



## SUMMARY: PUBLIC SERVICES & TAXATION 2013 OREGON VALUES & BELIEFS STUDY

*Project Background: This memo presents summary points related to taxation from the 2013 Oregon Values & Beliefs study. The summary draws from three surveys conducted in April and May 2013. Final sample sizes were 3971 respondents for Survey #1, 1958 for Survey #2, and 1865 for Survey #3. The questionnaires and findings are available at [www.oregonvaluesproject.org](http://www.oregonvaluesproject.org).*

*DHM Research and PolicyInteractive Research designed and conducted the surveys using telephone and online formats to aid accessibility and help obtain a representative sample. Enough interviews were completed in five geographic regions (Central, Eastern, Portland Metro, Southern, and Willamette) to permit statistically reliable analysis at the regional level. The research design used quotas and statistical weighting based on the U.S. Census to ensure representativeness within regions by age, gender, and income. The regions were then weighted proportionally by population per the U.S. Census to yield statewide results.*

*This study stands out from others in that, when asking questions about policy priorities with cost implications, we informed respondents that rating an item as "important" or "desirable" meant willingness to support some increase in taxes or reallocation of funds from other public services. The visual surveys used \$ symbols to emphasize the real-world implications of policy preferences.*

*Another distinctive feature of the study is that focal topics recur across the three surveys in a variety of question forms and contexts. High-quality research uses this "test-retest" or "triangulation" method to improve confidence in response validity.*

*This summary of key findings, observations and conclusions reflects the judgment of the research partners and not necessarily the views of the sponsoring organizations.*

### Findings

1. Oregonians cite **taxes** as the third most important issue they want both their **local and state government officials to do something about** (S1.4-5). Residents also express concern about **government spending or wasteful government spending**, which came in fourth on the list of issues they want their local government to do something about and ninth on the list for state officials to address.
2. In a forced choice question about the number of government-provided services, residents who feel that the **government provides too many services** (55%) outnumber those who would like to see **government services increased** (35%) (S1-30).
3. No issues relating to public services or taxation make the list of top 10 reasons residents think Oregon or their community will be a better place to live in 10 years (S2.2).
4. Meanwhile, **too many taxes/raising taxes** (15%) and **poor government/mismanagement** (15%) are the second and third most popular reasons that



PROJECT SPONSORS



RESEARCH PARTNERS



residents give when asked why Oregon may be a worse place to live in 10 years. Only overpopulation ranks higher at 18% (S2.3).

5. Oregonians are evenly divided over the level of public services provided and the cost to taxpayers (S2.4). Thirty-one percent (31%) believe **we spend about the right amount on public services and taxes should remain the same**; while thirty percent (30%) believe **we spend too much on public services and taxes should be reduced**; and twenty-eight percent (28%) feel that **we don't spend enough on public services and we should increase some taxes**.
6. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Oregonians feel that **a change is needed in Oregon's tax system**, while two in ten (21%) say **no change is needed** and two in ten (16%) are unsure (S2.5).
7. Presented with a list of statements about Oregon's tax system, respondents agree most frequently that **taxes are necessary to pay for the common good** (86%), that **our tax system should be overhauled to be more simple and straightforward** (78%), and that **people who make the most money should pay the most in taxes** (77%) (S2.6-13).
8. Nearly two-thirds of Oregonians (63%) **disagree** with the statement that **our tax system is fair** (S2.11).
9. Asked to choose between two statements, four in ten Oregonians (42%) favor the view that **reducing personal income taxes and capital gains taxes will spark economic growth**, with 16% feeling strongly. On the other side, a similar four in ten (41%) feel that **reducing personal income taxes and capital gains taxes will strangle essential public services and support for those in need**, with 19% feeling strongly (S2.14).
10. Six in ten Oregonians (60%) identify more with the statement that **user taxes for services discourages or prevents widespread participation in after school activities, public parks, libraries, and mobility**, with nearly three in ten (28%) in strong agreement (S2.15). This compares to just two in ten (21%) who feel that **the government should charge fees for public services like after school athletics and access to parks, toll highways, and libraries**, with only six percent (6%) feeling strongly.
11. Nearly half of Oregonians (47%) identify more with the statement that **capital gains taxes which are lower than earned income taxes give unfair advantage to the wealthy**, with nearly three in ten (27%) in strong agreement (S2.16). This compares to just over three in ten (31%) who feel that **low capital gains taxes on investment income stimulates economic development and job creation**, with fourteen percent (14%) in strong agreement.

## **Observations and Conclusions**

Oregonians cite taxation, government spending, and public services levels with relative frequency as reasons why individual communities and the state will be worse in the future as opposed to better.

A majority of Oregonians feel that the tax system is unfair, but they also believe taxes are necessary to pay for the common good. Many feel strongly that the tax system should be overhauled and that the people who make the most money should pay the most in taxes.

Nearly two-thirds of Oregonians feel strongly that user taxes for services like after school activities, public parks, and libraries may be more of a hindrance than a help to broader participation in these activities.

Oregonians are divided when it comes to how much they are willing to pay in taxes for public services, with one third each feeling that we spend the right amount, too much, or not enough on public services.