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Red, Why, and Blue: A Study of Upstate Local Politics

Derek Weng

The American political process is established upon a self-adjusting mechanism that weathers down opposing factions, and streamlines different values and needs to a cohesive solution that best addresses the public good. The premise of a democratic government is that elected leaders represent the will of the people. A democratic political system cannot exist without the presence of political parties and their competition to best represent the interests of their constituency. In the ever dynamic state of New York, where an exceptional diversity of geographic, economic, social, and political interests exist in polarizing camps and distinct patterns, it is the role of the state government to ensure that its policies are relatively fair and equal to the differences in needs.

Elections matter in a democracy. At the most basic level, New Yorkers influence state policy by choosing their elected leaders. As New Yorkers participate at the polls every election season to vote for the candidates that they most wish to see in the capital halls of Albany, Washington DC, and local offices, they are placing their sacred trust in a system that promises to uphold the central tenets of democracy- popular sovereignty and majority rule. In a healthy democracy, elected candidates work to represent and resolve constituency concerns. Individual leaders who serve in public office respond to different constituencies, have different priorities, and pursue them with varying levels of dedication to the broader welfare. Political parties back candidates in order to control the state government and institute the party's policies. However, New York's nefarious political balancing act between the two major political parties is a prime example of a declining democracy mired in petty party politics that ultimately harms the people.

The root of all political drama in New York is a conflicting tale of "two states." Like the government, New York is ripped by the historical contentions between New York City and the state's vast entire regions due north. Longstanding economic, social and political differences between Upstate and Downstate New York are among the most vital elements of the state's political and governmental tensions. The common perception is that Downstate, mainly New York City, has

substantially different needs than the rest of the state. The salient Upstate-Downstate divide and the historical mistrust between the two regions have typified much political contentions in the Empire State. Political tradeoffs and compromises are frequently made as legislators strive to appeal and appease the multiplicity of needs between the parties.

Political parties are the principal driving force in instituting public policies. Via a coalition of elected party members, political parties espouse an expressed ideology and a grand plan to materialize their goals through public outreach and in legislation. Political parties are in turn popularized by a base of citizens with shared ideologies who possess the votes needed to elect party candidates to office. In exchange for their vote of confidence, the party will help to represent their voice on the floors of legislatures and political offices. In lieu of this model, perhaps it is prudent to assume that an individual supports his or her political party by a composition of factors that are neither random nor arbitrary. Whether their electoral decision is based on fierce party loyalty, personal political ideologies, or strictly by the merit of the candidates, an individual chooses a candidate and the representing party with faith that the constituent interests will be best represented. In theory, this is an ideal system that democratically engages everyone in its political process through representation of elected officials. But in hindsight, the perfect marriage between political parties and the voters is marred by accusations of mistrust, betrayal, and uncertainty about the future.

With every election season, the downstate heavily hedges its votes on Democratic candidates with the faith that by party tradition they are more sympathetic to their needs for social welfare programs and low-income services. New York City has an overwhelmingly higher percentage of minorities and low income individuals while the upstate region tends to be more homogeneous in ethnic makeup and in affluence. The ethnic minorities tend, on average, to be more liberal than whites and are more concerned with social programs and jobs. Whites, suburbanites, rural groups, and the high income voters align closer with the Republican Party. Likewise, the upstate

populace perennially sides with the Republican Party on its long heralded promises of tax cuts and fiscal conservatism that appeal particularly to their demographic interests.

However, poor economic conditions combined with poor publicity arising from Albany have disillusioned the people of New York. Public opinion on the government and its performance is strongly influenced by the state of the economy. A poll conducted by Marist College Institute for Public Opinion in 2005 found more than half of New York City and downstate suburban residents saying that the state was on the “right track.” But less than a third of Upstate residents agreed, with 62 percent seeing New York on the “wrong track” (Ward, 18). As it turns out, the voters’ perception of the direction the state is heading is greatly shaped by the differences in regional economies.

The great tragedy of the “two state” division is that while the downstate region is protected by the powerful engines of New York City’s world-class economic infrastructure, its upstate sibling is mired in decades of endemic stagnation and decline. While many plausible explanations exist for the iconic decline of the upstate region, the purpose of this paper is a study of the political perspectives of the cause. The lack of a democratic two party system and the insurmountable predominance of the Republican Party, as well as a history of failed reform policies combine to form a formidable contributing challenge to upstate vitality. The upstate electoral base is also committing itself to a precarious disservice by voting for the same party that has failed to revive their economic livelihood throughout recent history.

This analysis of state and local politics will be aided by my personal insight into a state senate race in the 59th district. In more ways than one, this district is a microcosm and a fair representation of the broader regions of Upstate New York that I wish to examine. The 59th State Senate district unfailingly sends Republican officials to the state capital year after year, despite uncertainty as to whether the party is capable of actually reviving the region’s stale economy. The district’s constituents, by the action of their votes, are clearly in favor of maintaining the status quo as opposed to electing a different party that perhaps might be able to bring much needed changes.

The 59th Senate District

My primary interest in local Upstate politics began shortly after joining a local campaign for

New York State Senate of the 59th district in the 2010 general election. While studying political science at the State University of New York at Geneseo, this general feeling of detachment from local politics has prompted me to become more educated and involved in the election scene. While statewide races for governor and US Senators have unfailingly garnered the prominence of press headlines, the majority of local races for state legislatures are for the most part limited to regional media. The student population in large, have ignored the local races all together. The internship has offered me meaningful firsthand knowledge of election politics and local issues important to the district where I currently reside.

The 59th Senate District of New York encompasses all of Wyoming County with select portions of nearby Erie, Livingston (including the college town of Geneseo), and Ontario counties. Currently, Republicans maintain a sizable but shrinking advantage with 77,803 in enrollment over the 63,879 Democrats in the district (New York State Board of Election). In addition, Republican candidates have consistently outperformed Democratic candidates up and down the ticket in recent elections. The retirement of longtime Republican Senator Dale Volker represented a golden opportunity for Democrats to break GOP control of the local senate seat for the first time in thirty plus years.

For two months, I worked as a student intern for Cynthia Appleton, a Democratic hopeful in a formidable Republican district. Her atypical background as a longtime critical care nurse in Rochester’s Strong Memorial Hospital challenged my antiquated notion that most politicians originate as lawyers or businessmen. Appleton’s great political credentials include three terms as the Village of Warsaw Trustee, Chair of Street/Public Works and Fire Department Committees, and a member of the Budget Committee, Warsaw Chamber of Commerce, and the Warsaw Grange 1088. An established creative figure in her community, Appleton is also an award-winning director and an actress in regional theater productions. A refreshing candidate with charismatic qualifications, Cynthia is one who doesn’t follow the usual beaten path of the career politician.

