

Report of the Oregon Governmental Issues Survey 2000

The 2000 Survey was conducted by telephone (random-digit-dial), May 18 (two days after the primary election) through early June, 2000, by student interviewers from Oregon State University, trained and directed by Political Science Department faculty Brent Steel and Robert Sahr; it produced 651 completed responses, a 63 percent response rate

Surveys—formerly called the “Oregon Fiscal Choices Surveys”—have been conducted periodically starting in 1992; some data are available for the entire period; parallel surveys have been conducted during some of those periods in Washington state

- 1992 by mail; 667 respondents; 69.9 percent response rate
- 1993 by mail; 739 respondents, 68.8 percent response rate
- 1994 by mail; 698 respondents; ~51 percent response rate
- 1995-96 by mail; 606 responses; 44 percent response rate
- 1996-97 by mail with telephone follow-up; 699 responses; 51 percent response rate

(Mail surveys allow asking more complicated questions. However, mail surveys also tend to reflect a response bias, with much higher response rates by individuals in the upper part of the income and education scales. Because the 2000 survey was conducted entirely by telephone, its responses may not be exactly comparable with those from earlier years because the 2000 survey appears to reflect more accurately a broad range of income and education.)

Theme: The “Great Disconnect” among Oregonians about Taxing and Spending

- ◆ Want continued relatively high spending for most programs
- ◆ Want lower taxes, especially property taxes
- ◆ Presumably reconcile by assuming “waste” in government spending

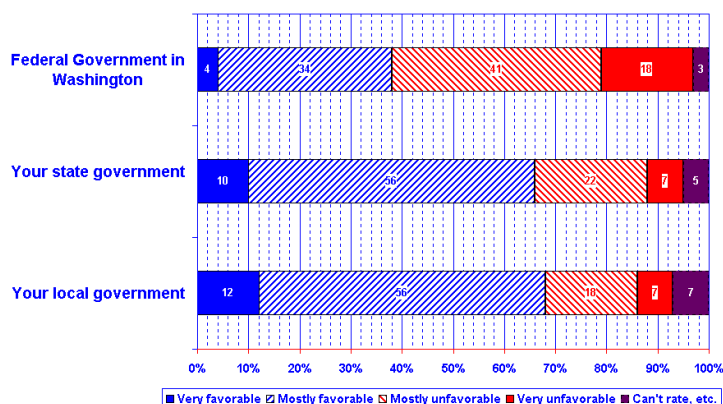
All of this takes place in a context of

- ◆ Relatively low trust in government officials
- ◆ Low levels of information about state spending and taxes

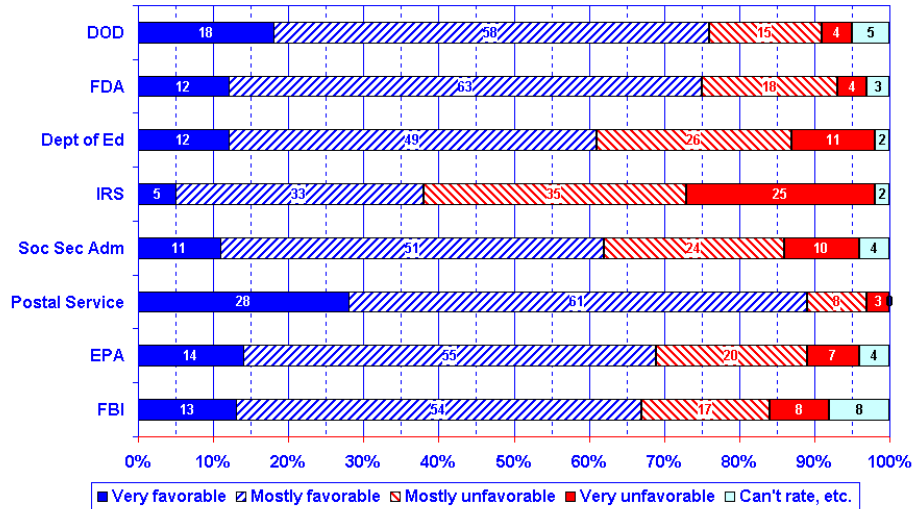
Two Aspects of the “Disconnect” (general-specific opinions, taxes vs. spending)

General vs. specific opinions: General opinions about the national government contrasted with views of specific agencies or of “regulation” in contrast to specific kinds of regulation (Pew)

**Evaluations of Levels of Government,
September-October 1997, in Percent
(Pew Research Center for the People and the Press)**

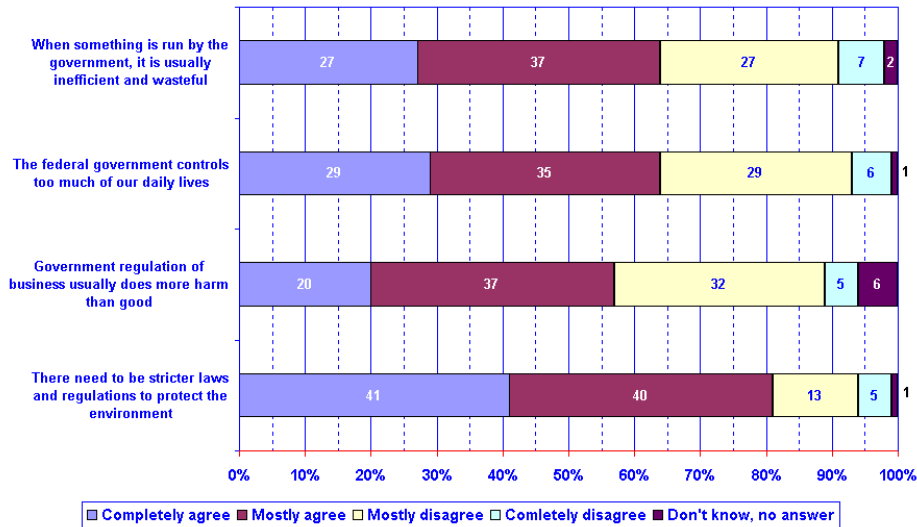


Evaluations of Selected National Government Agencies, 1997, in Percent (Pew Center for People and Press)



