Better Taxes for a Better America

How Voters Connect Taxes and Democracy

Findings from a Better Taxes commissioned national survey of 2,610 registered voters · Hart Research Associates, May 2026

Recently, there has been an enormous amount of well-deserved attention on the state of American democracy itself. The rise of authoritarianism combined with the well-documented decline in public trust of government has provoked real concern that Americans are losing faith in the idea of democratic self-governance. And while we are certain that the causes of - and solutions to - these troubling trends are many and complicated, we here at **Better Taxes for a Better America** were interested in exploring the relationship between tax policy and American voters' perceptions of the effectiveness, fairness, and utility of democratic self-governance.

We commissioned Hart Research Associates to conduct a study exploring the relationship between American voters' perceptions of our democracy and our tax system, to see if there were any connections. From May 6 to 11, 2026, Hart surveyed 2,610 registered voters nationally, matched to the voter file, probing how Americans think about democracy, about taxes, and about the relationship between the two.

Key Takeaways

1. Efforts to strengthen and solidify American democracy will be much more effective if they target one of the **core underlying frustrations that most people have with the current system: namely that it has been captured by the wealthy,** and it only works for the rich and corporations.

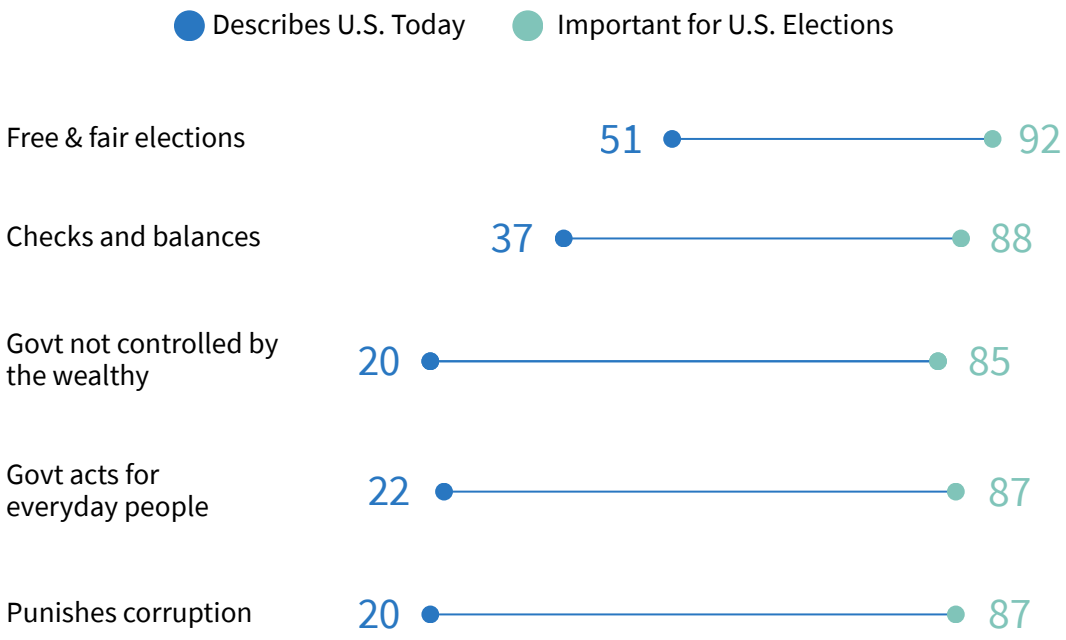
2. The public sees a skewed tax code in which the wealthy and corporations do not pay as much as they "should" as both **evidence of, and the result of, a broken system** of democratic self-governance.

3. Raising taxes on the rich and corporations is a **concrete, tangible way to demonstrate to the American public that democratic governance can deliver for the American people,** and it would improve the public's faith in democracy

Key Findings

The American public is extremely frustrated with the state of our democracy and has lost faith that our political system can solve the problems of ordinary Americans. But it's not a general frustration with democracy itself, instead it stems from the sense that our current system has been captured by the wealthy and corporations and therefore only delivers for them.

Biggest voter frustration with democracy is the perceived capture of the system by the rich

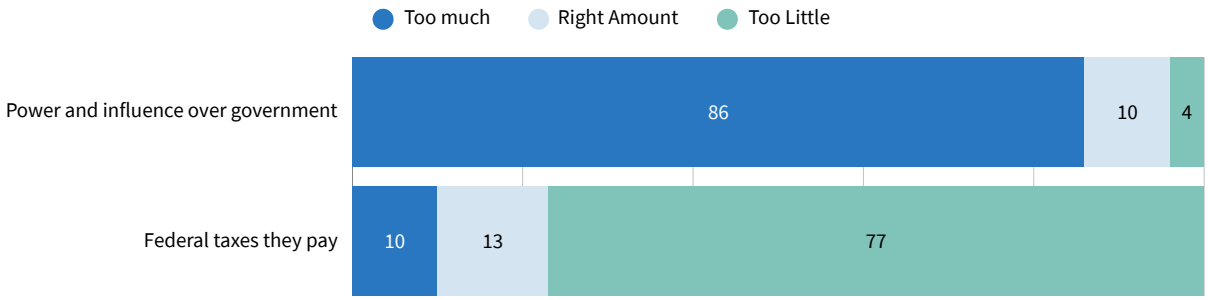


A majority of voters (62%) say our democracy is not working well for people like them and have little or no confidence that it can solve the country's most important problems. That frustration is broad and bipartisan. But this is not a public that has given up on democracy itself. 80% say it is extremely or very important that the United States remain a democracy, a conviction that holds across party, age, race, and income. Instead, voters believe that our system has been captured by the wealthy and corporations. Fully 86% say the wealthy have too much power and influence over our government, and only about one in five think the system works in the interest of average people rather than the wealthy.