Championing a fiscally responsible platform that aimed to impose a property tax cap and foster small business growth, Appleton was a good example of a Democratic candidate appeasing the moderate swing voters in the district. In fact, the

differences between Appleton and the Republican candidate, Patrick Gallivan, seemed almost negligent. The state budget is excessively bloated and exceedingly inefficient. Naturally, the top concerns of reducing the tax burden on average New Yorkers and cleaning out wasteful or fraudulent state spending are popular bipartisan rhetoric valued by all citizens. Both candidates have included this in their platform. Yet, more cognizant of the voters' frustration with overall bad politics, Cynthia is among the few candidates who were committed to both non-partisan redistricting and campaign finance reform to bring transparency and accountability in election politics.

Since the two platforms converged on many issues, mostly fiscal, the voters theoretically would benefit from either candidate. Both candidates appear to be good representatives of Western New York and are capable of delivering the voices of the Upstate residents to Albany. However, my involvement with the Appleton campaign was entirely motivated by my own partisan bias. Due to the liberal Downstate Democratic doctrines ingrained within me, I was unable to conceive that the Republicans are good for anybody. A proof of my political naivety, I was utterly convinced that the Democrats would better suit the populace of Upstate who are increasingly becoming more dependent on social welfare programs. Upstate, as I know it, is an economically forsaken region clearly in need of new political directions.

Nonetheless, it was an unusually promising campaign for the Democrats in Western New York. Initially, the competition began as a four way race between Cynthia Appleton, Patrick Gallivan, Jim Domagalski on the Independence and Conservative Party lines, and lastly the Carl Paladino-backed Tea Party candidate David DiPietro. The latter three all emerged out of a deeply bitter Republican primary with unwillingness to concede their senate ambitions. The prospect of three Republican candidates each fighting for their share of the voting base essentially guaranteed the seat to the lone Democrat candidate. But on the heels of evaporating support, Domagalski promptly withdrew from the race on October 4, 2010, citing concerns of splitting Republican votes and his fear of a Democrat victory. In a prepared statement for *The Daily News*, Appleton suggested the usual political maneuvering at work, stating "nothing shows better that the Republican side is using its standard bag of tricks than this last minute, back-room maneuvering to get Mr. Domagalski off the ballot by nominating him for a judgeship he admits

he doesn't even want" (Surtel). With the remaining two Republican candidates left in the race, Appleton hedged her bet on voters favoring a change in direction in leadership over the same tiresome Republican ideals.

In the end however, the same party that has dominated this race for decades prevailed once again. The figures were a landslide for the Republican. When I looked over to the campaign manager on the night of the election, her expression grew tenser by the minute. The local news declared Gallivan the winner long before all the machines have been counted. In the official tabulation, Cynthia Appleton garnered 28.8 percent of the vote while Gallivan won the seat with an overwhelming 55.5 percent (see table 1). The third party candidate, David DiPietro gathered approximately 10 percent of the remaining votes.

The reality was initially too difficult for me to fathom. Seeing the stretch of empty storefronts across the street from the campaign office on Main Street in Warsaw, a feeling of puzzlement and disappointment arose. The defeat of Cynthia Appleton and our Democratic dream has led me to ponder the political mechanisms behind that election outcome. Why do the constituencies of upstate New York consistently vote for the same political party that has failed to realize their campaign promises of job creation and rescuing the economy? In addition, why are the Republicans able to maintain their dominance in the district, as well as other comparable rural upstate districts year after year? These questions have dogged me as I left the abandoned streets of Warsaw that night searching for satisfactory answers.

Upstate's Decline

In order to identify plausible explanations for Upstate's economic and population decline, it is crucial to first comprehend all of its symptoms and ailments. The iconic decline of the Empire State, primarily of the Upstate region, has caused invariable grief to its citizens and politicians alike. As its nickname suggests, New York was once an undisputed forerunner of the American dream. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 brought a century of growth and prosperity to both Upstate and Downstate counties. It cut the cost of shipping goods from the manufacturers of Buffalo to New York City by 90 percent, making the latter the preeminent commercial and trading center in the country. At the time, the state's economy was more

than capable of providing jobs for the millions of new residents making home in the Empire State.

Upstate is an unofficial but an exceedingly common vernacular used to differentiate the New York City Metropolitan Area and the entire region due north. Expedient in establishing the biggest urban-rural divide in the state, the term itself objectively capitalizes on the prominence of New York City in relation to the rest of the state. To the Downstate population, there is the city and then there is everything else. Yet, New York is home to numerous other nationally renowned cities like Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse. In addition, the political epicenter of the state is located in the capital of Albany, a medium sized city roughly 150 miles north of New York City. So is "Upstate" really a politically correct term that thoroughly encompasses all the economic and political activities outside of Manhattan? Perhaps it is no wonder that Upstate residents are seemingly critical and hostile to the Downstate egotism that has long permeated state politics.

Cornell University economist, Rolf Pendall, argues that the state is made up of essentially three broad regional economies. In his analysis, New York City is the undisputed headquarter of financial activities in the state as well as the nation. The city's economic dynamism affects the entire region's cycle of rise and decline, providing it with much needed growth opportunities as well as great liabilities. The rest of the eastern portion of New York State (which includes Long Island, the northern suburbs, the Hudson Valley, and the Capital District) mirrors rather closely with the prevalent trends of the nation, demonstrating moderate growth in jobs and population. It is the last component of New York, the western and northern frontiers that would essentially rank as the third slowest growing state in the nation if it were to be a standalone state (Schneier, Murtaugh and Pole, 17). Stretching hundreds of miles of uninhabited natural landscape and scattered farms, the region has seen remarkably diminutive economic growth. It is the region that contains the 59th State Senate district and many countless other ones that mirror its vital signs.

The Upstate region as a whole is marked by troubling signs of persistent poverty, evaporation of a young and healthy work force, and less than average wage earning potential. In addition to its economic decline, the region's political clout is shrinking as well. The release of the 2010 Census indicates the loss of two seats in the House of Representatives due to New York's lagging

population growth compared to other states (Barrett and Fleisher). The region that is most likely to lose at least one representative will be none other than Western New York, where population growth has been the smallest. In the 59th State Senate district, Livingston County witnessed a 2.3% decline in population from 2000 to 2009, contrary to the statewide trend of a 3% increase (U.S. Census Bureau). Wyoming and Erie Counties fared even worse, with 4.7% and 4.3% negative population growth respectively during the same period. The district and similar Upstate rural regions are all faced with the daunting prospects of an anemic economy and an aging populace.

