Affordability in New York, 2026

More Than Half of New York Adults Under 65 Are Just Getting By or Worse, and Three in Four Have Cut Their Spending as Prices Rise

Small business owners are squeezed hardest on cash: two-thirds have three months or less of runway, and more than four in ten have cut their own pay

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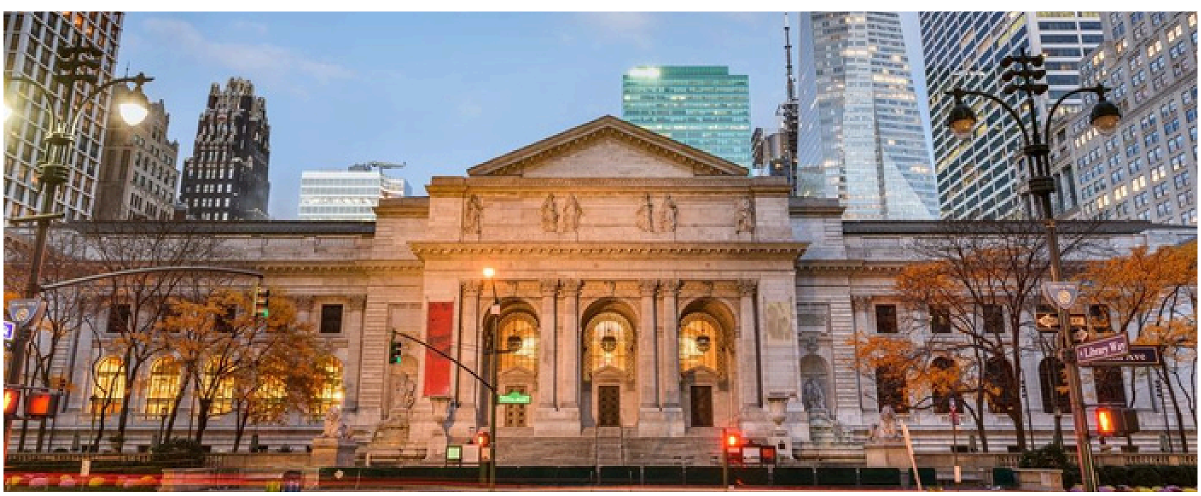
Small business owners are squeezed hardest on cash: two-thirds have three months or less of runway, and more than four in ten have cut their own pay

Four surveys commissioned by New Yorkers for Local Businesses (NYLB) and fielded between June 29 and July 9, 2026, find that economic stress is a widespread condition across New York. The centerpiece is a statewide survey of 1,200 New York adults ages 18 to 64. It is accompanied by a survey of 413 New York small business owners (defined below), a survey of 266 adults in the Rochester area, and a two-state survey of 1,200 adults across the Newark/NYC metro area fielded for shared use with a New Jersey counterpart organization.

All were conducted on the Pollfish online panel, a nonprobability (opt-in) sample. Results are weighted, and modeled credibility intervals are approximately ±3 percentage points for each 1,200-person survey, ±5 points for the small business owner survey, and ±8 points for the Rochester survey. Full details, definitions, and data quality notes appear at the end of this report.



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This report presents findings from four surveys on household and small-business finances across New York. Readers may navigate directly to any section using the page references below.

Key Findings

54% of New York adults ages 18–64 describe themselves as “just getting by” (35%) or “finding it difficult to get by” (19%); 34% say they are “doing okay,” and 12% are “living comfortably.”

58% say they had trouble paying regular bills, such as rent or utilities, on time at least occasionally over the past year, including 18% who had trouble most months.

76% report spending less overall in the past year because prices have gone up.

18% could not cover an unexpected $100 expense right now, and fewer than half (48%) would cover it with cash, savings, or a card paid off in full. The divide here is income, not age: 34% of households under $25,000 could not cover the expense, compared with 4% at $150,000 or more, a 30-point gap.

43% of New York small business owners (self-employed residents; see definition) skipped, delayed, or lowered their own pay in the past year (28% multiple times), and a further 23% pay themselves no regular salary. 54% had trouble paying the business’s main bills at least once in the past three months, and two-thirds (66%) could cover main expenses for three months or less if revenue stopped.

50% vs. 59% Residents of the New York side of the Newark/NYC metro are less likely to be financially strained than those in the rest of the state (50% vs. 59%), and less likely to be unable to cover a $100 expense (15% vs. 23%); both differences exceed the surveys’ combined modeled intervals. In contrast, Rochester’s rates of financial strain and spending cutbacks are statistically similar to the statewide figures, but the area has fewer reports of routine bill-payment issues.

