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LONG ISLAND

Poll: Long Islanders have more debt, less money for food



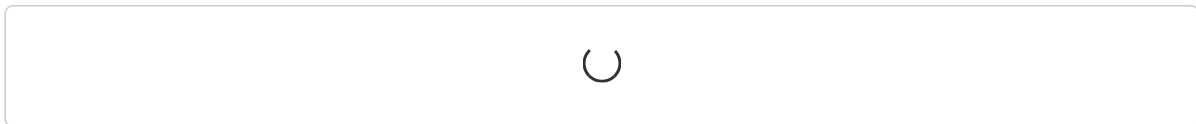
People shop at a Levittown market. A new poll says food costs are rising faster than incomes. Credit: Rick Kopstein

By Olivia Winslow

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A large majority of Long Islanders — and New Yorkers overall — said the cost of food was rising faster than their income, and well over half said their debt had increased as a result, according to a survey by a nonprofit focused on childhood hunger statewide.

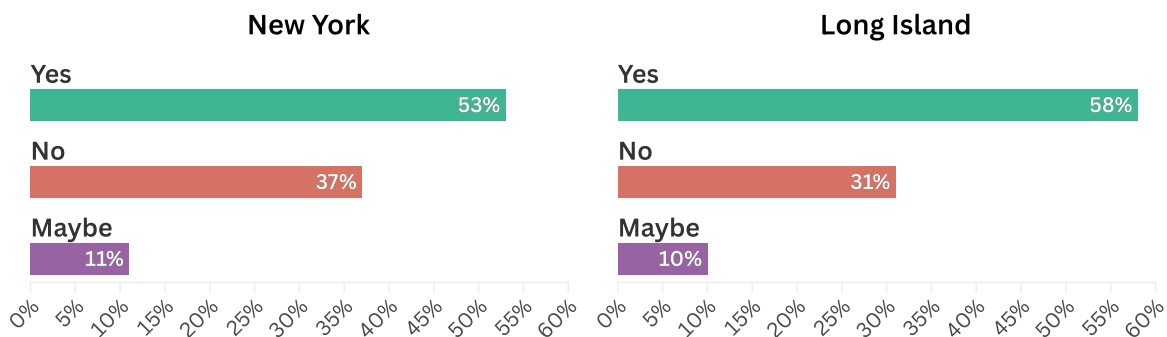
One Suffolk County man, who wasn't named but who participated in the [poll](#) by [No Kid Hungry New York](#), said of higher prices: "It has made me put more [debt] on my credit cards. I also had to take money out of my 401K [so I wouldn't] get behind on my bills."

He was among respondents whose comments were highlighted in the poll, which was released Tuesday.

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"For the last few years No Kid Hungry has done this poll of New Yorkers, and what has been a consistent finding of the polls is New Yorkers' support for bipartisan work toward addressing childhood hunger," said Rachel Sabella, director of the No Kid Hungry New York, a nonprofit that works to end childhood hunger in the state.

In the past 12 months, has your debt (including credit card debt) increased due to the cost of food?



Source: No Kid Hungry New York poll

* A Flourish chart

"In fact, in this year's poll we found 82% of New Yorkers statewide were likely to support bipartisan action," Sabella said in a phone interview with Newsday. "But on Long Island, it was 84%."

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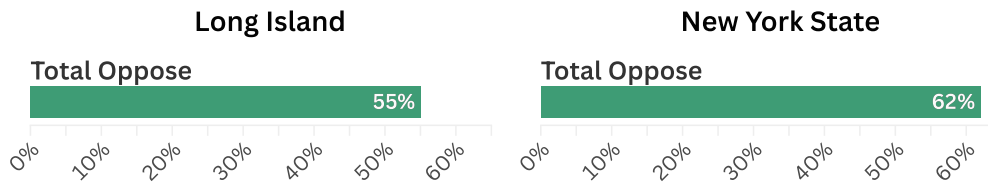
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She said poll respondents "really recognize this is not a political issue."

"This is a crisis hitting" many families, including those on Long Island, Sabella said. "They see homes, or they say, 'Someone has a roof over the heads. How are they facing hunger?' Think about the cost their dealing with to keep that roof over their head ... For families to remain there, it's a struggle."

Do you support or oppose funding cuts and other reductions to food assistance programs and benefits?



Source: No Kid Hungry New York poll

* A Flourish chart

At a time when people are facing rising costs in other areas, she added, food is the one place where they may find room to make cutbacks, whether by purchasing less healthy foods, or "caretakers eating less" so the children don't go without meals.

According to the poll:

- 86% of New Yorkers overall and 85% of Long Islanders said "the cost of food is rising faster than my income."
- 53% of New Yorkers and 58% of Long Islanders responded that they've taken on more debt over the past 12 months, such as on credit cards, due to the rising cost of food.
- 62% of New Yorkers and 55% of Long Islanders said they "strongly oppose" or "somewhat oppose" reductions to food assistance programs for low-income families, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP, formerly known as food stamps – and the Women, Infants and Children [WIC] supplemental food assistance program.
- 75% of New Yorkers and 77% of Long Islanders agreed that "ending childhood hunger in New York should be a shared, bipartisan goal."

"We heard from people in the poll how important these programs are," Sabella said.

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The poll of 1,596 New Yorkers, including 263 from Long Island, was conducted between Feb. 8 and 14, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.6%. San Francisco-based Change Research conducted the poll on behalf of No Kid Hungry New York.

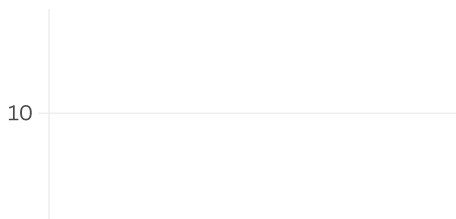
The results did not surprise leaders of the Island's two food banks.

"There are so many people living on the edge and just a flat tire can mean they just can't buy food for their families for a month," said Randi Shubin Dresner, president and CEO of Melville-based Island Harvest food bank.

How much does your household spend on food each month?

All ▼

New York State Long Island



Source: No Kid Hungry New York poll

* A Flourish chart

"So when prices go up just a little bit," Shubin Dresner added, "where does the extra money come from? It's not like income is going up. If people are lucky to have savings, it's coming out of their savings or 401K."

Paule T. Pachter, president and CEO of Long Island Cares — The Harry Chapin Regional Food Bank, based in Hauppauge, said Long Island shouldn't really be thought of anymore as a region of affluence. He said 40 years ago the Island had "pockets of poverty. You knew, where the quote, unquote poor lived. But that narrative has switched." The the Island now has "pockets of affluence."

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"It doesn't surprise me that ... Long Islanders who responded to the No Kid Hungry [poll] feel that they just don't have an upper hand in managing their economics," Pachter said.



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