

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE OPINIONS OF
NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS ON MINIMUM WAGE,
PAID SICK DAYS, AND LIVING WAGES:
RESULTS FROM A SURVEY OF 1200 NEW YORKERS
(April/May 2011)**

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing interest from a number of stakeholders including advocacy organizations, community residents, academics, and elected officials about proposed policies to increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation; whether to mandate that employers provide paid sick days for workers; and whether to require employers who receive tax-payer funded subsidies to pay their workers a living wage of \$10 per hour and provide health benefits.

Most of these policy debates have consequences for voters, employers, and other community residents but they have taken place without much recent concrete information on the perceptions and opinions of New York City residents. It is essential that the voices of New Yorkers are taken into account in making important policy decisions that impact the lives and livelihoods of all City residents.

This report discusses data from a recent survey on the opinions of a large, diverse, and representative sample of New Yorkers conducted by the Survey Research Unit at the School of Public Affairs at Baruch College of the City University of New York (CUNY). The poll was conducted by a team of academics and polling experts to explore the opinions of New Yorkers on a range of relevant policy and public affairs issues¹. This report focuses on the opinions of New Yorkers on matters regarding the minimum wage, paid sick days, and living wages.

New Yorkers were asked:

- a) The current minimum wage for workers in New York is \$7.25 an hour, or about \$15,000 a year. Would you favor or oppose raising the minimum wage to \$10.00 an hour by 2012 and adjusting it every year to keep pace with the cost of living? (Question 9)
- b) Would you favor or oppose requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year? (Question 10)
- c) Would you favor or oppose requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded City subsidies to pay workers \$10 an hour plus health benefits? (Question 11)

The results of the survey indicate that New Yorkers **overwhelmingly support**:

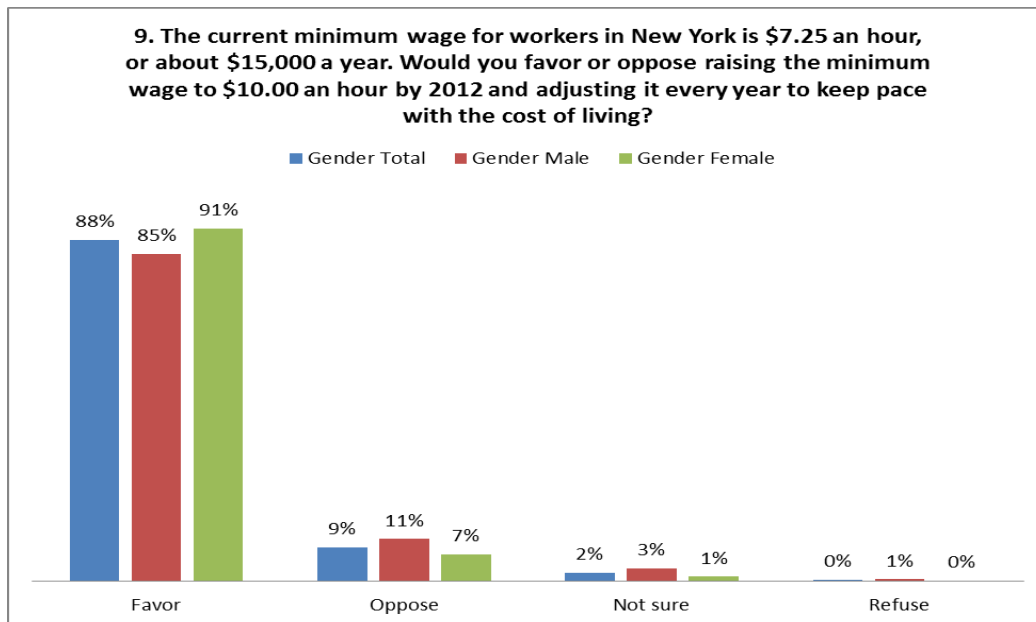
- **Raising the minimum wage** from the current \$7.15 an hour to \$10 by 2012 and adjusting it to the cost of living every year with **88% in favor and 9% opposed**.
- **Requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days** per year with **89% in favor and 8% opposed**.
- **Requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour** plus health benefits with **78% in favor and 15% opposed**.

The rest of the report discusses various breakdowns of the data on each question by a number of demographic and other relevant characteristics including: gender categories, age groups, ethnic and racial categories, income groups, educational levels, area of residence, birthplace, employment categories, voting behavior, and political affiliation.

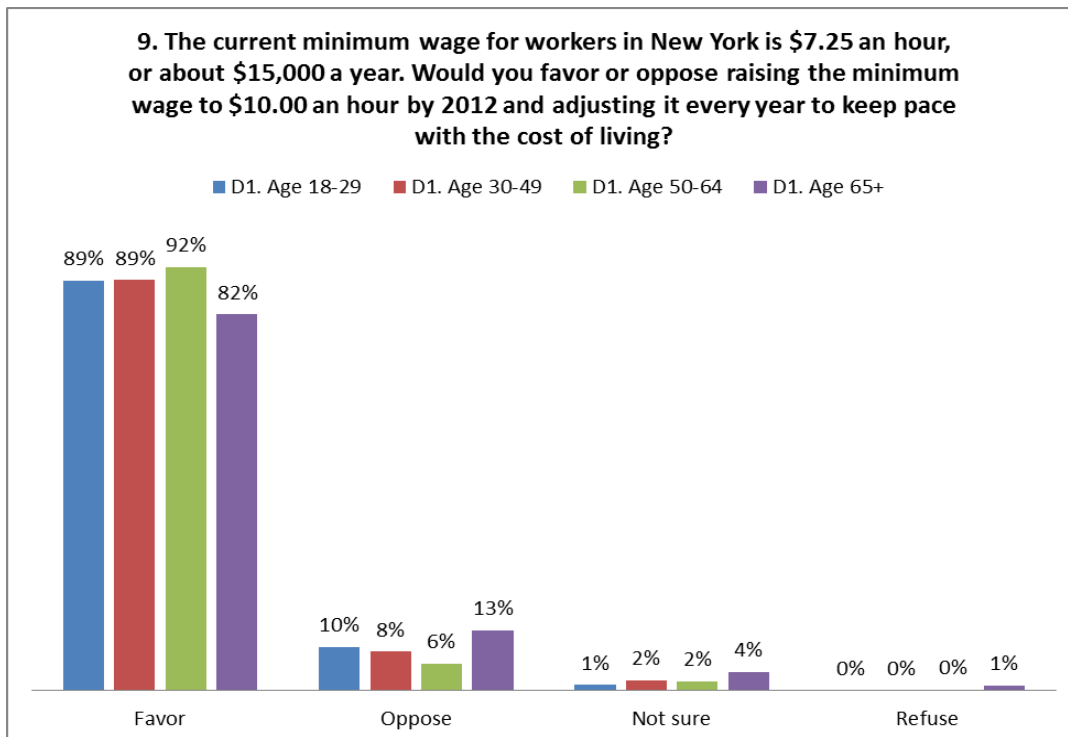
¹The Principal Investigators were Professor Doug Muzzio and Professor Micheline Blum from the School of Public Affairs. I gratefully acknowledge their support and the comments from Professor Edwin Melendez and Dean David Birdsell.

II. OPINIONS OF NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS ON MINIMUM WAGE

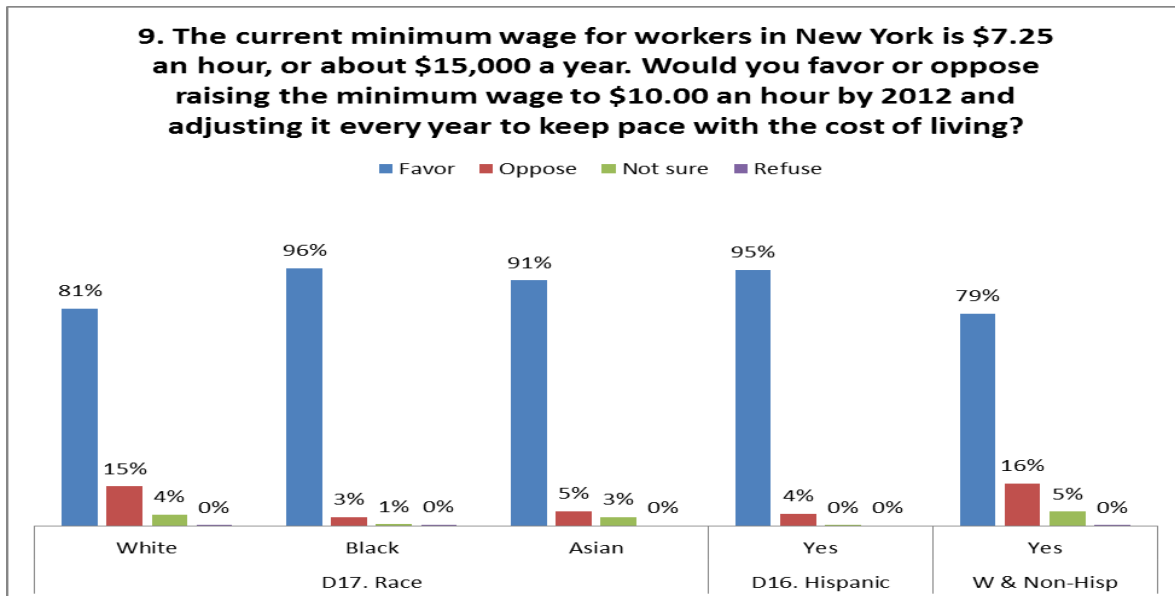
New Yorkers overwhelmingly support raising the minimum wage from the current \$7.15 an hour to \$10 by 2012 and adjusting it to the cost of living every year. **The margin of support is 88% in favor compared to 9% opposed** (with 3% who don't know or refused to answer). Women are slightly more likely to support an increase in the minimum wage with 91% support compared to 85% among men.



