

What Do You Know About Taxes?

The answers to these information questions suggest why many people, believing upper-income people pay too little in taxes, favor changes (such as flat tax or sales tax) that they assume will increase taxes on that group.

Date	Fact question, with correct answer highlighted	Source of data	Percent correct
February-March 2002	To the best of your knowledge, in the past two years has there or hasn't there been a federal income tax cut?	NPR/Kaiser/Harvard	50%
February-March 2002	Generally speaking, how does the federal income tax system work? Are people with higher incomes taxed at a higher percentage of their income than people who make less money? Or does everyone pay the same percentage of their income in income taxes? Or don't you know enough to say?	NPR/Kaiser/Harvard (but see also the results of the following question)	60%
February-March 2002	In the United States, which group do you think pays the highest percentage of their income in federal taxes: high-income people , middle-income people, or lower-income people, or don't you know enough to say?	NPR/Kaiser/Harvard (51% said middle-income people)	25%
February-March 2002	Do you think that most families have to pay the federal estate tax when someone dies or only a few families have to pay?	NPR/Kaiser/Harvard	33%
February-March 2002	When you think of the federal taxes that you pay, do you think the amount deducted from your paycheck for Social Security and Medicare is part of the federal income tax, or isn't part of the income tax, or don't you know enough to say?	NPR/Kaiser/Harvard	43%
February-March 2002	Compared with citizens of Western European countries, do you think Americans pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes, a smaller percentage of their income in taxes , about the same percentage of income in taxes, or don't you know enough to say?	NPR/Kaiser/Harvard	30%
January 2003	Does the federal government take in more than it spends, as much as it spends, or less than it spends (deficit)?	CBS/New York Times	58%
Spring 2003	About what percentage of the typical American family's income do you think goes to paying taxes-including all levels of government? (Blinder-Krueger calculated the correct answer to be 23.3% .)	Blinder-Krueger survey	Mean estimate 31%
Spring 2003	Most workers have both payroll taxes and income taxes deducted from their paychecks. Do you think most people pay more money in payroll taxes or in income taxes?	Blinder-Krueger survey	35%
Winter 2004	As contrasted with the beginning of the Clinton presidency, at the end of the Clinton presidency did most US tax payers pay federal income taxes that were: a larger percent of their income, the same, or a smaller percent? (Source: Congressional Budget Office)	Student survey, OSU (no national poll appears to have asked about this)	29% (41% said larger)