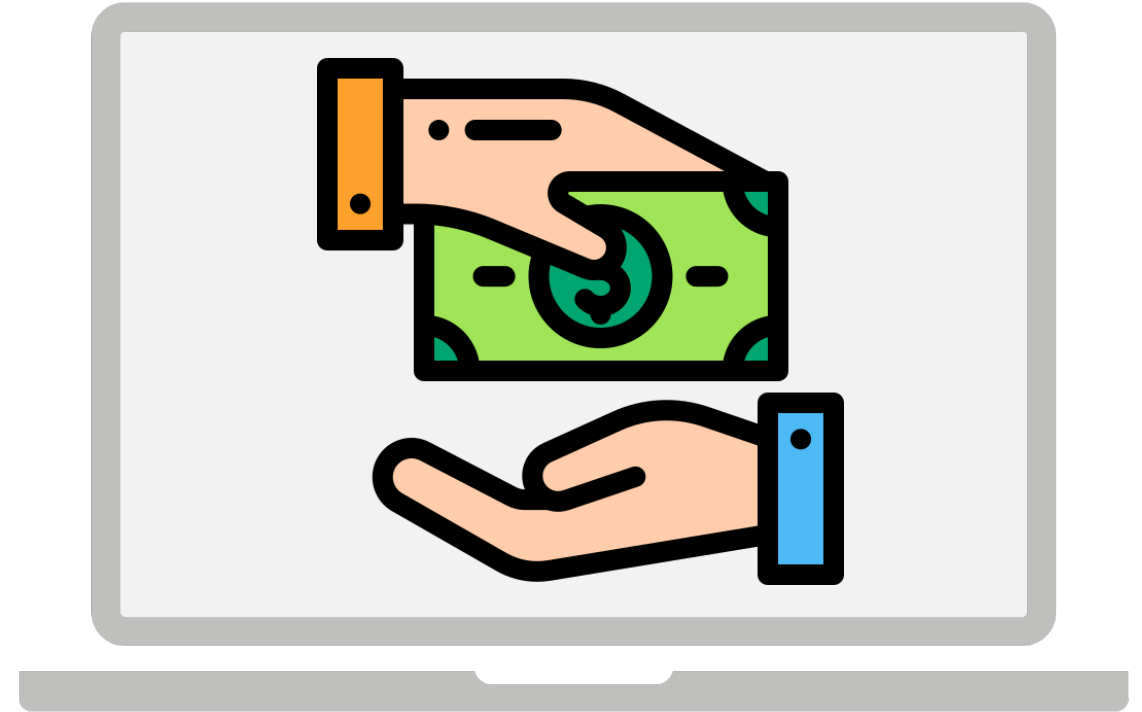


# navigator\*

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

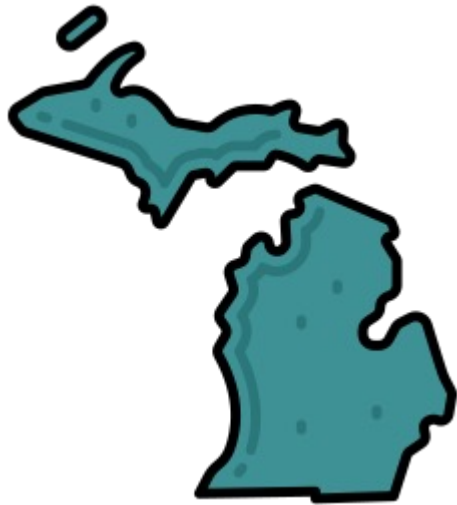
Monday, April 15, 2024

Soft Partisans and Independents on  
the Tax System



# Methodology

On April 4, 2024, GBAO conducted three online focus groups with soft partisans and independents across various demographics – including a mix across education, gender, and income brackets.



Soft partisans with a household income of \$30k-\$50k in Michigan



Soft partisans with a household income of \$100k+ in Virginia



Soft partisans with household income of \$50k-\$100k in Minnesota

# Key Takeaways

- Participants perceive some modest economic improvements.
- Many see corporate special interests holding them back personally.
- The federal tax system is widely seen as unfair, benefiting only those who know how to navigate loopholes.
- The Biden Administration's record on taxes feels virtually unknown to most.
- The Trump tax cuts remembered more fondly initially than when the details are reintroduced.
- Taxes should go toward infrastructure, schools, and social programs, but the perceived reality is different.