Reminder: In 1997 congressional hearings were being conducted about "excesses" of the IRS

(Pew Research Center for People and Press)



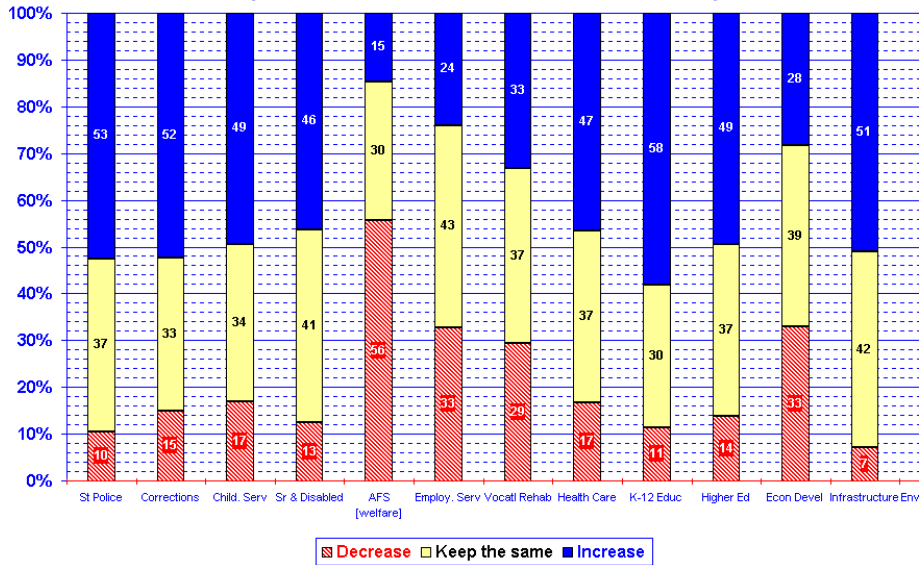
Opinions Among Oregonians about Taxing and Spending

Generally people favor spending on specific programs but also favor reductions (or at least no increases) in taxes

Spending

From the 1995-96 survey, among 13 state spending categories, on nearly all a majority wanted either increased funding or no reductions; especially pronounced for education and public safety

Summary Judgments of Funding of State Government Functions
in Oregon 1995-96, in Percent, From 7-Point Scale
(1-3 = Reduce, 4 = Same, 5-7 = Increase)



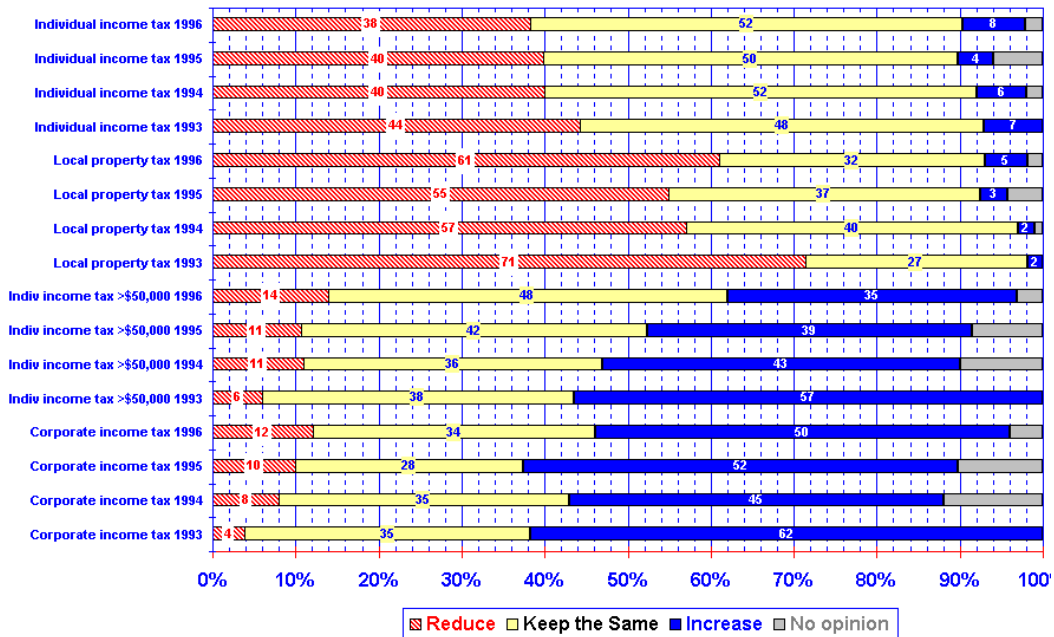
Ballot measures reflect and reinforce the “disconnect” by allowing voting on only one side, usually taxes

Taxes

At the same time they want continued spending, most Oregonians want either reductions in taxes or at least no increases

Note especially the property tax; as examine later, many people think this is a source of state government revenue

Judgments about Selected Revenue Sources in Oregon
1993, 1994, 1995-96, and 1996-97, in Percent



The 2000 survey asked about tax fairness, using this question: I'm going to name a few types of taxpayers. For each one, please tell me if you think the taxes they pay are too high, too low, or about right in terms of what their fair share should be.

