

# JUST THE FACTS:

## PROPERTY TAXES IN TEXAS' MOST POPULOUS CITIES, COUNTIES, AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

### 3RD EDITION



by James Quintero and John Bonura

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**Texas Public Policy**  
Foundation

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# Just the Facts:

## Property Taxes in Texas' Most Populous Cities, Counties, and School Districts, 3rd Edition

James Quintero and John Bonura

### Introduction

Texas' property tax is unique in many ways.

To begin, it is effectuated at the local level. This means that local government officials are the ones who “set tax rates and collect property taxes that are used to provide local services including schools, streets, roads, police, fire protection, and many other services” ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2022a, p. 1](#)). As this is the case, local decision-makers are most responsible for the bulk of a community's property tax burden—or lack thereof.

Next, it is large. In fact, the property tax is “the largest tax assessed in Texas” ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2022b, p. 5](#)). For context, **Table 1** reveals that property tax levies totaled \$79.4 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2022 ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, n.d.](#)). By comparison, the state's sales tax, which is the next biggest tax revenue source, generated only \$38.6 billion during the same period, while all state tax collections amounted to \$67.4 billion ([Legislative Budget Board, 2022a, p. 32](#)).

Third, it is ubiquitous. In FY 2022, the number of taxing units levying a property tax totaled 4,532 ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, n.d.](#)). Per **Table 1**, the most numerous types were special purpose districts (+2,188) followed by municipalities (+1,086), school districts (+1,004), and counties (+254). In FY 2013, the number of property taxing units was modestly lower at 4,096 or approximately 450 fewer governmental entities ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2014, p. 7](#)).

Fourth, it is complex. The rules, requirements, and procedures surrounding Texas' property tax system can be quite confusing, oftentimes requiring a layman to seek help through consultants, accountants, advocates, and attorneys. The challenging nature of the system can be even more daunting for recent arrivals and first-time property owners who have never had to learn the lingo nor been forced to grapple with the appraisal process.

Fifth, and perhaps most commonly understood, it is on the rise. In FY 2013, local governments levied property taxes totaling \$45.3 billion ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2014, p. 1](#)). By FY 2022, the burden on homeowners and businesses had grown to \$79.4 billion, which represents a 75.5% increase over that 10-year timeframe. In contrast, population and inflation (P&I) increased only 39% over the same period.<sup>1</sup> The dramatic difference between these two values indicates a significant break between how fast property taxes *are* growing and how fast property taxes *ought to be* growing.

### Key Points

- Property taxes are growing faster than necessary in many parts of Texas.
- From 2018 to 2022, property taxes outstripped population and inflation in a majority of Texas' most populous cities, counties, and school districts.
- The delta between property tax levy growth versus population and inflation signals the need for structural tax reform and fiscal discipline.
- An informed electorate is critical to achieving both reform and restraint. total \$31.5 billion, or \$31,215 per student.

<sup>1</sup> From 2013 to 2022, Texas' population increased from 26,480,266 ([U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a](#)) to 30,029,572 ([U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b](#)), which equates to a 13.4% growth rate. Over the same period, the annual average in the consumer price index rose from 232.957 to 292.655, representing a 25.6% increase ([Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.](#)).

Thus far, we have considered macro trends related to the property tax to get a sense of its attributes. However, it is also worthwhile to examine the tax as it exists within specific communities. Hence, this report analyzes property tax levy growth in Texas' most populous cities, counties, and school districts to assess the fiscal trends in those jurisdictions. The 30 separate taxing units analyzed govern well over half of Texas' population, providing useful context for all taxpayers as they consider their own tax bills and engage with their state and local elected officials during the legislative session, the tax rate-setting process, the budget adoption period, and any other time taxes come up in conversation.

