

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Summer 2024 Contemporary Economic Policy

OLLI - UNLV June-July, 2024

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National Economic Education Delegation



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Course Outline

Contemporary Economic Policy

- Week 1 (6/3): US Economic Update (Jon Haveman, NEED)
- Week 2 (6/10): Healthcare Economics
- Week 3 (6/17): Federal Debt
- Week 4 (6/24): Economics of Immigration (Kelley Cullen, E. Washington Univ.)
- Week 5 (7/1): Taxes: Rebellion, Rascals, and Revenue
- Week 6 (7/8): Climate Change Economics
- Week 7 (7/15): International Institutions (Alan Deardorff, Univ. of Michigan)



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Submitting Questions

- Please submit questions of clarification in the chat.
 - I will try to handle them as they come up.
- We will do a verbal Q&A once the material has been presented.
- Slides will be available from the NEED website shortly after the talk (https://NEEDEcon.org/delivered_presentations.php)



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Taxes: Rebellions, Rascals and Revenues

OLLI - University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Jon Haveman, Ph.D. NEED



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Credits and Disclaimer

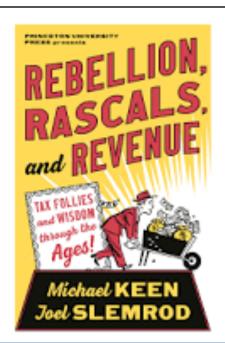


- This slide deck was authored by:
 - Jon Haveman, Executive Director of NEED
- Content sourced primarily from:
 - Rebellion, Rascals, and Revenue: Tax Follies and Wisdom through the Ages
 Michael Keen and Joel Slemrod, Princeton University Press, 2021
- Disclaimer
 - NEED presentations are designed to be nonpartisan.
 - It is, however, inevitable that the presenter will be asked for and will provide their own views.
 - Such views are those of the presenter and not necessarily those of the National Economic Education Delegation (NEED).



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- What Are Taxes?
- Tax Rebellions
- Federal Revenues
- History of U.S. Taxation
- Tax Rascals (Tax Gap)
- Tax Issues (Fairness, Burden, Incidence)
- U.S. Income Tax Structure
- Summary



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What Are Taxes and Why Should We Talk About Them?



Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes



"Taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society."



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Definitionally:



- Taxes are mandatory contributions levied on individuals or corporations by a government entity.
 - National, state/regional, or local.
- Tax revenues finance government activities, including public works and services such as roads and schools, or programs such as Social Security or Medicare.
- Three basic tax types:
 - On what you earn.
 - On what you buy.
 - On what you own.



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Variety of Different Types of Taxes



TYPES OF TAXES

- Poll tax
 - Aka Head tax
- Community tax
 - Community is collectively responsible for local tax liability.
- Ad valorem tax
 - Tax is a specific percent (%) of the value of the item.
- Specific tax
 - Tax is a specific monetary amount, per unit.

THINGS THAT GET TAXED

- Personal income
- Corporate income
- Payroll/wages
- Sales
- Property
- Estates
- Imports
- Many other things...

EAST INDIA COMPANY



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THE PROCESSION DELEGATION

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- Granting state monopolies
 - Ability to ship alcohol in California
- Conscription
- Sale of spectrum
- Un/under paid work
 - Slaves throughout history
 - Rwanda on Saturday each month
 - U.S. convict labor
- Voluntary contributions
 - Prussia 1813-1815 gifts of gold to support the war against Napoleon.
 - Germany "Gold for the fatherland"
 - California suggested contribution to child's school
- Diligence in law enforcement



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Not All Taxes are Called "Taxes" - con't



- Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement
 - Structured so as to be a tax on future cigarette sales.
- Venality sale of public positions
- Lotteries tax on ignorance (?)
- And so many more...



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Raise Revenues

- Finance wars and response to emergencies
- Make investments in the economy

INVESTMENTS:

- Infrastructure
 - Ports, bridges, roads, airports
 - Infrastructure in the United States routinely receives poor marks. Improvements would likely result in increased economic growth.

Health care

- A healthier workforce is a more productive workforce.
- Education
 - Education is increasingly important for growth of the U.S. economy.







Social Engineering

Cigarette and alcohol taxes

- Sin taxes

Beard taxes

- Russia: Get nobility to look more European.

Hut tax

- Brits, 1898, Sierra Leone, tax on all housing
- Get natives to participate in the cash economy



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Reduce Market Inefficiencies

- Subsidize positive spillovers

- Tax negative spillovers

Externalities

- Market interactions can affect people outside of the market.
- Negative
 - o Pollution/climate change
 - o Smoking
 - o Driving
- Positive
 - o General R&D
 - o Education
 - Raising bees.



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Tax Rebellions



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- King John signing the Magna Carta, 1215
 - Embodied the idea that the power to tax was limited by general consent.
- King Charles and the Ship Money tax, 1634
 - Inland areas and John Hampden refused to pay.
- Hut tax war 1898
- Maori uprising Dog Tax War 1898
- 10 Cents War 1879-1884
 - Why is Bolivia landlocked?



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 "The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest possible amount of feathers with the smallest amount of hissing."