The economy of Upstate New York, by nearly all major measures, worsened in the 1990's, and lagged behind both the nation and its own performance in the 1980s. In the fifteen years leading up to 2005, Upstate's economy was among the worst in the country. If considered as a separate state, Upstate's population growth during the 1990s would have ranked 49th in the nation, and just ahead of North Dakota and West Virginia. A study by the Brookings Institution found that nearly 30 percent of Upstate's population increase reflected rise in state prison populations rather than from its natural growth (Pendall, Upstate New York's Population Plateau: The Third-Slowest Growing "State"). Another study released by the Brookings Institution found that Upstate's personal income rose at half the national pace during the 1990s, and most of its new income came from gains in Social Security, public and private pensions and other transfer payments, rather than from new economy growth (Pendall and Christopherson, *Losing Ground: Income and Poverty in Upstate New York, 1980-2000*). Almost all new jobs in Upstate were either on public payrolls, or in sectors such as health care and social services that largely depend on taxpayer funding.

The misfortune of the upstate New York economy is one that that has been foretold by the empty storefronts and abandoned factories of countless towns and cities across the Rust Belt states of America. It is the iconic story of the relentless decline of once vital regional manufacturing bases ousted from power. The outsourcing of manufacturing jobs and the structural shift to a service-based economy have depressed real wages and stifled job growth for the past few decades. Much of upstate New York shares the same industrial roots as the Rust Belt states that also border the Great Lakes. It was home to the manufacturing industries of steel,

automobiles, fabricated metal products, and industrial machinery that anchored the economies of former boom towns like Buffalo, Syracuse, Jamestown, Utica, and Schenectady. But these industries were hit hard by the economic recession that started in the early 1970s and the movement of manufacturers and population south to the Sun Belt. A combination of high taxes, labor costs, and energy costs have contributed negatively to the economy, making it almost impossible to foster new growth. As manufacturing jobs were lost and the economy slowly transitioned to service sectors, much of the Upstate failed to recover.

Besides losing more manufacturing capacities, New York did far worse than most other states in keeping and attracting the highest-paying jobs. As employers and residents moved elsewhere, the Upstate cities saw their tax bases stagnate or dwindle. With flat revenues, continual increases in public employee compensation and other expenses, mayors of these cities were forced to impose public service reductions that prompted more residents (especially affluent ones) to depart. Cities such as Buffalo, Syracuse, and Niagara Falls now have “severely constrained revenue streams, high levels of debt and high fixed costs- suggesting that they are so negatively affected by fiscal stress that they have very little local capacity to attain long-term fiscal stability and growth” (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 17). With their population in decline, many Upstate cities saw decline in housing quality and the closure of numerous local businesses. Once-lively neighborhoods have deteriorated into communities of concentrated poverty, often afflicted with high levels of crime and social dysfunction.

In the span of several decades, Upstate New York has downgraded from a stable middle-income region to one with serious income and economic problems. Its declining standard of living compares unfavorably to other parts of the nation (see figure 2). In 1969, per capita personal income in Upstate comfortably exceeded that of the national average. But by 2000, it has trailed the national average by 11 percent (\$26,260 compared to \$29,760) (Pendall and Christopherson, *Losing Ground: Income and Poverty in Upstate New York, 1980-2000*). A prevailing factor contributing to the low wages per capita is unemployment, with only 75% of Upstate men 16 and older working in 1999, compared with 79.5% nationwide. Employment in Upstate New York, including self-employment, rose from just under 3.1 million in 1980 to 3.6 million in 1990, a 17.5 percent increase. An impressive gain by its

own merit, but it was still lower than the national average of 22.1 percent for the same period. By the 1990s, the self-employment gain was less than half as large as it was in the 1980s.

With jobs becoming scarcer, a decent wage earning prospect is also dimming for Upstate (see figure 3). Upstate’s lackluster labor markets present recent college graduates strong wage disincentives in pursuing full time careers in the region.

According to the same report from The Brookings Institution, in every age group between 20 and 65 years old, college-educated white men and women who worked fulltime in 2000 earned less than 93 percent of the average national hourly wage. More importantly, the most mobile segment of the population (the white full-time workers with college degrees aged 25-34) earned only 87 percent (males) and 85 percent (females) of the national average wage. Even Upstate’s highest income households failed to earn comparable wages to their national counterparts. The 80th percentile household, whose income is higher than 80 percent but lower than 20 percent of all households, earned about \$74,300 in Upstate in 1999, compared with over \$81,100 nationwide (Pendall and Christopherson, *Losing Ground: Income and Poverty in Upstate New York, 1980-2000*). This 8 percent gap represents a substantial deterioration for Upstate since 1990, when Upstate’s 80th percentile household earned just 3 percent less than its national average.

Like the well-heeled households, Upstate’s poorest households are also in an unsatisfactory position earning lower incomes, on average, than those nationwide. They have become increasingly more dependent on government transfer payments as a source of income. Over half of the increase in Upstate’s per capita income during the 1990s came from growing sources such as social security, government and private-sector pensions, Medicare, and Medicaid. Upstate New York’s traditional status as a low-poverty region no longer holds true. In the 1990s, as poverty declined nationally, it actually crept up in Upstate (see figure 4). In fact, the number of residents living below poverty in Upstate grew by 7.9 percent in the 1990s, a much faster rate of growth than nationwide (6.8 percent) and far outpacing the region’s population growth rate (Pendall and Christopherson, *Losing Ground: Income and Poverty in Upstate New York, 1980-2000*). No longer is the region failing in producing potential new members of the workforce, it is also failing to provide enough living income for its populace.

Upstate's decline is perhaps best demonstrated by the growth of high-poverty tracts, a symbolic representation of population shifts. The number of people below poverty in a tract grows from the influx of poor people and by reduction of established residents' incomes. Upstate's population became more concentrated in high-poverty neighborhoods in the 1990s because 98 tracts with nearly 315,000 residents (more than the entire population of Buffalo city) transitioned from low to high poverty. Upstate's 240 persistent poverty tracts, home to 30 percent of Upstate's poor population in 2000, lost about 69,000 people overall and 13,000 poor residents (Pendall and Christopherson, *Losing Ground: Income and Poverty in Upstate New York, 1980-2000*). This great migration of population out of concentrated poverty has had a negative impact on those left stranded behind in these poor neighborhoods, as they are now surrounded not only by chronic poverty but also by increasing isolation, and in some cases, a loss of threshold densities to support economic, social, religious, and political institutions.