The data are largely presented without commentary so that you—the reader—can see *just the facts!*

**Table 1**

*Property Taxes in Texas by Taxing Unit Type*

Taxing Unit by Type	2021			2022			% Growth of Tax Levy 2021–2022
	# of Taxing Units	Tax Levy	% of Levy	# of Taxing Units	Tax Levy	% of Levy	
School Districts	1,005	\$38,946,142,784	53%	1,004	\$43,949,069,983	55.3%	12.85%
Cities	1,084	\$12,495,941,116	17%	1,086	\$13,634,471,866	17.2%	9.11%
Counties	254	\$11,709,379,301	15.9%	254	\$12,797,292,176	16.1%	9.29%
Special Districts	2,085	\$10,400,964,537	14.1%	2,188	\$9,058,729,927	11.4%	-12.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,428</b>	<b>\$73,552,427,738</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4,532</b>	<b>\$79,439,563,952</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8%</b>

Note. Data from *Biennial Property Tax Report: Tax Years 2020 and 2021*, by Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2022, p. 6 (<https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/property-tax/docs/96-1728.pdf>) and authors' calculations from *Texas Rates and Levies*, Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, n.d. (<https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/property-tax/rates/index.php>). Figures may not add due to rounding.

## Most Populous Cities

Property tax levy growth is outpacing P&I increases in many of Texas' largest cities. This widespread discrepancy suggests that most municipalities reviewed are overburdening their taxpayers, which ought to motivate these officials to scrutinize their budget and operations for opportunities to streamline, consolidate, and eliminate. To be fair, the data also indicate that at least a few cities have shown some measure of restraint. However, temperate municipalities constitute a minority of the sample.

From 2018 to 2022, 7 of the top 10 most populous cities levied property taxes in excess of P&I, with the most egregious instance of over-taxation occurring in the city of Austin (+33.7%). The other six cities with a burden-positive difference ranged from a low of 10.2% in San Antonio to a high of 19.7% in Dallas. Three municipalities held levy growth below P&I. Those entities included Houston (-1.9%), Lubbock (-3.1%), and Plano (-5.9%).

As shown in **Table 1**, property taxes levied by *all* municipal governments comprised 17.2% of the total tax levy in 2022.

**Table 2**

*Municipal Levy Growth Versus P&I*

Tracking Trends: Large Cities, 2018 – 2022			
	Property tax	Population & Inflation (P&I)	Diff.
Houston	13.9%	15.8%	-1.9%
San Antonio	23%	12.8%	10.2%
Dallas	33.1%	13.4%	19.7%
Austin	51.4%	17.7%	33.7%
Fort Worth	34.4%	23.6%	10.8%
El Paso	29%	16.1%	12.9%
Arlington	30%	15.6%	14.4%
Corpus Christi	29.2%	13.4%	15.8%
Plano	10.9%	16.8%	-5.9%
Lubbock	16.3%	19.4%	-3.1%

Figures may not add due to rounding.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Tax rates are a key determinant of one's property tax liability. Rates are adopted annually by local elected officials in each taxing unit who vote to set them by ordinance, resolution, or order. To adopt a tax rate that exceeds the no-new-revenue tax rate, a supermajority on governing body must vote in the affirmative ([SB 1760, 2015, p. 3](#)).

Of the top 10 largest cities, the city of El Paso's FY 2022 tax rate ranked as the highest, at \$0.862398 per \$100 of value. That was followed by the cities of Dallas (\$0.7458 per \$100), Fort Worth (\$0.7125 per \$100), and Corpus Christi (\$0.620261 per \$100). The city with the lowest adopted tax rate was Plano, at \$0.4176 ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, n.d.](#)).

### City of Houston

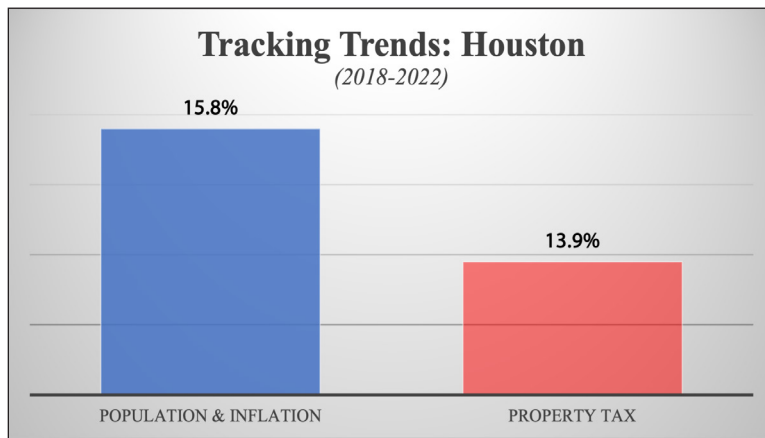
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Houston’s property tax levy increased from \$1.37 billion to \$1.56 billion, representing a growth of 13.9% ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, n.d.](#)).