Jean-Baptiste Colbert
French Minister of the Navy



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In The United States: Revolutionary Times



- 1689 Boston Revolt
 - Governor Andros imposed new taxes and other restrictions.
 - Origins of the "No taxation w/o representation" sentiment.
- 1772 Gaspee Affair
 - The Gaspee was a British customs ship. It collected customs taxes (goods) from ships believed to be evading the taxes.
 - It ran aground in 1772 and locals set it afire to express their displeasure.
- 1773 Boston Tea Party
 - Townshend Acts
- 1794 Whiskey Rebellion



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Stamp Act 1765 (aka Duties in American Colonies Act)

- Required that many printed materials in the colonies be produce don stamped paper from London which included an embossed revenue stamp.
- Failed: No taxation w/o representation!





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(ownshend Acts (1767-68)

- Instituted taxes on glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea.
- The purposes of the acts were to:
 - Raise revenue in the colonies to pay the salaries of governors and judges so that they would remain loyal to Great Britain,
 - Create more effective means of enforcing compliance with trade regulations,
 - Punish the Province of New York for failing to comply with the 1765 Quartering Act, and
 - Establish the precedent that the British Parliament had the right to tax the colonies.



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Boston Tea Party



- Was about the REMOVAL of taxes!
- Tea Act of May 19, 1773:
 - Allowed East India Company to sell tea from China in the colonies without paying taxes other than the Townshend Act taxes.
 - Prior to the Tea Act, tea from China paid taxes in Britain before paying more taxes in the colonies.
 - After the Tea Act, taxes on tea from China sold in the colonies were lower.
 - o So prices were lower.
 - o Turns out smugglers (John Hancock) didn't like that.
 - Thus, the tea party.



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1794 Whiskey Rebellion

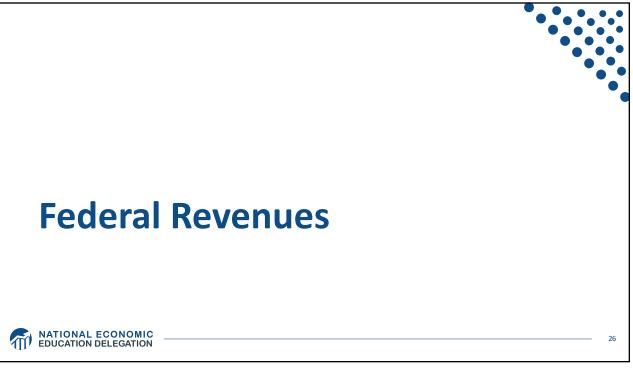


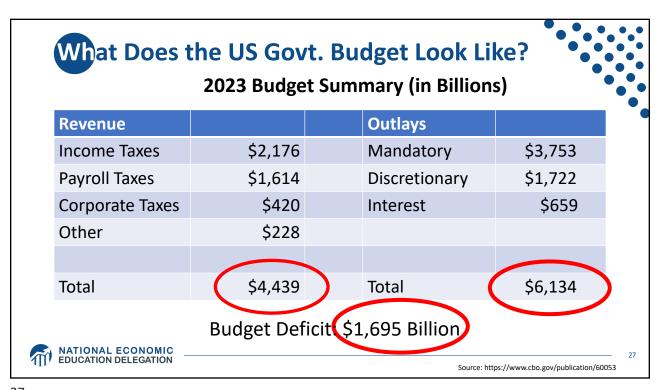
- 1791 Hamilton put a tax on whiskey.
 - First tax on a domestic product: "whiskey tax". (Previously only tariffs.)
 - Intended to generate revenue to pay for war debt.
 - Flat fee per still, or paying by the gallon
 - Large distilleries could pay flat fee (~\$.06/gallon).
 - ∘ Small distillers (farmers) were subject to greater fees (~\$.09/gallon).
 - Western Penn. farmers objected and violently resisted paying taxes.
 - Washington rode in with 13,000 militiamen to quell the uprising.

