

Massachusetts Taxes Hit Poor & Middle Class Harder than the Wealthy

Low- and middle-income families in Massachusetts pay larger shares of their income in state and local taxes than do the richest Massachusetts families, according to a new study by the Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy.

“State and local governments are being called upon to take on more and more responsibilities,” said Robert S. McIntyre, ITEP’s tax policy director and lead author of the study, titled *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All 50 States*. “When it comes to paying for services, Massachusetts’s tax system is not quite fair.”

Massachusetts’s Tax Code: Tax the Poor & Middle Class More Than the Wealthy

When all Massachusetts taxes are totaled up, the study found that:

- The state and local tax rate on the best off one percent of Massachusetts families—with average incomes of \$1.4 million—is 6.8% before accounting for the tax savings from federal itemized deductions. After the federal offset, the effective tax rate is just 4.6%.
- The average tax rate on families in the middle of the income distribution—those earning between \$34,000 and \$56,000—is 9.2%. After the federal offset, the rate is 8.6%, close to twice the effective rate the richest pay.
- The tax rate on the poorest Massachusetts families—those earning less than \$19,000—is still high. At 9.3% it is more than twice as much as the effective rate on the wealthiest.

“Massachusetts’s income tax does not offset the regressivity of its sales and excise taxes, giving the state a regressive tax system,” McIntyre said. “Taxes ought to be based on people’s ability to pay them, which means that the share of income paid in taxes should rise as income grows, not fall as is the case in Massachusetts.”

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Tax Regressivity Has Grown Since 1989

The study also examined the impact of changes in the regressivity of Massachusetts taxes since 1989, when the last cycle of state government shortfalls began. The study's findings include:

- Tax burdens rose slightly on middle- and lower-income families, but fell substantially on the wealthiest families.
- The state income tax became somewhat more progressive, albeit lower. But the benefits to low-income taxpayers were largely outweighed by regressive cigarette excise tax hikes.

“What benefits the state gave to the poor in the form of an earned-income tax credit, it took away through regressive hikes in excise taxes,” said McIntyre. “As lawmakers consider budget-balancing strategies in 2003, they should remember that the Massachusetts tax system remains very unfair.”

Two pages of tables detailing the Massachusetts findings of the study follow

The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy is a nonpartisan Washington-based research group. The full *Who Pays?* report is available in PDF format at www.itepnet.org. Printed copies can be ordered by calling ITEP at 202-737-4315.

Who Pays? examines the tax systems of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, using the Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy Microsimulation Tax Model. The ITEP Model is similar in methodology and data sources to the elaborate computer models used by the U.S. Treasury and the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation, except that the ITEP Model adds state-by-state estimating capabilities.