# Some Notice Modest Improvements in our Economy

*Moderator: How is the economy doing in the country?*



"I think watching every day and watching the news and watching CNBC, it seems like job growth overall is at record highs and doing well, and the stock markets is at record highs and earnings are doing really- company's earnings are doing really well. **And just things have been growing and growing, growing.**" – VA man, Democrat

"I think the economy is the best thing we have going [in the country]. Job rates are high, and people are spending money. And housing prices are high, which is, I don't know, bad or good or whatever, but it seems to me that people are still buying them." – VA woman, Democrat

"I think [the economy is] a little bit better than it has been in the last six months or so, or a year, where the price of chicken was high, eggs was high, milk was high, so those things have gone down now." – MN woman, Democrat

"Well, the economy, it's been worse than it is now, so it's kind of that, so-so. The job market, everything to me kind of seems to be kind in that so-so, in the middle. Looking back, there's been times that I've known that it's not going as well as it's now, but I don't think it's going stellar right now either." – MN woman, Independent

"Unemployment is down, but I guess in my opinion, the quality of jobs isn't the highest. So maybe there are a lot of jobs, but there aren't a lot of [jobs] many would consider to be good jobs." – MI woman, Democrat



**navigator\***

# Yet Inflation Worries Many, and Housing Costs Continue to Pervade



"So, I started going to college in the early 2000s, and I had a lot of student loan debt, so I kind of wasn't able to buy a house for a long time. And now that I am older, more financially stable, the housing market is kind of way further out of reach than it's ever been." – MI woman, Democrat

"To be honest, I think there's jobs available. Like she said earlier, the unemployment rate is down. Only issue I see now is inflation. Like okay, people have jobs and people are making decent money, but with the price of every single thing going up, it makes it almost kind of hard to make it feel like it's an even keel." – MI woman, Independent lean Republican

"Everything's just crazy. It hasn't really gone down, gas prices at that. At some point it came down for a little bit, but then it went back up. And groceries, just everything, you really have to think about where you're going to spend money." – VA man, Democrat

"And overall, it's true, the economy's doing well overall. I just think that some other fields are still recovering and the housing market, it's getting really inaccessible for a high percentage of the population." – VA woman, Republican

"It's hard to save. It's hard to make any headway here. It's actually kind of depressing to me." – MN man, Independent lean Democrat



**navigator\***

# Most Have Filed Taxes, Making it Particularly Salient

*Moderator: What emotion comes to mind when you think about filing your own federal taxes?*

**"It's just painful to pay.** I don't mind paying the taxes, it's just I know they're not going to do anything beneficial with them." – VA woman, Republican

**"We tried to work a lot this year and tried to make money, but then in the end we ended up owing a lot of taxes.** It's like, how do we win? I don't know. I'm not really sure." – VA woman, Democrat

**"I'm expecting [my taxes] to increase a little bit. It's not a good thing. I said it in a bad tone. I expect it."** – MN woman, Republican

**"Anxiety inducing...** Last year I got \$4,000 back. Today, this year I got \$600 back, and I don't understand why there was such a major discrepancy, but there wasn't a big difference in my income, so it wasn't very clear to me why there was such a large difference in my refund." – MI woman, Democrat

**"It's like anxiety inducing because obviously you don't know if you're going to get money back or you're going to have to owe money.** That's the anxiety part of it. Now, if you always knew you were getting money back, everybody would love doing their taxes." – MI man, Republican



**navigator\***

# There Is a Wide Range of Understanding About How Taxes Work, With Most Seeing Them as Overcomplicated



???



"[The federal tax system is] convoluted. I just did my taxes. I mean, the amount of forms and things that you got to dig out, it could make it a simple tax where it would be easy for people to do." – VA man, Republican

"The tax code is just so antiquated and convoluted and complicated unnecessarily, and it just needs to be simplified... I'm so confused because there's so many forms, and you have no idea what's going on. They're like, deduct this amount from here and use 0.5% of this, and whichever is lesser. It does not need to be that complicated. It could be a lot simpler. So, just simplify the tax code. That would go a long way, I feel like." – VA man, Democrat

"Very divided, a lot of brackets." – VA man, Democrat

"Honestly, [I] don't really understand the depths of [tax brackets]. I just know that if you're in a higher tax bracket, you pay more taxes. You're in a lower [tax bracket], I don't know how it works. To me, it's just words." – MI woman, Independent lean Democrat