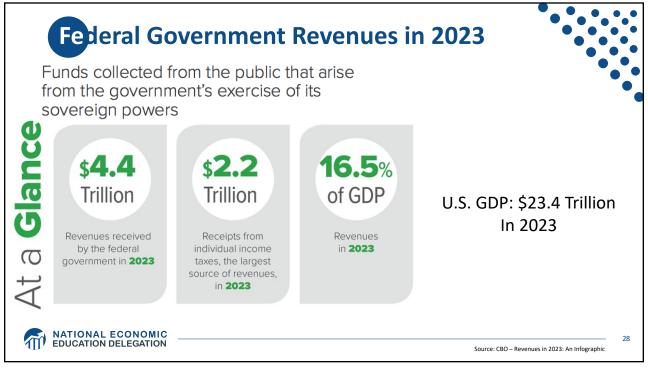


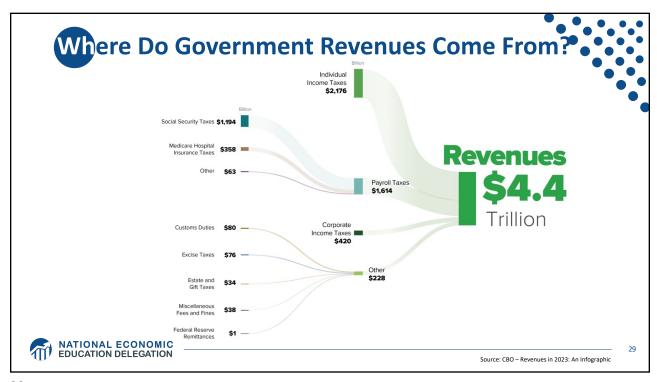
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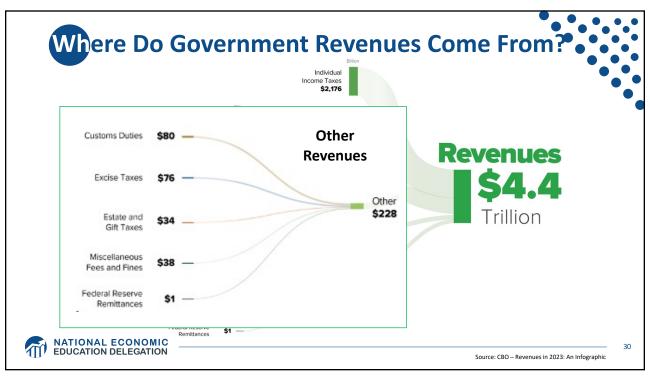


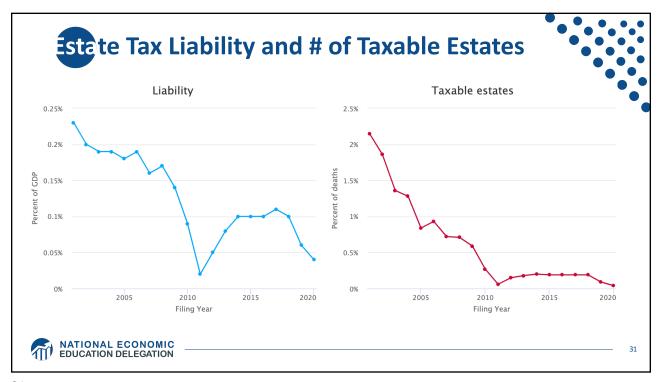


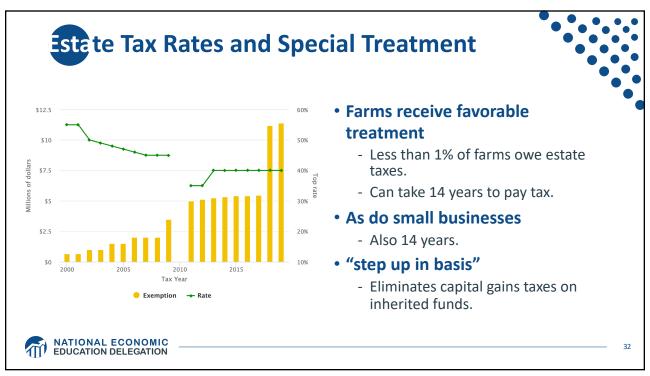


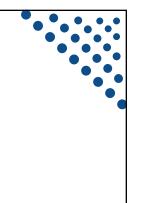






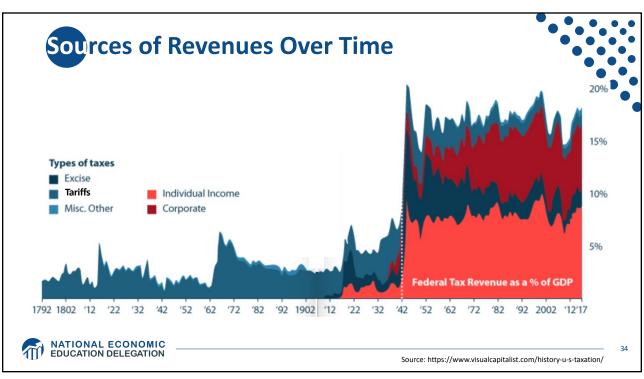






History of U.S. Taxation









1787 Constitution

- "Congress shall have the power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts, and excises."
- For years, primarily excise taxes and tariffs, including an "importation tax on slaves."
- 1791-94 Whiskey Rebellion
- 1862 First Income tax
 - To cover civil war expenses.

Revenue Act of 1894

- Corp tax (1909)
- Income tax ruled unconstitutional.

1913 16th Amendment

- Allows taxation w/o allocation according to state population.
- Form 1040 is introduced.
- Top rate of 7%. < 1% of pop pays.

1918 Revenue Act

- Top tax rate goes to 77%.



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1935 Social Security Act

- Introduced payroll taxes (2% shared)
- 1942 The Revenue Act
 - Raised tax rates.
 - Broadened the base.

• 1943 Current Tax Payment Act

- Instituted tax withholding.
- 1981 Economic Recovery Tax Act
 - Lowered taxes to stimulate growth.

- 1986 Tax Reform Act
 - Lowered individual taxes.
 - Raised corp taxes (20% to 28%)
 - Reduced corp tax breaks.

2001 Econ Growth and Tax Relief **Reconciliation Act**

- Lowered individual rates.
- Expanded child tax credit.

2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

- Lowered tax rates.
- Restricted some deductions.



