

Regional Political Conflict in New York State

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Political conflict over regional concerns in New York is as old as the state's history and as current as today's news stories from Albany. Grounded in different needs and interests, these regional concerns both reinforce and reflect larger ideological distinctions between and among the state's political parties. Although the ideological divide in New York is less pronounced than it is nationally, the "liberal wing" of the Democratic Party, represented by a number of state legislators from New York City and upstate urban districts, and the "conservative wing" of the Republican Party, represented by legislators from upstate rural areas and suburban districts, each reflect distinctly different approaches to governance.

In recent years, these differences have been exacerbated among conservatives in New York by the "tea party notions" permeating the national Republican Party evident in the angry tone of Carl Paladino's 2010 gubernatorial campaign. They have been reinforced on the left by proposals to downsize public employee pension benefits and cut social service programs in the wake of the recent economic downturn. Divided governance, the norm in New York for four decades now, and interrupted only briefly by the somewhat chaotic one-party governance of 2009–2010, serves to make these regionally based, ideological positions highly relevant to policy decision making in Albany.

Politics concerns choices about who gets what share of scarce resources and from this perspective one region's gain is often perceived

as another's loss. Political conflicts in New York, therefore, often emerge from the socioeconomic differences between and among the different regions in the state. This chapter, which examines the nature of regional political conflicts in New York and their impact on state governance, is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the historical evolution of regional politics in New York State from an era best characterized as an upstate–downstate dichotomy to one of a tripartite regional division defined by the suburbanization of the state's population. Section II examines a number of the current demographic, socioeconomic, and political differences between, among, and within the various regions in the state. And the third section analyzes how these regional differences are both manifested and somewhat blurred in today's legislative and executive politics and policymaking in Albany.

A History of Regional Conflict in New York

From the early nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, regional politics in New York reflected largely an upstate–downstate division between New York City and the rest of the state.¹ In part, this division had an inherent cultural dimension. People from cities and people from more rural areas often view each other with emotions ranging from bemusement to hostility. As creations of modernity, cities challenge the traditional culture found in rural areas by incubating liberal social and political attitudes and as the country's most modern and most international city, New York has always represented the greatest American challenge to traditional values.

But cultural differences explain only part of the upstate–downstate divide of this period. Regional tensions also were based in the state's socioeconomic development and political history. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, linking New York City to the American heartland, secured the city's position as the premier commercial center in the United States.² Although parts of upstate New York, most notably the cities of Buffalo and Rochester, as well as other cities and towns that grew along the route of the Erie Canal, also developed as commercial and cultural centers, the upstate economy remained largely agricultural and its residents, particularly those in more rural areas of upstate, were not as “cosmopolitan” in social custom or economic outlook as those in New York City.

New York City's emergence as the country's primary commercial center in the early nineteenth century initiated a process of downstate

urban development that has seen the city remade several times as periodic economic crises created the demand for governance changes that then helped lay the foundations for eventual economic restructuring.³ This process of crisis, retrenchment, and recovery saw commercial New York City become the politically consolidated, industrial giant of the late nineteenth mid-twentieth centuries and then, painfully in the 1970s, begin the evolution toward becoming the postindustrial, financial center of American capitalism in the twenty-first century. This economic evolution also encouraged one of the most notable characteristics of the New York City experience—a dramatic and continual process of foreign immigration that first changed the city’s ethnic and religious make-up, then reformulated its racial demographics, and eventually resulted in the creation of today’s global city. In terms of regional divisions, the immigration resulting from economic changes served to reinforce already existing cultural differences between New York City and the rest of the state.

Although cities upstate also experienced notable economic and population growth, including significant immigration, in the wake of the opening of the Erie Canal, their socioeconomic evolution, unlike the situation downstate, paralleled that of other cities in the American “rust belt.” Decades of industrial development upstate, led by companies such as General Electric in Schenectady, Eastman Kodak in Rochester, and Bethlehem Steel in Buffalo—development that helped define New York State as the leading industrial power in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century—was followed by a long and continuing period of economic decline. Beginning in the 1950s, and reaching crisis proportions by the 1970s, the upstate industrial economy began to stagnate as companies either relocated or downsized and a combination of suburbanization and regional migration depopulated the cities of Western New York and the state’s Southern Tier. Buffalo stands as a classic case in point. Since 1950, the city’s population has declined by more than 50 percent and its economy, once grounded in the steel and automobile industries, has stagnated.⁴