Residents Under Strain

Strain is the norm, and prices are changing behavior. Asked to describe their finances today, 19% of New York adults ages 18–64 say they are finding it difficult to get by, and 35% say they are just getting by, a combined 54%. Another 34% say they are doing okay, and 12% say they are living comfortably.

A majority (58%) also had trouble paying regular bills such as rent or utilities on time at least occasionally over the past year, including 18% who had trouble most months.

Prices are changing behavior as well: 76% report spending less overall in the past year because prices went up, and 78% took at least one action in the past three months to cover expenses. The most common actions were reducing how much they save (31%), using credit cards more than usual (28%), and dipping into savings (19%). (Respondents selected a single action; see Data Quality Notes.)

54%

just getting by or finding it difficult to get by

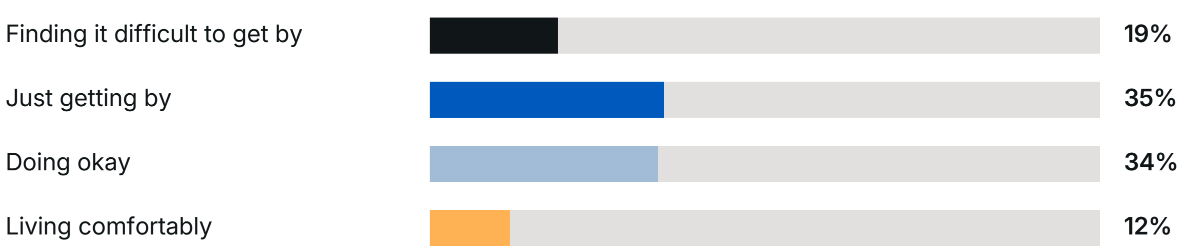
58%

had trouble paying regular bills on time at least occasionally

76%

spent less in the past year because prices went up

How New Yorkers describe their finances today



Source: Pollfish survey of 1,200 New York adults ages 18–64, June 29–30, 2026. Weighted estimates.

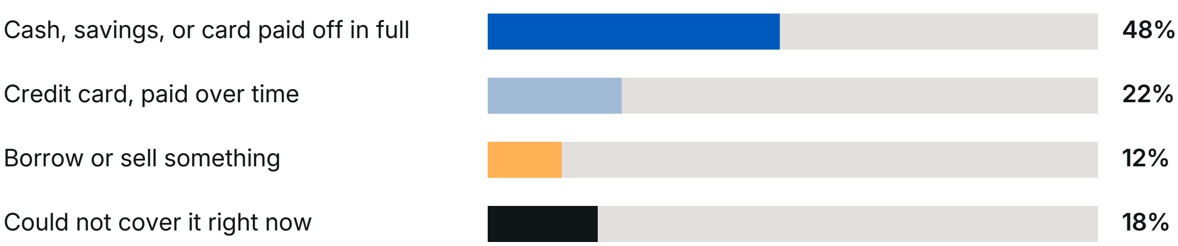
Resilience to a $100 Shock

The ability to absorb even a small shock is limited. Fewer than half (48%) would cover an unexpected $100 expense with cash, savings, or a card paid off in full; 22% would put it on a credit card and pay it off over time, 12% would borrow or sell something, and 18% could not cover it right now.

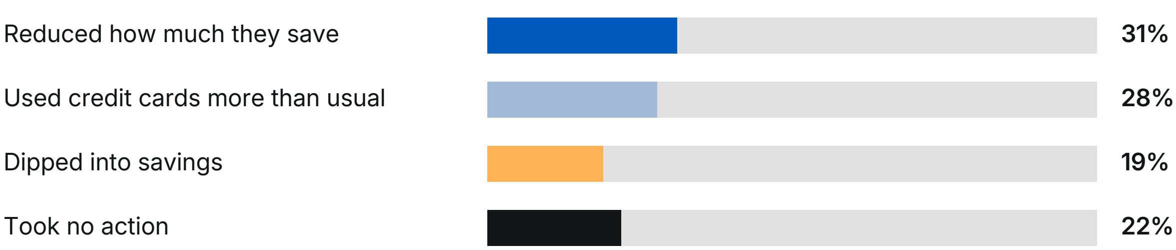
18%

could not cover an unexpected $100 expense right now

How New Yorkers would cover an unexpected $100 expense



Actions taken in the past three months to cover expenses



Respondents selected a single action; see Data Quality Notes. Source: Pollfish survey of 1,200 New York adults ages 18–64, June 29–30, 2026. Weighted estimates.