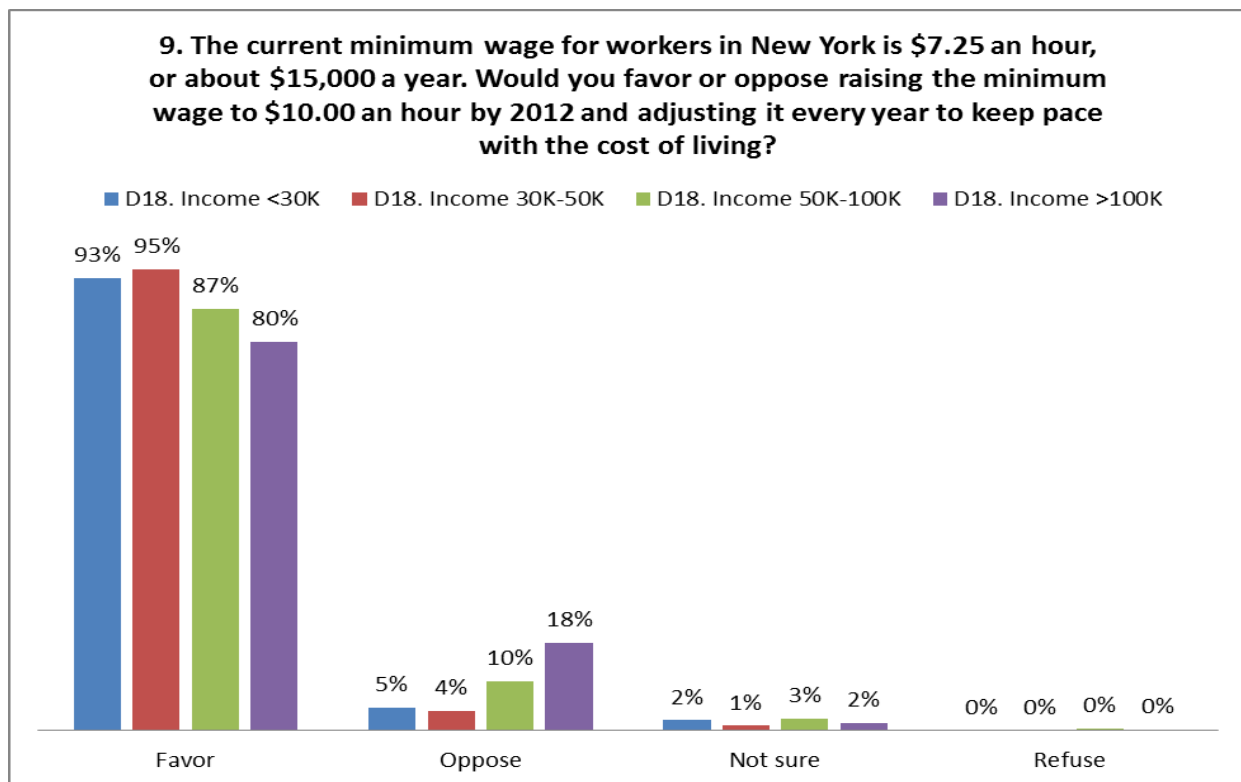
Support for an increase and indexing of the minimum wage is strong among all **age groups** but support is slightly lower among New Yorkers older than 65 years of age.



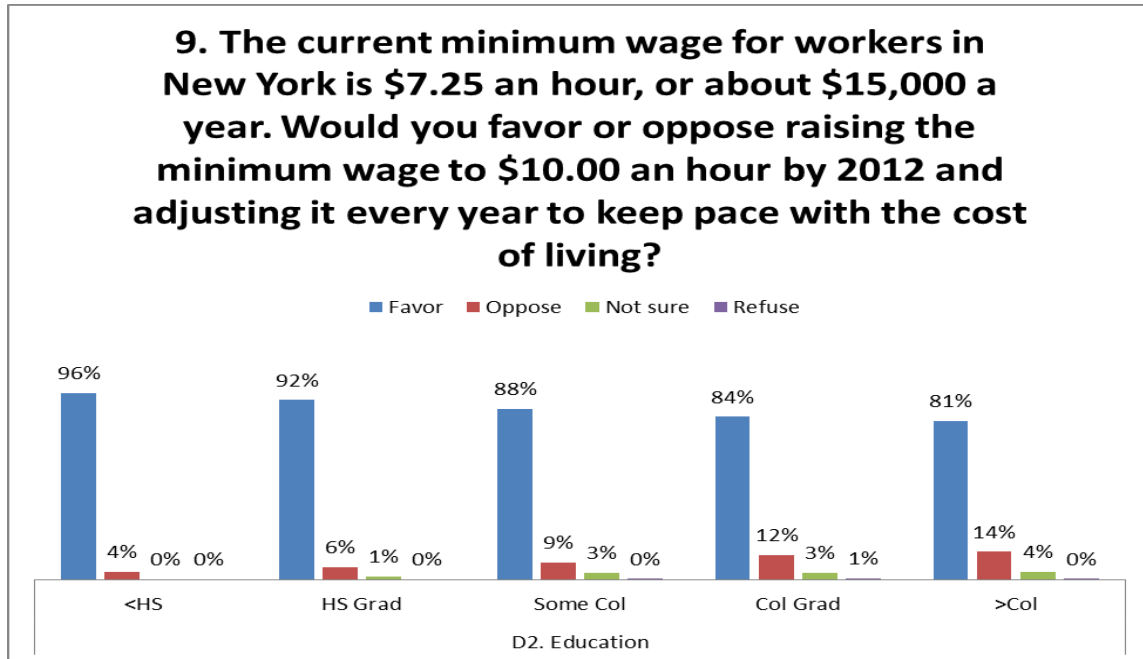
Non-Hispanic whites overwhelmingly support (81% in favor to 16% opposed) an increase and indexing of the minimum wage but support is even higher among **Asians** (91%), **Blacks** (96%) and **Hispanics** (95%).



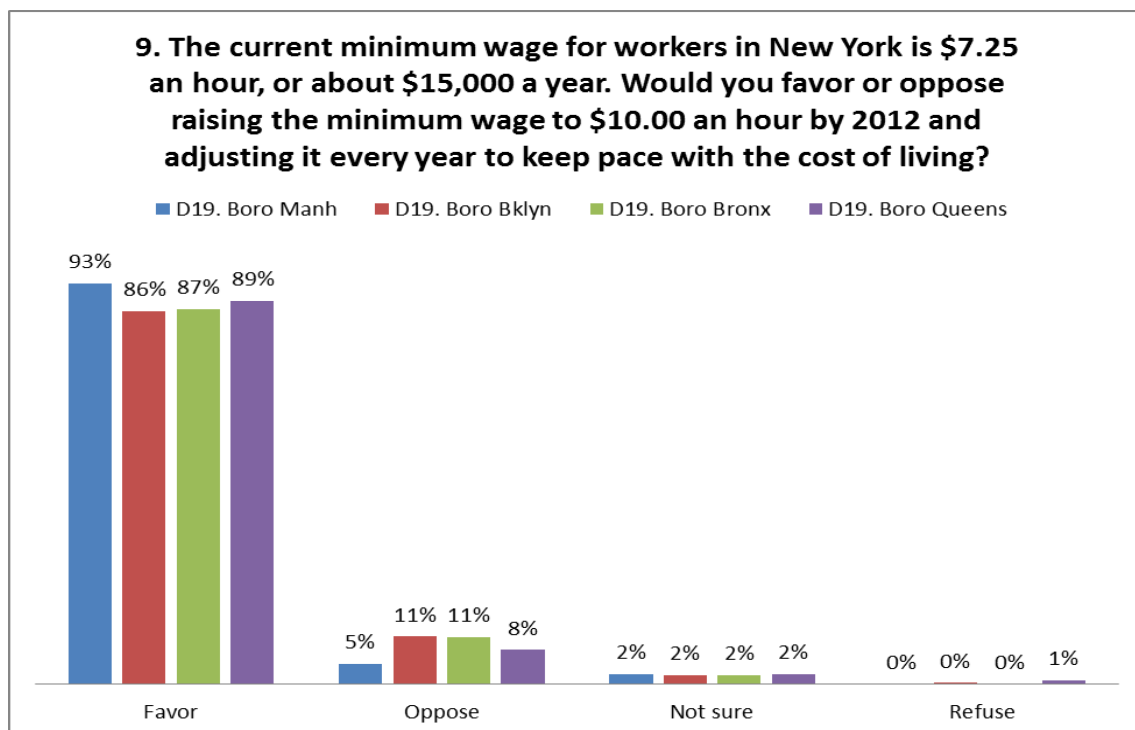
New Yorkers of all **income groups** overwhelmingly support an increase in the minimum wage and subsequent adjustments for inflation. Support, however, is strongest-- at between 93% and 95%-- among New Yorkers making less than \$50,000 per year. New Yorkers making over \$100,000 have the *lowest level of support* at 80% in favor of an increase in the minimum wage and 18% opposed.



