

State Sales and Income Taxes: An Economic Analysis (Texas A&M University Economics Series)

George R. Zodrow

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As state governments grapple with increased revenue needs or demands for state tax reform, they typically must choose between relying on an income tax system or utilizing a sales tax, perhaps in conjunction with a corporate franchise tax. Choosing between these two tax options is often a contentious process, and many arguments can arise in the debates surrounding this issue.

In this study of small, open economic systems, George R. Zodrow addresses the relative advantages and disadvantages of state sales and income taxes from an economic perspective. He evaluates the two options in terms of the criteria commonly used in the public finance literature, including economic efficiency, fairness, administrative simplicity, and tax exportability. Zodrow's study emphasizes how the comparison of state sales and income taxes is critically affected by the details of the alternative tax structures being considered, as well as by the nature of the interactions between the economy of a state and the rest of the nation and world, and by the interactions between the state and federal tax systems in the United States. He also considers briefly two alternatives to state sales and income taxes—increased utilization of user charges and the adoption of a state tax based on mildly progressive taxation of individual consumption rather than income.

In the chapter, Zodrow applies his analysis to the current Texas tax system as well as proposals for the introduction of a state income tax. This provocative case study will serve as an informative contribution to the continuing public policy debate over the state tax structure.



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