"I think the reversal of the Ryan tax plan should be done because that cut the top individual tax rate to like 25%, I think it was, when it used to be 40. And that's again, the top tax rate was moved pretty much down, graduated over a couple of years. So, if everyone would like to look up the Ryan tax plan, I think that should be reversed." – MI woman, Independent

**navigator\***

# The Federal System Is Widely Seen as Unfair, Benefiting The Ultra-Wealthy and Corporations & Burdening the Middle Class

"I think the big corporations and that 1% that they're talking about [don't pay their fair share], just because they pay people that know their way around taxes, and they know what they do unlike the middle class that have to do their own taxes." – VA woman, Republican



"I mean we all have to pay taxes... It does seem like certain groups pay less percentage-wise than others. And it just seems to me that it's uneven the way that the taxes work in terms of how you're paid and what you owe." – VA woman, Democrat

"It seems like the ultra wealthy should be paying a lot more in taxes. It's almost like the middle class is kind of disappearing from this country in the traditional way it used to be." – VA man, Democrat

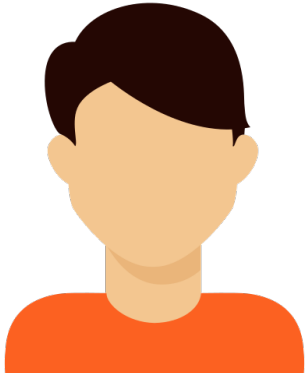
"The tax system is set up to benefit those who make more money... I feel like if you make less money, you end up, percentage-wise, paying more taxes. I just want everyone to pay their fair share. And the government sort of provides all of these different ways for people to get out of paying taxes." – MI woman, Democrat

"I think the middle class and the lower-class people [are being screwed], but primarily the middle-class people because it just seems like a lot of the burden falls on us." – MI man, Independent lean Republican

**navigator\***

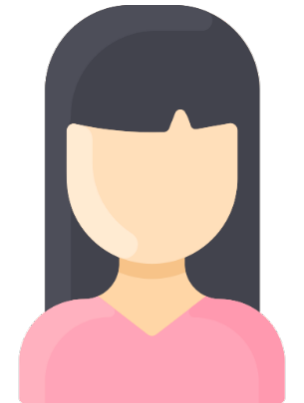


# Across Partisan Lines, Some Lament Corporate Special Influence in Politics



"[There are] definitely different tax brackets for different people, including corporations, the rich and the wealthy. There's definitely people who get tax cuts and breaks for their status and what they do, and just people they know. So, it's definitely like a game, there's no doubt about that."  
– MI man, Republican

[Moderator: What could the government do to improve the economy?] "Reduce corporate influence over politics. So less influence through lobbying and super PACs and money." – MI woman, Independent



**navigator\***

# Many Think Increasing Transparency and Taking Money out of Politics Would Increase Tax Fairness

*Moderator: What could the government do to improve the economy?*

**"I was thinking that [transparency] would help definitely for tax and the taxation process, and also how and where the taxes are used. If that were more transparent."** – MN man, Independent lean Republican

**"I think that taking money out of politics would affect the economy quite a bit. When decisions from the government aren't coming from private corporations via lobbies and things like that, I think that's a huge problem. And I think that if you eliminated that, it would incentivize the politicians to actually make policies that work for the people rather than the corporations that they're kind of getting funded by."** – MI woman, Democrat

**"They just need to work together. I mean, they have to set some goals for this country and work towards them as a team. We're working on opposites and we're not going to get anywhere. We're just going to keep being divisive like this."** – VA man, Republican



**navigator\***

# Few Feel They Know Specifics to the Biden Administration's Approach on Taxes



"I don't think they've touched anything with the [tax plan] that was implemented in the last administration." – MI non-binary, Independent

"I feel like I've heard false promises... like reducing a tax burden on lower socioeconomic classes, **but** I really haven't really seen or noticed any effect or seen any sort of legislation passed to reduce tax burdens." – MI man, Independent lean Democrat

"I haven't heard of, nor have I looked into anything... **because** I haven't heard anything or nothing's come across me, I would have to defer to the fact they haven't made any changes in this new administration and just have left to things how the former administration left them." – MI woman, Democrat

"He wants to tax your wealth and not just your income." – VA man, Republican

"I don't know all the details, but I think the plan is Biden wants to increase, again, increase taxes on billionaires and the ultra wealthy and raise the tax rate for them. And then he claims that anyone earning up to \$400,000 a year won't pay any more in taxes." – VA man, Democrat