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population shrank from 2,318,573 to 2,302,878, equating to a 0.7% decrease ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a](#); [U.S. Census Bureau, 2023b](#)).

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation, as determined by the Consumer Price Index (U.S. city average, All items), climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.](#)).

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 15.8%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Houston rose *more slowly than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of San Antonio

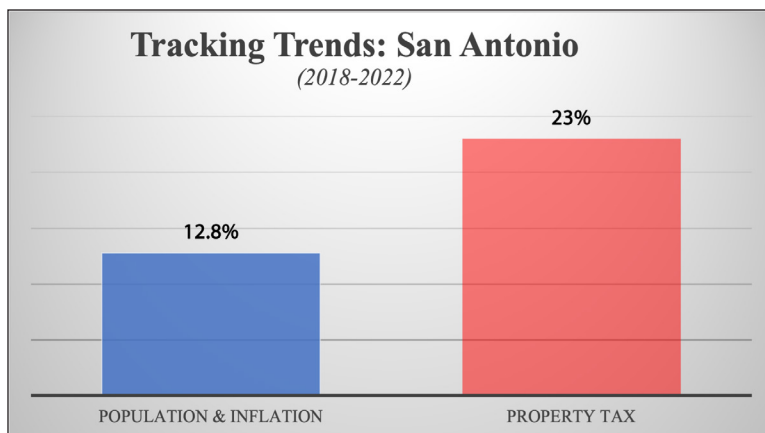
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of San Antonio’s property tax levy increased from \$640.1 million to \$787 million, representing a growth of 23%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population shrank from 1,530,016 to 1,472,909, equating to a decrease of 3.7%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 12.8%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of San Antonio rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of Dallas

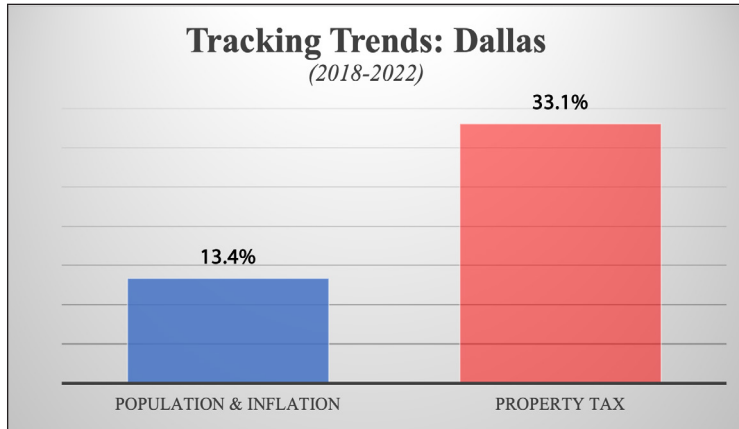
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Dallas' property tax levy increased from \$1 billion to \$1.35 billion, representing a growth of 33.1%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city's population shrank from 1,341,802 to 1,299,544, equating to a decrease of 3.1%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 13.4%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Dallas rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of Austin

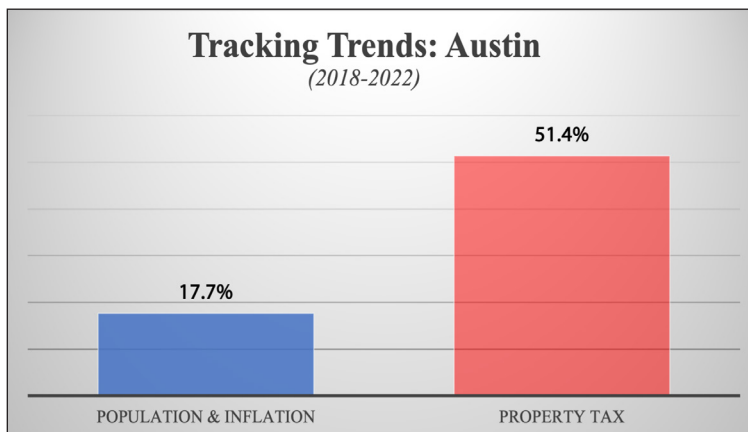
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Austin's property tax levy increased from \$674.6 million to \$1.02 billion, representing a growth of 51.4%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city's population grew from 962,469 to 974,447, equating to an increase of 1.2%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 17.7%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Austin rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of Fort Worth

