

WHERE THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES STAND ON TAX POLICY: METHODOLOGY

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“Where the 2020 Presidential Candidates Stand on Tax Policy” is a comprehensive guide to both large and small tax proposals made by the candidates since they announced they are running for president. The Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center (TPC) will prepare more detailed analyses of some candidates’ tax plans. As we release analyses of those candidates’ plans, we will add the revenue estimates and distributional analyses (and links to the full reports) to this guide.

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE CANDIDATES’ TAX PROPOSALS

Identifying the candidates’ tax plans is challenging because their campaign websites typically do not display a full list of tax proposals in one place. Instead, the candidates’ tax proposals are embedded in descriptions of broad policy areas, such as the environment or health care. Often, one tax proposal may feature in the descriptions of several policy areas.

For information on the candidates’ positions, we rely on

- the candidates’ websites, which sometimes direct the reader to position papers or articles on other platforms, such as Medium;
- transcripts or videos of candidate debates; and
- interviews with the candidates.

For each proposal, we provide a link to the source material.

We do not include proposals that the candidate does not personally express support for. Comments by campaign staff members or outside advisers are not considered expressions of a candidate’s positions.

Some of the candidates currently serve in Congress and have introduced or cosponsored bills that affect tax policy. However, we generally will not include the policies contained in those bills unless candidates reaffirm support for that legislation during their campaigns.

Campaigns are dynamic processes, and the candidates’ positions evolve over the course of their campaigns. Some proposals are added or dropped, and some previously announced proposals are refined. We endeavor to monitor the candidates’ announcements about new or refined tax proposals and update the guide regularly. Sometimes, we will cite a proposal that has been announced by a candidate and reported by more than one media source but that has not yet been incorporated into his or her campaign website. However, not all proposals receive media coverage when they are announced, so we may unintentionally omit some proposals from the guide. We welcome updates from campaign staff on the details of their candidate’s tax plans.

REVENUE ESTIMATES AND DISTRIBUTIONAL INFORMATION

Throughout the primaries and general election, TPC will periodically issue reports further analyzing a candidate's tax plan and including estimates of the plan's revenue and distributional effects. When we release a report, we will update the overview of this guide to include the effects of the candidate's plan on the budget and on after-tax income and the size of the tax cut among households of different incomes.

Given the number of presidential candidates and our limited staff time, we are unable to produce a quantitative analysis of every candidate's proposals. We use a few criteria to determine whose plans to analyze:

- Has the campaign provided sufficient detail?
- Can we accurately model the proposal?
- Does the proposal provide an opportunity to discuss an important or novel concept?
- Is the candidate or the proposal significantly influencing tax policy debates?

If a plan satisfies those criteria, we may ask a campaign for additional information to help us flesh out and analyze the plan. Where we do not get the detail we need, we have to fill in the blanks with some assumptions. We will make any assumptions clear in our reports and may discuss how alternative assumptions would affect our estimates. We will revise our assumptions when campaigns supply us with additional information.

Once we have enough information, we run the proposals through our microsimulation tax model, a tool we have been using and refining for more than a decade. The model uses data from the Internal Revenue Service and many other sources. It produces revenue estimates as well as a wealth of information on how tax changes affect households of different incomes.

More information on how TPC produces revenue estimates and distributional analyses can be found on our [website](#).

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