"I heard they want to impose a **15% minimum on corporate tax** on publicly traded companies." – MN woman, Republican

**navigator\***

# Although With More Information, CTC Expansion and Taxing the Wealthy Ring a Few Bells; Questions on Specifics Remain

"I have heard of [child tax credits] just like the other one, but I also think there's a downside to it because obviously people take advantage of that stuff and use it for the wrong way. But I think it is a step in the right direction. **But I haven't really seen it in action. It hasn't really affected me in any way, but it could affect others.** So, if it is helping others in a way, yeah, it's a good thing." – MI man, Republican



[Twenty-five percent tax on billionaires' wealth and cracking down on tax evasion] "Yeah, I've heard it... Well, I think if people are cheating with the current tax law, then they need to be held responsible and they need to pay the money that they're owed with the current rules and regulations as they are." – MI man, Independent lean Republican

"I actually have heard [of the child tax credit], and I think it is investing in our future to support something like this. It does seem like a positive proposal. But again, how do we pay for it considering the debt that we're in as a country?" – VA woman, Democrat

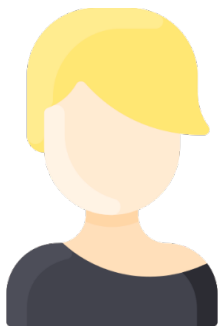
**navigator\***

# There Is Some Awareness Of the Trump Tax Cuts, and Many Say They Paid Less Under Trump

"I just remember he gave us a plan with a tax break. I was getting more money in my paycheck." – VA man, Independent lean Republican

"He cut corporate taxes, brought more business back into the country." – VA man, Republican

"I think things were a lot cheaper when he was in office. So maybe in my personal opinion, him doing that, was able to keep costs down on the cost of goods and everything because corporations were able to pay less taxes, which means they could lower the cost of goods because they're not losing as much money in their pockets." – MI man, Republican



"It benefited everybody. People were like, 'Oh, it only helps the 1%.' And I said, they don't need any more help. They have all the lawyers and accounts they want in the world to avoid paying taxes." – MN man, Independent

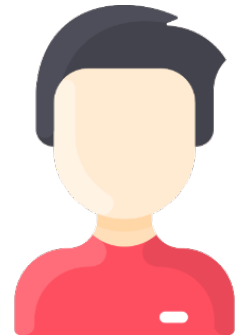
"I remember I [paid] less tax. I get more tax return when he was around." – MN woman, Republican

**navigator\***

# When Given Information About Trump's Tax Cuts, Some Feel It Leaves Out the Middle Class and Seems Self-Interested

[Moderator: Tax cut signed into law could lead to average increased wages of \$750 per year, per worker.] "It's 20 bucks a month. That's nothing. That's chump change." – MN man, Independent

"I think it's a good thing to tax billion-dollar corporations who aren't paying any amount of money right now because they're benefiting from operating and selling goods or services in this country, and we're all paying for those things, and they're ending up not paying any taxes and then all their executives are making multimillion dollar salaries, so they can afford to pay more taxes, I believe." – VA man, Democrat



"He's a businessman, so I think he's going to work toward trying to cut the tax because he doesn't want to pay his fair share of how much he's bringing in." – MI woman, Democrat



"Like, okay, he didn't pay his own taxes. He's put these laws into place, but I think he did it because of this. I think he did it because of that. The reality is he did it to benefit himself and those of his counterparts, and he's continuing to do it." – MI woman, Independent lean Republican

**navigator\***

# “Patriotic” Is a Stretch To Describe Paying Taxes, But “Civic Duty” and “Necessary” Resonate

Moderator: How well do the following words describe how you think about your federal taxes?