Regional cultural and economic differences in New York State were both reflected in and reinforced by partisan political differences with long-standing historical roots. From its inception in the 1850s, when the issue of slavery saw it replace the Whig Party as the Democrats’ major political opposition in the state, the Republican Party garnered strong support in upstate New York. A series of religious “awakenings” in Central and Western New York in the early nineteenth century had helped nurture

a Protestant reform culture in this region of the state that drove the abolitionist movement in the antebellum years.⁵ Although the abolitionist movement had support from downstate financiers, New York City also had a number of powerful financial interests that were heavily involved in the Southern cotton trade. These downstate interests were highly resistant to policies that challenged states in the South and therefore their own financial stability. It is notable that although Abraham Lincoln carried New York State in both the 1860 and the 1864 presidential elections, he never received more than 37 percent of the vote in New York City, a result that proved to be a precursor of future elections. Although Republican candidates carried upstate New York in twenty-three of the twenty-four presidential elections held between 1860 and 1952, Democratic candidates were carrying New York City in twenty-three of these elections.

The Republican Party was organized upstate in the 1850s largely through the efforts of Roscoe Conkling. After national party divisions over the issue of political patronage, a practice favored by New York's Republicans, led to Conkling's resignation from the U.S. Senate and retirement from public life, the party in New York was led by Thomas Platt.⁶ In the 1890s, Platt's Republican machine, controlling both the executive and legislative branches in Albany, used its power to remake state government through a variety of initiatives including the enactment of the 1894 State Constitution, which remains the basis of state governance. Although the Republican machine extended its political operations into downstate areas of the state, it was primarily an upstate organization that used its influence over state government to work its political will throughout New York.

The downstate political situation was defined by the power of Tammany Hall, the New York County Democratic organization and the nation's most famous urban political machine. Organized as a social club in the early nineteenth century, Tammany became the driving force in New York City politics by the middle of that century. Following the fall of the Tweed Ring in 1871, Tammany leaders, most notably John Kelly, Richard Croker, and Charles Murphy, restructured and consolidated the machine's political power by using its control of the resources of city government to secure the support or at least the tolerance of major financial interests in the city on the one hand and the active electoral support of the immigrants arriving in the city on the other.⁷ The machinations of Tammany Hall, with its electoral base in the city's largely Catholic immigrants of the period, reaffirmed for many Republicans upstate that

the city was indeed an “alien place” and that its Democratic politicians represented an “alien philosophy.”

Well into the twentieth century, upstate Republicans successfully limited New York City’s statewide political influence through their control of Legislature apportionment and redistricting. The 1894 State Constitution that had been enacted through the efforts of Platt’s Republican machine incorporated a reapportionment/redistricting formula that heavily favored rural districts and ensured that the growing number of voters in New York City would never achieve full representation in the New York State Legislature. Despite the fact that city residents made up a majority of the state’s population by 1910, a majority that peaked at more than 55 percent of state residents in the 1940s, the formula in the state Constitution meant that the city never had anything close to its proportional share of state Assembly or Senate representatives in Albany. Indeed, Republican influence in the Legislature during this period was virtually unquestioned, evidenced by the fact that Republicans controlled the state Assembly for all but eight and the state Senate for all but fourteen of the seventy-five years from 1900 to 1975. This dramatic inequity in downstate legislative representation was not redressed until the series of “one person, one vote” Supreme Court decisions in the early 1960s, with the 1964 *WMCA v Lomenzo* decision overturning the apportionment/redistricting formula in New York’s Constitution.⁸

There were other examples of ongoing efforts by upstate politicians to maintain political control of New York City. In 1898, Platt’s Republicans enacted the first charter for the consolidated city of Greater New York seeking to use that document and the idea of consolidation itself, in part, to neutralize Tammany Hall’s downstate political influence. And, despite the formal adoption of a “home rule” amendment to the state’s Constitution in 1923, politicians in Albany continued to exercise considerable influence on downstate policymaking, with general rules applicable to all local governments in the state but with specific mandates focused on New York City, often enacted as general laws applying to “cities with a population of one million or more.”

In summary, in the 125 years following the opening of the Erie Canal, disparities in regional economic development, growing demographic distinctions between the city and upstate, and the differences in political attitudes and legislative power in the two regions acted to reinforce an already existing upstate–downstate state cultural division in New York. The regional dichotomy between the City of New York and the rest

of the state was both long-standing and easily summarized: New York City residents have been and are less Protestant, more ethnically diverse, more culturally and economically cosmopolitan, and far more likely to be Democrats than people in the rest of the state.

Suburbanization and the Transformation of Regional Divisions

During the second half of the twentieth century, dramatic changes in the population distribution in New York State transformed the traditional upstate–downstate distinction into a more complex web of regional distinctions. The extensive suburbanization of the state’s population since that time resulted in a tripartite system of regional politics in the state with New York City, its suburbs, and the rural areas of upstate New York all vying for political advantage and policy influence in state government. This tripartite regional division would itself be blurred somewhat by other socioeconomic forces in the latter years of the twentieth century. The urban crises of the 1960s and 1970s, which impacted all the cities in New York, spawned statewide urban problems that crossed regional lines. And the demographic and economic changes in the inner-ring suburbs around New York City tempered partisan allegiances in these areas.

