

MAJORITIES VIEW LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL TAXES AS TOO HIGH AND DELIVERING TOO LITTLE VALUE FOR PEOPLE LIKE THEM

The public tends to have similar opinions of sales, property, and income taxes, and attitudes toward these taxes are closely tied to political partisanship, according to new UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll.

About two-thirds of people consider their federal income tax (67%), state sales tax (62%), and local property tax (69%) to be too high. Most believe that middle income earners have the heaviest tax burden compared with those in higher or lower income groups.



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Most adults say federal income tax (60%) and local property tax (59%) are unfair while about 4 in 10 say each tax is fair. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to see taxes as fair, and Republicans are more likely to say their taxes are too high.

About a third of adults say they are receiving poor value from the taxes they pay, while less than a quarter believe they receive good value from paying these taxes.

Most people lack confidence in the way taxes are spent by the federal government (66%) or state governments (58%). People are more likely to express at least some confidence in local governments (49%) or local school districts (53%) to spend their tax dollars wisely.

Democrats generally trust the government to spend tax money for the benefit of people like them and are open to higher taxes for more services. In contrast, Republicans are more skeptical of government spending, expressing a preference for lower taxes with fewer services.

Three Things You Should Know

About the UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll Among U.S. Adults:

- 1) Less than a quarter believe they receive valuable services from paying local property tax (23%), state sales tax (23%), or federal income tax (22%).
- 2) Nearly two-thirds say local property tax (69%), federal income tax (67%), or state sales tax (62%) are too high.
- 3) Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say local property taxes (66% vs. 51%) or federal income taxes (65% vs. 50%) are unfair.

Attitudes toward income, property, or sales taxes tend to be more closely associated with partisanship than other demographic characteristics such as age, education, or income.

The nationwide poll was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from December 14 to 18, 2023, using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Online and telephone interviews using landlines and cell phones were conducted with 1,024 adults. The margin of sampling error is +/-4.2 percentage points.

THE PUBLIC HOLDS SIMILAR VIEWS ABOUT THE FAIRNESS AND COMPLEXITY OF DIFFERENT FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL TAXES.

