

New poll provides snapshot of New Yorkers' views

June 25 2009, By Lauren Gold

(PhysOrg.com) -- New York state residents are concerned about the obesity epidemic -- but only 24 percent support a junk food tax, and 39 percent support banning TV ads for junk food.

That's just one of the findings of the first Cornell/New York Times/NY1 poll, which gave New York state residents a snapshot of their collective zeitgeist about obesity, key politicians, the economy and gay marriage when it was released in early June.

The poll is the first to take advantage of the new collaboration between Cornell's Survey Research Institute (SRI), The New York Times and the television station NY1. It also tested the new partnership -- the first collaboration between The New York Times and an academic institution in which questions were contributed by Times pollsters and Cornell faculty members.

"This poll provides an opportunity for faculty to collect data for their research and to try out questions for proposals and national surveys," said David Harris, deputy provost and vice provost for the social sciences. Faculty can also use the survey as a teaching tool, giving students a chance to work with fresh data in statistics and other classes. "And it's part of our outreach mission, working with The New York Times and NY1 to help New York residents learn about their state."

For John Cawley, associate professor of policy analysis and management and author of the obesity questions, the poll results complement previous

surveys that explore the intricacies of public opinion surrounding obesity, taxes and public policy.

"New York state is really on the frontier of imaginatively tackling the obesity problem," Cawley said. But while 80 to 90 percent of residents classify obesity as a major problem, "as soon as you start to talk about specifics, there's only modest support for anti-obesity policies," he said. One exception is calorie labeling on restaurant menus, which is mandated by law in New York City; 65 percent of respondents agree with that policy.

So far, news reports about the poll have focused on the findings about the popularity of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Gov. David Paterson. But results on [obesity](#) and financial security may prove valuable in future research and policy decisions, said Harris.

"The idea wasn't that all the questions were going to end up as news stories. Some of them were things that we have tremendous interest in for courses and that are of interest to researchers. ... And for some, even though we may not think they're newsworthy right now, six or eight months from now we may be glad we have the data," he said.

Meanwhile, Cornell researchers are available to reporters to help make sense of any survey results, said Yasamin Miller, director of SRI.

"Oftentimes when poll results go out, they're just a very short news bite," said Miller. But with Cornell faculty members on hand, "they can really explain and enlighten the results. That's what's missing in the polling world -- the depth of the understanding. And that's where Cornell is really greatly positioned to make a huge contribution."

The poll also strengthens Cornell's reputation as a leader in policy analysis and public service. "It's an opportunity for us to showcase our

talent and our expertise," Harris said.

The team will meet over the summer to plan the next step -- possibly another poll in early fall. "We hope this will be an ongoing relationship," Harris said.

For more on the [poll](#), see the SRI Web site at sri.cornell.edu

Provided by Cornell University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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