Suburbanization in New York State, as well as in the rest of the nation, had a distinctly racial cast. In the 1950s and 1960s, millions of white middle-class people, encouraged by federal tax and housing subsidies as well as highway building programs, left the cities of the Northeast and Midwest to settle in suburbs. One of the largest such migrations in the United States was the eastern exodus from New York City. Between 1950 and 1970, the population of Nassau County more than doubled, while the population of Suffolk County increased by more than 300 percent. The period saw millions of Catholic ethnics, the sons and daughters of early twentieth-century immigrants, settled in the city’s eastern suburbs, where—although notably hostile to the urban centers they had left behind—they were to prove less politically conservative than were original suburban populations.

During the period when large numbers of Euro-American families were leaving New York City for the suburbs, the mechanization of Southern agriculture, the racist policies of Southern states, and the expectation of employment in the cities were producing a Northern migration of African Americans. Following train lines north, blacks transformed themselves from a rural to an urban population and in so doing transformed city, state,

and national politics. At the same time, large numbers of Puerto Ricans, seeking jobs not available on their home island, settled in the city. And, in the decades after the liberalization of immigration laws in 1965, the immigration of African and Hispanic Americans to New York was followed by the largest foreign immigration to the city since the early twentieth century. Composed largely of Hispanic and Asian populations, this wave of immigrants remade the city's demographics yet again and, by 1990, "people of color" make up a majority of New York City's population.

The impacts of suburbanization and in-migration to the cities were similar upstate. Between 1950 and 1970, the population in Erie County grew by 24 percent, whereas the population of Buffalo decreased by more than 20 percent. Monroe County experienced the same dynamic, growing by 46 percent, whereas the city of Rochester lost 11 percent of its population. Moreover, both cities saw an increase in their black populations during this period. As it had in Nassau and Suffolk counties, upstate suburban sprawl came at the expense of the region's agricultural economy. The number of farms in Erie County, for example, decreased nearly 80 percent between 1950 and 1997. Although some of this decrease in number was due to consolidation, the number of acres in farm production did drop 62 percent in the same period.⁹

From the middle 1960s through the 1980s, the New York City metropolitan area reflected a socioeconomic pattern typical both in upstate New York and in other metropolitan areas of the Northeast and the Midwest. A deteriorating center city, increasingly populated by people of color, as well as a growing economic underclass, was surrounded by essentially white middle-class suburbs where home values and family wealth increased based on distance from the center city. These were the years when the urban social crisis, evident in rising crime rates, increasing poverty, and deteriorating qualities of life, presaged the next phase of urban *fiscal* crisis, evident in city governments faced with mounting demands for social programs and deteriorating tax bases that led some to confront the specter of municipal bankruptcy.

New York City's particular crisis narrative has been well chronicled. Suffice it to say that New York City, perhaps at a higher volume and with more national attention, shared the dual burdens of social and fiscal collapse with a host of other cities in the state and region. New York City, however, did not share the same long-term fate as most of these other cities. As a result of its long history as an international center as well as the fiscal retrenchment and governance changes of the 1970s and

1980s, the city was remade as one of the global centers of the emerging postindustrial, financial world. Unlike Buffalo and Rochester, or Detroit and Cleveland for that matter, New York City, particularly that segment of its export base involved in finance, health care, education, and cultural pursuits, recovered from the dual crises and, beginning sometime in the middle 1980s, began to reinvent itself as a place not only to do business but as a place for upwardly mobile professionals to live.

In the second half of the twentieth century then, extensive suburbanization coupled with the transformation of New York City resulted in a dramatic change in the nature of regional divisions in New York State. The old notion of an upstate–downstate dichotomy has been replaced by a tripartite regional model, the evolution of which is evident in a time-bound snapshot today. In 2012, New York City, with its corporate economy grounded in international finance, its historically low crime rates, and its renewed cultural vibrancy is, at least from a macro perspective, a major success story. Conversely, although the region's smaller agricultural economy remains reasonably healthy, upstate New York continues its long period of social and economic decline with its cities losing their populations and growing their social problems. And the suburbs, once the venue for middle-class aspirations and upper-class leisure, increasingly are experiencing the problems of aging infrastructure and the influx into their inner rings of lower income, service-demanding populations.