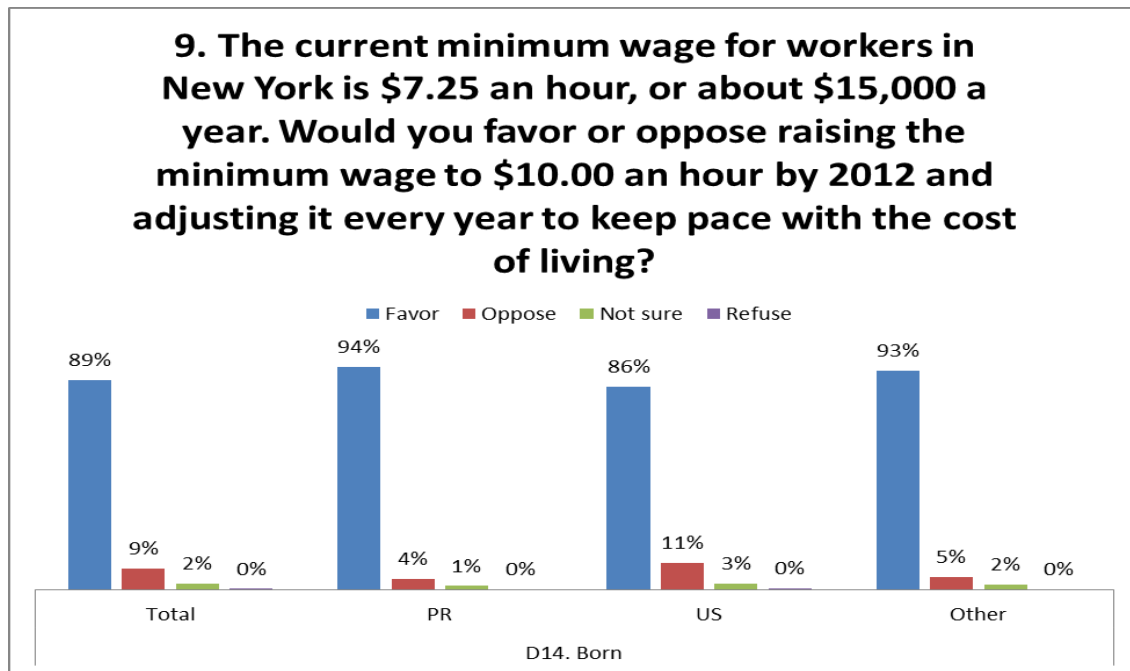
New Yorkers in all **educational categories** overwhelmingly support an increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.00 per hour and subsequent adjustments for inflation. Support, however, is strongest at 96% among New Yorkers with less than a high school degree and it decreases steadily with increases in education. New Yorkers who are college graduates, or have advanced degrees, have the *lowest level of support* for increases in the minimum wage at 84% in favor, for college graduates, and 81% in favor among those with graduate or professional degrees.



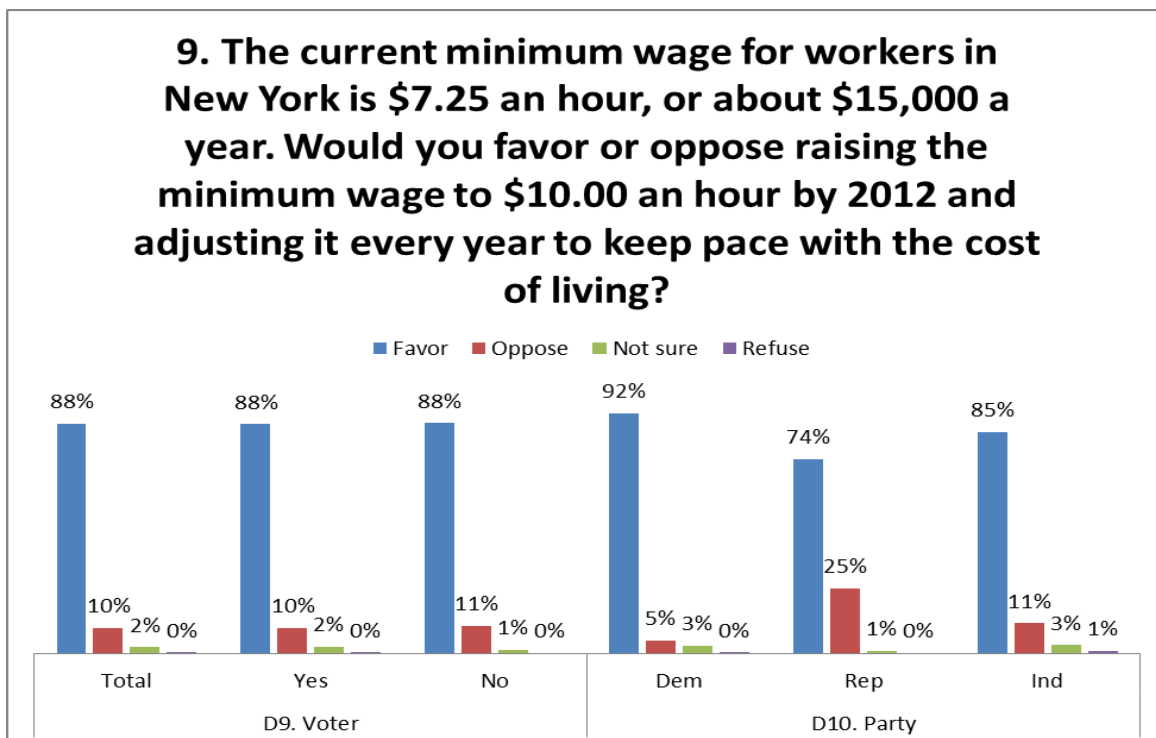
Residents of Manhattan tend to express slightly higher levels of support for an increase in the minimum wage than those in Brooklyn and The Bronx.



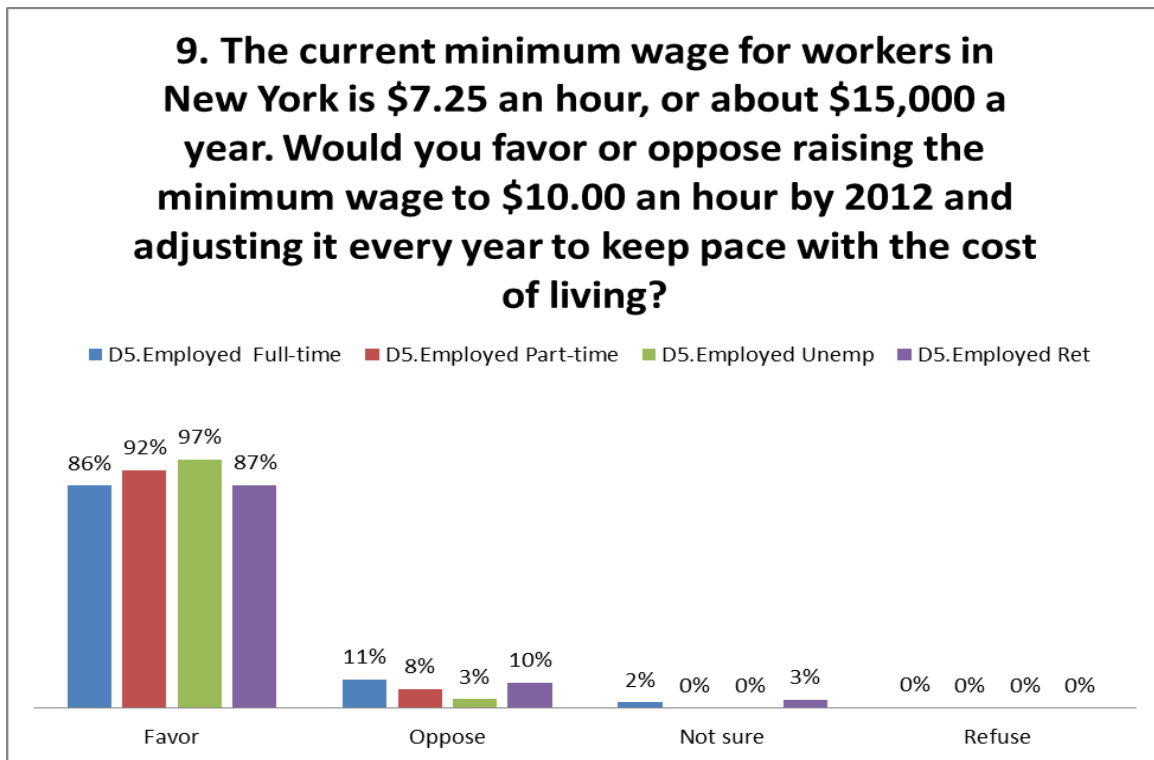
New Yorkers **born in Puerto Rico or Abroad** show higher levels of support for an increase in the minimum wage and subsequent adjustments for inflation at close to 94% compared to 86% of US born New Yorkers who favor an increase.



There is no difference in the high levels of support for an increase in the minimum wage and subsequent adjustments for inflation between **New Yorkers that voted in the last election and those that did not at 88%**. Close to 92% of **Democrats** support an increase in the minimum wage and indexing for inflation but, interestingly, also 74% of **Republicans** and 85% of **Independents** support an increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10 per hour and adjusting it every year to keep pace with the cost of living.



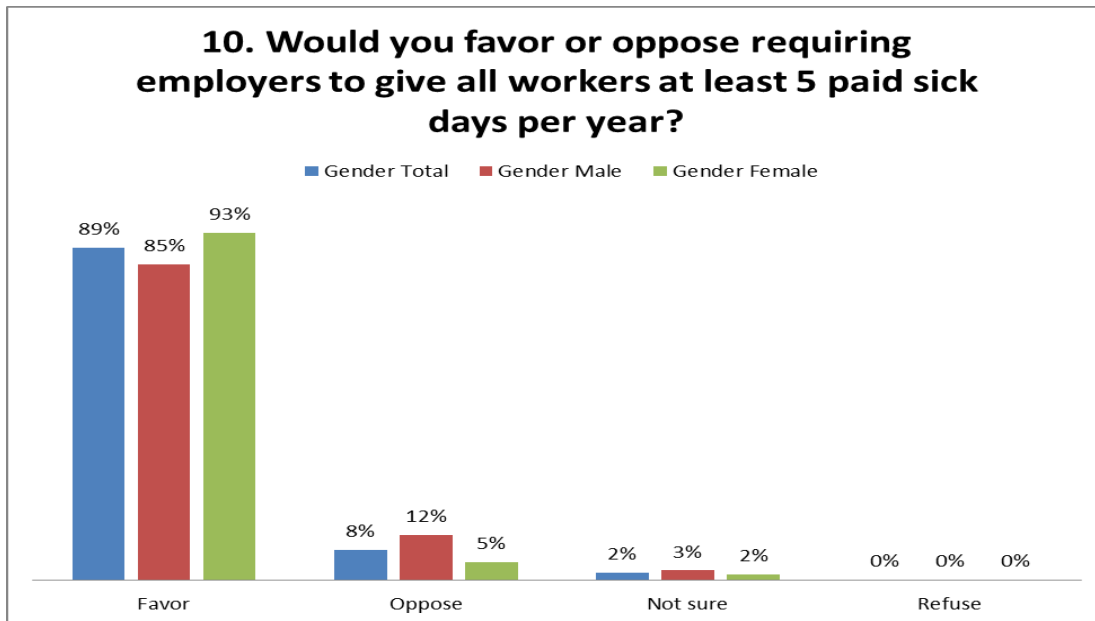
Unemployed New Yorkers express the highest level of support, at 97%, for an increase in the minimum wage and adjusting it every year to keep pace with the cost of living followed by those **employed part time at 92% support. Retired** New Yorkers and those **employed full time** expressed the lowest, but still quite high, levels of support for an increase in the minimum wage at 87% and 86%.