The Income Divide

Income divides the state far more than age. Every measure of strain is far higher at the bottom of the income distribution than at the top, and the gaps are many times the survey's intervals:

Household income	n	Just getting by or difficult (%)	Any bill trouble (%)	Couldn't cover $100 (%)
Under $25,000	311	66	68	**34**
$25,000–$49,999	203	71	67	**25**
$50,000–$99,999	348	51	59	**9**
$100,000–$149,999	153	34	45	**5**
$150,000 or more	135	22	30	**4**

Source: Pollfish survey of 1,200 New York adults ages 18–64, June 29–30, 2026. Weighted estimates. Respondents declining to state income (n=50) were excluded from this table.

The two lowest income bands are statistically tied at the top of the strain measures. From $50,000 upward, every measure falls steadily; the gap in the share unable to absorb a $100 shock reaches 30 points (34% under $25,000 vs. 4% at $150,000 or more), and the gaps in overall strain exceed 35 points.

Age matters far less. The share reporting any bill trouble declines from about 63% among adults under 35 to 48% among those 55–64, and at least two-thirds of every age band say they cut spending because of prices.

30 pts income gap in ability to absorb a $100 shock

35+ pts income gaps in overall financial strain

Small Business Cash Runway

Cash is thin, and owners absorb the strain. NYLB's companion survey reached 413 New York small business owners, defined in this report as self-employed residents ages 18–64 (260 self-employed full-time, 153 part-time). Business ownership, firm size, and employer status were not independently verified.

With 413 respondents, the credibility interval is roughly ±5 points. The only demographic breakdown reported below is full-time versus part-time self-employment, the one comparison that meets this report's cell-size floor.

If revenue stopped today, 33% of owners could cover their main expenses for less than one month, and another 33% could do so for one to three months, meaning 66% have three months or less of coverage. Only 17% report more than six months.

In line with that thin cushion, 54% had trouble paying the business's main bills (payroll, rent, suppliers, or utilities) on time at least once in the past three months, including 27% who faced this most or every month.

66%

could cover main expenses for three months or less if revenue stopped

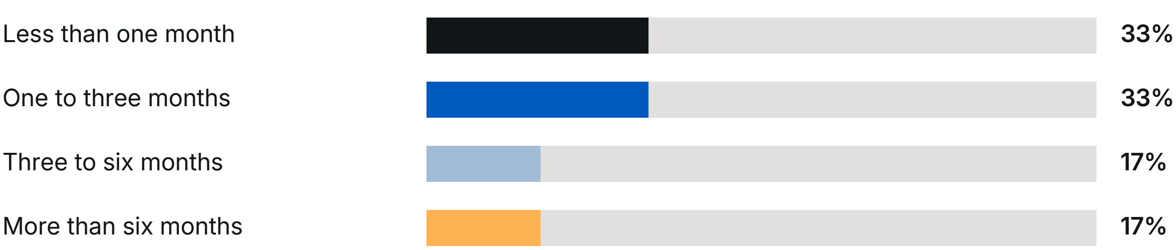
54%

had trouble paying the business's main bills in the past three months

17%

report more than six months of coverage

If revenue stopped today, main expenses could be covered for...



Source: Pollfish survey of 413 self-employed New York residents ages 18–64, June 29–July 6, 2026. Weighted estimates.

Owners Absorbing the Strain

Much of the pressure lands on owners themselves. In the past year, 43% skipped, delayed, or lowered their own pay at least once to keep the business going (28% multiple times), and a further 23% do not pay themselves a regular salary at all; about a third (34%) kept their pay untouched.

Household finances are exposed too: 39% used personal savings to keep the business going, 32% used a personal credit card, 27% borrowed from family or friends, 18% fell behind on a personal bill, and 14% took on personal debt.