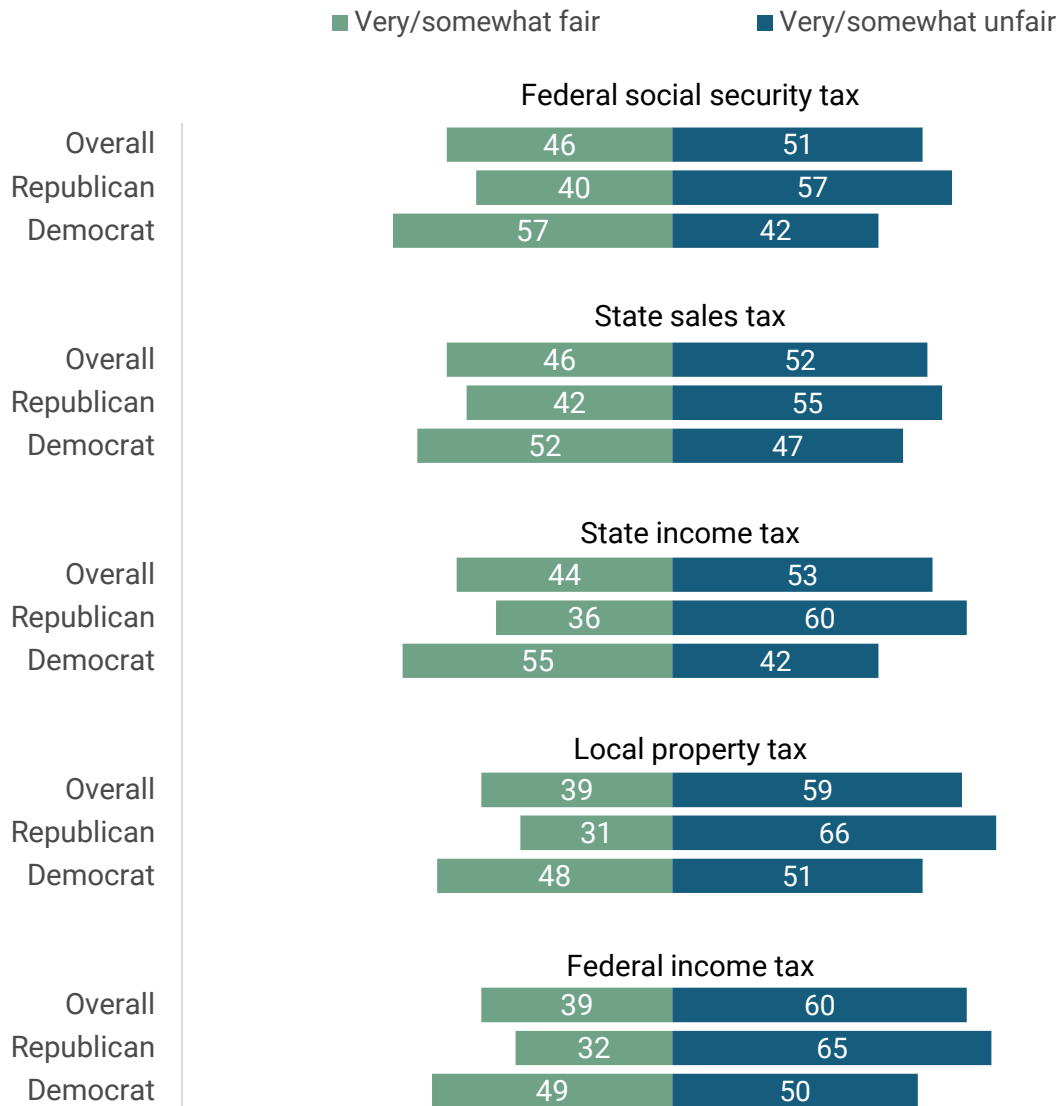
When asked about the fairness and complexity of different taxes, the public tends to have similar attitudes about a variety of local, state, and federal taxes. While previous surveys have indicated greater public dissatisfaction with local property tax or federal income tax,¹ this study shows no significant differences in views about the fairness of these taxes.

The public is relatively divided on the fairness of taxes, with their perception of tax fairness strongly related to political partisanship. Republicans are more likely to say that federal, state, or local taxes are unfair while Democrats are divided about the fairness of various taxes.

¹ Gallup 2023 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/505970/americans-views-federal-income-taxes-worsen.aspx#:~:text=Perceptions%20of%20Income%20Tax%20Fairness%20Near%20Record%20Low&text=Now%2C%20for%20only%20the%20third,Gallup%20has%20measured%20to%20date>.

There are partisan differences in the public's assessment of tax fairness.

Percent of adults



Question: How fair or unfair do you think each of the following taxes are?

Source: AP-NORC Poll conducted December 14-18, 2023 with 1,024 adults nationwide.