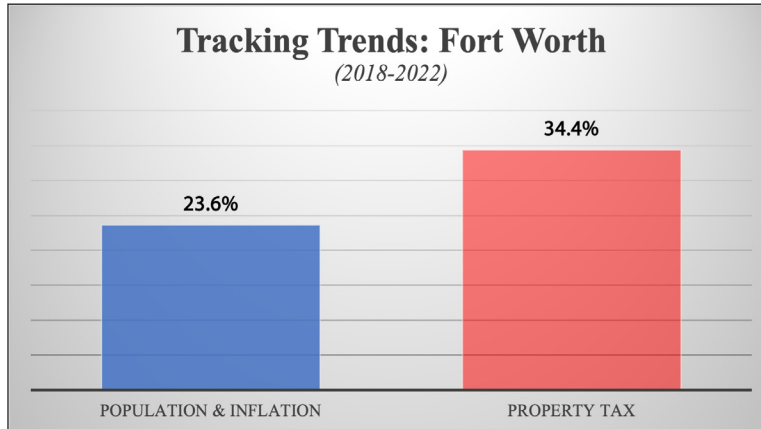
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Fort Worth’s property tax levy increased from \$541.2 million to \$727.4 million, representing a growth of 34.4%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population grew from 893,216 to 956,709, equating to an increase of 7.1%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 23.6%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Fort Worth rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of El Paso

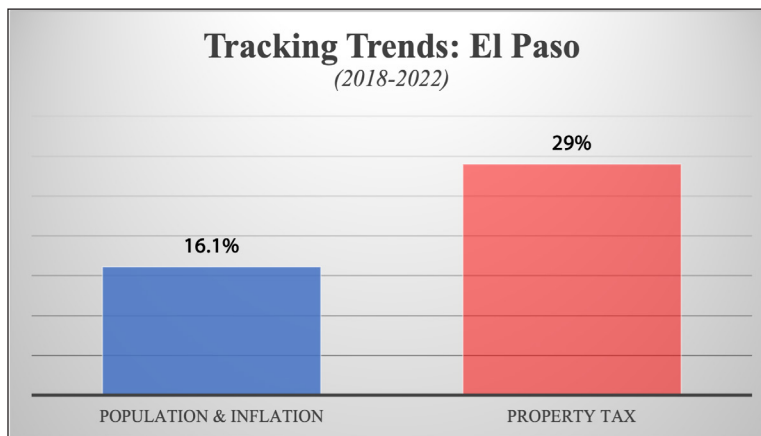
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of El Paso’s property tax levy increased from \$301.1 million to \$388.4 million, representing a growth of 29%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population shrank from 679,875 to 677,456, equating to a decrease of 0.4%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 16.1%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of El Paso rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.





### City of Arlington

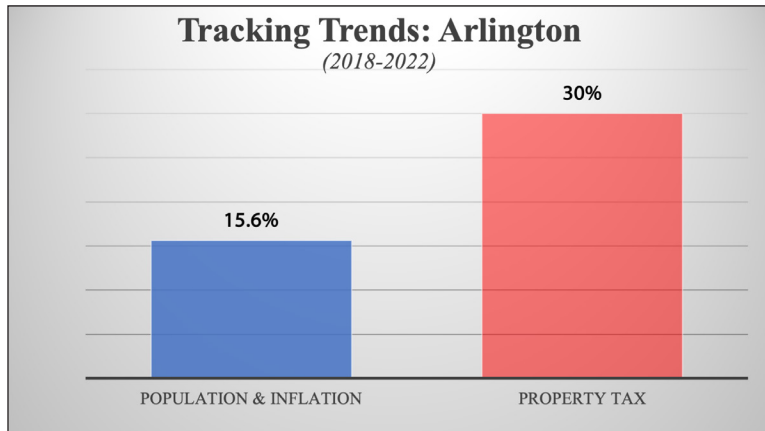
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Arlington’s property tax levy increased from \$166.4 million to \$216.3 million, representing a growth of 30%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population shrank from 398,123 to 394,602, equating to a decrease of 0.9%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 15.6%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Arlington rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of Corpus Christi