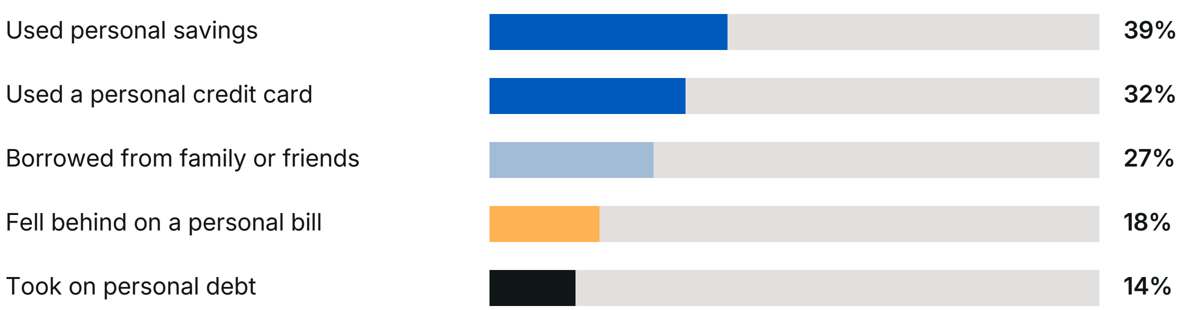
43%

skipped, delayed, or lowered their own pay in the past year

23%

pay themselves no regular salary at all

Personal resources used to keep the business going in the past year



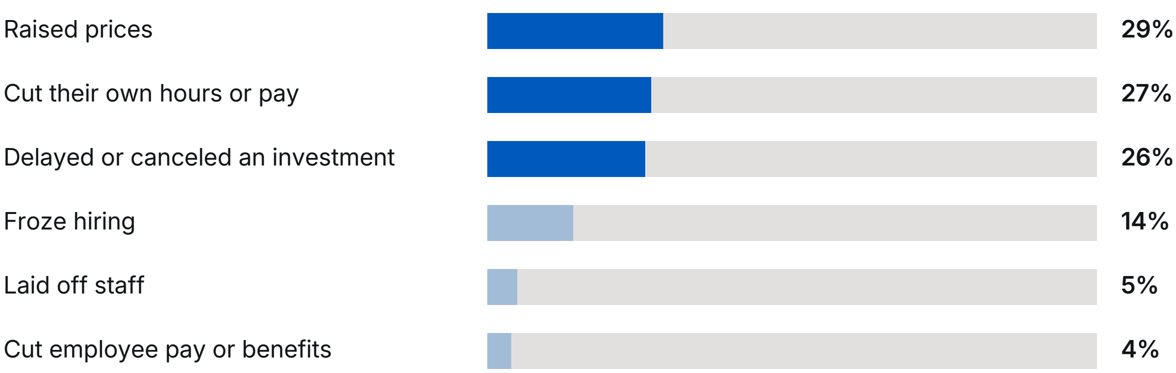
Multi-select question. Source: Pollfish survey of 413 self-employed New York residents ages 18–64, June 29–July 6, 2026. Weighted estimates.

Operational Responses

On the operations side, owners turned to prices and their own paychecks before their workforce: 29% raised prices, 27% cut their own hours or pay, and 26% delayed or canceled an investment. Workforce measures were rare: 14% froze hiring, 5% laid off staff, and 4% cut employee pay or benefits (figures computed across all respondents, including owners with no employees).

Full-time self-employed owners are substantially more likely than part-timers to have raised prices (34% vs. 21%), a difference outside the combined intervals; their higher rate of repeated pay cuts (31% vs. 22%) is suggestive but within the combined intervals.

Steps taken in response to financial pressure



Workforce figures computed across all respondents, including owners with no employees. Source: Pollfish survey of 413 self-employed New York residents ages 18–64, June 29–July 6, 2026. Weighted estimates.

34% of full-time owners raised prices

21% of part-time owners raised prices

Spotlight: The Rochester Area

A dedicated survey reached 266 adults ages 18–64 in the Rochester metropolitan area. This is the widest-interval survey in the project, with a modeled interval of roughly ±8 points after weighting, so findings are reported at the topline level only, and only differences from statewide figures that exceed about ±8 combined points are treated as meaningful.

On the main measures, Rochester mirrors the statewide patterns: 51% of Rochester-area adults are just getting by or finding it difficult (compared to 54% statewide), 76% cut spending because of prices (matching the statewide figure), and 16% could not cover an unexpected $100 expense (slightly less than the 18% statewide). None of these differences is statistically meaningful. The only meaningful difference is that 48% of Rochester respondents report at least occasional trouble paying regular bills, which is lower than the 58% statewide — a 10-point gap that is just beyond the combined modeled intervals.