The Demographic and Economic Roots of Regional Politics Today

The regions in New York State interact within a web of political relationships that are in large part defined by the underlying socioeconomic forces characterizing their populations. Beginning with regional demographic characteristics, this section of the chapter examines the underlying socioeconomic forces in the New York of 2012; places them within their historical perspective; and indicates what they may imply concerning regional political agendas in Albany.

Demographics and Regional Politics

The data in Table 1.1 indicate clearly that population growth in New York State has been slow overall and regionally uneven. Although New

Table 1.1. New York Regions: A Socioeconomic Profile

	New York State	New York City	NYC Suburbs	Upstate Cities	Upstate Rural
Population 2010	19,378,102	8,175,133	4,271,304	709,930	1,539,830
Change Since 2000	2.0	2.0	5.0	-6.4	-1.0
African American	15.9	25.5	10.0	35.3	3.2
Asian	7.3	12.7	5.0	2.8	1.0
Latino—any race*	17.6	28.6	13.8	9.2	3.3
White	65.7	44.0	76.5	55.3	93.0
Foreign Born	21.3	35.9	17.9	7.7	3.4
Speak a Language other than English at Home	28.5	47.1	22.4	13.1	6.0
Median Household Income					
As a Percentage of the State Median	1	1.01	1.55	.57	.84
Families below Poverty Level	13.8	18.6	5.6	23.4	9.9
No H.S. Diploma	15.8	21.0	11.0	19.4	14.5

Population data is from the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau Reports. All other data is U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, 2009 reports.
 **“Any race” for Latino respondents.

- a. *NYC suburbs*: Nassau, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk and Westchester counties (includes Yonkers).
- b. *Upstate cities*: Albany, Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse.
- c. *Upstate rural*: 26 NYS counties not within Standard Metropolitan Areas (SMAs).

York City and its suburbs have seen population increases since 2000, other regions of the state, most notably upstate cities, have experienced population declines during that period. In fact, since 1990 cities upstate have lost nearly 15 percent of their total populations. The overall state growth rate of 2 percent is one of the lowest among all states, placing New York forty-sixth on national rankings. Because states in the Northeast and Midwest regions of the country grew at a lower rate since 2000 than did their counterparts in the South and West, continuing a half-century long trend, New York is a notably slow-growth state within a notably slow-growth region of the nation.

Population size has direct political implications both within New York State and in terms of its national political influence. As the populations in New York City and more notably its surrounding suburbs grow, the political influence of these areas on statewide elections and within the Legislature in Albany also grows relative the rest of the state. On the national political scene, New York State's relatively slow population growth has lessened its influence in Congress and in the Electoral College. In 1960, New York State had 43 members of the House of Representatives and 45 Electoral College votes; in 2012, the state has 27 members of the House and will cast 29 Electoral College votes. This reduction reflects a long-term regional trend in the nation. In 1960, the five most populated states of the Northeast and Midwest, including New York, had 32 percent of the votes in the House of Representatives; in 2012, these same five states have just over 20 percent of the House vote.

Table 1.1 also indicates that New York City remains more ethnically and racially heterogeneous than any other area of the state. Despite the constancy of the *fact* of demographic differences between the city and the rest of the state, however, the *extent* of these differences has been modified in recent years. Although upstate rural New York remains overwhelmingly white, cities upstate include substantial black populations. Moreover, in recent years, people of color have been relocating to the inner-ring suburbs around New York City; areas like Mt. Vernon and Yonkers in Westchester County, as well as Hempstead in Nassau County, now include significant "minority" populations. As a result, the overall demographic picture affirming that New York City remains the most racially heterogeneous area of the state is masking important nuances with potential cross-regional political implications.

The New York City experience with *foreign-born* residents remains *sui generis* in the state and in the nation and explains the city's recent

population growth. In 2012, the city's population included representatives of more than two-hundred ethnic groups. At the turn of the twentieth century, roughly 33 percent of New York City's population *was* foreign born; today, nearly 36 percent of the city's population *is* foreign born. The majority of the most recent arrivals are from Latin America; there also are substantial numbers from Eastern Europe and Southern and Southeastern Asia. The city's role as a national port of entry continues to have political implications, providing the city with new entrepreneurial groups creating jobs and local wealth but also putting great strain on education and social service budgets.

Economics and Regional Politics

The economic resources each region brings to and the fiscal demands it makes on state budgets are important drivers of politics in New York. State legislators are charged with representing the economic interests of their constituencies and to the extent that these interests are regionally defined, politics in Albany will take on a regional flavor. To the degree, however, that economic interests cross regional lines, cross-regional cooperation between and among legislators with shared interests may well develop.