	Too high	About right	Too low	Don't Know [VOL.]
Large corporations and businesses	9.1%	32.0%	50.7%	8.3%
Small business and self-employed people	61.1%	32.3%	2.3%	4.3%
Lower income families earning less than \$25,000 per year.....	50.4%	33.5%	11.1%	5.1%
Middle income families earning \$25,000 to \$75,000 per year.....	36.1%	53.6%	4.8%	5.5%
Higher income families earning more than \$75,000 per year.....	17.7%	27.2%	43.0%	12.1%

Concerning judgments of taxing and spending, two Survey 2000 questions are of interest

Are you more concerned with

1. How well state government works, or 70.3%
2. How much it costs in taxes 28.3%
3. [Volunteered] Don't know or no answer 1.4%

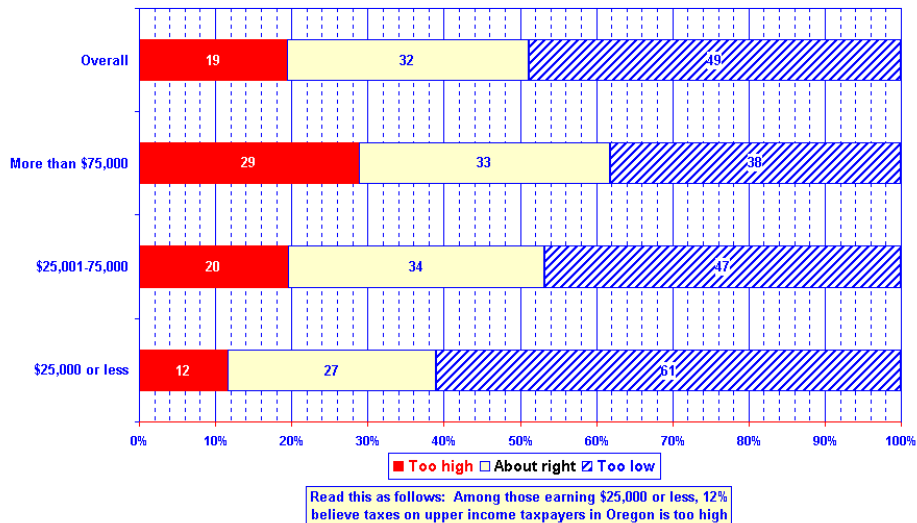
Do you think the state taxes you pay are reasonable or unreasonable, considering the benefits you receive?

1. Reasonable 53.9%
2. Unreasonable 41.5%
3. [Volunteered] Don't know/No answer 4.6%

Self interest and ideology (liberal-conservative; overlaps with party identification but not the same) both affect views

Self-interest: For example, the relationship between income and views of personal income tax rates for upper-income people

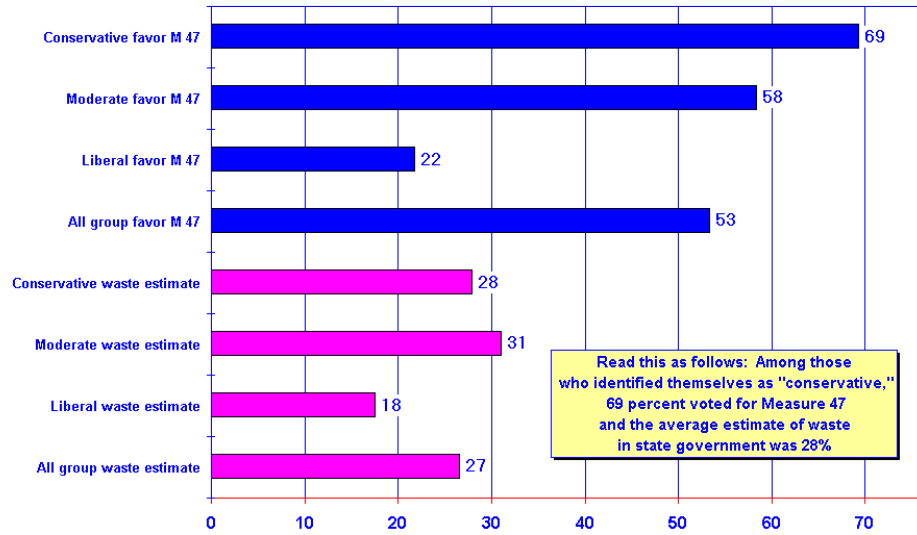
Relationship of Income and Judgments of Tax Fairness for Those Earning More than \$75,000, in Percent, Oregon Survey 2000 (N = 651; "Don't Know" responses omitted in calculating percent)



Ideology: Liberals, moderates, conservatives differ—self-described “conservatives” differ from self-described “liberals” (on the 2000 survey, 26.7% classified themselves as liberal, 39.3% as moderate, 31.2% as conservative, and 2.8% could not respond using those terms)

Ideology is very strongly related to many opinions

1996-97 Relationship of Ideology with Estimates of State Government Waste and Support for Measure 47, in Percent

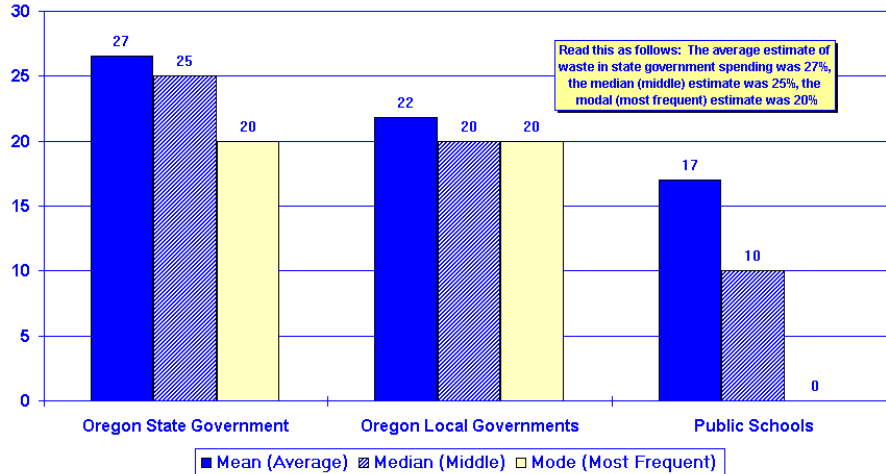


Regional variation in Oregon appears due primarily to the fact that in the eastern and southern areas more are conservative and Republican than in other regions