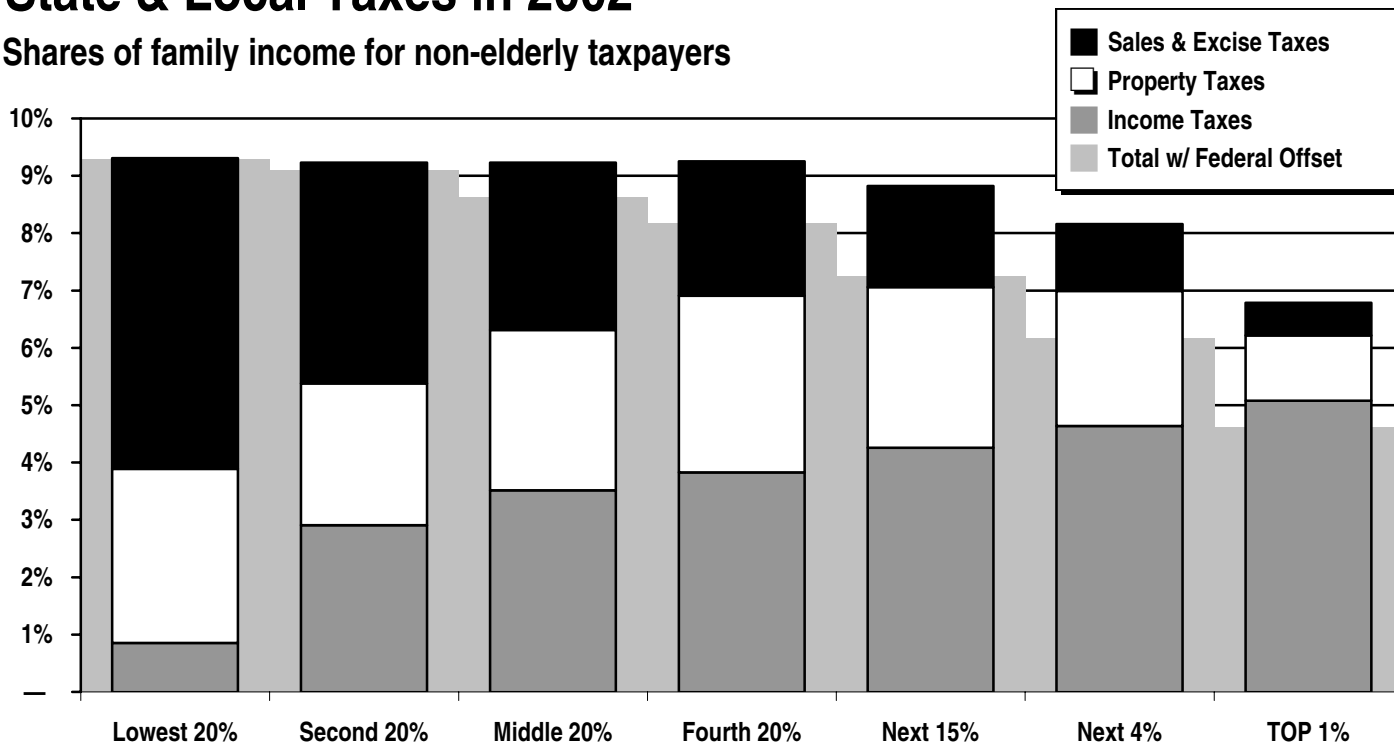
The findings published in the study detail state and local taxes paid by non-elderly couples and individuals. The study includes all major state and local taxes: personal and corporate income taxes, property taxes, and sales and excise taxes.

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Massachusetts

State & Local Taxes in 2002

Shares of family income for non-elderly taxpayers



Income Group	Lowest 20%	Second 20%	Middle 20%	Fourth 20%	Top 20%		
					Next 15%	Next 4%	TOP 1%
Income Range	Less than \$19,000	\$19,000 – \$34,000	\$34,000 – \$56,000	\$56,000 – \$90,000	\$90,000 – \$182,000	\$182,000 – \$413,000	\$413,000 or more
Average Income in Group	\$10,500	\$26,800	\$44,400	\$71,600	\$121,000	\$263,000	\$1,383,000
Sales & Excise Taxes	5.4%	3.9%	2.9%	2.3%	1.8%	1.2%	0.6%
General Sales—Individuals	2.0%	1.6%	1.4%	1.2%	0.9%	0.6%	0.3%
Other Sales & Excise—Ind.	1.9%	1.0%	0.7%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%
Sales & Excise on Business	1.6%	1.2%	0.9%	0.7%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%
Property Taxes	3.0%	2.5%	2.8%	3.1%	2.8%	2.4%	1.1%
Property Taxes on Families	3.0%	2.4%	2.8%	3.0%	2.7%	2.2%	0.8%
Other Property Taxes	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%
Income Taxes	0.9%	2.9%	3.5%	3.8%	4.3%	4.6%	5.1%
Personal Income Tax	0.8%	2.9%	3.5%	3.8%	4.2%	4.6%	4.8%
Corporate Income Tax	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%
TOTAL TAXES	9.3%	9.2%	9.2%	9.3%	8.8%	8.2%	6.8%
Federal Deduction Offset	-0.0%	-0.1%	-0.6%	-1.1%	-1.6%	-2.0%	-2.2%
TOTAL AFTER OFFSET	9.3%	9.1%	8.6%	8.2%	7.3%	6.2%	4.6%

Note: Table shows 2002 tax law at 2000 income levels.