In 2012, New York City's economy is characterized by a long-standing and growing contradiction. At the same time that the city acts as one of the financial centers of the global economy, it is also the regional center for widespread social problems. Manhattan has the largest income gap between rich and poor of any county in the nation. With slightly more than 42 percent of the state's population, the city accounts for roughly 45 percent of the state's personal income and more than 50 percent of total state jobs in finance, insurance, and real estate.¹⁰ Conversely, the city has a greater concentration of social problems than other areas of the state. More than 70 percent of all the state's households on public assistance and 66 percent of all Medicaid cases reside in New York City and more than 66 percent of all state funds allocated for these two programs are spent in the city.¹¹

These latter characteristics encourage the city's state representatives in Albany to be active proponents for liberal social and economic programs. Maintaining state spending on social welfare programs will therefore be of primary interest to city legislators, particularly those representing impacted constituencies, just as reducing the revenue burdens

of such spending is a driving political force to people further removed economically and geographically from the problems. In this regard, however, it is important to note that the social problems that plague New York City are also present in upstate cities and in the inner-ring suburbs. Indeed, in many of these areas, the problems are more pronounced as the counterbalance of growth at the top of the economy is not present as it is in New York City.

The upstate economy has been deteriorating for more than fifty years. Although nearly 25 percent of the state's land area remains in agricultural production and New York remains one of the nation's most important dairy and grape-producing states, the economic pressures on upstate rural communities is intense. "Farmers face many challenges. Access to credit, especially today, is difficult; property taxes are high; and foreign competition is stiff."¹² Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the residents of upstate rural communities focus less on the need for state government social programs and more on matters of capital infusion and property tax relief. Coupled with the fact that farming has been an intergenerational "way of life" for people in this region, the economic situation in upstate rural New York simply reinforces long-standing cultural attitudes about self-reliance and opposition to state government social programs. Therefore, it also is not surprising that state representatives from this region identify politically with the conservative wing of the Republican Party, a partisan attachment now more than 160 years old.

As Table 1.1 indicates, many of the socioeconomic problems in urban areas upstate rival those in New York City. Cities upstate, however, do not approach the wealth-creation capacity evident downstate. The industrial downsizing that began in the 1950s has largely continued unabated to the present day and state government efforts to encourage economic growth through technology-based initiatives, most notably in biotech areas, have as yet not turned the economic situation around. Indeed, the creation in 2003 of the Buffalo Fiscal Stabilization Authority to monitor and develop a long-term plan for the city's finances was a clear sign of continuing and serious fiscal pressures in that city. State legislators from these areas are understandably focused on state-sponsored development initiatives as well as state assistance in dealing with the economic dislocations being experienced by the residents of upstate cities.

Despite their overall economic health, the suburbs around New York City also are experiencing economic and fiscal instability. Although the median household income in suburban areas is significantly higher than

the state average and the percentage of families below the poverty level is significantly lower than that of the rest of the state, aging infrastructure, environmental problems, development issues, and already notably high property taxes put great pressure on local budgets in the suburbs. In 2011, due to a 7 percent deficit in the county's operating budget, a state public benefit corporation, the Nassau County Interim Finance Authority, began active oversight and review of county fiscal policy. Under these circumstances, it is not at all surprising that property tax relief, state school aid, and state assistance with the local share of Medicaid payments are policy priorities on the agenda of suburban legislators.

Regional Political Differences in New York State Today

Regional differences notwithstanding, New York State has a long history of progressive politics. Driven in large part by New York City's commercial standing (the Erie Canal was an early example of government-initiated public improvements), as well as the city's extensive social needs, New York historically has had an activist state government. From the movement for political and social reform under Republican Gov. Theodore Roosevelt and Democratic Gov. Al Smith in the late 1800s and early 1900s to the institutionalization of a social welfare state under both Democratic and Republican governors during much of the twentieth century, New York's political culture stands in stark contrast to Thomas Jefferson's precept that "the government that governs least, governs best." Indeed, it is not surprising that Jefferson's main political opponent during the early years of the Republic was New York's Alexander Hamilton who early on envisioned a proactive role for government in the United States.

New York's activist political culture, however, was challenged by the state's slow growth and consequent fiscal problems of the later twentieth century. Under the relatively liberal and highly ambitious Republican Nelson Rockefeller, taxes and expenditures began to increase significantly, and by the 1970s, New York had developed the highest combined state and local tax burden in the nation.¹³ During the final decades of the twentieth century, New York's lagging economy put pressure on the state's ability to fund its large public sector. Democratic governors Hugh Carey and Mario Cuomo and Republican Gov. George Pataki presided over efforts to decrease the state's tax burden and rein in the costs of government in an effort to reinvigorate the state's economy and make New York more

“business friendly.” In this light, it is not at all surprising that Gov. Andrew Cuomo has pledged his administration to a no new taxes and fiscal retrenchment approach to governance. Indeed, for more than four decades, activist state government in New York has been more or less tempered by Gov. Carey’s 1975 assertion the “the times of plenty, the days of wine and roses” were over in the state.