Waste

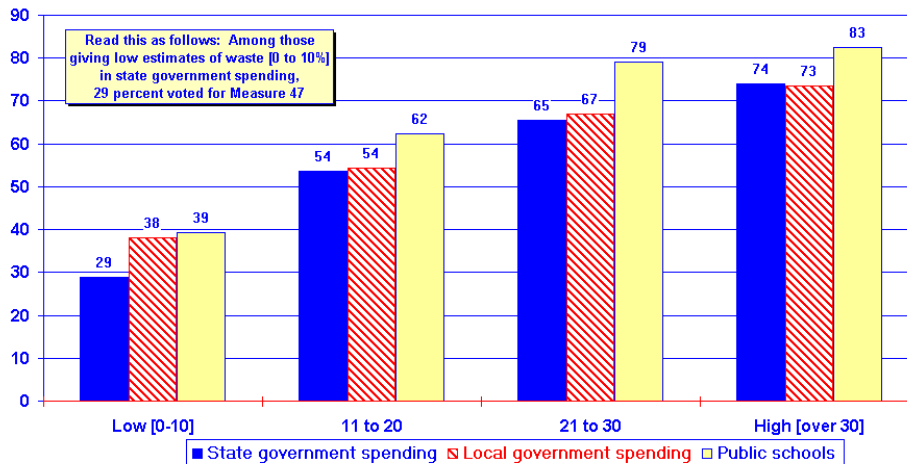
Views of waste appear to be a way to reconcile wanting both continued benefits and lower taxes—and (as will be discussed later) these are related to information level; in general, it appears Oregonians assume more waste in state government than local government and less waste in public schools than in state or local government

Estimates of Waste in Oregon State Government, Oregon Local Governments, and Oregon Public Schools, 1996-97, in Percent



Views of waste in state and local governments and in public schools are strongly related to opinions, for example, Measure 47 in 1996

Support for Measure 47 in Relation to Judgments of Waste in State and Local Governments and Schools, in Percent



Views of waste in schools are related to whether have children in schools and—if so—in public or private schools; those who have children in private schools suggest the highest levels of waste in public schools

Trust and Confidence (important parts of the political context)

Low level of trust in government and confidence in leaders is a central part of the context; this is true both in Oregon and nationally (see earlier graph of Pew data)

Level of government trusted: The Oregon 2000 survey asked: Which level of government do you trust most to make the best decisions for you—national, state, or local? This parallels the findings in the Pew survey (see page 1, above) that people have greatest trust in lowest levels of government.

		Oregon
1	National.....	8.4%
2	State	26.0%
3	Local	37.6%
4	[IF VOLUNTEERED] All equally.....	9.4%
5	[IF VOLUNTEERED] None of them	18.9%

Relatively low confidence in many public leaders, 2000 and over time, though Governor Kitzhaber relatively high standing (Note: slight change in wording in 2000 vs. earlier years: “only some” was replaced by “some,” a seemingly more positive response, so earlier year responses may not be exactly comparable with those of 2000)

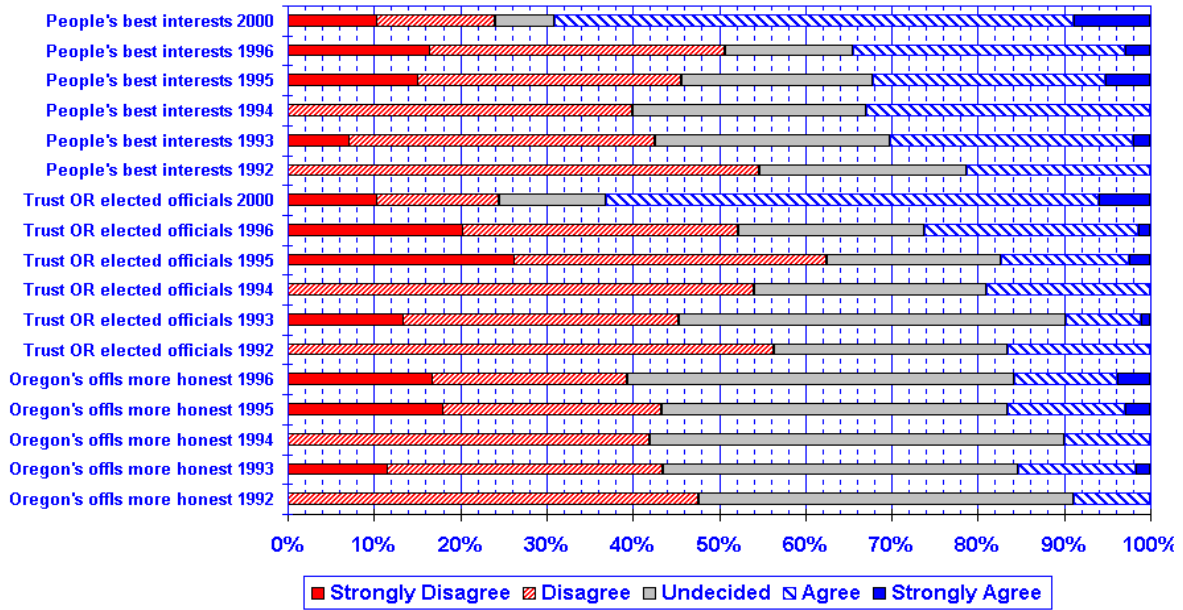
The 2000 survey: Confidence in various government organizations: As far as people in the following institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all?