Personal Income Tax

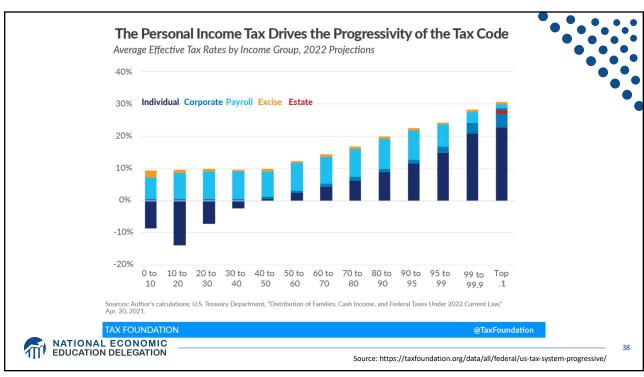


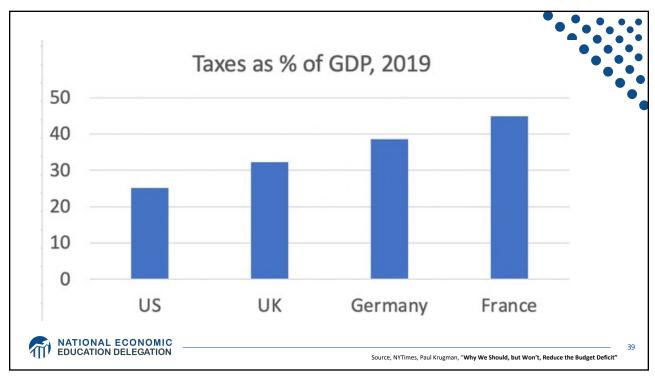
- Not every dollar is taxed the same.
- Tax systems can be progressive, flat, or regressive.
 - o **Progressive**: average effective tax rate increases with income.
 - o *Proportional*: average effective tax rate is the same at all levels of income.
 - o *Regressive*: average effective tax rate decreases with income.
- Different for single people and married couples
- Deductions
 - For yourself, and for dependents
 - Numerous others....

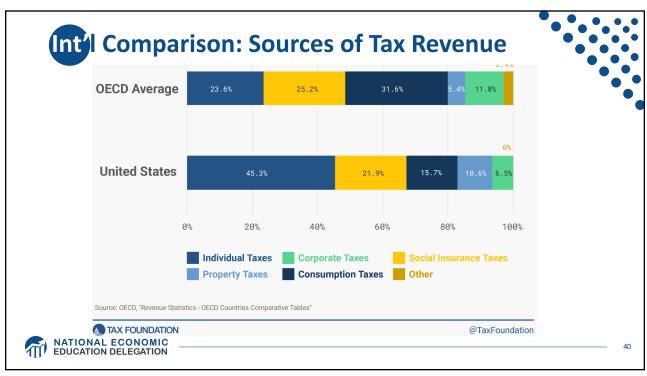


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• Arguments in favor of a corporate income tax:

- Revenues have to come from somewhere.
- Adds to the progressivity of the overall tax system.
- Absent the tax, corporations could be used for tax avoidance.

Arguments against a corporate income tax:

- Distorts economic activity: reduced investment and entrepreneurship.
- Compliance costs of an additional tax.
- The tax leads to tremendous spending on avoidance strategies.
- It's a hidden tax of unknown size on workers.



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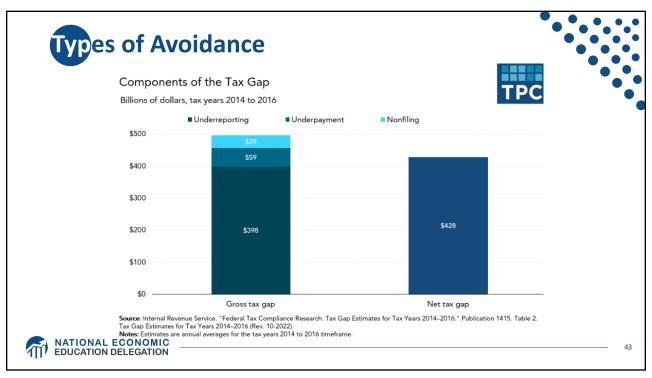
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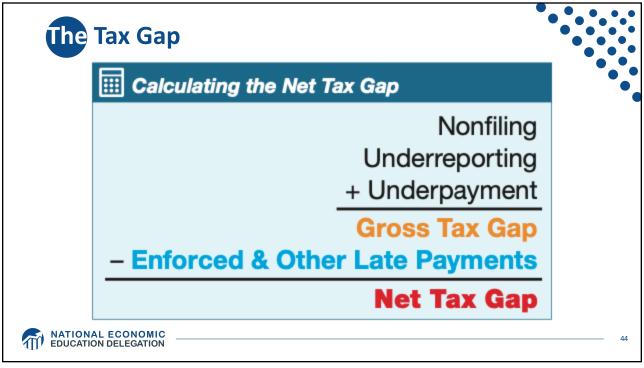


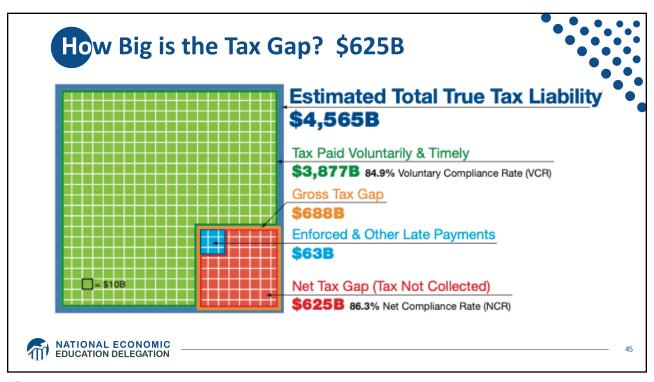
Tax Rascals (The Tax Gap)