The Upstate-Downstate Divide

Upstate's emblematic decline is accentuated even more by comparison to Downstate's shimmering prosperity. New York City and Upstate New York have viewed each other with suspicion for much of the state's history. Residents in each area tend to believe that their tax dollars subsidize the other. However, detailed studies of the state's revenues and spending reveal that Upstate receives more in state appropriations than it pays in taxes, and that New York City pays more than it receives (Gardner, 2). Nevertheless, the myth has persisted as Upstate continues to resent the city's great influence in regards to state government policy.

The mayor of New York City is a major media figure, capable to command a bully pulpit often exceeding that of the governor (Ward, 524). In 2003, Mayor Bloomberg persuaded state legislators to provide additional emergency budget assistance to the city for employee payroll expenditures. To minimize the negative public outcry, the state legislature opted instead to assume the responsibility for \$170 million in bonds that the city's Municipal Assistance Corporation had originally issued in the wake of the mid-1970s fiscal crisis. The effect was to transfer to taxpayers around the state the burden of repaying debt the city had incurred nearly three decades earlier. An

unfair disservice to Upstate, the already troubled region doesn't need to be burdened even more with downstate's debt. This is just a small speckle in the many powerful ways New York City exercises its command in Albany.

For the residents of Downstate, there are only two categories: New York City, and everything else. The city's political-social establishment looks down its nose at Albany. The attitude of those in New York City toward their state capital (and the rest of the nation) was captured in a famous New Yorker magazine cartoon that showed the world from the elitist perspective of the Upper East Side of Manhattan (see figure 1). In the illustration, there was Manhattan, beyond it a strip of New Jersey and a flat heartland, then the Pacific Ocean in the distance. Albany, as well as the rest of the state, was painfully excluded in the map. Former New York Mayor Ed Koch famously called rural Upstate "a joke", insulting the men's department store suits and the women's "gingham dresses" (Ward, 37). When Democratic Attorney General Eliot Spitzer likened Upstate New York to Appalachia during his 2006 gubernatorial campaign, some Republicans accused him of blatant city-centric elitism. These are just few of the many displays that illustrate Downstate's lack of brotherly attitude towards Upstate.

Failed Policies

It is no surprise that Upstate legislators have historically proposed establishing the region as a separate state, to break away from the perceived negative effects of association with the big city. In a New York Times article, David F. Shaffer, of the Public Policy Institute, largely blamed Upstate's failure to recover on "the dominance exercised by the downstate political culture," an establishment largely synonymous with the Democrats (Roberts). However, political finger pointing is simply incapable of realistically resolving Upstate's economic ailments.

Most of Upstate's candidates for statewide seats have considered it essential to discuss proposed solutions to the region's economic stagnation. But despite detailed promises to reduce taxes and ambiguous projects to reinvigorate the region, the results have yet to be seen. From 1990 to 2005, manufacturing employment declined 20 percent nationally and by 35 percent in Upstate New York. Yet, rust belt states like Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan have enjoyed double-digit percentage gains in overall private-sector employment since

1990, while Upstate's increase was less than 4 percent (Ward, 46). If industry-shift isn't the only factor contributing to Upstate's economic decline, then there must be other factors, perhaps a political one, causing the downturn.

The diminishing figures all point in one direction: the New York State government has largely failed Upstate. Discounting the amount of job losses expected from a structural shift from manufacturing to the service sector, the region has failed to see the new businesses and the economy take form. In a recent study released by the Manhattan Institute, the state of New York's decline is caused by the government itself. "New York's political class spends, taxes, and borrows far more than the national average, consistently ranking at or near the top of the list in every measure of the burden that government imposes on citizens and businesses" (Ward, 46). What New York has is an irresponsible legislature that spends rather than saves for its own sake.

Business leaders and many economists cite high business costs in New York as the key disadvantage in global and national competition for jobs. Extensive anecdotal evidence indicates that business executives and investors react to high costs (Ward, 49). A 2006 report by the Tax Foundation determined New York's state business tax climate as the worst among the fifty states (Gallagher, 5). In a citizen's guide to state finances published by the Office of the State Comptroller, local taxes in New York are 78.7% above the national average, while the state taxes are 8.7% higher (Office of the State Comptroller). New York's debt per capita is over three times the national median. Public school costs, the per capita income tax, and the per capita state-local debt in the state are the highest in the nation, and the state-local tax burden in the Empire State is second only to the burden in Alaska. While business taxes are especially high in the New York City metropolitan region, companies there can usually overcome high costs by virtue of the city's global status in financial and business services, corporate headquarters and other high-value activities. Unfortunately for Upstate region, the businesses there retained the burden of relatively high costs while intrinsically lacking the structural advantages of New York City that retain businesses.

As a result, decades of failed campaign promises from both parties to make Upstate more business friendly and cost competitive have left some New Yorkers skeptical that neither party has the will or the ability to fix the foundering

economy. In the New York Times article, Denis M. Hughes, president of the New York State A.F.L.-C.I.O lamented, "they all had ideas, but none of the ideas worked" (Roberts). In fact, urgent attention needs to be focused on government policies that will effectively address what is essentially a demand deficiency problem at both ends of the income scale. At the high end, Upstate desperately needs new strategies to create more demand for highly skilled workers and offer jobs that offer nationally competitive wages. At the lower end, additional welfare measures are needed to supplement low incomes and to alleviate the growing concentration of poverty. These are bipartisan issues that require bipartisan cooperation in passing the right legislation.

Despite the rhetoric of reform and change, the Governor and the Legislature desperately lack the agency to actually fix New York's chronic ailments. Ironically, Albany is incapable of saving the state because it can't even save itself from mismanagement. Heavily burdened by bureaucracy, fiscal irresponsibility, and bad politics in general, New York is in a substantial amount of debt. The state's budget deficit is at an estimated \$8.2 billion, due in no small part to state spending that has risen by nearly 70%, or \$35 billion, over the past decade (Roberts). The recent financial crisis has exposed the state's overreliance on the downstate economy and on tax revenue from Wall Street. The public's frustration with Albany's inability to govern and the government's preference for New York City has angered many Upstate voters. John Faso, a former leader of Republicans in the State Assembly from Columbia County, blames the deficit on the selfishness of special interests, especially the public employee unions that have crippled the state's economy. "West of Albany and north of Saratoga the state is an economic dead zone," Faso declares in a Wall Street Journal article, "People in downstate have no idea of the anger and frustration against state government in Albany the people in upstate have" (Lind).