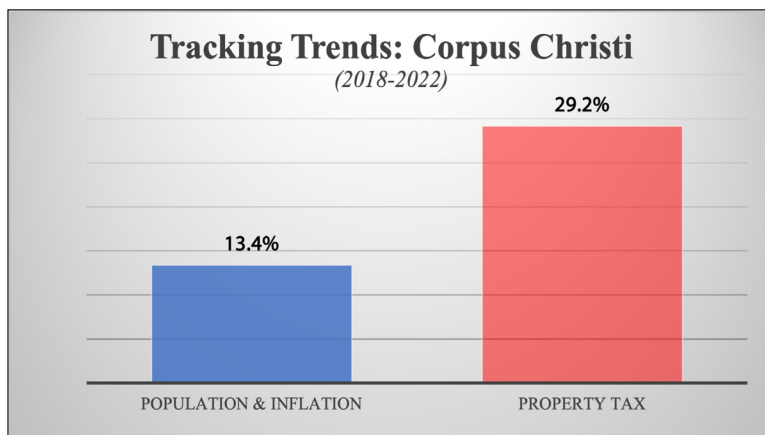
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Corpus Christi’s property tax levy increased from \$131.7 million to \$170.1 million, representing a growth of 29.2%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population shrank from 326,307 to 316,239, equating to a decrease of 3.1%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 13.4%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Corpus Christi rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of Plano

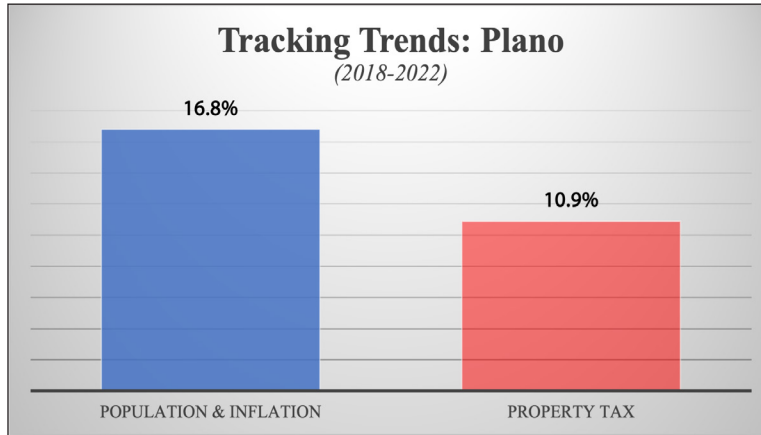
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Plano’s property tax levy increased from \$197.5 million to \$219 million, representing a growth of 10.9%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population grew from 288,747 to 289,547, equating to an increase of 0.3%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 16.8%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Plano rose *more slowly than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### City of Lubbock

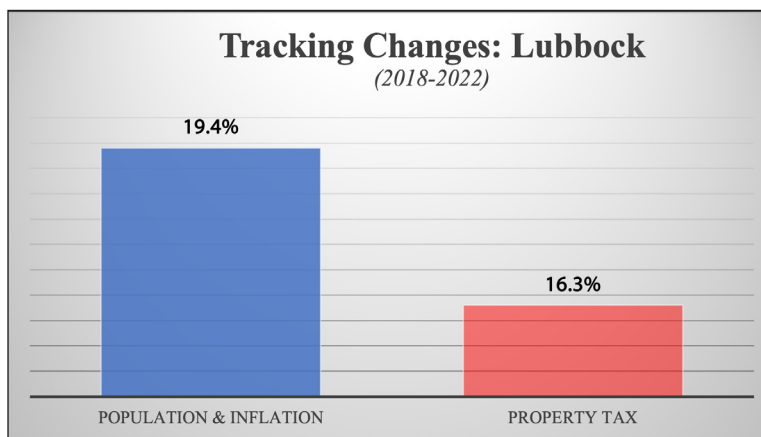
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, the city of Lubbock’s property tax levy increased from \$98.3 million to \$114.2 million, representing a growth of 16.3%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the city’s population grew from 256,469 to 263,930, equating to an increase of 2.9%.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 19.4%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Lubbock rose *more slowly than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



## Most Populous Counties

In most large, urban Texas counties, property taxes grew at a faster clip than reasonable fiscal discipline would allow. Albeit the difference between the actual rate of levy growth and the preferred rate of growth was not as pronounced as with cities, but there was still an observable difference in most instances nonetheless.

