services
80% - Raising taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers

New York faces a multi-billion dollar deficit due to coronavirus. To close the deficit policymakers are considering some new taxes and budget cuts. For each tax or budget cut, say whether you support or oppose it:

a. *A tax on those making over $2 million per year, which would raise $4.5 billion or more.*

53% - Strongly support
27% - Somewhat support
8% - Somewhat oppose
5% - Strongly oppose
6% - Don't know

b. *A tax on money made by billionaires on their investments, paid annually instead of when the investments are sold, which would raise $5.5 billion.*

54% - Strongly support
27% - Somewhat support
7% - Somewhat oppose
5% - Strongly oppose
7% - Don't know

c. *A tax on second, third and fourth homes, which would raise $650 million.*

41% - Strongly support

32% - Somewhat support
11% - Somewhat oppose
7% - Strongly oppose
9% - Don't know

d. *A tax on digital advertising on platforms owned by companies like Amazon, Google, Facebook and Microsoft, which could raise up to $900 million*

45% - Strongly support
34% - Somewhat support
8% - Somewhat oppose
5% - Strongly oppose
8% - Don't know

e. *Cuts to Medicaid which could save up to $10 billion*

12% - Strongly oppose
17% - Somewhat oppose
18% - Somewhat oppose
45% - Strongly oppose
8% - Don't know

Would you support or oppose the following proposals:

a. *Canceling rent for the duration of the state of emergency for all those impacted by the coronavirus who have lost income, including undocumented households.*

30% - Strongly support
29% - Somewhat support
19% - Somewhat oppose
12% - Strongly oppose
10% - Don't know

b. *Disallowing all forms of rent hikes during the state of emergency and providing all tenants the right to renew their leases.*

47% - Strongly support
32% - Somewhat support
9% - Somewhat oppose

5% - Strongly oppose

7% - Don't know

c. *Extending the current eviction moratorium until two months after New York is no longer in a state of emergency.*

37% - Strongly support

39% - Somewhat support

9% - Somewhat oppose

6% - Strongly oppose

9% - Don't know

Governor Cuomo is proposing 20% cuts to state aid to schools. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view:

15% - Times are tough, and we have no choice but to cut school spending and adjust teaching methods.

34% - In the midst of a crisis, everyone should have to sacrifice. The rich should pay more in taxes, and the government should tighten its belt.

50% - In the midst of this crisis our schools and teachers are more important than ever for our kids, our communities and our families. Education should be our number one priority, and the Governor has to raise taxes on the wealthy to fully fund our schools.

Millions of immigrant workers in New York have been excluded from the federal government's cash relief and unemployment insurance programs because of their immigration status. Would you support or oppose taxing the state's 118 billionaires to create a $3.5 billion fund to support workers who have been excluded from the federal stimulus?

34% - Strongly support

27% - Somewhat support

10% - Somewhat oppose

15% - Strongly oppose

13% - Don't know

Methodology

From June 4th through June 7th, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,639 likely voters in New York State, using web-panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ± 2.4 percentage points.