Perhaps the best indicators of public discontent with the government can be seen with every election season. The constitution guarantees its citizens the power to elect and reelect politicians that they believe are useful in instituting policies that will benefit their district. Ineffective and unpopular politicians are subjected to being voted out of their office should they fail to live up to their duty. Therefore, given the perpetual dissatisfaction with New York's economic decline, it is my expectation that public discontent will lead to the

systematic defeat of incumbents who have done little to resurrect the local economy. Since a political party is highly indicative of the platform of policies its politician will espouse, it is predicted that party change will result for every district where voters are disillusioned with the previous administration. However during the process of my research, overwhelming evidence suggests otherwise. Despite endemic economic decline, not only are legislative incumbents successful in maintaining their seat, the political parties are also equally successful in maintaining their respective share of power in the state government. Republicans, with a strong Upstate base, have largely retained the majority in the State Senate for 40 years.

This inconsistency can only be explained by the unique political structuring of Albany that has consistently kept the incumbents and the same parties in power. Political parties, aided by gerrymandered districts, have little trouble in securing a majority at the polls which essentially maintains the status quo power structure in Albany. The Republicans have carved a powerful niche in the Senate by utilizing the historical Upstate-Downstate rivalry to persuade Upstate voters that they are the best party to represent their interests. The logic is that a Republican majority in the Senate is the only way to counterbalance the Democrat-controlled Assembly and the recent Democratic governors who heavily tilts in favor of Downstate constituents. Upstate voters are aware of this as they head to the polls in each election season.

A Divided Government

Political parties can either make or break a democratic government. Bipartisan cooperation between the parties can safeguard and expedite the passage of important legislation. Hostile interparty competition, on the other hand, only causes gridlock and accomplishes rarely anything significant or mutually beneficial. Kept to moderation, a competitive party system can function as a democratizing force. Voters benefit when parties compete by offering programs designed for mass appeal and by proving that they can deliver policies through effective governance. In practice however, the two-party system in New York has not worked well in defining real alternatives for the voters or encouraging responsible government policies.

What the Republicans and Democrats have accomplished instead is a heavily divided government and a splintered voter base. The division of voters into the two major parties dates far back into American history. Since the beginning, it was the city man against the rural farmer, the new immigrant against the third-generation American, the Downstate Irish against the Upstate British. What we have today is a state in which patterns of partisanship are clearly evident. Whereas political parties should strive to encompass all interests of the voting population, in reality, they settle to only represent a coalition of people with particular social and political orientations.

The fact that the two parties represent fairly different constituencies within in the state should naturally increase the level of their competition. But despite claims of democracy and fair competition, election outcomes have always been predictable. It has been an electoral tradition for the Democrats to win in New York City (and some urban pockets in Upstate) and for the Republicans to win pretty much everywhere else. In fact, interparty competition for seats in the state legislature became something of a rarity in the 1980s and 1990s. Stonecash showed that since 1900, the average margin of victory (percentage points by which the winner leads the loser) in legislative elections has steadily increased from a little over 20 to the current level of 54 percentage points (Schneier, Murtaugh and Pole, 69). Ironically, the real competition lies within the September primary elections of the respective political parties. For the three-way 59th Senate District primary race, Patrick Gallivan narrowly won with 8,250 votes, with Domagalski coming at second place with 7,289 votes, and lastly DiPietro with an equally impressive 6,591 votes (New York State Board of Election). As the district favors Republican candidates for local races, the official party nomination is highly sought after by the Republican hopefuls.

Both parties have protected and preserved their territory within the legislature. The Democrats have always controlled the State Assembly while the Republicans long dominated the State Senate. The 2006 state legislative elections were relatively typical of the single-party-dominance scenario. In the State Senate, party control changed in only one of sixty-two districts; in thirty four districts, the winning candidate received more than 60 percent of the vote; and ten candidates who ran without major

party opposition. In the State Assembly, only two of the 150 seats changed parties, 116 of those were won by margins exceeding 60 percent, and 42 of these candidates had what amounted to a free ride (Schneier, Murtaugh and Pole, 65). Predictable election results such as these have earned New York the dubious distinction of having some of the least meaningful statewide and local elections in the country.

In addition to uncompetitive local races, New York has one of the lowest rates of voter participation in the nation. In the 2004 presidential election, it ranked forty-eighth in overall turnout (Schneier, Murtaugh and Pole, 75). Few states have a lower turnout in primary elections than New York. A known factor contributing to this phenomenon is the unwillingness of the voters to participate in the races of noncompetitive districts. It is also important to note that common to all ethnic groups, the economically and academically disadvantaged people vote at dramatically lower rates than their wealthier and more educated compatriots. Given the poor economic outlook of the Upstate region, lower income and uneducated voters may have simply given up on voting for a better future. Those who fail to participate in politics are not merely dissatisfied but they are also discouraged to vote. It is possible that the single-party-dominance and the limited choices of candidates have simply made participation in elections meaningless for the public.

Republican Dominance in Upstate

If the political system is failing to offer meaningful and competitive races to voters, then why do the residents of Upstate vote at all? There is a twofold explanation for the Republican dominance of rural and suburban districts in Upstate. In both explanations, the voters are voting entirely on a rational and self-interested basis. For one, the Upstate voters cling to the Republican candidates in retaliation of the further encroachment of Downstate influence in Albany via the Democrat-controlled Assembly. Alternatively, the voters are helplessly manipulated by the political structure in Albany to produce predictable election outcomes. Political parties pour substantial financial and technical resources into key races to influence the voters where the election districts have been gerrymandered, or drawn to incorporate only regions that demographically favor the party. Despite the challenges political gerrymandering may pose to democracy, the

Upstate voters still benefit from having their voice maintained in Albany by the Senate Republicans.

For the majority of the working class voters in Upstate, many of them who might normally be expected to vote Democratic end up voting for Republican candidates in state offices out of hostility to New York City. Compared to its neighboring states in the Northeast, Upstate New York votes more Republican than states with similar demographic profiles. Its Upstate cities are more Republican than cities of equivalent size elsewhere in the country. For many years, Upstate voters have perceived themselves as paying high taxes to pay for New York City social services that were distributed by corrupt or incompetent city politicians (Schneier, Murtaugh and Pole, 69). As of 2006, nine members of the Legislature have been charged with bribery or other forms of crimes within the past five years, all represented districts in New York City where voters are less likely to be aware of their representatives and their activities (Ward 32). This problem exists especially in Downstate districts where the large minority and immigrant population are much less involved in politics.

In the following case study, Upstate politicians seized the opportunity to sharply criticize Albany for playing favoritism with the Downstate politicians. Notably, the Republicans have capitalized on Albany's Downstate bias, by convincing Upstate voters that they are the only party that can help counter New York City's powerful influence.