From 2018 to 2022, 7 of the state's 10 most populous counties experienced levy growth in excess of P&I. Fort Bend County (+21.1%) had the largest discrepancy between the two values, followed by Travis (+15.3%), Hidalgo (+14.6%), Denton (+16.5) and Tarrant (+11.9%) counties. The jurisdictions that held their property tax growth below P&I were Collin (-12.3%) and Harris (-11.6%) counties.

As shown in **Table 1**, property taxes levied by *all* county governments comprised 16.1% of the total tax levy in 2022.

**Table 3**

*County Tax Levy Growth Versus P&I*

Tracking Trends: Large Counties, 2018 – 2022			
	Property Tax	Population & Inflation (P&I)	Diff.
Harris County	7.9%	18.7%	-10.8%
Dallas County	24.9%	15.4%	9.5%
Tarrant County	31.9%	20%	11.9%
Bexar County	28.4%	20.5%	7.9%
Travis County	38.2%	22.9%	15.3%
Collin County	19.6%	31.9%	-12.3%
Denton County	46.8%	30.3%	16.5%
Fort Bend County	50.4%	29.3%	21.1%
Hidalgo County	34.1%	19.5%	14.6%
El Paso County	25.6%	20.3%	5.3%

Figures may not add due to rounding.

## DID YOU KNOW?

From 1998 to 2021, the average annual increase in property taxes levied by all taxing unit types was 6.13%. In other words, for the last two decades, the typical local government enjoyed a yearly property tax revenue increase of more than 6%.

For their part, county governments experienced revenue growth at an even faster rate. The average annual increase for counties was 6.72%, which was the second fastest growth rate among all types of taxing units ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2022b, p. 17](#)).

### Harris County

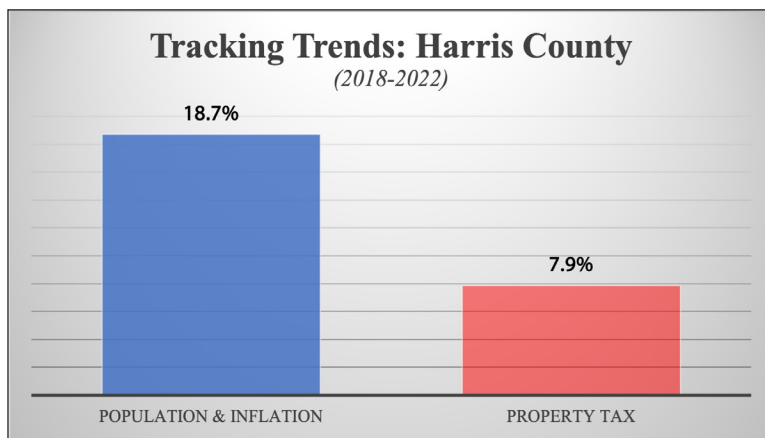
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Harris County’s property tax levy increased from \$1.89 billion to \$2.04 billion, representing a growth of 7.9% ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, n.d.](#)).

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, Harris County’s population grew from 4,680,045 to 4,780,913, equating to a 2.2% increase ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2022c](#); [U.S. Census Bureau, 2023d](#)).

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation, as determined by the Consumer Price Index (U.S. city average, All items), climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase ([Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.](#)).

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 18.7%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Harris County rose *more slowly than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Dallas County

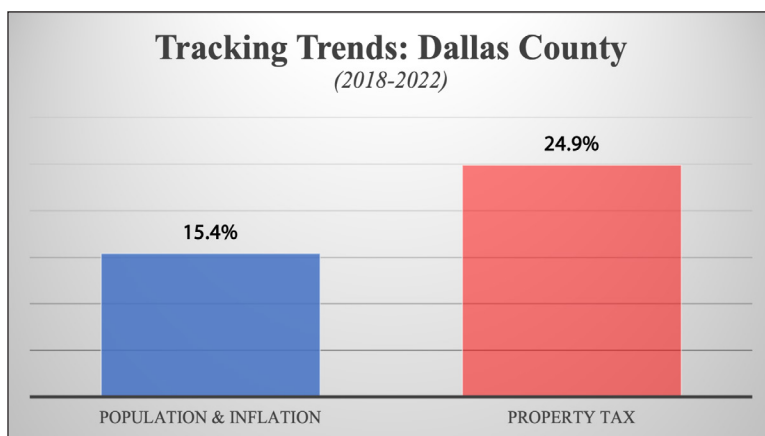
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Dallas County’s property tax levy increased from \$597.3 million to \$745.9 million, representing a growth of 24.9%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county’s population shrank from 2,629,350 to 2,600,840, equating to a 1.1% decrease.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 15.4%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Dallas County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Tarrant County