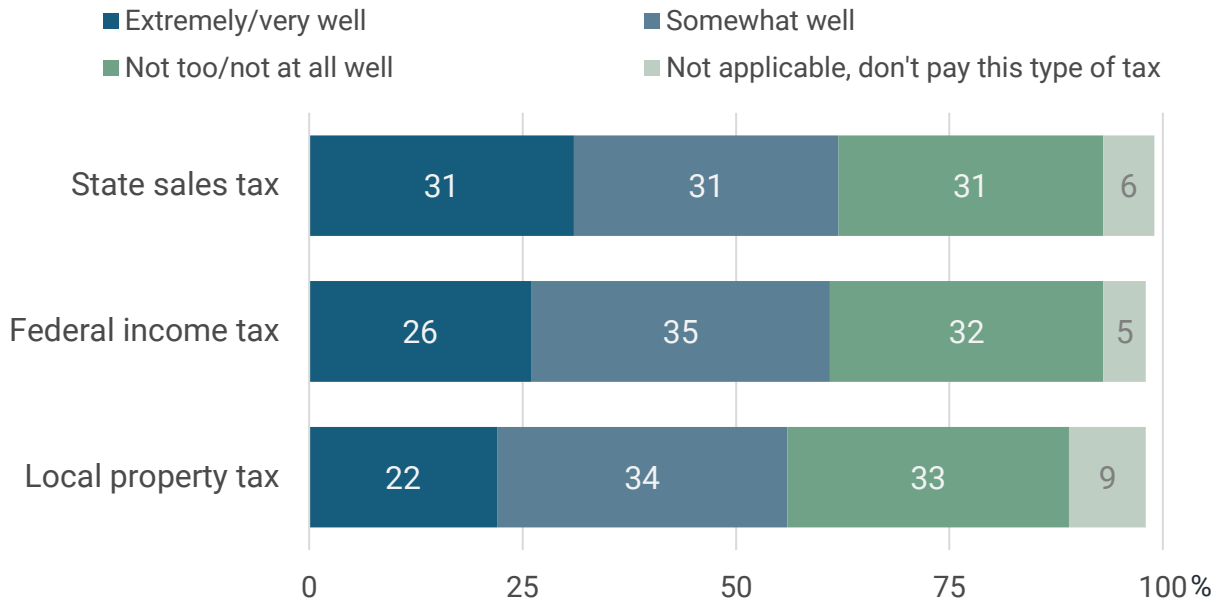
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Adults age 45 and older are more likely to say taxes are fair compared with younger adults. Fifty-nine percent of adults younger than 45 view federal social security tax as unfair, compared with 44% of older adults.

The complexity of taxes is another factor that may impact attitudes. Less than a third of adults say they understand very well how the amount they owe in state sales tax, federal income tax, or local property tax is calculated.

Most do not understand very well how their taxes are calculated.

Percent of adults



Question: How well do you understand how the amount you owe is calculated for each of the following taxes?

Source: AP-NORC Poll conducted December 14-18, 2023 with 1,024 adults nationwide.



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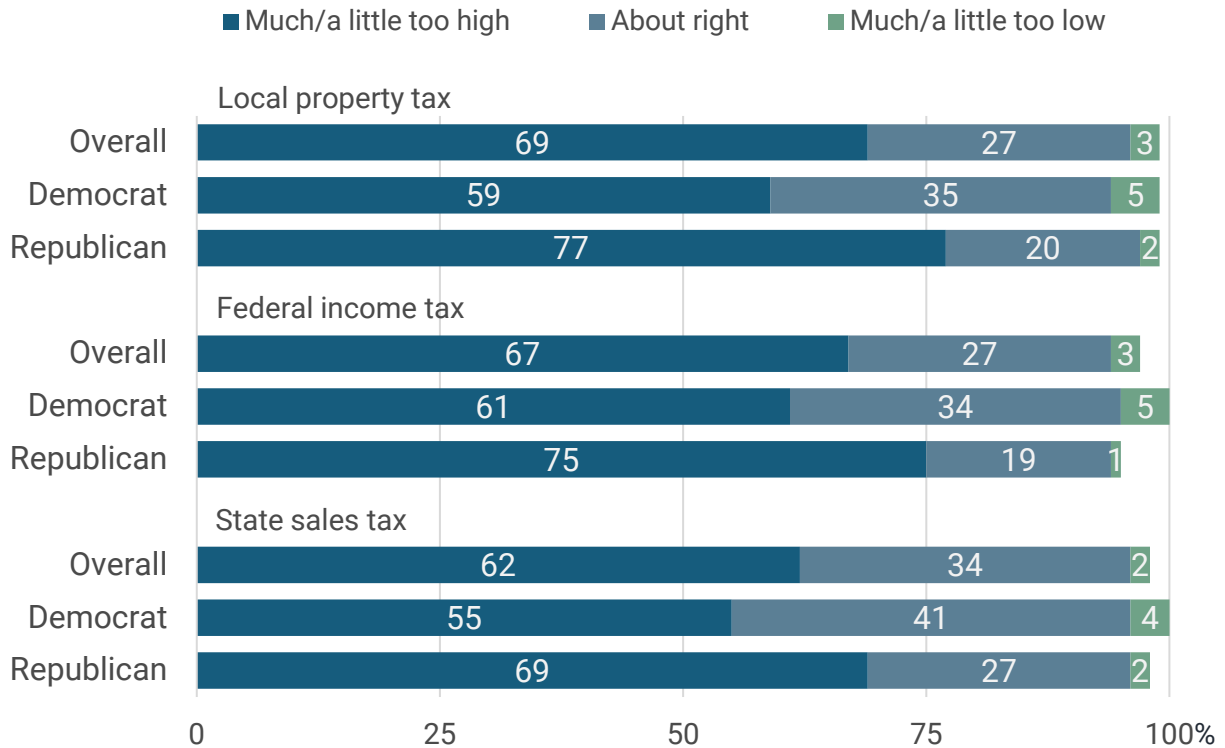
College graduates are more likely to understand how the amount they owe in state sales tax (41% vs. 25%), federal income tax (35% vs. 21%), or local property tax (28% vs. 19%) are calculated compared with those without a college degree. A similar pattern emerges based on income, where higher-income adults are more likely to understand their taxes than those with lower incomes. Democrats and Republicans similarly understand how taxes are calculated.