Case Study: MTA Bailout Benefits Downstate

New York City's immense size alone commands considerable political influence in Albany. Home to more than 8 million residents, about 43% of the state population, the city runs an extensive urban transit system that boasts a daily ridership of approximately 7 million (Metropolitan Transportation Authority). The MTA is a massive state-chartered agency that has constantly been in the news for its lack of funding and threat to terminate services. The agency's budget deficit is a growing crisis for the organization as well as New York City and the state legislature. The MTA currently holds \$31 billion in debt and it also suffers from a \$900 million gap in its operating budget for 2011 (The Drum Major Institute).

The fact is that the governor and the state legislature are directly responsible for the MTA's finances as only they have the power to allocate

funding to the authority. While the MTA has been cutting costs at the margins in terms of reductions in services, its internal efforts have not been enough to close the budget gap and avert an impending fiscal disaster. Much like the myriad state agencies that are over-borrowing and under-performing, MTA's deficit comes at the expense of state taxpayers' dollars. As feared by Upstate residents, Albany has made a contentious decision that unabashedly favors Downstate constituents. The centerpiece of the 2009 MTA bailout plan is a \$1.5 billion payroll tax increase to fund for the agency.

The MTA bailout is a gross negligence of the interest of the Upstate taxpayers. In the process of appeasing the downstate constituents, Albany funds an agency that only services a specific regional populace. In a piece from Senator James L. Seward's blog titled "MTA Bailout Lets Down Upstate", the Upstate Republican (SD-51) raised grave concerns in regards to the bailout for the MTA and the dire consequences his residents. In his argument, most Upstate residents will never set foot on a subway, bus, or train operated by the MTA let alone benefit from it. To further alienate the Upstate citizens, the state vowed to reimburse school districts in the MTA region for their share of the payroll tax to quell the initial public outrage of a tax hike. The reimbursement, costing anywhere from \$60 million to \$100 million, will come from the state's general fund. This means that taxpayers from outside of the MTA region will be helping foot the bill again without exchange for any tangential benefits. He states, "The statewide payroll tax will be devastating for businesses, nonprofits, hospitals, local governments and school districts. Companies outside of New York, thinking about expansion or relocation, will lose interest in moving to New York in short order" (Seward).

There was also a very important omission from the debate over the MTA bailout: Upstate roads and bridges. For decades, the state approved five-year capital plans for the MTA while at the same time passing a proposal to improve roads and bridges in Upstate and on Long Island. Safe, well-maintained highways and bridges are vital to the Upstate economy and daily life. Like the public transportation system that is so vital to the Downstate, Upstate residents depend heavily on highways to get to places. But for the first time in recent years, that parity has been ignored. As the MTA bill authorizes a two year capital plan for mass transit, a road and bridge capital plan for the rest of the state was never discussed.

The exclusion of an infrastructure plan vital to the Upstate is essentially a bad policy that discriminates against the residents of the entire region. Seward states that, "It shouldn't be any real surprise that upstate was left out of this plan. After all, the MTA bailout was put together in secrecy by the same three New York City politicians that crafted the state budget. Both plans were assembled behind closed doors, and both are disastrous to upstate and New York as a whole" (Seward). In the context of the MTA bailout debacle, Republican officials have become an indispensable strong voice for Upstate constituents (despite the fact that they weren't able to change the actual policy). Since the Democrats have a huge constituent base in the city, traditional Republican and swing voters in Upstate are naturally skeptical in voting for a party that might or might not represent their interests. Thus, the Republican Party has become the last savior of Upstate residents as their mouthpiece in lieu of the ever powerful Downstate influence.

Money Influences Elections

The dominance of a party in particular regions can also be explained by a political system that heavily prioritizes winning elections. During the campaign season, the party leaders provide remarkable assistance to individual legislative candidates of their party. In competitive races especially, campaign literature, printing, propaganda, materials on opponents, and so on, are financed and provided by the county party committees. Occasionally, monetary funds are distributed to candidates running in marginal districts. The accomplishments of Republican candidates in winning State Senate seats are the product of successful campaign financing.

Fundraising for campaigns include extensive centralized efforts by the party conferences. The Senate Republican Campaign Committee and the Democratic Assembly Campaign Committee, as the political arms of the majority conferences, can make available hundreds of thousands of dollars to a candidate in an importance race. The campaign committees for the Senate Democrats and Assembly Republicans, the two minority parties, do not raise as much money, but can still provide meaningful funding and technical assistance (Ward, 133). This gives great evidence to the Republican strategy on maintaining the control of the State Senate, their last bastion of power in Albany. The preservation of a Senate majority hinges upon

getting newcomers and incumbents elected. The fact is most rural Upstate districts are under Republican control, and the local county party committees are better organized and financed for the purpose of assisting their candidates. For the party in majority power, it has greater means to assist their candidates by utilizing the research and financial resources of the legislature to these ends.

Judith Hunter, the Chair of the Livingston County Democrats and the campaign manager for Cynthia Appleton, can attest to the power of money in election politics. In a personal interview, Hunter confesses that, “It all comes down to money. Gallivan was able to buy the ads to bombard local airwaves, whereas we ran on a shoestring budget” (Hunter). Indeed, Gallivan’s campaign had a substantial financial advantage. From New York State Board of Election campaign finance reports, Gallivan for Senate raised \$194,453.00 while Cynthia Appleton for Senate raised only \$44,516.26 (New York State Board of Election). Whereas Appleton’s commitment to Campaign Finance Reform has deterred potential special interest money from funding her campaign, Gallivan gained the upper hand of having received much more support from its party committees, PACs, individual donors, and special interest groups. Hunter also lamented the lackluster support from the Erie County Democratic Committee as well as the Ontario County Democratic Committee. Unsure of her chances of victory in lieu of the powerful Republican candidacy, the Senate Democratic Campaign Committees and local Democrat leaders were hesitant in committing money to help her campaign which ultimately hindered her momentum in the race. This is a clear instance where Republican dominance in Senate districts has successfully deterred Democrats from raising and committing the level of money needed to win the race.

Political Gerrymandering & Redistricting

The second part of the analysis focuses on the use of gerrymandering by Republicans to maintain their power in Upstate. Members of the Senate and Assembly in New York have built one of the most effective incumbent-protection systems in the nation. An 1894 constitution was engineered by the Upstate Republicans who controlled the convention to ensure that New York City would never be able to elect a majority of either house of the legislature. This arrangement was accomplished by guaranteeing sixty of the state’s sixty-two counties

at least one seat in the assembly and providing that “no two counties divided by a river” could ever have half the Senate seats (Schneier, Murtaugh and Pole, 79). A constitutional amendment in the 1960s and notable court cases have challenged the plan, mandating a one person –one vote basis in drawing district lines that are strictly equal in population. However, it has not improved the situation of gerrymandering in New York with neither party willing to compromise their greatest shot at winning political offices.