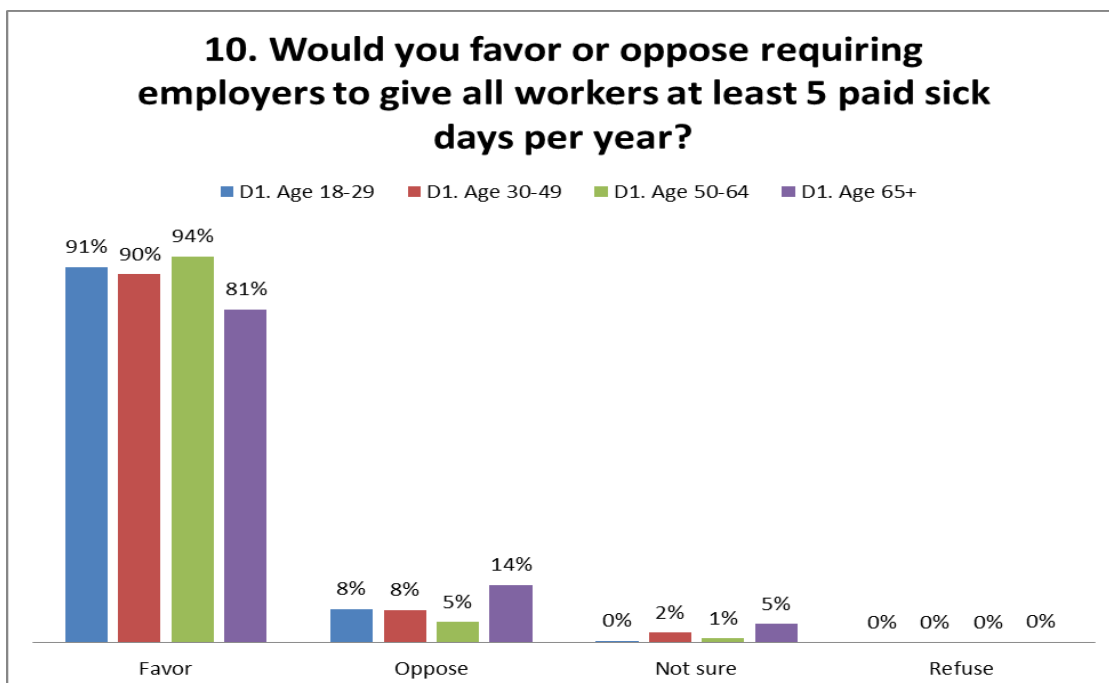
New Yorkers overwhelmingly and strongly support an increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10 per hour and adjusting it every year to keep pace with the cost of living. **There is very strong support across all gender categories, age groups, ethnic and racial categories, income groups, educational levels, areas of residence, birthplace, employment categories, voting behavior, and political affiliation.** Breaking down the statistics a little further suggests that support is slightly weakest but still very strong among whites, those earning over \$100k per year, those over 65 and retired, and those with advanced education degrees. This raises interesting questions in that support is somewhat weakest among those high educated\high earning New Yorkers least likely to be directly affected by an increase in the minimum wage.

III. OPINIONS OF NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS ON PAID SICK DAYS

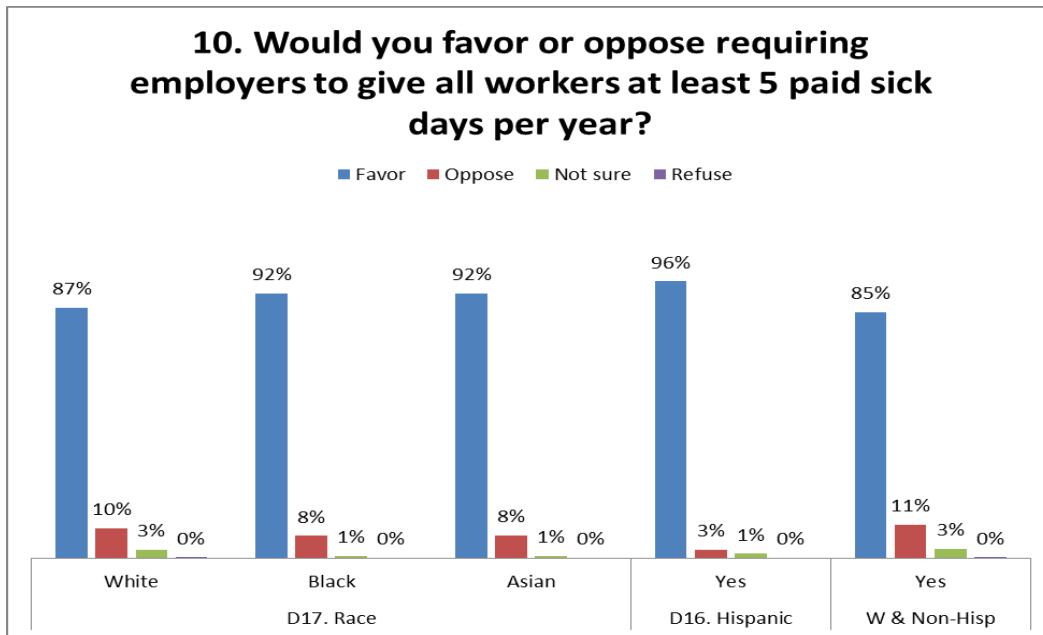
New Yorkers **overwhelmingly support** requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year with 89% in favor compared to 8% opposed. **Women** express higher degrees of support for paid sick days at 93% compared to 85% for males.



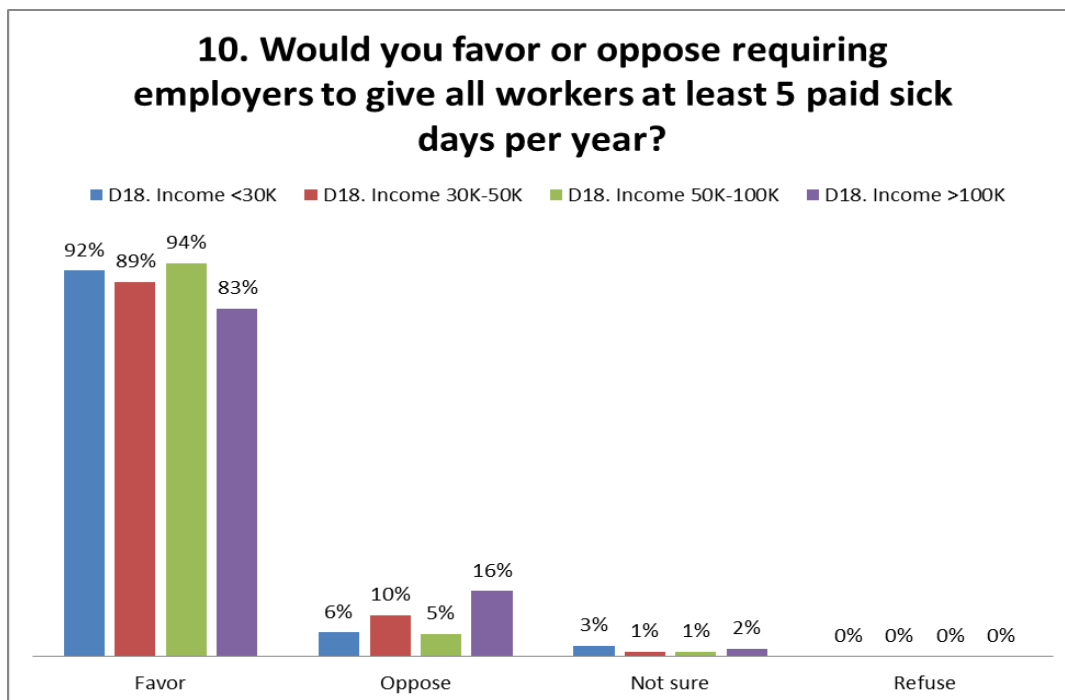
Support for requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year is **very high and consistent across all age groups** but slightly less likely among New Yorkers older than 65 years of age.



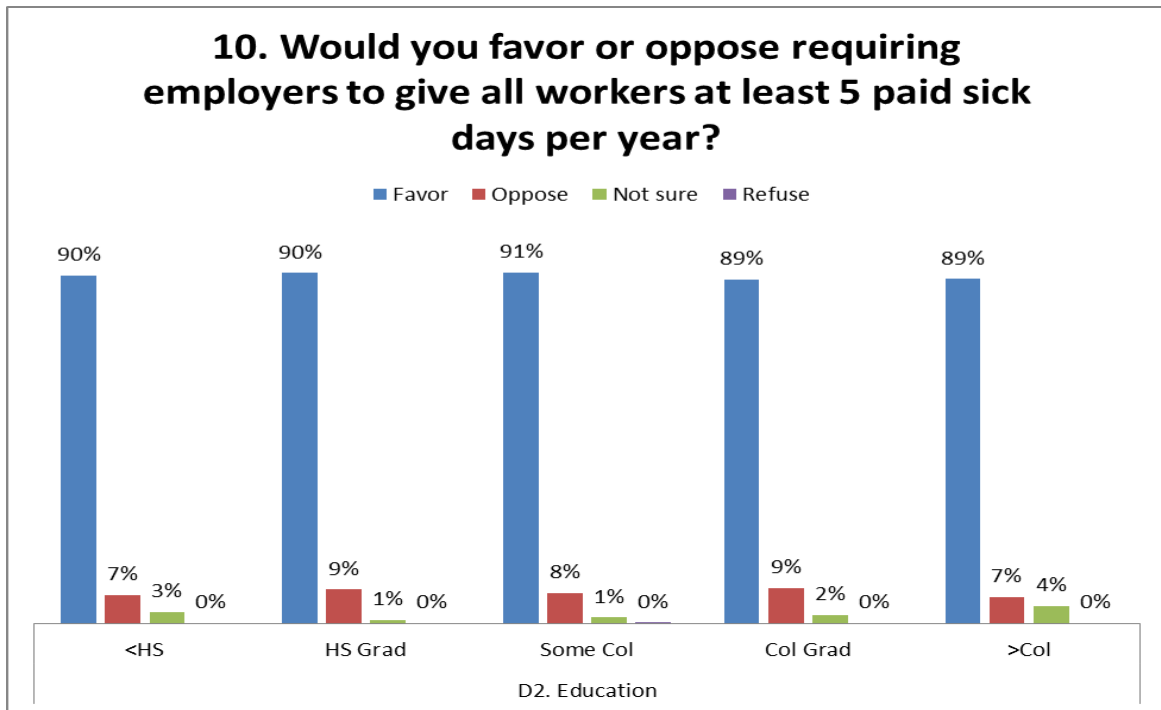
Non-Hispanic whites overwhelmingly support (85% in favor to 11% opposed) requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year but support is even higher among **Asians** (92%), **Blacks** (92%), and **Hispanics** (96%).