Regional Politics in the State Legislature

For all but two years, since 1975, control of the state Legislature has been divided with the Democrats firmly in charge of the assembly and the Republicans holding a majority in the Senate. No other state has had as long a history of divided party control of its Legislature. Under the state’s highly partisan system, majority party conferences charge their legislative leaders with developing unified policy positions and representing them in negotiations with the other house and the governor. To assist the leaders in their task, the conferences grant them virtually full authority to select the chairs and majority members of committees; to fill lower leadership positions; and to allocate staff among members. The majority party conference, therefore, empowers its leaders to make the policy decisions for each house.

The majority conferences in the two houses clearly reflect the regional nature of party politics in the state. As Table 1.2 indicates, whereas the Republican majority in the Senate includes mostly suburban and rural members, there is a decided urban and predominantly New York City cast to the Democratic conference in the Assembly. Since gaining control of the Assembly in 1974, more than 60 percent of the Democratic conference each session and all five Assembly speakers have been from New York City.

Given the city’s influence, it is not surprising that for four decades, the Assembly has emphasized a liberal approach to government that includes support for increased social spending and increased taxes on the wealthy. And, as Table 1.3 indicates, Democrats in the Assembly continue to be significantly more liberal than Republicans and New York City Democrats remain the most liberal of the regional groupings. The liberal approach is evident in the Assembly’s strong support for enhanced rent regulations, increased state school aid for city schools, and protection of

Table 1.2. New York Regions: A Legislative Profile

	New York City	NYC Suburbs	Upstate Cities	Upstate Rural
STATE ASSEMBLY				
Total Seats*	(62)**	(31)***	(9)	(21)
Democrats	57	16	9	4
Republicans	2	15	0	17
STATE SENATE				
Total Seats*	(26)	(13)	(6)	(13)
Democrats	24	4	2	0
Republicans	2	9	4	13

**“Total seats” include the 123 Assembly seats and the 58 Senate seats in the four district types listed.

**Three seats vacant as of July 2011.

***One Suffolk County Independent who conferences with the Democrats.

a. *NYC suburbs*: Nassau, Putnam, Rockland, Suffolk and Westchester counties (includes city of Yonkers).

b. *Upstate cities*: Albany, Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse.

c. *Upstate rural*: 26 NYS counties not within Standard Metropolitan Areas (SMAs).

Table 1.3. New York State Regions: A Legislative Ideological Profile

ASSEMBLY			SENATE		
Democrats		Republicans	Democrats		Republicans
10.8	Overall	69.7	14.0	Overall	65.0
5.2	NYC	*	13.9	NYC	61.3
16.7	Outside NYC	69.7	14.2	Outside NYC	65.4

NB: the ratings range from 0 to 100, the higher the rating, the more conservative the voting record.

Based on: The Conservative Party of New York State, Ratings. 2010 Legislative Session. <http://www.cpnys.org/node/63>

public employee pension programs. In policy terms, the Assembly reflects a classically urban agenda with the protection of the state's activist welfare state its primary driving motivation.

The Democratic conference, however, is not ideologically monolithic and many of the divisions are regional in nature. In general, upstate Democrats and those from suburban areas tend to be less liberal than their New York City counterparts. Many of these upstate and suburban Democrats try to avoid being too closely associated with the type of liberal policies that their constituents associate with New York City. As a result, no matter how liberal the downstate Democratic leadership is, or wishes to be, it simply cannot ignore the interests of these upstate members if the party is to hold its majority in the Assembly.

Political diversity within the Democratic Assembly conference, however, also crosses regional lines. Although the New York City delegation is liberal overall, it also includes some Democrats who represent white working-class areas of New York City and who emphasize more moderate agendas. These Democrats reflect the views of single-family homeowners from the "outer boroughs" who have at times distinct policy differences with what they often view as "Manhattan liberals." Conversely, there are Democrats from cities upstate with political perspectives closer to those held by the liberal wing of the New York City delegation than to the views of their fellow upstate moderates.

Usually, intraparty divisions, regional and otherwise, are accommodated within party conferences that are closed to the public and that produce unified policy positions on the floor of the Assembly. On occasion, however, the divisions become more visible. In May 2000, ideological and managerial conflicts with regional implications within the Democratic conference turned into open rebellion when a majority leader from an upstate district sought to unseat the speaker of the Assembly from the Lower East Side of Manhattan. By most accounts, the rebellion was as much a personal as a regional fight but regardless of its genesis it did highlight the point that Assembly leadership must always be attentive to the diversity of interests, regional and otherwise, represented in the majority conference.

