

# Virginia Taxes Hit Poor & Middle Class Much Harder than the Wealthy

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Low- and middle-income families in Virginia pay a much higher share of their income in state and local taxes than do the richest Virginians, 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*. “Unfortunately, when it comes to paying for services, Virginia has an unfair tax system.”

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

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

- The state and local tax rate on the best off one percent of Virginia families—with average incomes of \$989,000—is 7.0% before accounting for the tax savings from federal itemized deductions. After the federal offset, the effective tax rate is only 4.8%.
- The average tax rate on families in the middle of the income distribution—those earning between \$28,000 and \$48,000—is 8.4% before the federal offset and 8.1% after, more than one and a half times the effective rate the richest pay.
- But the tax rate on the poorest Virginia families—those earning less than \$16,000—is the highest of all. At 9.1% it is nearly double the effective rate on the very wealthy.

“Virginia’s income tax fails to 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 Virginia.”

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## Tax Regressivity Has Grown Since 1989

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

- Despite the elimination of the car tax and the reduction of the sales tax on groceries, tax burdens rose for middle- and low-income families.
- Because income tax parameters are not indexed for inflation, a new poverty credit did not stop rising income tax burdens.
- In contrast, taxes on the top fifth of Virginians fell.

"Low- and middle-income taxpayers in Virginia were forced to take the money they saved from cuts in the car tax and grocery tax and pay it right back in inflationary income tax hikes," said McIntyre. "As lawmakers consider budget-balancing strategies in 2003, they should remember that their past actions have served to shift a greater share of the tax burden onto low-income taxpayers."

### **Two pages of tables detailing the Virginia 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](http://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.

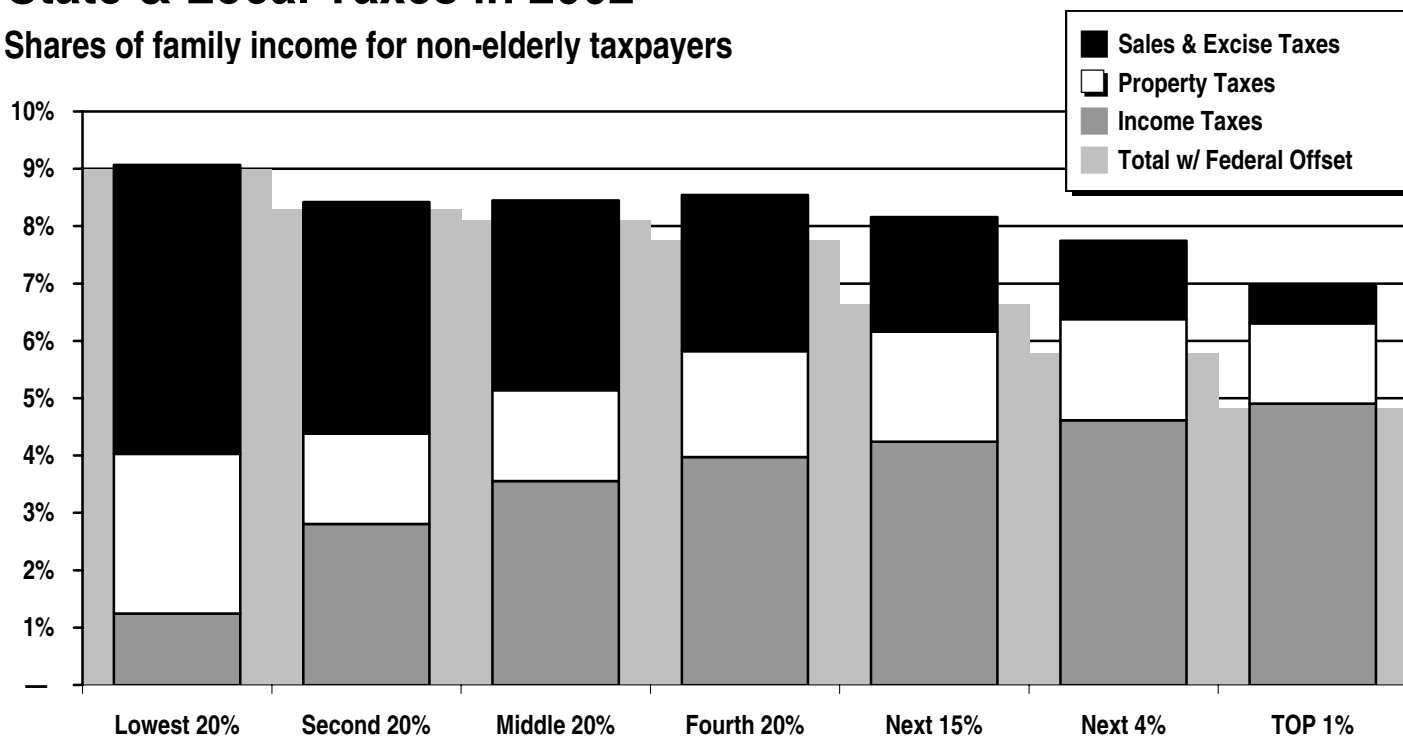
The findings published in the study detail state and local taxes paid by non-elderly couples and individuals. The study includes all major state and local taxes: personal and corporate income taxes, property taxes, and sales and excise taxes.