Since the early 1980s, a key element has been the once-every-ten year redrawing of legislative districts that favor majority party incumbents, with the Republicans in the Senate and Democrats in the Assembly (Ward, 26). Although the lines must be approved by both houses, each majority gives the other a wink and a nod to assure each other’s survival. Unable to agree on a redistricting plan that could pass both houses and satisfy the courts, Assembly Speaker Stanley Fink finally proclaimed to Senate majority leader Warren Anderson, “You don’t quarrel with the way that I draw the Assembly and I won’t quarrel with the way that you draw the Senate. I will pass a bill that has your version of the Senate if you will pass the same bill that has my version of the Assembly” (Schneier, Murtaugh and Pole, 89). Aided by newly developed computer programs, both Assembly Democrats and Senate Republicans have become remarkably adept at drawing district lines to maximize their respective party advantages.

Under this cynical system, the legislators choose their voters rather than the other way around. The constitution that was built to check government’s power is reversed. The 59th Senate District is a fine example of such political engineering. Former Senator Dale Volker was a longtime incumbent and his district is based on partisan gerrymandering that favors Republican candidates. Reformers and public interest groups have long called for an independent redistricting commission to make legislative elections more competitive and make legislators more accountable to voters. A legislature-favored bipartisan commission on the other hand is more likely to engage in partisan gerrymandering with certain districts safely assigned to one party and other districts safely assigned to the other party. To remove partisan motivation from the redrawing of legislative district lines, numerous proposals have been advanced for vesting the responsibility in a nonpartisan redistricting commission.

Case Study: Upstate Prisoner Representation

Backtracking on previous campaign promises to commit to a nonpartisan redistricting plan, the Republicans abandoned the democratic ideals for political gain. When former Governor David Paterson signed a law banning gerrymandering of prisoner populations, the Republicans were outraged. Under the groundbreaking legislation, prisoners will be counted towards their home districts before incarceration and not the districts where the prison or detention unit is located. Crucial to Republican-controlled districts, the Upstate prisons account for a considerable population in counties that are otherwise under the minimum threshold. The practice of counting inmates as residents of the district grossly inflates the overall population of an electoral district. The practice of counting inmates where they are incarcerated has long been criticized as disenfranchising the poor, urban and largely Democratic minority neighborhoods by undercounting their populations, and thus reducing their political clout when legislative districts are drawn. The net impact of the new legislation will restore prisoner populations to Downstate.

In a recent article titled “New York Republicans Challenge Ban on Gerrymandering”, nine Republican State Senators filed a lawsuit challenging the ban on prison-based gerrymandering. One of the protesting Senators, Retty Little, has 13 prisons in her district each accounting for more than 10,000 prisoners from various parts of the state (Loftin). Government watch groups characterized the Republican tactic as a political obstruction to one of the greatest civil rights accomplishments of the last decade in the State. However, seeing that the Republicans are clinging on to a fragile majority over the Democrats in the State Senate, it is safe to say that they are guaranteed to fight any redistricting reform that could cost them seats that are considered safe for their party. Senator Joseph A. Griffo, another Republican whose district relied on its prison population, said that the change in law underscored how the Legislature was dominated by Democrats from New York City. Griffo noted that “This is another attempt by New York City leadership to silence the upstate voices” (Loftin).

While the Republican defense for gerrymandering is deplorable, ultimately the Upstate voters benefit from a Senate Republican redistricting plans that would benefit Upstate representation. It is clearly not in the interest of

Upstate citizens to lose political representations due to declining population. It is also not in the interest of the Republican Party to lose dominance over the State Senate with new redistricting plans. For that reason, the Republican Party and the Upstate residents have formed a bond that is the key to ensure both of their political survival by keeping to a system that has largely maintained the status quo.

Future Prospects

Long time journalist of Albany politics, Jay Gallagher, published a book-length explication of criticisms linking governmental failure to weakness in New York’s economy. Much of the blame, he wrote, “can be laid at the feet of the men and women we send to the Capitol to serve us. All too often, the politicians act in their own self-interest and that of the thousands of lobbyists who spent \$144 million last year trying to influence them and less for the general good” (Ward, 34). What Gallagher argues is that Albany seems to be lacking the principle that should be its focus: a dedication to the prosperity and wellbeing of its citizens. It also doesn’t help that it has been known as an institution that did most of its important work in the dark of night- with “lawmakers so exhausted or confused or just fed up that they would vote for almost anything just to end the pain. Merely ending the legislative session in daylight was considered something worth cheering” (Gallagher, xi). Under such conditions, how can the public even be sure that their best interests are being considered?

The current situation in Albany has yet to give voters compelling reasons to participate in the political process. The combination of strong partisanship and a divided government complicates and distorts the process. The Republican minority in the Assembly and the Democratic minority in the Senate continually complain that the majority party singlehandedly controls the legislative process, thereby making it impossible for minority members to have major bills supported and approved. The State Executive-Legislative relationship is also subjected to partisanship. The parties in majority of either house have huge bargaining power with the Governor. Frank J. Munger and Ralph A. Straetz explained that the New York State Legislature “possesses a party discipline far superior to that found either in the United States Congress or in all but a few capitals... Consequently, the process of legislation consists of a process of negotiations among the legislative leaders... and the Governor” (Gallagher, 105).

Revitalizing the Upstate economy requires a coordinated and sustained effort from all parties and all levels of the government. If the politics is a cause of the decline, then it also must be its savior. The politicians in Albany should have no higher priority than to stand up for New York State's economic future and making it the best place to do business in America. First, the business climate must be improved to stimulate economic development and create new jobs. Second, we must revitalize cities and downtowns to make them economically vibrant places to live and work, especially for the young population. With dedicated leadership, New York will emerge as a state where ideas are born, companies are raised and jobs and careers thrive. If those promises come true, and if a new Upstate generation can rediscover the entrepreneurial genius of the past, the region's prospects look bright.