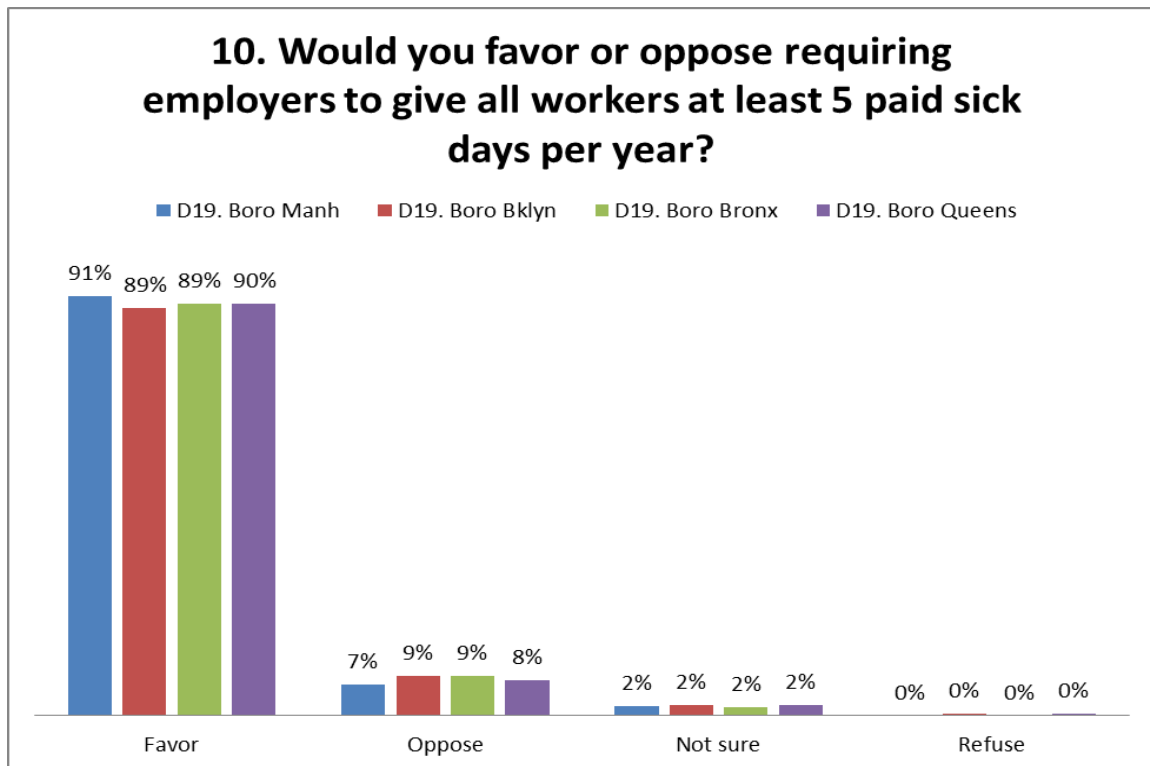
New Yorkers of all **income groups** overwhelmingly support requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year. Support, however, is strongest-- at close to 90% --among New Yorkers making less than \$50,000 per year. New Yorkers making over \$100,000 have the *lowest level of support* with 83% in favor and 16% opposed to requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year.



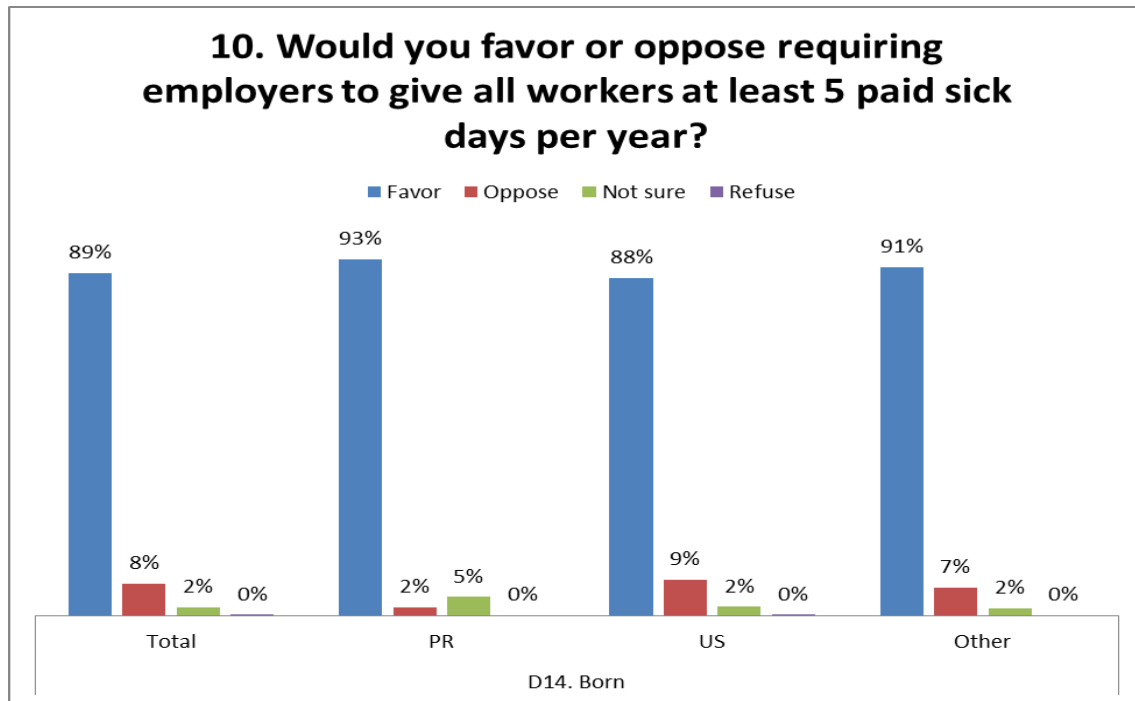
New Yorkers in all **educational categories** overwhelmingly support requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year. Support is close to 90% across all educational categories.



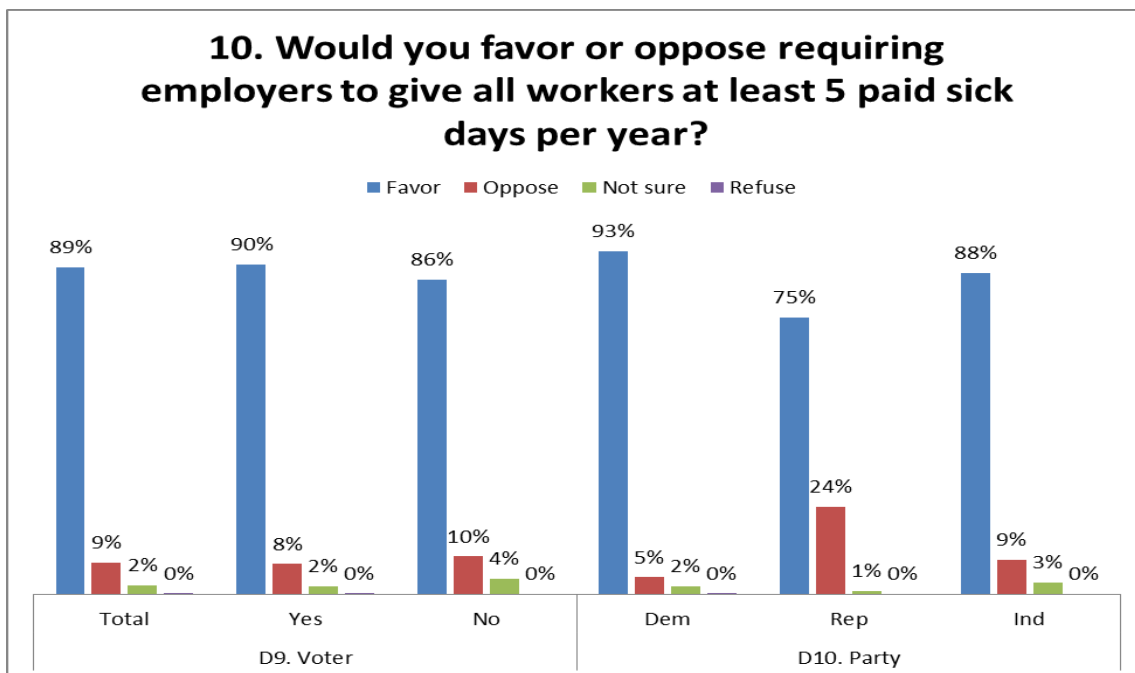
Residents of all boroughs express consistently high levels of support for requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year.