	A Great Deal	Some	Hardly Any	No Opinion [VOL.]
a. Governor John Kitzhaber	30.9%	47.0%	18.0%	4.2%
b. Oregon State Legislature	9.8%	63.6%	19.2%	7.4%
c. Oregon Business Community	20.7%	55.0%	14.3%	10.0%
d. Oregon Courts	26.3%	50.4%	17.7%	5.7%
e. Your local governments (county/city)	20.9%	53.3%	22.0%	3.8%

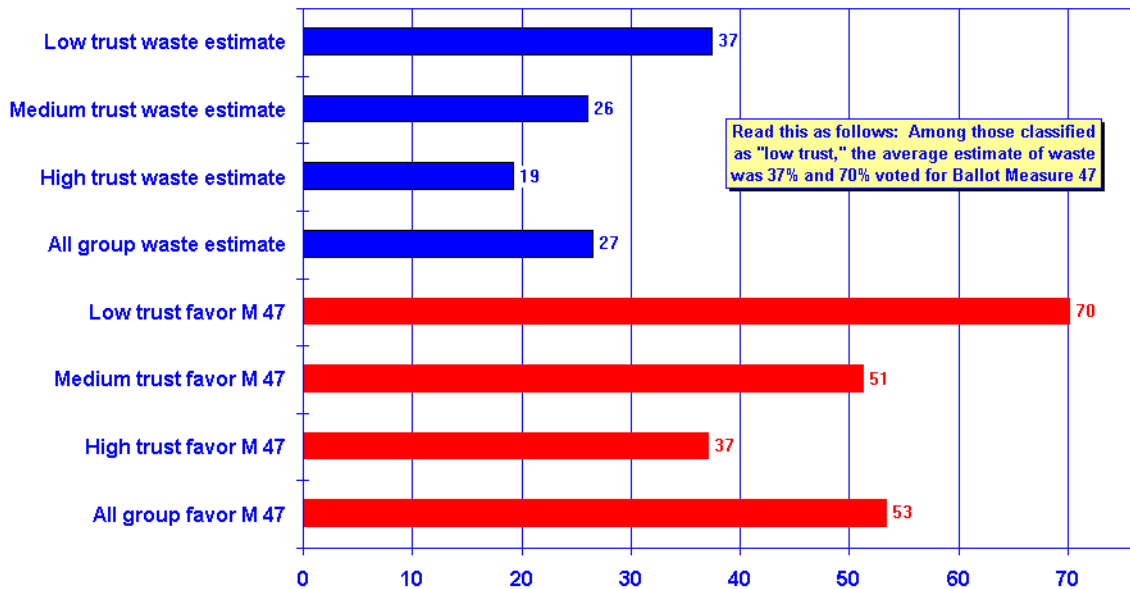
Two general questions that measure trust (sometimes also called “alienation” measures): Next I will read two statements concerning people’s opinions of Oregon politics and society. Please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. (In calculating percentages, the three non-responses are not included.)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided [VOL.]	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel that for the most part Oregon state government is looking out for the people’s best interests	8.8%	60.2%	6.9%	13.7%	10.3%
I feel I can trust Oregon’s elected officials to do the job they are elected to do	6.0%	57.1%	12.3%	14.2%	10.3%

Measures of Trust Among Oregonians, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995-96, 1996-97, and 2000, in Percent



Relationship of Trust and Estimates of Waste in State Spending and Support of Measure 47, in Percent of Those Classified as Low, Medium, and High Trust



Trust levels are related to opinions; for example, in 1996 those less trusting give higher estimates of government waste and also are more likely to support, for example, Measure 47

Concerning political ideology—liberal, moderate, and conservative—in relation to government, conservatives were least trusting of government, moderates somewhat more, and liberals most; estimates of waste and similar judgments of government also vary by ideology. The same differences were found in other survey questions. In the 2000 survey, for example, self-identified conservatives, moderates, and liberals differed on judgments of taxes, beliefs about government spending in Oregon, and many other factors.

Information about state budget and tax issues

Information known by voters is a very important part of the political context, and generally information levels about state taxes and spending are quite low

Three information questions this year (the first two have been asked yearly starting in 1992; the percent answering the two correctly is one of the elements of the Oregon Benchmarks):

1. Largest state government revenue source
2. Largest state government general fund spending category
3. How state and local taxes in Oregon compare to other states

1) Largest source of state government revenue

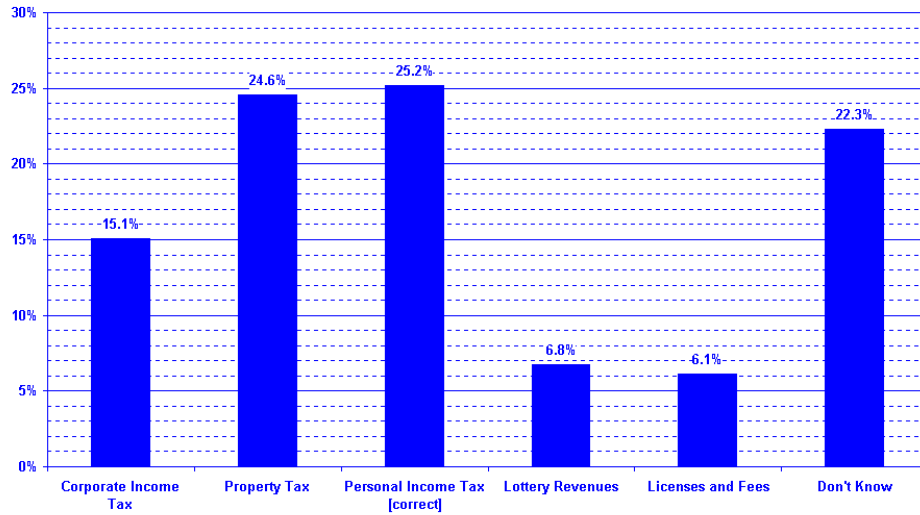
More people are accurate about personal income tax as largest state government revenue source but that percent has fallen from previous surveys, though reasons are not clear