In contrast to the Assembly, the majority conference in the Senate is composed largely of upstate rural conservatives and suburban moderates. With a smaller governing majority than their Assembly Democratic counterparts, Republicans in the Senate face a difficult political task. Unlike the Republican minority in the Assembly, whose small numbers

makes it largely irrelevant to the day-to-day policy legislative process, the Senate Republican majority must actually help govern the state. Although they share their party's rhetorical aversion to "big government," the Senate Republicans must address their rural and suburban constituencies' demands for specific government programs if they are to keep their majority. Some of these constituency demands, such as support for increased state education aid, greater economic development assistance from the state, and local mandate relief, call for the kind of expensive and expansive state government programs often derided in conservative rhetoric.

Moreover, upstate and suburban Republicans may not see eye to eye on some issues, with each region having different specific priorities it wants addressed in Albany. As noted previously, upstate New York is in the midst of a long economic decline and state development initiatives are both in demand and quite costly. Upstate Republican senators not only must heed their own constituency demands for increased state involvement in dealing with these problems but they also must be cognizant of the constituencies of their fellow senators from suburban areas where the demands for local property tax relief, which includes the unspoken corollary of increased state spending to make up the difference, are as loud and clear as are their demands for increased school aid.

As in the Assembly, intraparty divisions are usually dealt with in party conferences in the Senate. On some policy matters, however, the Senate Republican majority has been visibly constrained by regional politics. During the 1990s, for example, Senate Republicans held a seven- or eight-vote majority that included five seats from New York City. Because their electoral viability was critical for maintaining Republican control of the Senate, city Republicans were influential within the conference. Indeed, on issues of particular importance to their downstate constituents, they could threaten to act as a swing vote and deprive the leadership of a floor majority. In 1997, Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, under increasingly vocal pressure from New York City Republicans in his conference, abandoned his effort to end rent regulations in the state. In 2012, with a minimal majority, the Senate Republican leadership, although focused on shrinking New York's welfare state, or at least those parts of it that focus on urban constituencies, also must be cognizant of the political constituencies of the two New York City Republicans whose political interests the leadership cannot afford to ignore.

Dramatic and public showdowns, such as those chronicled above, occur only rarely in the state Legislature because potential swing vot-

ers in a party are usually as willing as others to negotiate within party conferences and settle for compromises that keep in place the benefits of strong leadership. Moreover, as was evident in the Assembly leadership rebellion, in *extreme cases*, legislative leaders can impose severe sanctions on rebellious members. Such open conflicts, therefore, are likely to occur only on issues of conscience or when the fear of external sanctions, like the reaction of angry and organized constituents, outweighs concerns over leadership authority.

Regional Politics and Statewide Elections

The unwritten rule for winning statewide elections in New York is simple: Republican candidates must maximize their winning margins in upstate rural New York, secure the suburban vote, and hold down their losing margins in New York City; Democratic candidates, on the other hand, need to carry the city by a wide margin, run reasonably close in the suburbs, and hold down their losing margins upstate. For most of the twentieth century, successful gubernatorial candidates from both parties have built campaigns around this regional strategy.

This regional strategic balancing tended to grow the size of state government in the first six decades of the twentieth century as both Democratic and Republican governors strove to address their electoral needs in New York City. Between 1942 and 1970, Republican governors Thomas Dewey and Nelson Rockefeller, with predictably strong support upstate, attended to New York City interests and were rewarded with sufficient support in the city to win seven statewide contests (see Table 1.4). Rockefeller, in particular, developed good working relationships with union leaders and prominent Democrats in the city that served him well in his four gubernatorial campaigns.

Governor George Pataki broke the regional-balancing mold when he became the first modern Republican to win election without securing roughly 40 percent of the New York City vote. Indeed, in his first election bid in 1994, Pataki won so overwhelmingly in upstate rural areas and so decisively in the suburbs that he was elected despite receiving just over 25 percent of the New York City vote. In his 2002 bid for reelection, however, with his upstate support significantly diminished, Pataki shifted gears, retreated to historical patterns, and made political overtures to New York City union leaders. As a result, he won a third term with nearly 40 percent of the city vote.

Table 1.4. Percent of Vote for Successful Republican Gubernatorial Candidates

	NYC	Suburbs	Upstate Cities*	Rural Counties	NYC % of State Vote
Republican vote:					
2006					
2002 (Pataki)	38	59	42	58	30
1998 (Pataki)	30	61	53	69	31
1994 (Pataki)	27	53	49	65	30
1970 (Rockefeller)	47	58	47	59	41
1966 (Rockefeller)	39	53	40	52	41
1962 (Rockefeller)	44	64	49	65	42
1958 (Rockefeller)	43	65	56	68	41
1950 (Dewey)	44	68	54	69	49
1946 (Dewey)	46	76	60	73	51
1942 (Dewey)	37	68	59	71	48

*Data for "upstate cities" reflects county vote.