The statewide survey provides an independent check on these figures. It separately sampled 87 Rochester-area residents, with no overlap in respondents, and its estimates agree with this dedicated sample's within their (wide) combined intervals on all headline measures; spending cutbacks match exactly. The loosest agreement is for the $100 expense measure, where the small statewide subsample was higher. Both readings are within the combined intervals.

Headline measure	Rochester (%)	Statewide (%)
Just getting by or finding it difficult	51	54
Cut spending because of prices	76	76
Could not cover a $100 expense	16	18
At least occasional trouble paying bills	**48**	**58**

Source: Pollfish survey of 266 adults ages 18–64 in the Rochester, NY metropolitan area, June 29–July 9, 2026. Weighted estimates. Bold row exceeds combined credibility intervals.

Spotlight: The Newark/NYC Metro Area

New York's share of the Newark/NYC metropolitan area (formally, the New York portion of the New York–Newark–Jersey City, NY-NJ metropolitan statistical area) is home to about six in ten of the statewide survey's respondents. Figures in this section come from that subset: 725 respondents, with a modeled interval of roughly ±4 points. The rest-of-state comparison group is the statewide survey's remaining 475 respondents (about ±5 points).

The metro/rest-of-state contrast is the report's clearest geographic finding, and it points the opposite way from what cost of living alone would predict. Metro-area New Yorkers are less likely to be financially strained than residents of the rest of the state (50% vs. 59% just getting by or worse) and less likely to be unable to cover an unexpected $100 expense (15% vs. 23%). Both gaps exceed the combined intervals. On bill trouble (59% vs. 56%) and spending cutbacks (76% vs. 75%), the two regions are statistically similar; the difference is in underlying resilience rather than in inflation-driven behavior.

The metro estimates are the most thoroughly corroborated in the project. A separate two-state survey of 1,200 adults across the full Newark/NYC metro region, fielded in the same window for shared use by NYLB and a New Jersey counterpart organization, independently sampled 807 New York metro residents with no overlap in respondents. Its estimates for this population agree with the statewide survey's estimates within 0.1 to 3.5 points on all headline measures (on a like-for-like, unweighted basis; see Data Quality Notes). In that two-state survey, New York–side and New Jersey–side metro residents gave broadly similar answers.

Headline measure	NY metro (%)	Rest of state (%)
Just getting by or worse	**50**	**59**
Could not cover a $100 expense	**15**	**23**
Any bill trouble	59	56
Cut spending because of prices	76	75

Source: Pollfish survey of 1,200 New York adults ages 18–64, June 29–30, 2026 (metro-area subset, n=725; rest of state, n=475). Weighted estimates. Bold rows exceed combined credibility intervals. Replication figures from a Pollfish survey of 1,200 adults ages 18–64 in the New York–Newark–Jersey City metro area, June 29–30, 2026.

Data Quality Notes

Every figure in this report was independently tabulated from the respondent-level survey data. AI-generated summary documents supplied by the survey platform were reviewed as part of the audit, but are not the source of any figure herein. Errors identified in those documents, including subgroup statistics computed on inconsistent bases (shares of answers versus shares of respondents, which understated several multi-select figures by 8 to 23 points) and claims resting on cells as small as three respondents, were corrected or excluded in the course of this analysis.

Points readers should weigh when interpreting results:

- All four surveys used an opt-in (nonprobability) online panel. Error figures cited are modeled 95% credibility intervals (approximately ±3 points for each 1,200-person survey, ±5 for the 413-person small business owner survey, and ±8 for the 266-person Rochester survey, after adjusting for weighting). They rest on modeling assumptions and are not margins of sampling error. Subgroup estimates carry wider intervals.

- All samples cover only ages 18–64. Adults 65 and older, a population of clear relevance regarding affordability, are not represented, and no finding in this report should be read as describing all adults.

- “Small business owners” refers to self-employed New York residents ages 18–64, as recorded in panel profiles (260 full-time, 153 part-time). Business ownership, firm size, and employer status were not independently verified. Employee-related findings (layoffs, hiring, employee pay) are computed across all respondents, including those who likely have no employees.

- Results are weighted using the supplied weights, which balance the samples’ age and gender composition; the panel’s weighting targets are not documented in the delivered files. The Rochester sample required the heaviest weighting (66% of respondents were women), which is reflected in its wider interval.