MOST SAY TAXES ARE TOO HIGH, AND MANY BELIEVE TAXES ARE MOST BURDENSOME TO MIDDLE INCOME EARNERS.

The public has similar views on the level of various local, state, and federal taxes. A majority of people say the amounts they owe in federal income tax, state sales tax, or local property tax are too high. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say state sales taxes or local property taxes are too high.

Majorities say various taxes are too high, and there are significant partisan differences in attitudes.

Percent of adults who pay the tax



Question: Do you consider the amount you have to pay for each of the following taxes as too high, too low, or about right?

Source: AP-NORC Poll conducted December 14-18, 2023 with 1,024 adults nationwide.

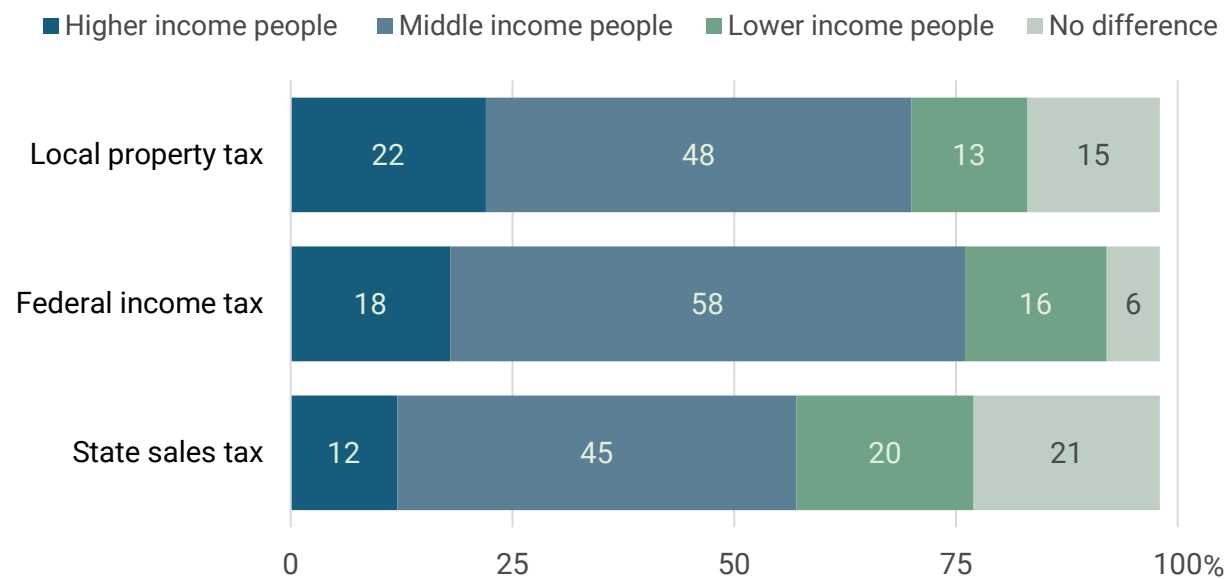


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Many people believe that the tax burden is highest for middle income earners compared with high-income earners or low-income earners. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say that people with higher incomes pay a larger percent of their income in federal income tax (25% vs. 14%). However, their views on state sales tax and local property taxes resemble those held by Democrats.