As mentioned above, successful Democratic gubernatorial candidates have consistently based their electoral victories in no small part on the overwhelming support of New York City voters. Between 1974 and 2010, Democratic governors Hugh Carey, Mario Cuomo, Eliot Spitzer, and Andrew Cuomo won seven of the ten statewide contests in large part because each carried the New York City vote by an overwhelming margin. In fact, until the 2006 elections, no Democratic gubernatorial candidate ever carried rural upstate New York and only one, Hugh Carey, won a majority of the suburban vote in their first attempt at winning office.

Historically then, New York City's vote bloc has been an important statewide political resource for Democratic candidates. The growth of the suburbs and the proportionately smaller turnout of the city's increasing number of low-income voters, however, have decreased the salience of the city vote over the years. As recently as 1950, New York City voters accounted for nearly 50 percent of the votes cast in statewide elections; in the 2010 election, that total dropped to barely 30 percent while the suburban vote has risen from 12 percent to nearly 25 percent of the total. In an era where the allocation of state resources is increasingly seen as a zero-sum game, the balance of statewide electoral influence has obviously

important political implications. Indeed, in no small part, it helps explain the smaller government focus, decreased business regulation, and no-tax increases pledges of recent Democratic governors.

Summary

Although regional issues have always been a source of political tension in New York State, the nature of the issues and the accompanying tensions have changed. The extensive suburbanization of the state's population complicated the upstate–downstate dichotomy that characterized New York State politics for more than one-hundred years. As we saw with the regional breakdown of legislative majorities and the competition between the parties for the statewide vote, regional issues still have a major impact on New York State politics. Nonetheless, the urban problems that have negatively impacted all cities in the state, the emergence of New York City as a global financial center, and the spread of social and economic problems to inner-ring suburban areas have all acted to make today's regional politics in New York State a more complex matter than in past years.

Notes

1. See Robert F. Pecorella, "Upstate and Downstate," in *The Encyclopedia of New York State*, ed. Peter Eisenstadt, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005.

2. For an analysis of the social, economic, and political impacts of the Erie Canal, see Bernstein, Peter L. *Wedding of the Waters: The Erie Canal and the Making of a Great Nation*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005; for an analysis of the economic and political impacts of the Erie Canal on New York City, see George Lankevich, *New York City: A Short History*. New York: New York University Press, 2002, chapter 3; For an analysis of the cultural impacts of the Erie Canal on New York State, see Alan Scott Willis, "Erie Canal in Folklore and Arts," *The Encyclopedia of New York State*, ed. Peter Eisenstadt, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005.

3. For one political economy analysis of changes in New York City governance, see Robert F. Pecorella, *Community Power in a Postreform City: Politics in New York*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.

4. Edward L. Glaeser, "Can Buffalo Ever Come Back?" *City Journal*, vol. 17, no. 4 (Autumn 2007). http://city-journal.org/html/17_4_buffalo_ny.html.

5. Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. New York: Abingdon, 1957.

6. Gosnell, Harold. *Boss Platt and His New York Machine: A Study of the Political Leadership of Thomas C. Platt, Theodore Roosevelt, and Others*. 1924. Reprint. New York: AMS Press, 1969.

7. For a general history of Tammany Hall, see Alfred Connable and Edward Silberfarb, *Tigers of Tammany*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967; for a political analysis of Tammany Hall following the fall of the Tweed Ring, see Martin Shefter, "The Emergence of the Political Machine: An Alternative View," in *Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Politics*, ed. Willis D. Hawley and Michael Lipsky, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

8. *WMCA, Inc. v Lomenzo* 377 U.S. 633 (1964).

9. James W. Darlington, "Agriculture," in *The Encyclopedia of New York State*, ed. Peter Eisenstadt, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005.

10. Citizen's Budget Commission, *5-Year Pocket Summary: New York City and New York State Finances, Fiscal Year 2010–2011*. New York: CBC: 63rd Edition, November 2010.

11. Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, *Temporary and Disability Statistics June 2011*. <http://otda.ny.gov/resources/caseload/2011/2011-06-stats.pdf>

12. State of New York Comptroller, "The Role of Agriculture in the New York State Economy," <http://osc.state.ny.us/reports/other/agriculture21-2010.pdf>

13. Roy Bahl and William Duncombe, *Economic Growth and Fiscal Planning: New York in the 1990s*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research, 1991, p. 119.