

2024 Federal Tax Brackets Are Out. Find Out Which Bracket You're In—and Why Tax Rates Are So High

The IRS released [new federal income tax brackets](#) last week. Though marginal tax rates did not change, federal law requires the brackets to be adjusted for inflation, and this is how they shake out.

Marginal rate	Individual income	Married couples filing jointly
10%	\$11,600	\$0-up to \$23,2000
12%	\$11,600 to \$47,150	\$23,2000 to \$94,300
22%	\$47,150 to \$100,525	\$94,300 to \$201,050
24%	\$100,525 to \$191,950	\$201,050 to \$383,900
32%	\$191,950 to \$243,725	\$383,900 to \$487,450
35%	\$243,725 to \$606,350	\$487,450 to \$731,200
37%	over \$606,350	over \$731,200

These brackets look substantially different than they did even a couple years ago because of historic inflation in recent years. Last year, income levels for each bracket increased 7% because of historically high inflation. This year, brackets are rising roughly 5.4%.

The income level changes are designed to avoid “[bracket creep](#)”—a merciful measure Americans can [thank the Reagan administration](#) for passing in 1981.

Even with the adjustments, however, the new brackets reveal the stunning amount of money Americans will fork over to the federal government.

I was recently reading the Bible with my kids, and we encountered the passage in which the Israelites are demanding a king like other nations. The prophet Samuel warns them what will happen if they do, and among the warnings is this.

“He will take the ten-percent tax of your flocks, and you will become his servants,” said Samuel.

Americans are not so lucky.

Ten percent is no small amount, to be sure, but a glance at the chart above shows many American taxpayers are paying way more than 10% of their income to the federal government. An individual making \$50,000 (after deductions) finds himself in the 22% income tax bracket.

From there, the income tax rates only go higher.

This invites an important question: why are so many Americans paying a fifth or a quarter of their income to the federal government? And then there are many other taxes (federal, state, and local) that Americans pay on top of this. The startling truth is that a typical American works roughly [four months a year](#) just to cover their tax bills.

How did this happen? Who said it was okay for lawmakers to pillage our paychecks with impunity? What precisely are we getting in return? And why are we paying all these taxes in the first place?

‘The Great and Chief End’

Few Americans ask themselves such questions. The reality is, most of us pay taxes [so we don't go to prison](#), not because we want to.

Some will argue they pay their taxes because it's their civic responsibility, but what's interesting is what happens when

you ask these very same people to voluntarily pay more taxes than they have to. [They don't!](#)

Others contend taxes have to fund the federal government's various departments and programs. The Pentagon's [budget](#), after all, is \$863 billion. The Treasury Department's is \$1.4 trillion. The Department of Health and Human Services costs \$1.7 trillion. The Department of Agriculture has a \$218 billion budget, and the Department of Education's is just under \$250 billion. [On and on](#) it goes.

The truth is, you'd be hard pressed to find an American who can name every federal agency, and there are fewer still who could actually explain what these agencies do. All of this should prompt us to ask an important question.

What is the purpose of government?

The question is surprisingly easy to answer, at least according to the American tradition, which was heavily influenced by the philosopher [John Locke](#) (1632-1704). Locke argued the role of government in "the social contract" is perfectly clear: it exists to protect life, liberty, and private property.

"...every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his," Locke wrote in the *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. "The great and chief end therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their Property."

In other words, governments exist to secure our individual rights, particularly our property.

The purpose of government is not to "make the world a better place," spread democracy, redistribute wealth, educate children, or provide goods and services.

Some of these things might, of course, be very good. As a father of three, I care very much about sound educational opportunities for children, and I very much want the world to be a better place. But that doesn't mean the government should be involved in these functions.

In the American system, government was designed to be *limited*. This is precisely why the framers of the Constitution spelled out exactly what the federal government was permitted to do, enumerating specific powers to it and stating in the Bill of Rights everything the federal government could *not* do to citizens.

The Law Itself Becomes Guilty

Look at the alphabet soup of federal agencies listed above, and compare it to what the Constitution authorizes the federal government to do.

It's not difficult to see that something has gone awry. The principle of limited government has been effectively abandoned.

The federal government now sees it as its business to become involved in virtually any affairs not explicitly prohibited to it under the Constitution. (And in some cases, [clear prohibitions](#) don't stop it.)

Unshackled from the restraining mechanisms of the Constitution, the government has exploded—in scope and size. The federal government is now nearly [\\$34 trillion in debt](#), a tally that is rapidly snowballing.

How did this happen?

In a stroke of irony, the very institution created to protect our rights—government—has devolved into an institution that is now (by far) the greatest violator of our rights.

It's shocking when you think about it, but it would not have surprised the brilliant French economist Frédéric Bastiat.

"Instead of checking crime, the law itself [becomes] guilty of the evils it is supposed to punish!" Bastiat wrote in *The Law*.

So next time you pay your taxes and you see you jumped up into yet another higher tax bracket because you got a bonus or a raise, you'll understand why you're forking over more money to Uncle Sam.

It stems directly from the perversion of the institution of government.

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