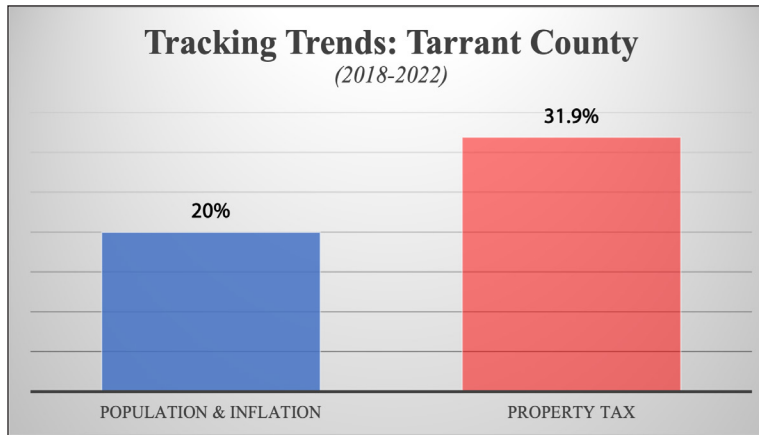
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Tarrant County’s property tax levy increased from \$444.1 million to \$585.7 million, representing a growth of 31.9%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county’s population grew from 2,081,446 to 2,154,595, equating to a 3.5% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 20%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Tarrant County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Bexar County

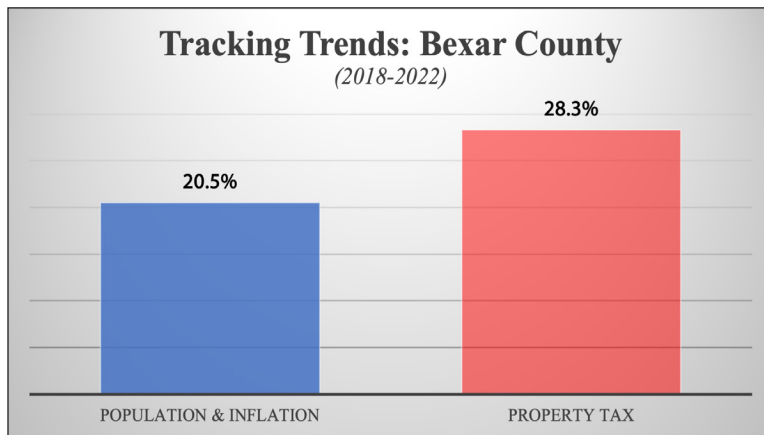
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Bexar County’s property tax levy increased from \$485.7 million to \$623.5, representing a growth of 28.4%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county’s population grew from 1,981,187 to 2,059,530, equating to a 4% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 20.5%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Bexar County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Travis County

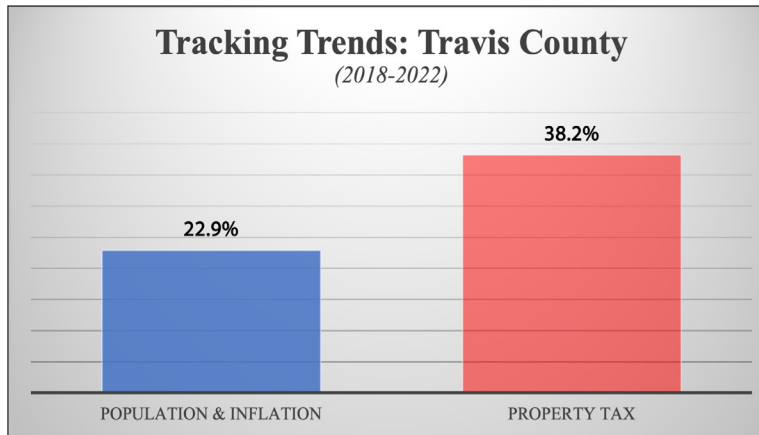
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Travis County’s property tax levy increased from \$671.4 million to \$928.1 million, representing a growth of 38.2%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county’s population grew from 1,246,572 to 1,326,436, equating to a 6.4% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 22.9%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Travis County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Collin County