Many people believe the tax burden is highest for middle income earners.

Percent of adults



Question: In the United States, which group do you think pays the highest percentage of their income for each of the following taxes?

Source: AP-NORC Poll conducted December 14-18, 2023 with 1,024 adults nationwide.



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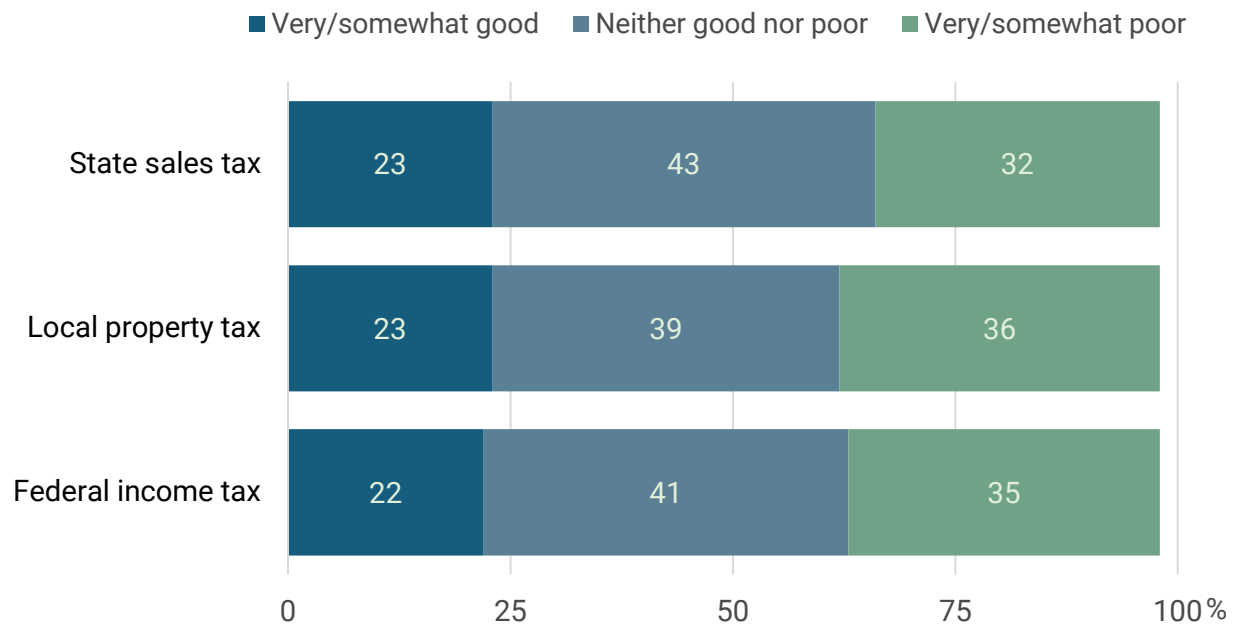
MOST ADULTS WANT LOWER TAXES WITH FEWER SERVICES AS THEY LACK CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENTS TO SPEND MONEY IN THE PUBLIC'S BEST INTEREST.

Many people are dissatisfied with the value derived from the taxes they pay, prefer lower taxes with fewer services, and lack confidence in the government's ability to allocate tax revenue in the public's best interest.

Few people believe they receive valuable services from paying state sales tax, local property tax, or federal income tax.

Few rate the value they receive from paying taxes as good.

Percent of adults



Question: How would you rate the value you receive from paying for each of the following taxes?

Source: AP-NORC Poll conducted December 14-18, 2023 with 1,024 adults nationwide.