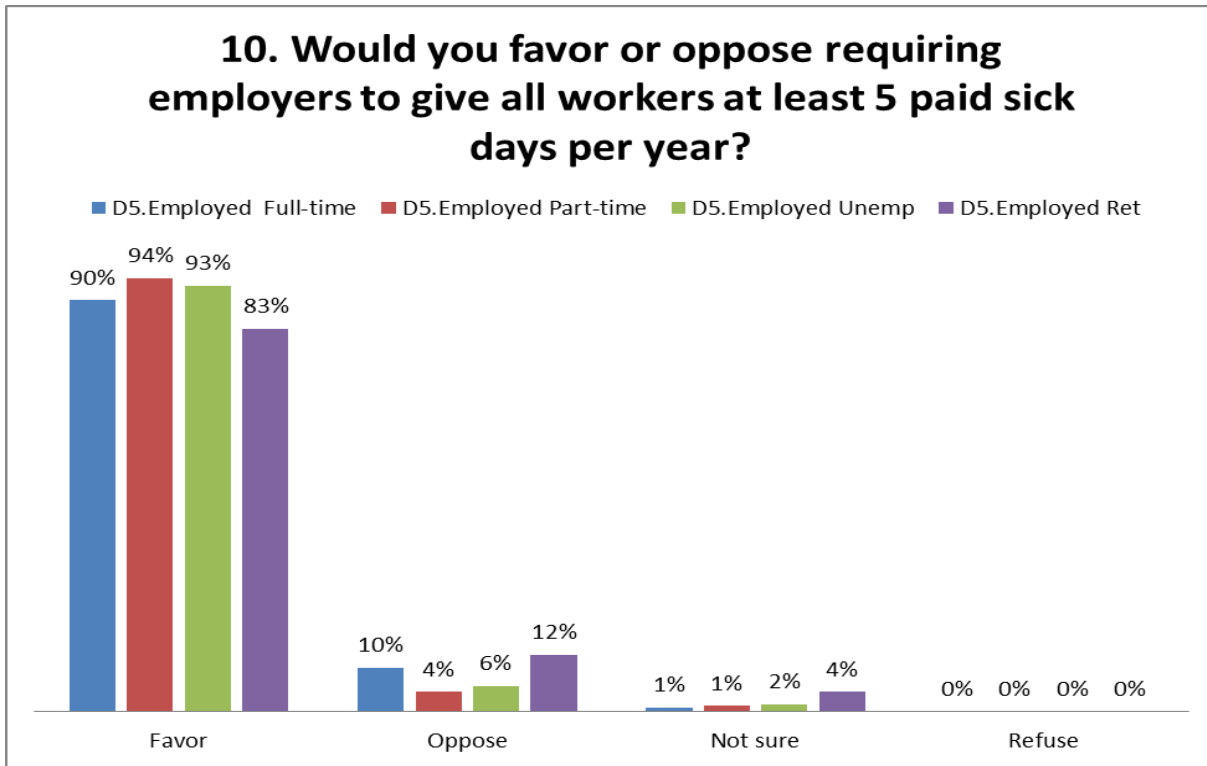
There are no differences by **birthplace** and there are high levels of support among US, Puerto Rico, and Foreign Born New Yorkers in requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year.



There is a small difference in the high levels of support requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year between New Yorkers **that voted in the last election** (at 90% support) and those that did not (with 86% support). Close to 93% of **Democrats** support requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year but, interestingly, also 75% of registered **Republicans**, and 88% of **Independents**, support requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year.



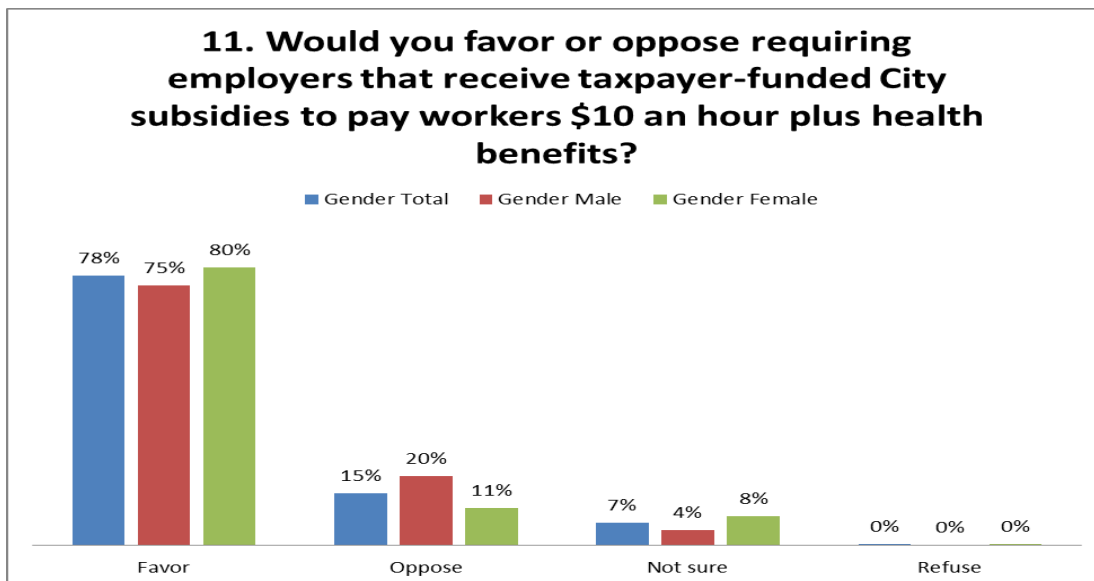
Unemployed New Yorkers, those **employed part time**, and those **employed full time**, expressed the highest level of support, at 93%, 94%, and 90% for requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year. **Retired** New Yorkers expressed the lowest, but still quite high, levels of support for requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year at 83%.



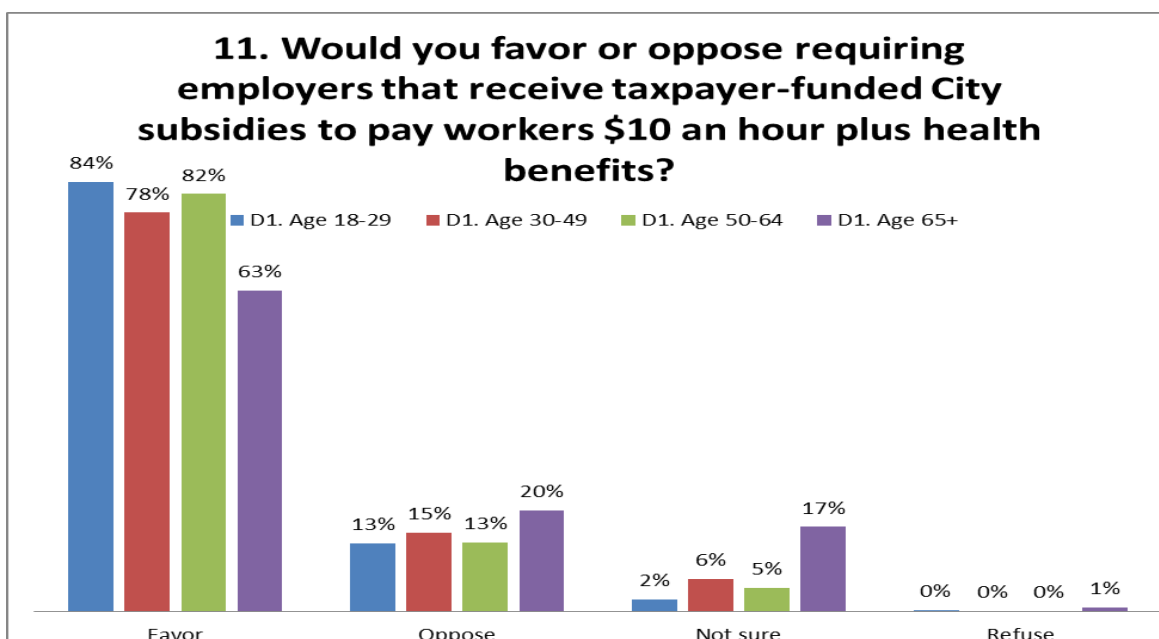
New Yorkers overwhelmingly and strongly support requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year. **There is very strong support across all gender categories, age groups, ethnic and racial categories, income groups, educational levels, areas of residence, birthplace, employment categories, voting behavior, and political affiliation.** Breaking down the statistics a little further suggests that support is slightly weakest, but still very strong, among whites, those earning over \$100k per year, and those over 65 and retired. This raises interesting questions in that support is weakest among those high educated \high earning New Yorkers who are more likely to already have access to paid sick days.

IV. OPINIONS OF NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS ON LIVING WAGES

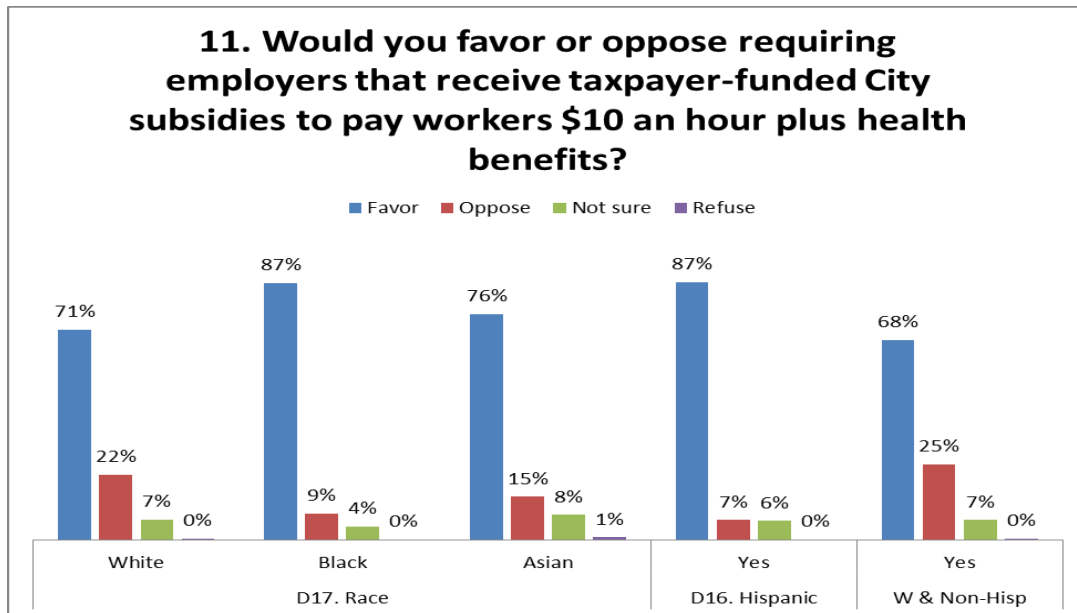
Requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits is strongly supported by New York City residents with 78% in favor and 15% opposed. Support varies slightly by **gender** with 80% of women in favor and 75% of men in support.