The perception of a broken tax code in which the rich pay too little is deeply tied to the perception that democracy is not working. The public views the skewed tax system as a concrete example and proof of the failings of our current system of governance.

Voters see the same imbalance in the tax code that they see in our democracy. Three in four (75%) say our tax system is unfair, and the specifics mirror almost exactly what voters said about power: 77% say the wealthy pay too little and 78% say large corporations pay too little. It is the same tilt they described in our political system, where the wealthy and corporations have too much and the average citizen too little, now showing up in who pays taxes and who doesn't. To voters, the tax code is where the capture of our democracy becomes something concrete they can point to. **A full 60% say the U.S. tax system is an example of democracy not working well, against just 14% who call it an example of democracy working well.** This is not a connection that has to be drawn for them; they make it themselves. 81% of voters say that a tax system in which the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share is important to a strong and healthy democracy, similar to the share of voters who say the same about checks and balances and the rule of law.

The wealthy: too much power, too little tax



The public would view a successful effort to raise taxes on the rich and corporations as a positive step towards strengthening democracy and making sure it works for everyday people. Indeed, raising taxes on the rich is on par with other, more traditionally "pro-democracy" reforms like banning gerrymandering or limiting big money in politics.

More than 85% of voters favor raising taxes on the wealthy and on large corporations. That makes raising taxes on the rich roughly as popular as term limits and limiting big money in politics. And voters say a successful effort to raise taxes on the top would genuinely restore some faith. 76% say a headline announcing "major tax reform signed into law that will increase taxes on the wealthiest Americans and large corporations" would make them more confident our democracy is working (46% much more confident), once again on par with term limits and a ban on unlimited election spending in its power to rebuild confidence. The flip side is a warning. If Congress fails to act, voters will not read it as ordinary gridlock: the single biggest reason they expect for inaction is that the system is rigged in favor of the wealthy (43%, and 69% place it in their top two), confirming the very frustration that drives their discontent in the first place.

76%

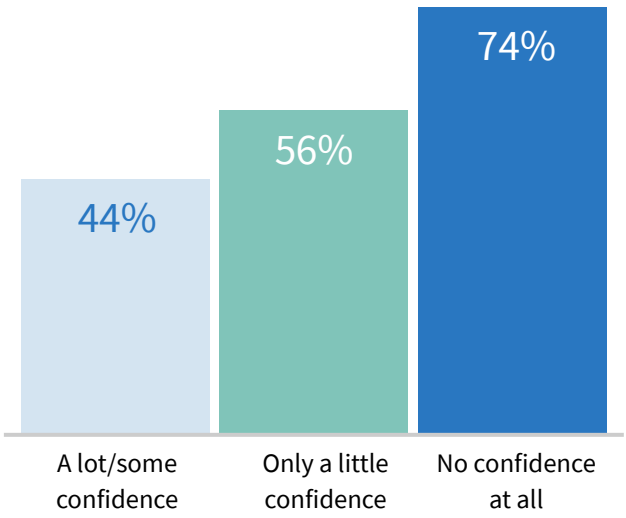
of voters say this headline would make them more confident in our democracy

The voters who are most frustrated with our democracy are also the most likely to trace that frustration to the tax system, and to see taxing the wealthy as central to fixing it.

This connection is strongest precisely where faith in democracy is weakest. The more confidence a voter has lost, the more directly they tie that loss to the tax code. Among the 62% with little or no confidence that our democracy can solve the country's problems, 69% say the tax system is an example of democracy not working, compared with just 46% of voters who retain a lot or some confidence. They also read inaction as confirmation of their skepticism: asked why Congress might fail to raise taxes on the wealthy, half of the most disillusioned say it is because the system is rigged in favor of the wealthy, against only 32% of more voters who are more confident in democracy. And they are the likeliest to see a fairer tax code as part of the cure, with 84% rating a tax system in which the wealthy pay their fair share as important to a strong democracy. The voters most alienated from our democracy are not looking past the tax issue; they see it most clearly as both the symptom and the remedy.

The more frustrated voters are with democracy, the more they see taxes as essential to it

Percent rating fair taxes a 10/10 in importance to a strong democracy



Confidence in our democracy today

Better Taxes for a Better America

Voters are very open to messaging that explicitly connects fair taxes and democracy. They understand it and find it persuasive.

When the link between fair taxes and a stronger democracy is stated outright, voters embrace it. Every explicit connection statement we tested drew broad agreement, and the strongest carried the highest intensity of any statement in the survey: 87% agreed, and 58% agreed strongly, that **"wealthy individuals and corporations have gained too much control over our government and political system, and increasing their taxes is an important step toward reducing their power and influence."**

To be sure, this is not a magic bullet that displaces the traditional case for taxing the wealthy. When voters weigh the reasons to raise taxes, the most familiar arguments still lead, namely making sure the government has the resources to fund priorities like healthcare (66% very important) and that the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share so the burden does not fall on average people (64%, and the single most important reason for 31% of voters). But the democratic rationale does not trail far behind, and that is the surprise: 61% call it very important to raise taxes so that average citizens can see that even the most powerful individuals and corporations are held accountable, putting it essentially even with the revenue arguments.

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