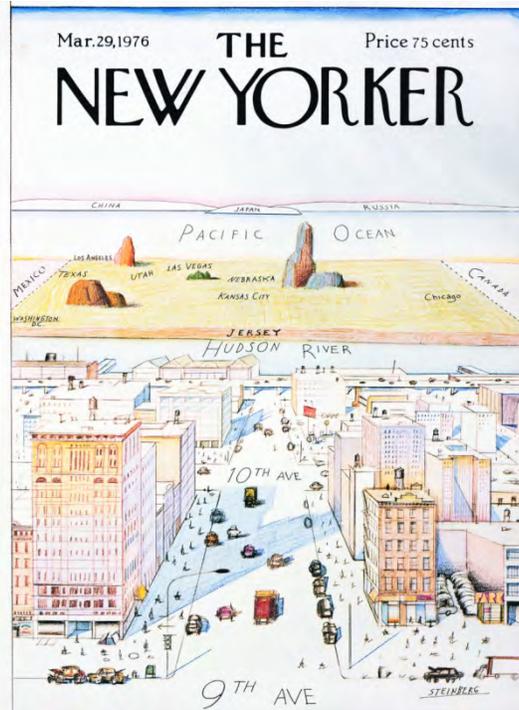
As for the 59th State Senate district, it appears that its prospects will remain the same in the near future. Without fair nonpartisan redistricting, Republican candidates will continue to dominate races as they have for decades. Without enticing job offers in the region, the young college graduates will continue to look for work elsewhere in the state and the nation. Without a vibrant pool of young and skilled workers, prospective employees and entrepreneurs will also look elsewhere to start their businesses. The cycle of economic stagnation will continue to perpetuate itself unless politicians from both parties are willing to cooperate on the only issue that should be on the top of their agenda- bringing meaningful legislation that will benefit all of New Yorkers.

While the Upstate-Downstate gap will continue to dominate political tensions, politicians

and constituents alike should all look past their differences and towards a common goal. Excessive partisan politics should especially be abandoned for the purpose of finding a middle ground that can be accepted for all citizens. If New York wants to truly be great again, the two regions must bridge their divide in Albany, and help each other with the necessary legislation even if it means agreeing to concessions they don't necessarily want to make. Albany should pay particular attention to Upstate concerns and not just cater to Downstate's powerful influence. While Republicans have found a political niche by using their Upstate stronghold to constantly foil the Downstate Democrats, perpetuating this stalemate will only prolong existing problems and inefficiency in the legislative process.

It will be interesting to see what Patrick Gallivan will do to improve the livelihood of Western New York. This senior thesis experience has really brought down my wall of resistance to pro-Republican notions. While by no means will I become a Republican anytime soon, I have decidedly erased my preconceived notions about the ills of the GOP. With the system we have now, Republicans are in fact helping Upstate citizens retain their share of representation in the state legislature against powerful Downstate interests. But I still hold on to the belief that if Cynthia Appleton were elected, an Upstate Democrat is just as capable as a Republican in representing Upstate interests. What politicians need to do in New York is to put aside party agendas and truly put their constituents' interests in mind. Representative democracy is not dead in New York as long as the citizens are informed and care enough to do something about their rights to be heard.

Figure 1



Source: *The New Yorker Magazine*

Table 1

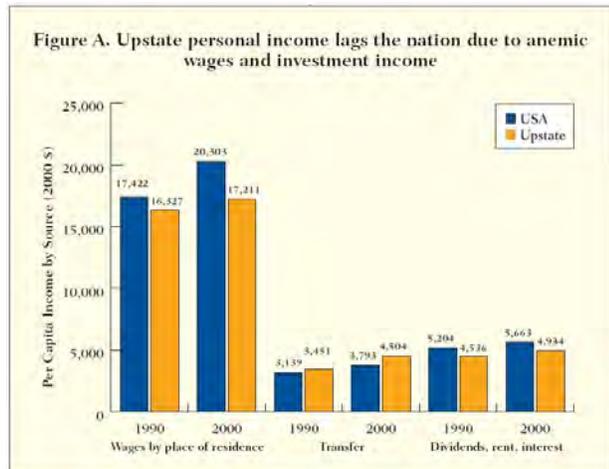
58th SENATE DISTRICT

County	Cynthia M. Appeler	Patrick M. Gallivan	Patrick M. Gallivan	Patrick M. Gallivan	Cynthia M. Appeler	David J. DiPietro	Blank	Void	Scattering	EVS Subtotal	Total
Wyoming	3,698	5,349	238	898	410	1,838	323	0	0	523	12,894
Part of Erie	14,538	30,447	2,745	4,540	2,636	7,540	3,412	0	0	3,412	65,870
Part of Livingston	4,266	6,607	438	1,054	379	830	834	9	4	847	14,251
Part of Ontario	4,259	5,764	385	1,019	328	835	1,067	1	3	1,071	13,641
Total	26,759	48,067	3,807	7,304	3,963	10,850	6,036	10	7	5,663	106,623

REC-AP: 30,712 (69,200) 10,850

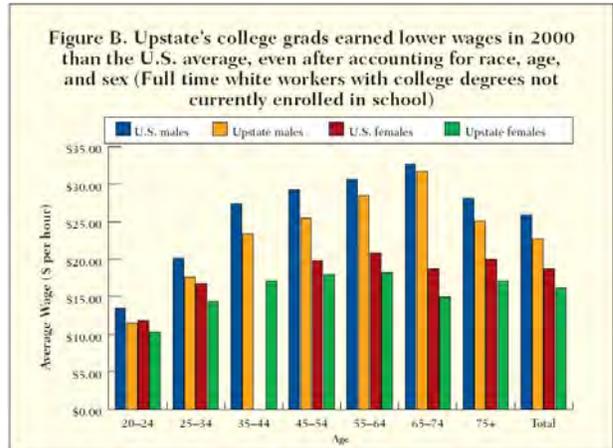
Source: *New York State Board of Election*

Figure 2



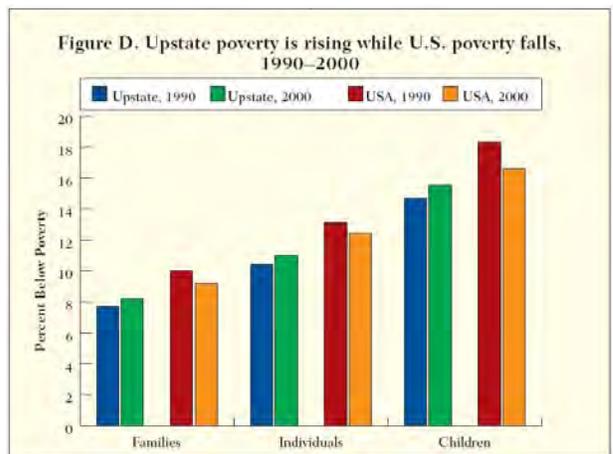
Source: *The Brookings Institution*

Figure 3



Source: *The Brookings Institution*

Figure 4



Source: *The Brookings Institution*

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