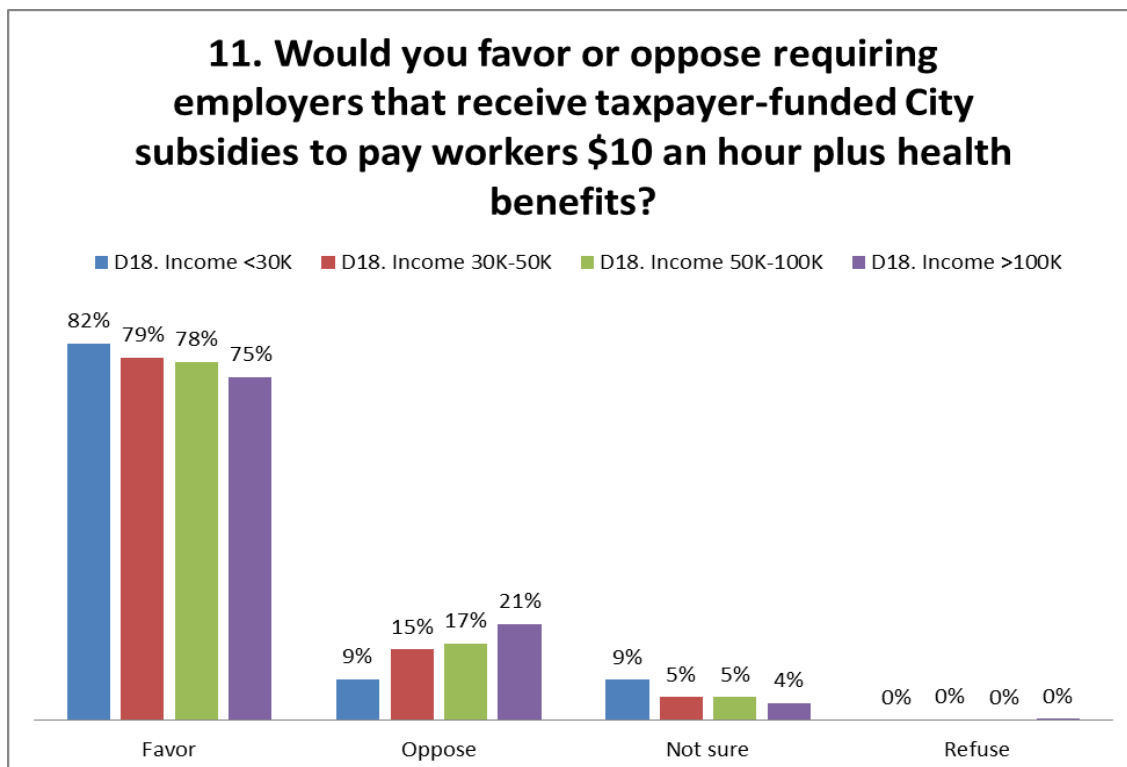
Support for requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits is strong among all **age groups** but slightly lower among New Yorkers older than 65 years of age.



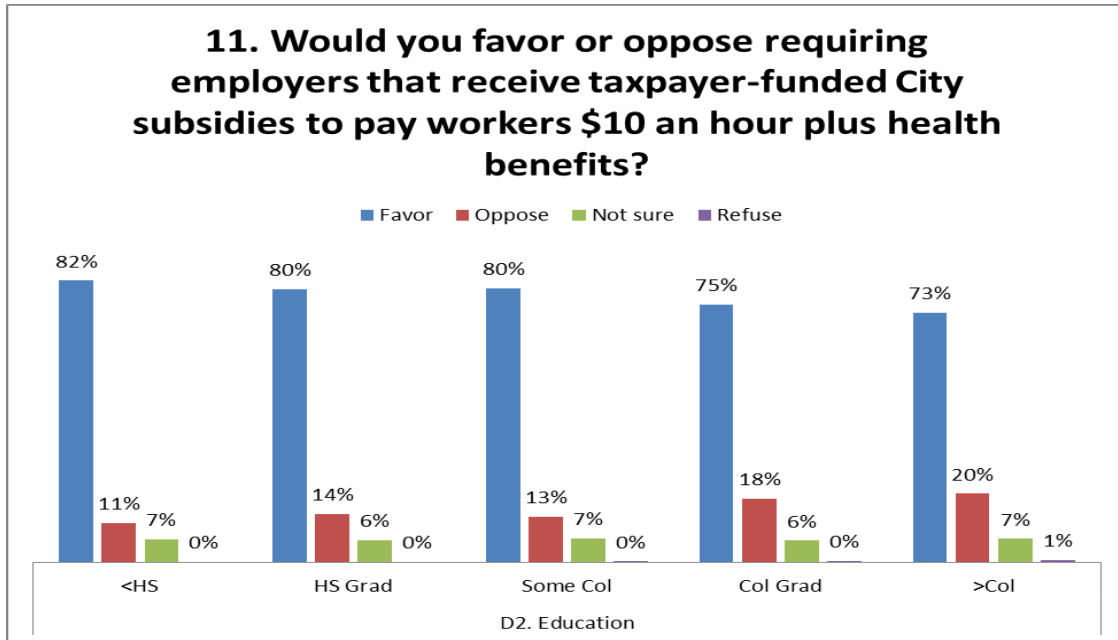
Non-Hispanic whites overwhelmingly support (68% in favor to 25% opposed) requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits but support is even higher among **Asians** (76%), **Blacks** (87%), and **Hispanics** (87%).



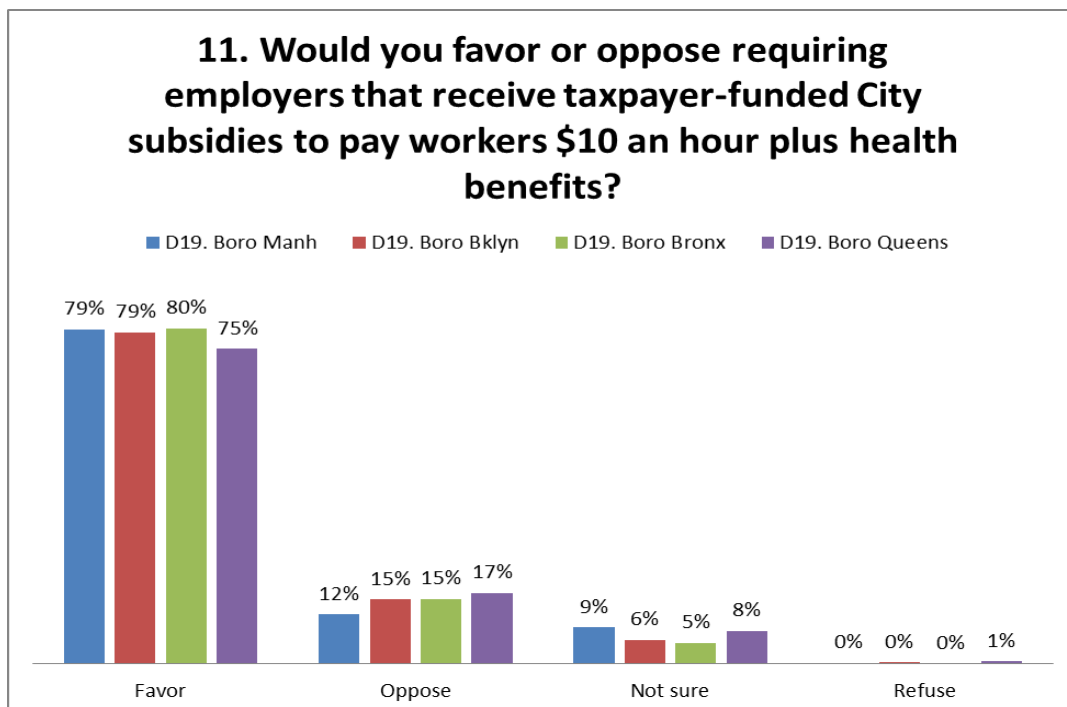
New Yorkers of all **income groups** overwhelmingly support requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits. Support, however, is strongest at close to 82% and 79% among New Yorkers making less than \$50,000 per year. New Yorkers making over \$100,000 expressed the *lowest level of support* at 75% in favor with 21% opposed to requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits.



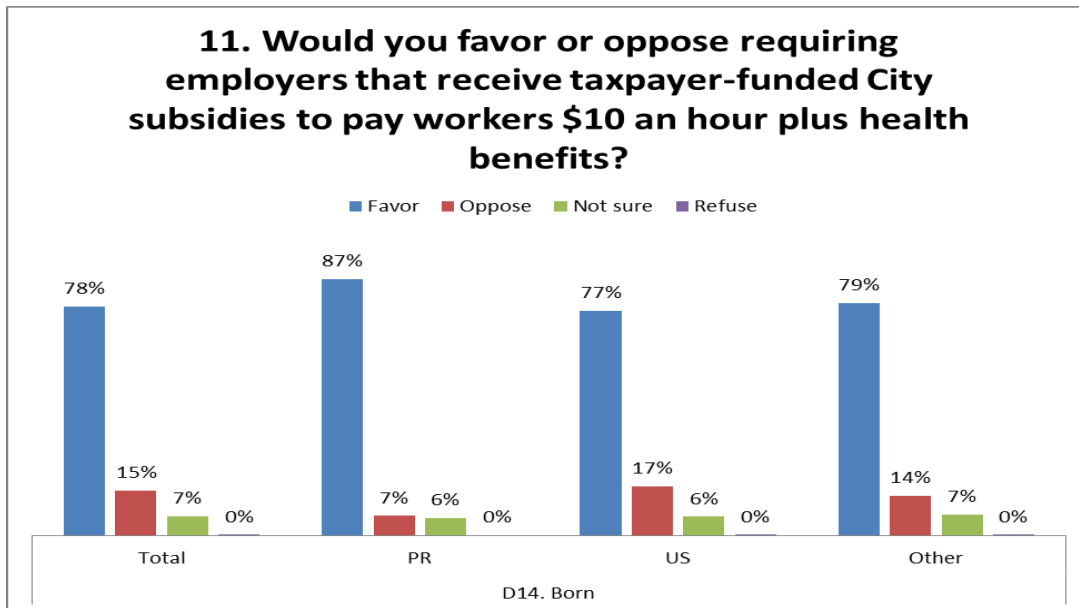
New Yorkers in all **educational categories** overwhelmingly support requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits. Support, however, is strongest at 82% among New Yorkers with less than a high school degree and it decreases steadily with increases in education. New Yorkers who are college graduates, or have advanced degrees, expressed the *lowest level of support* at 75% and 73% for requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour to their workers plus health benefits.