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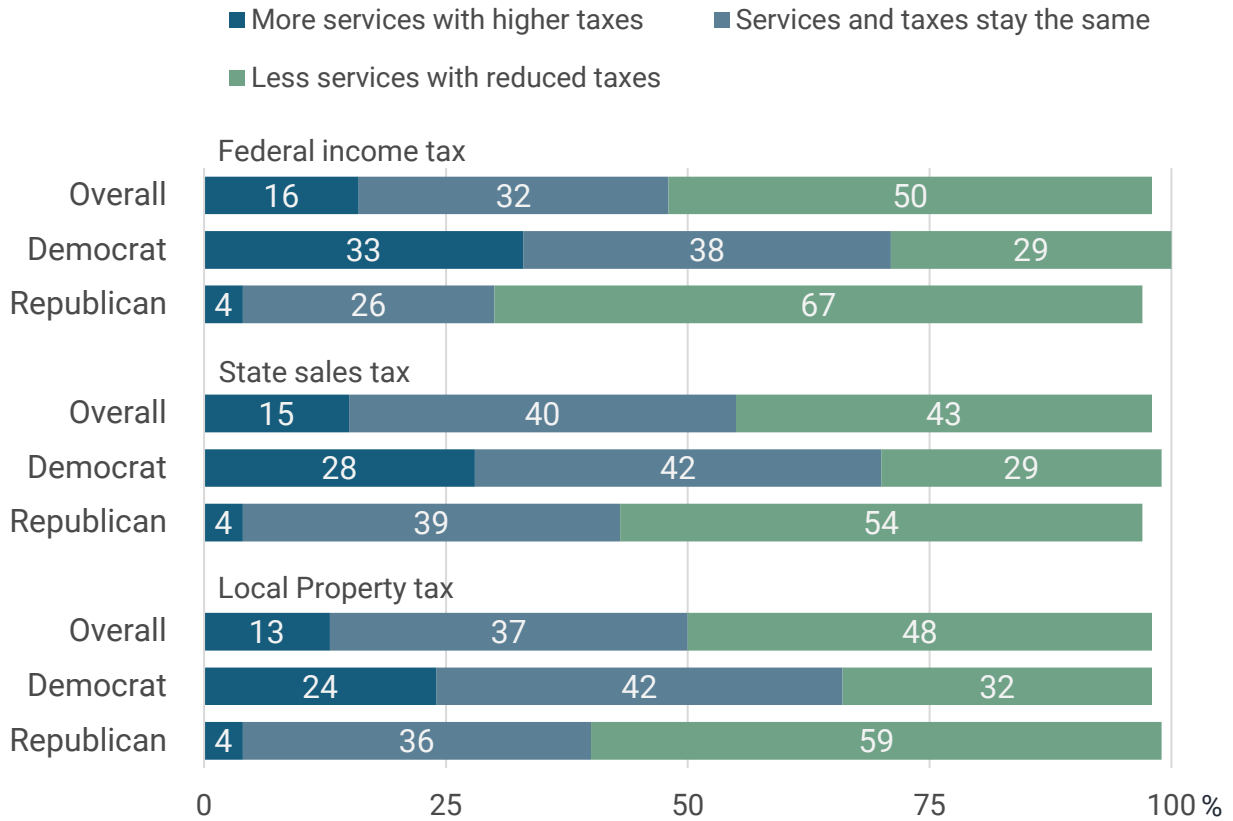
Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say they receive good value from paying federal income tax (33% vs. 15%) or state sales tax (31% vs. 20%). However, opinion on the value received from local property taxes is similar among both Republicans and Democrats.

About half of adults would favor fewer government services if it meant reducing federal income tax or local property taxes, while just under half say the same about state sales tax.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to prefer more services with higher taxes or prefer both services and taxes staying at the same level, while Republicans are more likely to prefer fewer services with reduced taxes.

Few adults say they want more services with higher taxes.

Percent of adults who pay the tax



Question: Would you rather have more government services if it meant higher taxes, less government services in order to reduce taxes, or services and taxes about as we have them now for each of the following?

Source: AP-NORC Poll conducted December 14-18, 2023 with 1,024 adults nationwide.