2000 survey: Currently the largest revenue source for the Oregon State government budget is which of these?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Corporate income tax | 15.1% |
| 2. Property taxes | 24.6% |
| 3. Personal income taxes [correct] | 25.2% |
| 4. Lottery Revenues | 6.8% |
| 5. Licenses and fees | 6.1% |
| 6. [Volunteered] Don't know | 22.3% |

Many people—consistently over 20%—believe the property tax is the largest source of state government revenue, even though state government receives no property tax (and an even larger number believe the state receives property tax revenues but that property taxes are not the state's largest revenue source)

Largest Oregon State Revenue Source
(Oregon 2000 Survey, N = 651)



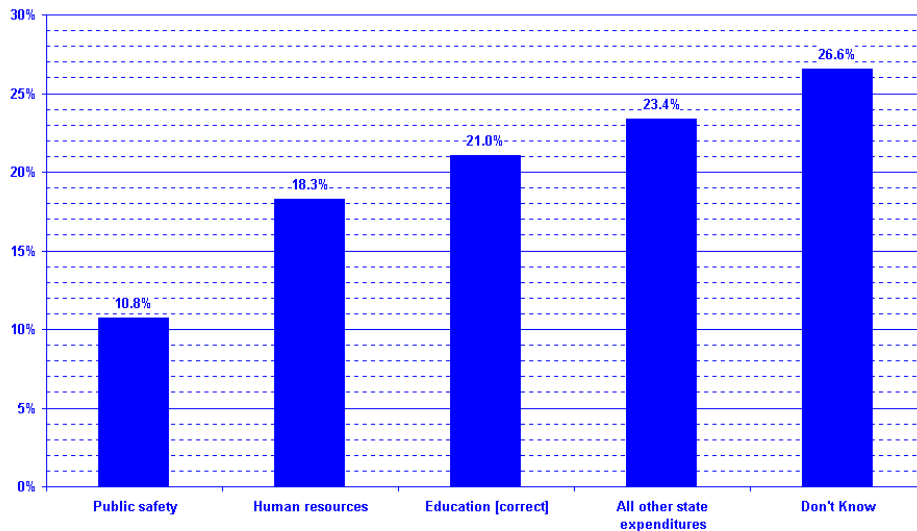
2) Largest state general fund spending category

Most people do not know that education is the largest category of the state government general fund budget. The 2000 survey: Currently the largest state government general fund expenditure goes to which of these?

- 1. Public safety (that is, police, corrections, and similar) 10.8%
- 2. Human resources (that is, welfare, social programs, and similar) 18.3%
- 3. Education [correct] 21.0%
- 4. All other state expenditures (including natural resources, economic development, environmental protection, and others) 23.4%
- 5. [Volunteered] Don't know 26.6%

Largest category response has varied, with largest group believing human resources is largest category in earlier years and "all other state spending" so judged in 2000

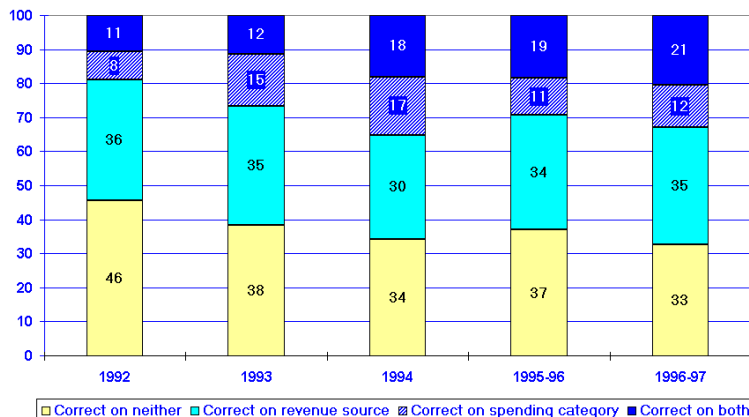
**Largest Oregon State Government Spending Category
(Oregon 2000 Survey, N = 651)**



Knowledge of revenue and spending categories combined

During the period since 1992 slightly more people now know the correct answer to both questions, but that still is only about one Oregonian in five (the percent correct on both is part of the "Oregon Benchmarks"); because of the different sample 2000 data may not be exactly comparable with earlier years

Correct Responses to Largest State Government Revenue and Spending Categories, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995-96, and 1996-97, in Percent



Each survey has included one or more additional information questions—in 2000 that third information question asked about how Oregon state and local taxes compared to other states

3) Oregon's state and local taxes compared to other states

Survey 2000 question: After the effects of Ballot Measure 5 in 1990 and other recent ballot measures, how do you think Oregon's state and local taxes compare to other states?

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Higher than the national average | 40.2% |
| 2. About the national average | 40.2% |
| 3. Lower than the national average [correct] | 8.5% |
| 4. Omitted or [volunteered] Don't know | 11.4% |

Note: In the 1996-97 survey, the question asked where Oregon would rank among the states in taxes as percent of income, the highest ten through the lowest ten

The best estimate is that in relation to state and local taxes as percent of personal income, Oregon ranked 12th in 1990-91, 26th in 1994-95, and 37th in 1995-96, the latest year for which comparative data are available (see material distributed from Legislative Revenue Office in *Basic Tax Packet*, section J.)