Massachusetts Tax Trends

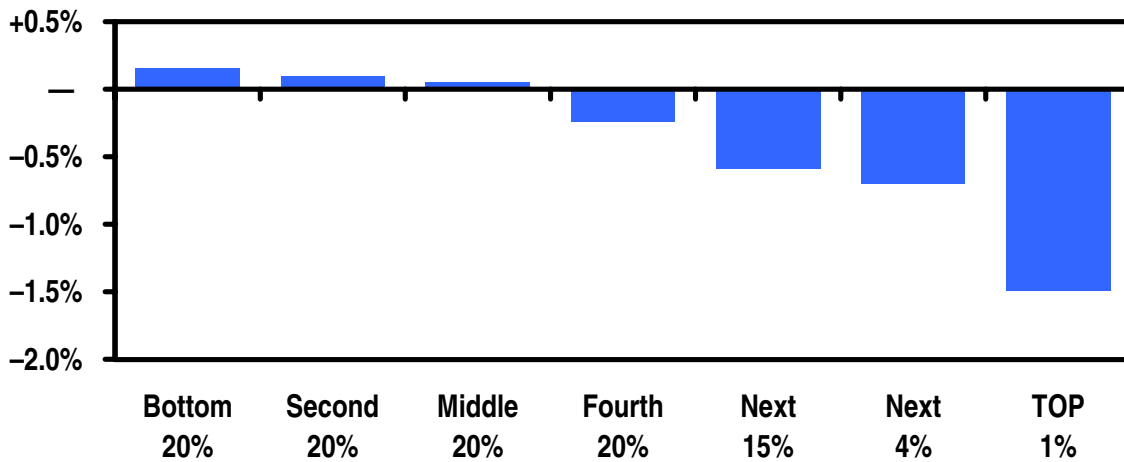
Progressive Features

- ✓ Earned Income Tax Credit

Regressive Features

- ✗ Flat tax on most income
- ✗ Highest cigarette tax in the nation

Changes in Taxes as Shares of Income, 1989 – 2002

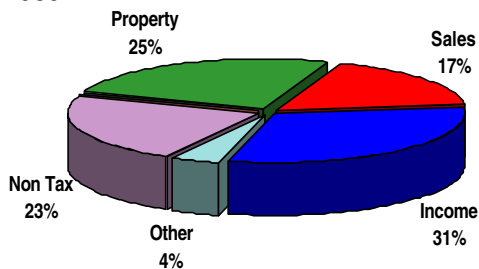


	Bottom 20%	Second 20%	Middle 20%	Fourth 20%	Top 20%		
					Next 15%	Next 4%	TOP 1%
Sales & Excise	+1.3%	+0.6%	+0.4%	+0.2%	+0.2%	+0.1%	+0.0%
Property	+0.4%	+0.3%	+0.6%	+0.3%	-0.4%	-0.4%	-0.3%
Income	-1.6%	-0.8%	-0.6%	-0.5%	-0.4%	-0.6%	-0.8%
Federal Offset	+0.0%	-0.0%	-0.3%	-0.4%	-0.0%	+0.2%	-0.4%
Overall Change	+0.2%	+0.1%	+0.1%	-0.2%	-0.6%	-0.7%	-1.5%

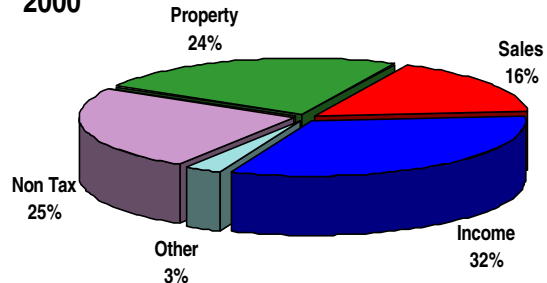
The expansion of the standard deduction and the EITC were progressive tax changes for the low- and middle-income tax payers and a cut in the long term capital gains tax rate helped out those at the top. Increases in the excise taxes, including the largest cigarette tax hike in the nation, nearly offset the change in the income burden for the lowest income quintiles.

Composition of Revenues

1989



2000



Source: Government Finances, US Department of Census