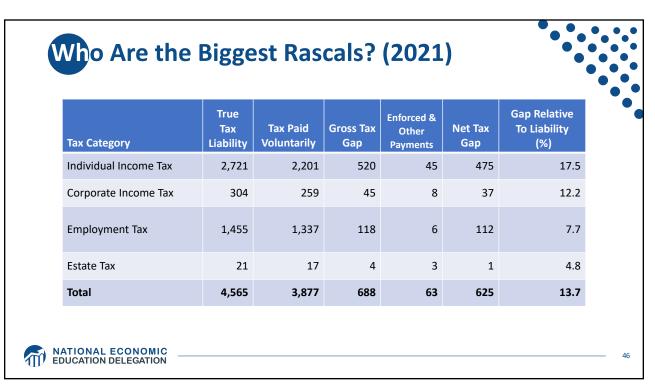


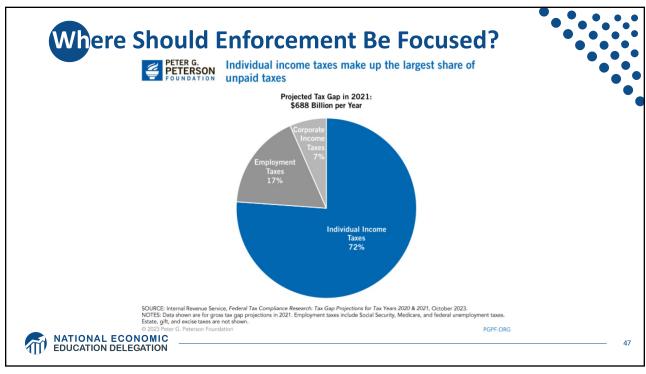
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39 Major Companies Paid <= No Taxes

Company	Pre-Tax Income (Millions)	Effective Tax Rate (%)
Adv Micro Dev	\$1,208	0.0
Archer Daniels	\$438	-37.4
Booz Allen	\$561	-0.5
Dish Network	\$2,532	-9.1
FedEx	\$1,218	-18.9
HP	\$861	-2.8
Nike	\$2,873	-3.8

Company	Pre-Tax Income (Millions)	Effective Tax Rate (%)
Salesforce	\$2,630	-0.5
TDS	\$284	-61.6
Unum Group	\$923	-10.7
Verisign	\$447	-27.7
Westlake Chem	\$227	-91.6
Williams	\$278	-10.4
Xcel Energy	\$1,465	-0.9



Source: https://itep.org/corporate-tax-avoidance-under-the-tax-cuts-and-jobs-act/

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73 Paid < Half The Statutory Rate

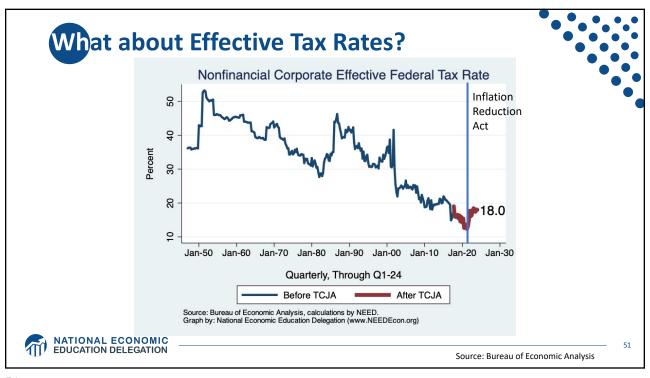
Company	Pre-Tax Income (Millions)	Effective Tax Rate (%)	Company	Pre-Tax Income (Millions)	Effective Tax Rate (%)
Amazon	\$43,437	4.3	Gen'l Motors	\$14,653	0.2
Bank of America	\$77,069	3.9	Hartford Fin.	\$6,599	6.1
Charter Comm	\$7.037	0.3	Honeywell	\$10,204	4.0
Deere	\$6,275	6.2	Lincoln Nat'l	\$3,227	6.5
Domino's Pizza	\$1,397	7.4	Motorola	\$2,703	8.3
Eversource (Energy)	\$4,038	5.5	Netflix	\$5,296	0.4
Exelon (Energy)	\$8.504	4.0	Northrop	\$2,703	10.5

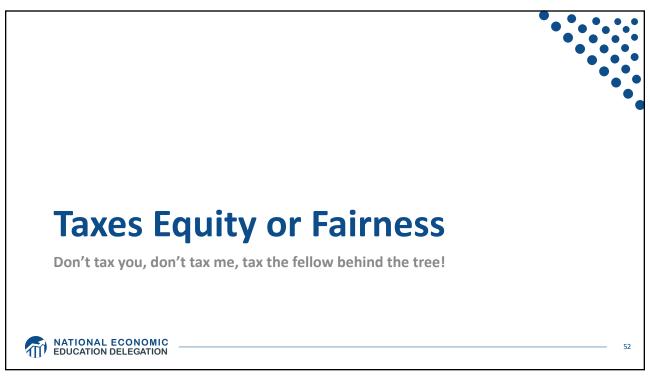
The 379 profitable Fortune 500 companies paid an average effective federal income tax rate of 11.3% on their 2018 income.



Source: https://itep.org/corporate-tax-avoidance-under-the-tax-cuts-and-jobs-act/

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How to Define Fairness?