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# Virginia

## 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 \$16,000	\$16,000 – \$28,000	\$28,000 – \$48,000	\$48,000 – \$80,000	\$80,000 – \$159,000	\$159,000 – \$407,000	\$407,000 or more
Average Income in Group	\$9,200	\$21,700	\$36,000	\$60,800	\$103,000	\$216,000	\$989,000
<b>Sales &amp; Excise Taxes</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>2.7%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>
General Sales—Individuals	2.4%	1.9%	1.5%	1.3%	1.0%	0.7%	0.4%
Other Sales & Excise—Ind.	1.4%	1.2%	1.0%	0.9%	0.6%	0.4%	0.2%
Sales & Excise on Business	1.2%	0.9%	0.7%	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%
<b>Property Taxes</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>
Property Taxes on Families	2.7%	1.5%	1.5%	1.7%	1.7%	1.5%	0.6%
Other Property Taxes	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.8%
<b>Income Taxes</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>4.9%</b>
Personal Income Tax	1.2%	2.8%	3.5%	4.0%	4.2%	4.6%	4.8%
Corporate Income Tax	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
<b>TOTAL TAXES</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>
Federal Deduction Offset	-0.1%	-0.1%	-0.3%	-0.8%	-1.5%	-2.0%	-2.2%
<b>TOTAL AFTER OFFSET</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>8.1%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>

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

# Virginia Tax Trends

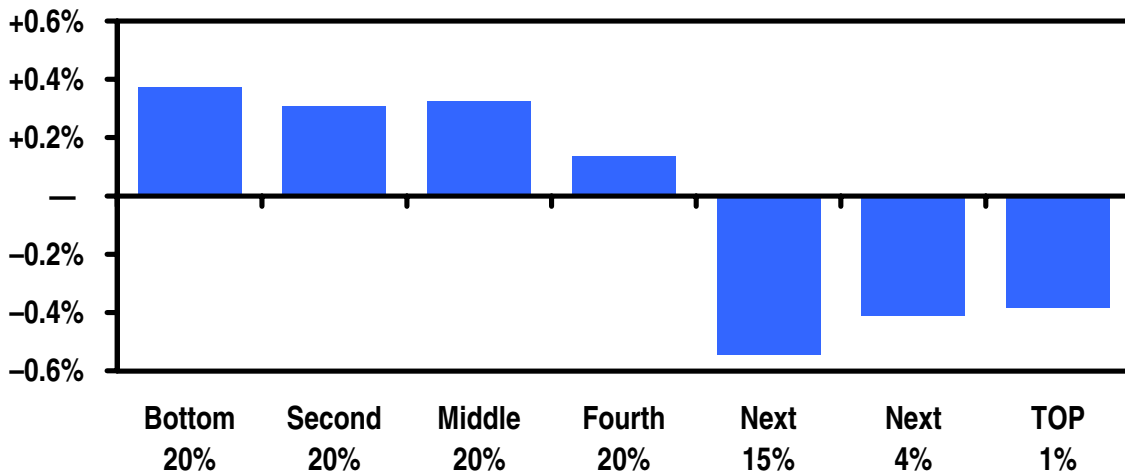
## Progressive Features

- ✓ Non-refundable income tax poverty credit
- ✓ Low excise taxes

## Regressive Features

- ✗ Only slightly graduated income tax
- ✗ Income tax not indexed for inflation
- ✗ Groceries subject to sales tax, though at a lower rate

## Changes in Taxes as Shares of Income, 1989 – 2002

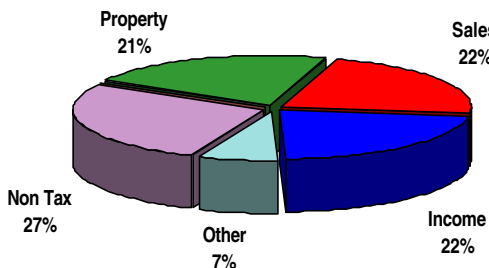


	Bottom 20%	Second 20%	Middle 20%	Fourth 20%	Top 20%		
					Next 15%	Next 4%	TOP 1%
<b>Sales &amp; Excise</b>	-0.3%	-0.3%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.1%	-0.1%	-0.0%
<b>Property</b>	+0.1%	-0.4%	-0.3%	-0.4%	-0.9%	-0.8%	-0.2%
<b>Income</b>	+0.7%	+1.0%	+1.0%	+1.0%	+0.7%	+0.7%	+0.5%
<b>Federal Offset</b>	-0.1%	-0.1%	-0.1%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.2%	-0.6%
<b>Overall Change</b>	+0.4%	+0.3%	+0.3%	+0.1%	-0.5%	-0.4%	-0.4%

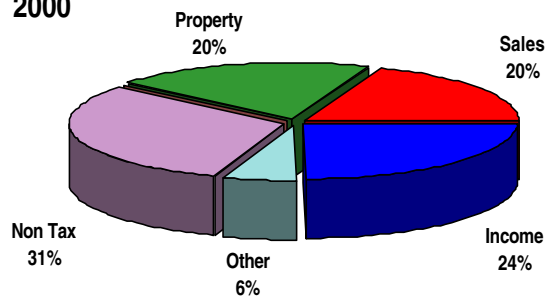
Virginia reduced the sales tax on groceries and eliminated the car tax. The lack of indexing the rate structure and exemption caused implicit hikes in income taxes for all Virginians, including low-income residents despite a \$300 poverty credit.

## Composition of Revenues

1989



2000



Source: Government Finances, US Department of Census