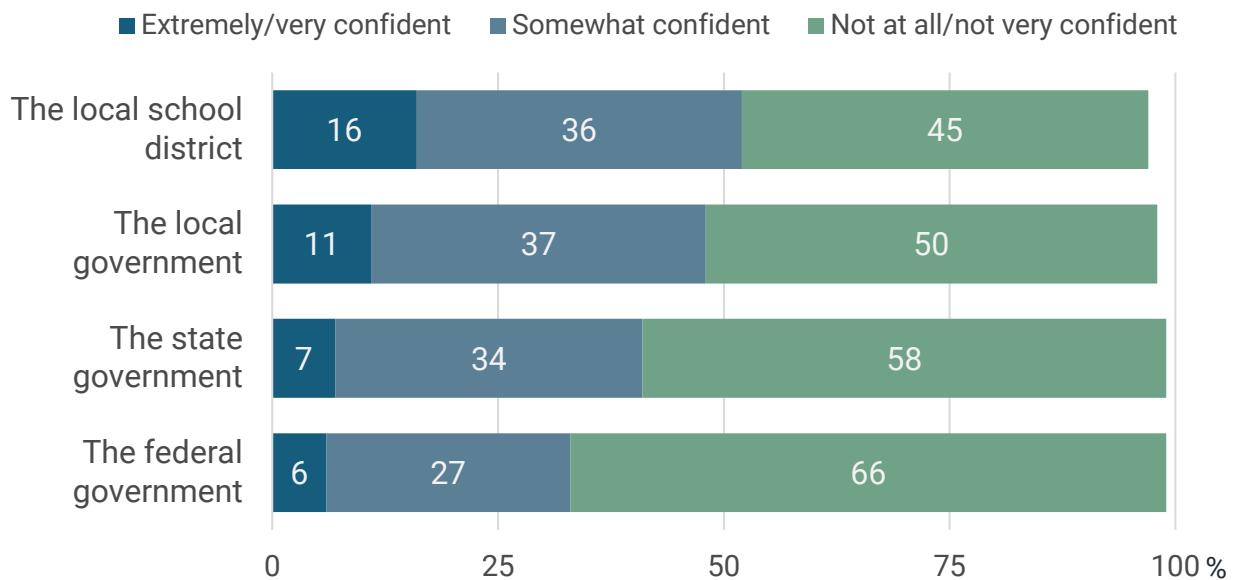
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College graduates are more inclined to prefer more income tax (24% vs. 12%), state sales tax (22% vs. 11%) or property tax (19% vs. 10%) in exchange for more services compared with those without a college degree.

Few adults are very confident in the federal or state government to spend taxes in the interest of people like them. However, the public is more confident in the local government or local school districts to spend tax revenue for their benefit.

Few express great confidence in government to spend tax money in their best interest.

Percent of adults



Question: How much confidence do you have in each of the following to spend the taxes that you pay in the best interest of people like you?

Source: AP-NORC Poll conducted December 14-18, 2023 with 1,024 adults nationwide.



APNORC.org

Democrats are more confident than Republicans in their federal (11% vs. 3%) or state governments (10% vs. 3%) to spend taxpayer money in people’s best interest. However, there are similar levels of confidence among Democrats and Republicans in the spending of tax revenue by local governments (15% vs. 11%) or local school districts (20% vs. 16%).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy. Staff from Harris Public Policy and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly, multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of a larger study that included questions about other topics not included in this report. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame or a secondary national address frame, both with over 97% coverage of all U.S. addresses, and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, or field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings population.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between December 14 and 18, 2023, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,024 completed the survey—965 via the web and 59 via telephone. Panel members were invited by email or by phone from an NORC telephone interviewer. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive (\$3) for completing the survey.

The final stage completion rate is 15.4%, the weighted household panel recruitment rate is 22.1%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 78.8%, for a cumulative response rate of 2.7%. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error, and there may be other unmeasured error in this or any other survey.

Quality assurance checks were conducted to ensure data quality. In total, 68 interviews were removed for nonresponse to at least 50% of the questions asked of them, for completing the survey in less than one-third the median interview time for the full sample, or for straight-lining all grid questions asked of them. These interviews were excluded from the data file prior to weighting.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2023 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

For more information, visit www.apnorc.org or email info@apnorc.org.

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