- You pay what you can?
 - Related to station in life
 - Richer pay more than poorer?o In total or as a % of income?
 - How do you determine this?
- You pay for what you get?
 - This is growing in popularity.
 - Port taxes: Why should a farmer pay for the protection of ports?
 - Earmarks
 - How do you determine this?



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Horizontal Equity

- People of a similar station should be treated equally.
 - Some things that make people different should be off limits.
 - o Race/gender/geography.

Vertical Equity

- People in different stations should be treated differently.
 - Taxing by class.
 - Taxing by community
 - Taxing the finer things in life.
 - Presumptions of prosperity
 - Window taxes
 - But more, less?
 - Kings of India taxed the poor more to ensure their subjugation.

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Horizontal Equity is Hard

- Men and women have different preferences/needs.
 - Taxing feminine products?
 - Cigarette taxes? (Men smoke more.)
- Income tax is a tax on labor.
 - Burdens those with a taste for goods over a taste for leisure.
- Individuals vs couples: marriage penalty.
 - Hits black families more than white.
- Very hard.



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Taxes and Burden

How much do taxes really cost?



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- Economic burden of the tax:
 - Amount of the tax paid.
 - Cost of change in behavior.
- Tax Incidence
 - Who really pays?



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Example: British Port and Lighthouse Fees



- 1773 for one hundred years
 - Tax that increased with the length and breadth of the vessel.
 - Did not depend on the depth of the vessel.
- How did this affect behavior?
 - Build ships that were skinny and deep drafted.
- What could go wrong?
 - These ships were much less stable than the regular designs.
- Economic burden = amount of the tax + cost of lost ships



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Example: Hearth (Fireplace) Tax



- 1662-1689 England: Hearth Tax
 - Set tax payable for each fireplace.
- Why?
 - Attempt to tax higher income households more.
 - More expensive homes have more fireplaces and are occupied by wealthier families.
- What could go wrong?
 - Tax collectors had to walk throughout the house.
 - Not very popular.
- Economic burden = amount of the tax + excess burden.
 - EB: letting tax collector in. Cold in the wintertime!



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Example: Window Tax

- 1696 Window Tax
 - Set tax payable per window.
- Why?
 - Replace the unpopular Hearth Tax.
- What could go wrong?
 - People might brick up windows.



- Light and fresh air.



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John Winslow

W/o the tax: 5 windowsW/ the tax: 4 windows

- Excess burden? 1 shilling (Less than 2, but more than 0)
- Economic burden? 4x2 shillings + 1 shilling = 9 shillings

Note: Excess burden = 11% of the economic burden



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consider the Window Tax: 2 shillings/window

Bernard Smith

W/o the tax: 5 windowsW/ the tax: 2 windows

- Excess burden? 3 shilling (Less than 2, but more than 0)
- Economic burden? 2x2 shillings + 3 shilling = 7 shillings

Note: Excess burden = 43% of the economic burden



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Consider the Window Tax: 4 shillings/window

John Winslow

- W/o the tax: 5 windows - W/ the tax: 3 windows

- Excess burden? 1 shilling (1st window) & 3 shillings (2nd)

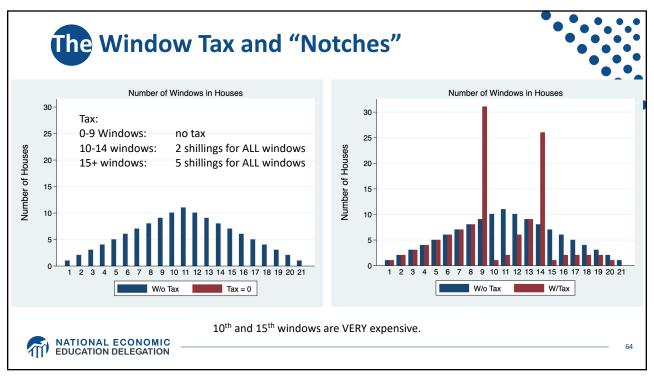
- Economic burden? 3x4 shillings + 4 shilling = 16 shillings

Note: Excess burden = 25% of the economic burden

NATIONAL ECONOMIC EDUCATION DELEGATION

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- There is a cost to a tax beyond the amount of taxes paid.
- This cost is higher the more it changes behavior.
 - E.g., how many windows go away?
 - Tax items that are necessities more lower excess burden.
- Equity issues with the windows tax.
 - o Lower-income households may be more responsive.
 - o Urban/rural rural may have lower income per window.
- "Notches" are no good!



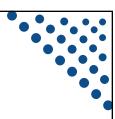
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Tax Incidence: Who Pays?