In 1996-97, about 7 in 10 Oregonians believed Oregon to be in one of top two categories of taxes as a percent of income, that is the highest 10 or the next 10; about 2/3 of those believed it was in the highest 10 states

Possible reasons for the view of Oregon as a "high tax" state:

- (1) Oregon has only two of the three "legs" of the state and local tax "stool," so one or both are likely to be high compared to other states—people extrapolate from this to the view that in overall taxes Oregon must rank high
In both property taxes and state personal income tax, Oregon historically has been ranked in the top 10 in taxes as percent of personal income—often in or close to the top 5
- (2) Prior to the early 1990's, Oregon was a relatively higher tax state, ranking usually high or mid in the second 10
- (3) *Money* magazine: Ranking Oregon by tax of families making about \$80,000 per year (in the richest fifth of Oregon families), the state ranks higher than many others because of personal income tax
Washington state, on other hand, ranks low in the *Money* survey because with regressive state and local tax structure (especially sales taxes), taxes on that \$80,000 per year family are low compared with other states
- (4) In some other ways, Oregon taxes are high, for example, Citizens for Tax Justice ranking Oregon taxes by percent paid through personal rather than corporate taxes

Whatever the reasons, the view is widespread among Oregonians that Oregon is a high tax state

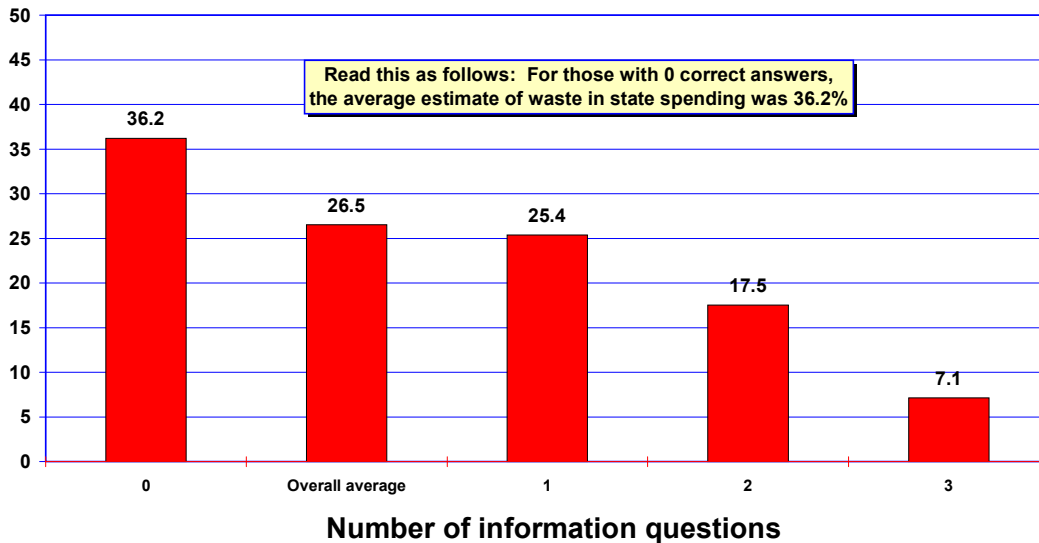
Information (knowledge) is related to opinions and information levels generally are relatively low

Beliefs—in the social science sense of that term—are about elements that are factual, that is, can be shown to be factually correct or incorrect—in this sense, we can say that a person's beliefs about something are wrong, that is, factually incorrect

Many beliefs about taxes and spending may be incorrect, but those beliefs—even if incorrect—are what guide people's views of and actions toward government. For example, people who believe that Oregon is a "high-tax state" are more likely than others to support certain ballot measures. It is not clear that if those individuals receive correct information about Oregon's tax ranking among the states that they will then change their views toward ballot measures, but clearly there is a relationship among beliefs—which may be correct or incorrect—and opinions and voting intentions.

Information and estimates of waste in government spending: Those with lower levels of information provide higher estimates of waste in government spending (this is less pronounced in 2000 than on some earlier years)

1996-97: Estimates of Waste in State Government Spending in Relation to Number of Information Questions Correct (of 3 Possible), in Percent



This has been consistent in all the Oregon Fiscal Choice Surveys, dating back to 1993, that have asked about waste

Estimates of waste are, as noted earlier, related to support of ballot measures

In addition, beliefs about factual items are directly related to support of ballot measures—for example, Measure 47 in 1996, in relation to correct/incorrect responses to information questions, on largest state government revenue source and largest state government spending category. Those giving incorrect responses were more likely to support the Measure.

As these show, beliefs about particular elements may be at least as important as overall knowledge

Knowledge does not appear to be statistically related to ideology (liberal-conservative) or to party identification or to gender or to a number of other demographic factors

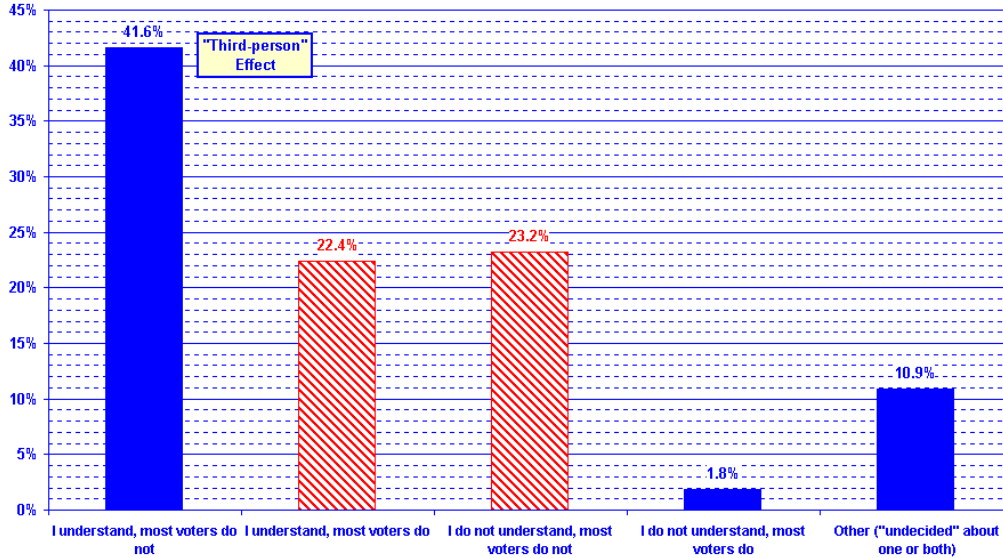
Knowledge is related to education level, which also is related to income