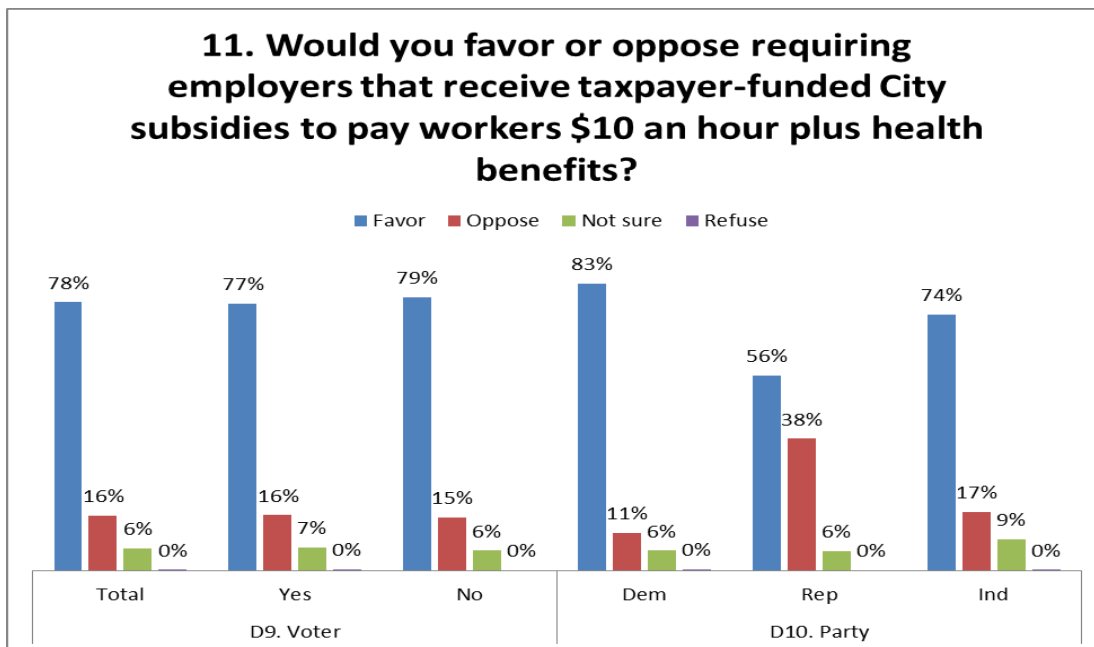
There are small differences **by residence** in terms of high levels of support for requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits with perhaps slightly less support in Queens (at 75%) than in the Bronx (at 80%).



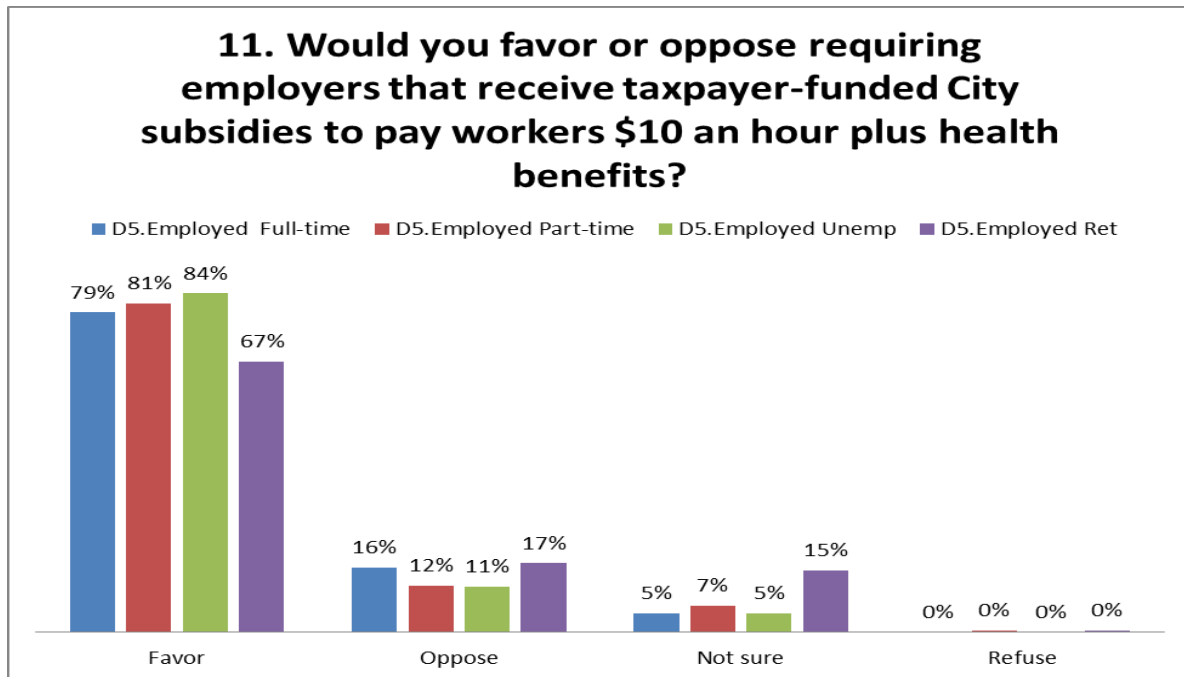
New Yorkers **born in Puerto Rico** show higher levels of support for requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits at close to 87% compared to 77% for US born New Yorkers and 79% of New Yorkers born abroad.



There is no difference in the high levels of support for requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits between New Yorkers that **voted in the last election** and those that did not. Close to 83% of **Democrats** support requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits but, interestingly, also 56% of **Republicans** and 74% of **Independents** support requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits.



Unemployed New Yorkers express the highest level of support at 84% for requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits. **Retired** New Yorkers expressed the lowest, but still quite high, levels of support for requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits at 67%.



New Yorkers overwhelmingly and strongly support requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay \$10 an hour plus health benefits to their workers. **There is very strong support across all gender categories, age groups, ethnic and racial categories, income groups, educational levels, area of residence, birthplace, employment categories, voting behavior and political affiliation.** Breaking down the statistics a little further suggests that support for these policies is slightly weaker—but still very strong--among whites, those earning over \$100k per year, those over 65 and retired, and those with advanced education degrees.

V. CONCLUSION

New Yorkers overwhelmingly and strongly support:

- An increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10 per hour and adjusting it every year to keep pace with the cost of living;
- Requiring employers to give all workers at least 5 paid sick days per year; and,
- Requiring employers that receive taxpayer-funded city subsidies to pay their workers \$10 an hour plus health benefits.

There is very strong support across all gender categories, age groups, ethnic and racial categories, income groups, educational levels, employment categories, area of residence, voting behavior, and political affiliation. New Yorkers are not known for being shy and they freely express their strongly formulated and deeply held opinions. Now it is up to others to make judgments and come to conclusions about the policy and political implications of these data. One thing, however, is very clear. The people of New York have spoken with a loud and uniform voice in support of these policies and those that pretend to know better, try to second guess the intelligence of voters, and otherwise ignore the will of the people do so at the risk of their own political peril.

VI. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This telephone poll of a random sample of 1207 adults in New York City was conducted by Baruch College Survey Research, School of Public Affairs, Baruch College, and City University of New York from April 26-May 9, 2011. 1001 landline telephone interviews were conducted of New York City residents who have landline phones, and 206 cell phone interviews were conducted among a separate cell-phone only sample. The questions about the Bin Laden death and the funding of the NYPD were conducted of 722 NYC adults May 2-May 9, 2011.

The landline sample was based on a random digit dial (RDD) design which draws numbers from all existing landline telephone exchanges in the five boroughs of New York City, giving all phone numbers, listed and unlisted, a proportionate chance of being included. Respondents in the landline sample were selected randomly within the household. This sample was supplemented by a randomly selected cell phone sample, based on numbers identified as cell phones in the five boroughs of New York City. Respondents were screened for residence in New York City and were offered the option of being interviewed in Spanish. The SAT score is based on an average of the positive responses to three questions in the poll.

The estimated average sample tolerance for data from the poll is $\pm 2.8\%$ for the full sample of 1207 and $+ 3.7\%$ for the sample of 722 (Questions 28 and 29) at the 95% confidence level. That is, the chances are about 19 out of 20 that if all households with telephones were surveyed with the same questionnaire, the results of the complete census would not be found to deviate from the poll findings by more than 2.8 percentage points (3.7 percentage points for the questions asked of 722 adults). Error for subgroups is higher. Sampling is only one source of error. Other sources of error may include question wording, question order, and interviewer effects. There is no evidence to suggest that this poll has any higher levels or other sources of error than other large public opinion polls.

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About the Author

Dr. Héctor R. Cordero-Guzmán received his Ph.D. in Sociology from *The University of Chicago* is a Professor at the School of Public Affairs at *Baruch College of the City University of New York*. He is also a Professor in the Ph.D. Programs in Sociology and in Urban Education at the *City University of New York Graduate School and University Center*. Prior to joining The School of Public Affairs at CUNY, Dr. Cordero-Guzman was a Program Officer in the Economic Development Unit and in the Quality Employment Unit of the Asset Building and Community Development Program at *The Ford Foundation*.