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- Corporate Taxes
- Social Security Taxes
- Sales Taxes
- Luxury Taxes
- Tariffs



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Corporate Income Tax & Incidence



- Who pays the corporate tax?
 - Owners
 - Stockholders through lower dividends
 - Employees through lower wages
 - Customers through higher prices



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Who Pays Payroll Taxes? E.g. Social Security



Technically:

- 6.2% by employers
- 6.2% by employees

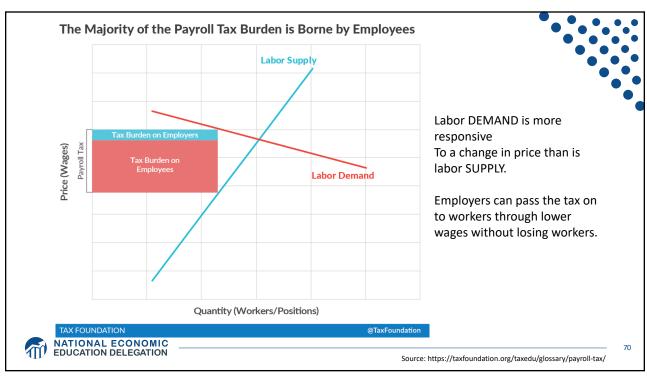
Actually:

- Depends...
 - Will employers lose a lot of workers if wages go down?
 - Will employers have to raise prices in response?
 - What is more responsive:
 - o Demand for labor
 - Supply of labor



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Sales Tax Incidence: Sellers vs Buyers

- mits
- Transactionally: The buyer pays the tax and seller remits.
- Who ACTUALLY pays the tax?
 - Some split between buyers and sellers.
 - It depends on the product.
 - o If it's a necessity: consumer likely pays the tax.
 - o If it's a luxury: producer likely pays the tax.
- If fewer people buy the product because the cost is higher, sellers will respond by lowering the price.
 - It is the lowering of the price that shifts some of the ACTUAL burden to the seller.



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- 10% on the part of the price over the threshold.
- Boats: Threshold was \$100,000
 - Unintended consequences (Excess burden/incidence):
 - Wealthy bought boats overseas
 - U.S. boat sales collapsed
 - > 7,600 boat related jobs lost
 - Est. total of 30,000 jobs lost
- Gov't paid unemployment benefits
- Boat tax yielded \$3 million/yr
- Losses probably exceeded revenues



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U.S 1990 Luxury Tax – con't



- Tax Incidence:
 - Boat-building and tourism industries.
 - Wealthy who had to go to Europe to get a boat.
- Excess Burden: Perhaps > 100%



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Let's Talk About Tariffs



- Tariffs are taxes on imported goods.
- Why do we impose tariffs?
 - Raise revenue
 - Protect/promote domestic industry
 - o E.g., solar
 - National Defense
 - o E.g., semiconductors
 - Protect workers, create jobs
 - Punish foreign countries
 - o For their tariffs
 - o For other things war, human rights



Let's Talk About Tariffs – con't

- Trump has said the Chinese will pay the duties (incidence).
 - You all now know that's not true.
 - It is sometimes true, but the exception and not the rule.
- Tariffs have other implications:
 - Tariff wars:
 - Great Depression Smoot-Hawley
 - o U.S. vs France: Tech tariffs (EU) vs Retaliatory (US, cheese, wine, etc.)
 - Domestic producers who use imported goods.
 - o Steel tariffs protect the steel industry
 - o Hurt: manufacture of cars, airplanes, bridges, homes, clothes washers



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U.S. Income Tax Structure



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Marginal Tax Schedule – Is Progressive, 2024

Tax Rate	Single Filers	Married Filing Jointly	
10%	Up to \$11,600	Up to \$23,200	
12%	11,601-47,150	23,201-94,300	
22%	47,151-100,525	94,301-201,050	
24%	100,526-191,950	201,050-383,900	
32%	191,951-243,725	383,901-487,450	
35%	243,726-609,350	487,451-731,200	
37%	Over \$609,350	Over \$731,200	

Quintile Upper Bounds:

 1^{st} Quintile: Up to \$30,000 2^{nd} Quintile: Up to \$58,020 3^{rd} Quintile: Up to \$94,000

4th Quintile: Up to \$153,000

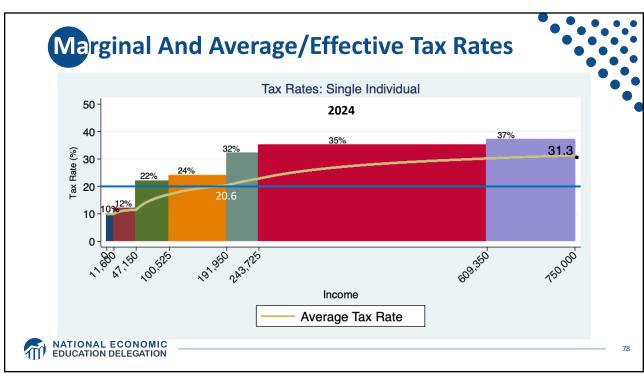
Lower Bound:

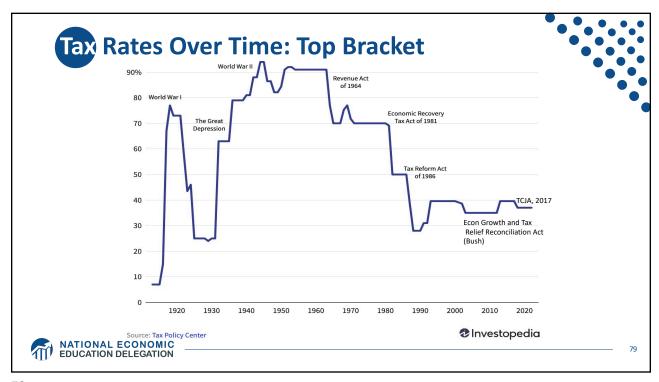
Top 5%: Starts at \$295,000

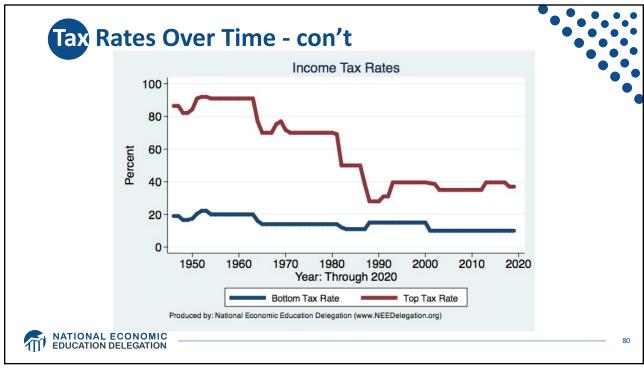


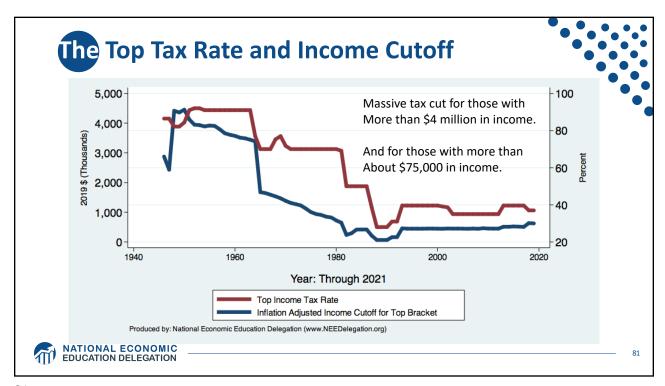
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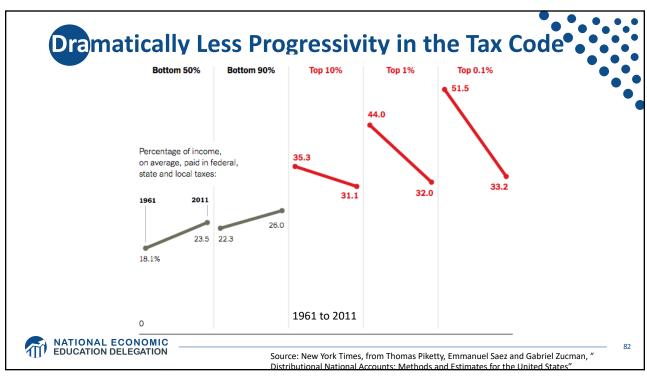
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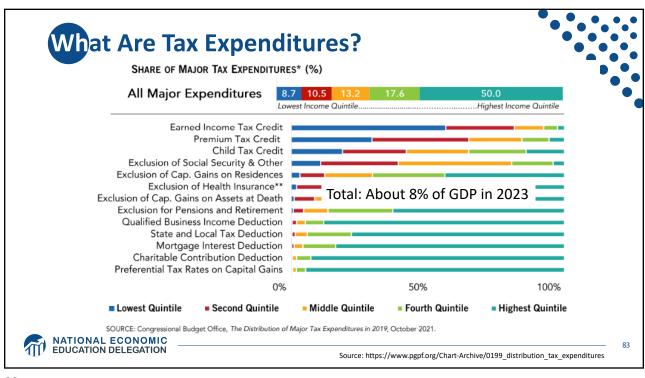












Tax Cuts or Tax Reform?

• Tax Reform – Fundamental Principles and Characteristics

- **Horizontal equity**: people with similar incomes/wealth should pay similar taxes.
- **Vertical equity**: people with more income/wealth should pay more taxes.
- **Efficiency:** taxes should minimize distortions to people's behavior—doing less or more of something they would otherwise do.
- **Economic Growth**: taxes should be structured in a way to minimize their impact on economic growth.
- Simplicity: taxes should be administered in simpler rather than more complex ways.



Summary



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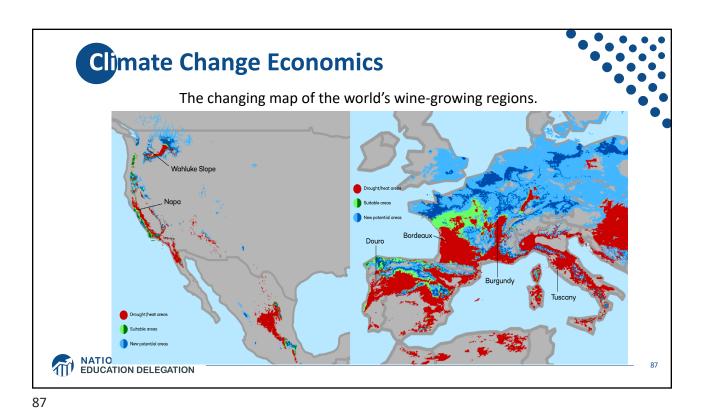
Taxes Affect the Efficiency of the Economy



- Many taxes have costs above and beyond the revenues raised.
 - Excess burden/deadweight loss.
 - The higher the tax, the higher the burden is likely to be.
- Taxes are likely a necessary evil for an economy.
 - A free market does not exist courts make contracts meaningful.
 - o Courts cost money.
- Taxes are very complicated.
 - Equity is hard to determine, judge, enact.
 - Never sure exactly who pays them incidence.
- Tax policy is more interesting than you thought! (?)



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Any Questions?

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