## Patriotic

“It makes me sad that people don't think it's your civic duty or your patriotic duty, or it makes me think that we need some civics education. I mean, if everybody doesn't know what their taxes are going for, that's a problem.” – VA woman, Independent lean Democrat

“Doesn't mean anything to me tax-related.” – MN woman, Democrat

## Civic Duty

“Theoretically, but it's just motions and checking off a to-do list kind of thing.” – MN woman, Republican

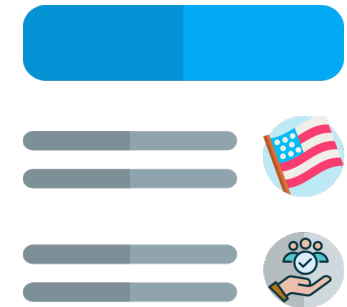
“I would agree with [civic duty].” - MI man, Republican

“I don't know. I only think of serving as a jury as a civic duty. This just feels like a chore that you have to get done.” – VA man, Democrat

## Necessary

“Yeah, absolutely necessary.” – VA man, Democrat

“It's not the most positive word, but I feel again like yeah, it is necessary. I have to do it. So, it's just part of life.” – MN Woman, Democrat



**navigator\***

# Taxes Should Go To Infrastructure, Schools, Social Programs, But Few See That as the Reality

*Moderator: What's the most important thing you want your tax dollars go toward?*

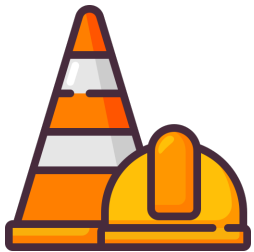
"The people that fall through the cracks. The people that genuinely can't work for whatever reason, or people that I believe in giving people, I want to say a hand up and not a handout, but there are people that genuinely need help, and I want my tax dollars to help them." – MI man, Independent lean Republican

"Just things that benefit the general population or even infrastructure. Things that improve the way that you live instead of like has been mentioned, spending so much on military and things like that." – MI woman, Democrat



"Honestly, addressing climate change." – MI woman, Independent lean Republican

"I would say education... Maybe just investing some taxes into ways to evolve school programs a little bit more." – MN man, Independent lean Republican



"I would say infrastructure. I like it when I can physically see taxpayer money being spent. For example, when I see the roads being fixed." – VA man, Independent lean Republican

"Medicare, Social Security, education." – VA woman, Republican

**navigator\***



# Many Lament Spending On Foreign Engagements, With Some Overestimating the Size Our Commitments

“Just don't understand how we have so much wealth and so much money in this country, but we can't fix the problems here and we send so much money overseas. Every time there's a new bill, there's an \$80 billion package for Ukraine or \$50 billion for Israel or send money to Haiti or something. But we don't focus on our own people...” – VA man, Democrat



“I think reducing government spending, especially abroad, where it would allow us to focus more at home and bring our tax rates down, which would put more money in my pocket.” – MI man, Independent lean Republican

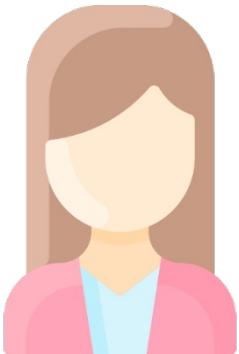
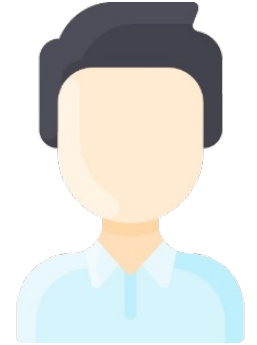
“Start focusing on what's going on at home first. And let me be clear, I have no problem with the U.S investing and helping in other countries. I think it's one of the greatest things about this country is we help others out... but when it comes to the end of the day, we need to take care of the people that are at home first.” – MI man, Republican

“I know people from the Ukraine, I understand our support for them, and I don't waver from that, but it's like that's Europe's issue. Europe needs to take care of that.” – MN man, Independent

**navigator\***

# High Earners Say They Feel Particularly Fortunate

"I live in the Washington DC area and I work for the federal government, so there's a bias there. So, I'm doing okay and we're not in any risk of losing our jobs for the most part...There's a lot of wealth on the outskirts of DC, a lot of spending. And it might be naive on my part because I'm looking at it only from this area, but I do travel a lot and I go to other parts of the country and so I see the disparity depending where geographically you go in the country." – VA man, Democrat



"At least in the area that I am, I can see that it's safe. The roads are good. There's jobs... To live in the DMV area, we pay a lot. And overall, it's a really good area to live." – VA woman, Republican

**navigator\***

# navigator\*

## About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

## About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups April 4, 2024 with soft partisans and independents in various income brackets in three states– MI, VA, MN . Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

For Press inquiries contact:

[press@navigatorresearch.org](mailto:press@navigatorresearch.org)

To learn more about  
Navigator:

<http://navigatorresearch.org>

@NavigatorSurvey on Twitter

navigator\*