The 2000 survey also asked opinions about ballot measures and the initiative process in Oregon (the fewer than five who did not respond to each item are omitted in showing percentages)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided [VOL.]	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Ballot initiatives enhance the democratic process in Oregon by allowing voters to decide important policy issues.	32.4%	47.0%	4.3%	10.9%	5.4%
There are too many initiatives to vote on in a typical Oregon election.	19.9%	32.7%	7.2%	27.3%	12.9%
I usually understand the intent and policy consequences of ballot initiatives.	23.0%	46.0%	5.4%	18.7%	6.9%
Most voters have little understanding of the initiatives on the ballot.	22.3%	45.9%	6.5%	17.3%	8.0%
The initiative process is an important method to hold Oregon state elected officials accountable.	28.0%	51.8%	5.9%	9.6%	4.8%
The Oregon legislature should decide important policy matters, not the initiative process	10.9%	30.5%	10.0%	30.8%	17.7%
It should be more difficult to place initiatives on the ballot.	12.9%	27.7%	9.9%	34.3%	15.2%
A limit should be placed on how much money groups can spend to support or oppose a ballot measure.	27.8%	39.4%	9.1%	17.4%	6.3%

An interesting combination of opinions occurs in relation to people's judgments of whether they understand ballot measures and whether other people do. The common judgment that they themselves understand but others do not sometimes is referred to as the "third person effect."

Relationship of Views of Self and Others about Knowledge of Initiatives, Oregon 2000 Survey (N = 651)



Opinions about specific ballot measures (at the time of the survey these were likely to qualify for the November ballot but were not yet certain):

We would also like to know your opinion about measures that might appear on the November ballot. As of today, would you vote for or against each of these measures?

Caution: These responses occurred before ballot campaigns began!	For	Against	Not yet decided [Volunteered]	Will not vote [Volunteered]
A measure that might be on the November ballot would amend the Oregon Constitution. It would make federal taxes fully deductible on Oregon personal and corporate income tax returns.	62.3%	24.2%	12.8%	0.8%
A measure that might be on the November ballot would expand the circumstances requiring background checks before transfer of firearms.	70.6%	20.3%	8.6%	0.5%
A measure that might be on the November ballot would amend the Oregon Constitution. It would replace the death penalty by restitution and mandatory life imprisonment without parole.	30.9%	55.1%	13.5%	0.5%

The following cross-tabulation by Brent Steel shows the relationship between support for the income tax measure introduced by Bill Sizemore and various demographic and other variables, as of May and June 2000.

**CROSSTABS INVESTIGATING SUPPORT FOR THE SIZEMORE INCOME TAX INITIATIVE
USING THE OREGON GOVERNMENTAL ISSUES SURVEY--July, 2000**

	Support and Opposition to the Sizemore Income Tax Initiative		
	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>Undecided/DK</i>
STATEWIDE (n=651)	62%	24%	14%
STATE REGION			
Portland Metro	54%	29%	17%
Willamette Valley	60%	24%	16%
Else	76%	17%	6%
GENDER			
Men	66%	22%	12%
Women	59%	26%	15%
AGE COHORT			
18-26 years	53%	23%	24%
27-44 years	60%	25%	15%
45-64 years	71%	20%	8%
65 plus years	58%	29%	13%
EDUCATION			
HS and less	62%	21%	17%
Some College	62%	26%	11%
BA/BS Degree	67%	18%	15%
Grad Degree	52%	35%	13%
ANNUAL INCOME			
\$0-\$25k	68%	23%	9%
\$25k-\$50k	62%	22%	16%
\$50k-\$75k	59%	25%	16%
\$75k plus	61%	24%	15%
PARTISANSHIP			
Democrats	54%	32%	14%
Republicans	66%	21%	13%
Independents	68%	19%	13%
IDEOLOGY			
Liberal	56%	30%	14%
Independent	65%	21%	14%
Conservative	63%	23%	13%

	Support and Opposition to the Sizemore Income Tax Initiative		
	<i>Support</i>	<i>Oppose</i>	<i>Undecided/DK</i>
PERCEIVED LEVEL OF WASTE IN STATE BUDGET			
Low (0%-15%)	57%	29%	14%
Medium (16%-27%)	58%	28%	14%
High (28% plus)	72%	18%	10%
PERCEIVED LEVEL OF TAXATION FOR LARGE CORPORATIONS & BUSINESS			
Too High	78%	12%	10%
About Right	72%	17%	11%
Too Low	56%	33%	11%
Uncertain/DK	51%	11%	38%
PERCEIVED LEVEL OF TAXATION FOR HIGH INCOME FAMILIES (\$75k plus)			
Too High	74%	16%	10%
About Right	62%	24%	14%
Too Low	60%	31%	10%
Uncertain/DK	55%	13%	32%
PERCEIVED LEVEL OF TAXATION FOR MID INCOME FAMILIES (\$25k to \$75k)			
Too High	68%	22%	10%
About Right	60%	27%	13%
Too Low	55%	26%	19%
Uncertain/DK	49%	11%	40%