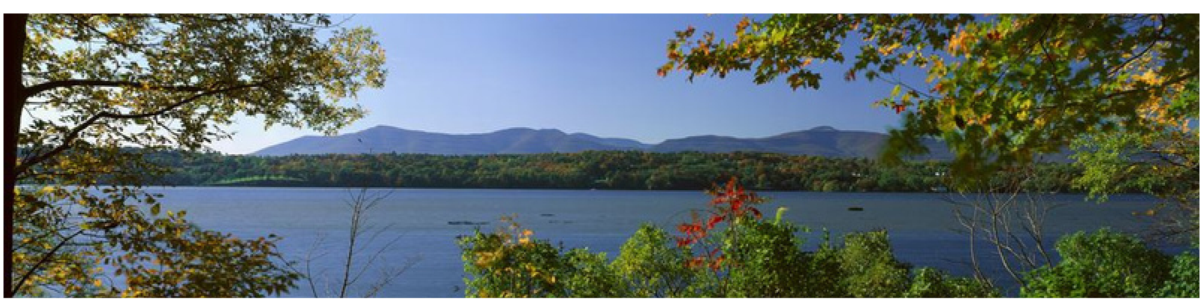
Data Quality Notes, Continued

- The expense-coping question ("have you done any of these things") was administered as a single-choice item in the individual surveys, so shares for individual actions show the one action each respondent selected and may understate how many people did each; the share taking no action (22% statewide) is unaffected. The small business owner survey's coping questions were genuine multi-select questions.

- Replication checks: (1) the statewide and two-state metro surveys independently sampled New York residents of the Newark/NYC metro area (n=725 and n=807) in the same field window with no overlapping respondent IDs; compared on a like-for-like unweighted basis, their estimates agree within 0.1–3.5 points on all headline measures. (2) The statewide survey's independent Rochester-area subsample (n=87) agrees with the dedicated Rochester survey within its combined intervals on all headline measures. Weighted figures are not directly comparable across surveys weighted to different population frames.

- Subgroup figures are reported only where unweighted cell sizes reach at least 100 respondents; accordingly, no age or income breakdowns are reported for the Rochester survey, and the small business owner survey reports only the full-time/part-time comparison. Respondents declining to state household income (n=50 statewide) are excluded from income-band tables.

- Field windows varied: the statewide survey was completed in a single overnight session of about 5 hours spanning June 29–30, while the Rochester survey required 11 days, suggesting its quota was filled slowly. The panel vendor disclosed no data-quality removals; the median completion time for the five-question instruments was about 30 seconds, and no responses were excluded due to speed, as no pre-registered threshold existed.



Methodology

Sponsor: New Yorkers for Local Businesses (NYLB). The Newark/NYC metro-area survey was fielded for shared use by NYLB and a New Jersey counterpart organization. All surveys were conducted on the Pollfish opt-in online panel (mobile and web), in English, with respondents geolocated by the panel.

Survey	Population	N	Field dates (2026)	Modeled interval
NY statewide individuals	NY adults 18–64	1,200	June 29–30	±3 pts
NY small business owners	Self-employed NY residents 18–64	413	June 29–July 6	±5 pts
Rochester-area individuals	Adults 18–64 in the Rochester, NY MSA	266	June 29–July 9	±8 pts
Newark/NYC metro individuals	Adults 18–64 in the NY–Newark–Jersey City MSA (807 NY, 393 NJ)	1,200	June 29–30	±3 pts

All surveys: five substantive questions on household or business finances. Weighted estimates throughout; percentages are rounded to whole numbers and may not sum to 100.

The “Spotlight: the Newark/NYC metro area” section is based on the statewide survey’s subset of respondents residing in the New York–Newark–Jersey City metropolitan statistical area (n=725; modeled interval approximately ±4 points), with the two-state metro survey’s New York subset (n=807) used for replication; the rest-of-state comparison group is the statewide survey’s remaining respondents (n=475; approximately ±5 points). The Rochester spotlight is based on the dedicated Rochester survey.

Because these are nonprobability samples, the intervals above are modeled credibility intervals adjusted for weighting-induced design effects, not margins of sampling error, and depend on modeling assumptions. Comparisons described as meaningful in this report exceed the combined intervals of the estimates involved; differences described as “similar” or “not statistically distinguishable” do not.

Citation

New Yorkers for Local Businesses, July 2026, "Affordability in New York: Residents and Small Business Owners Under Strain."

This report was commissioned by New Yorkers for Local Businesses (NYLB). All figures were independently tabulated from respondent-level survey data collected on the Pollfish online panel between June 29 and July 9, 2026.