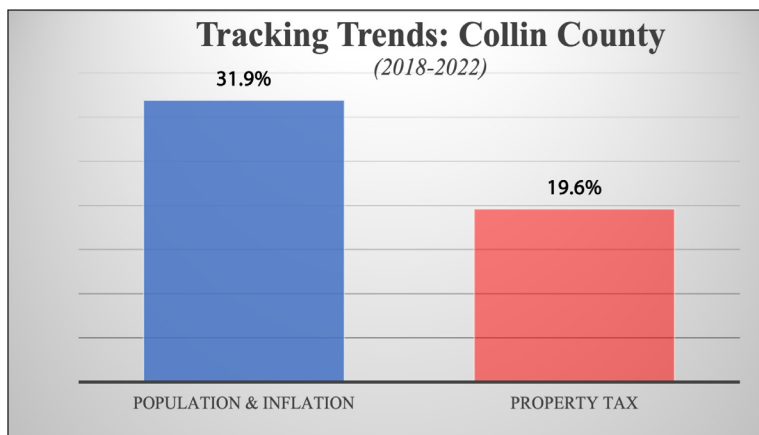
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Collin County’s property tax levy increased from \$250.1 million to \$299.2 million, representing a growth of 19.6%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county’s population grew from 1,004,307 to 1,158,696, equating to a 15.4% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 31.9%.

Hence, property taxes levied by the city of Arlington rose *more slowly than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Denton County

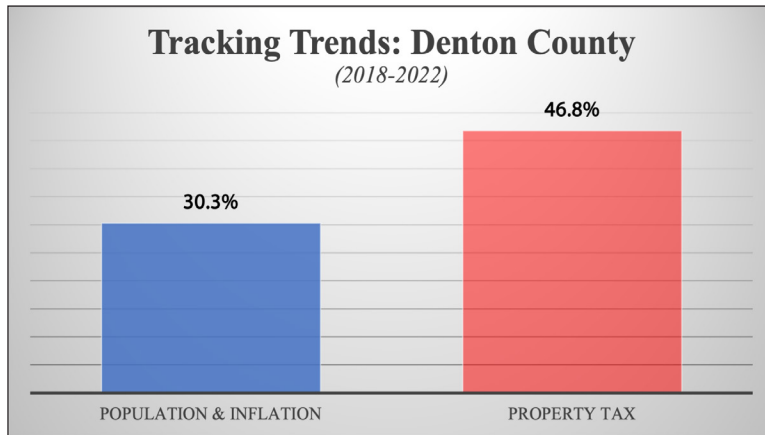
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Denton County's property tax levy increased from \$222 million to \$326 million, representing a growth of 46.8%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county's population grew from 858,741 to 977,281, equating to a 13.8% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 30.3%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Denton County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Fort Bend County

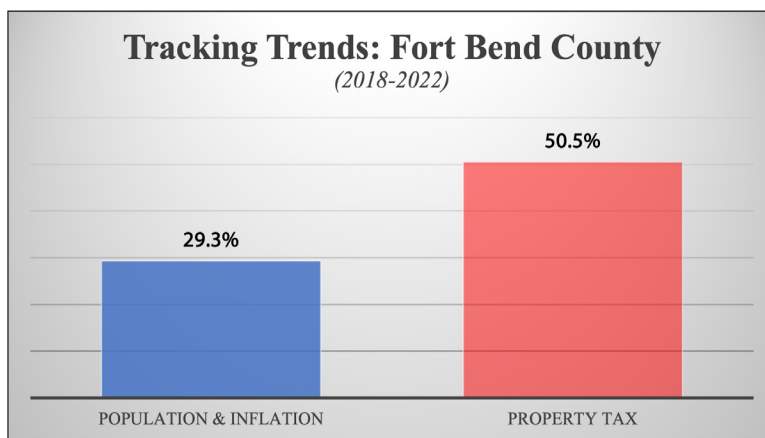
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Fort Bend County's property tax levy increased from \$298.4 million to \$448.9 million, representing a growth of 50.4%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county's population grew from 788,081 to 889,146, equating to a 12.8% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 29.3%.

Hence, property taxes levied by El Paso County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Hidalgo County

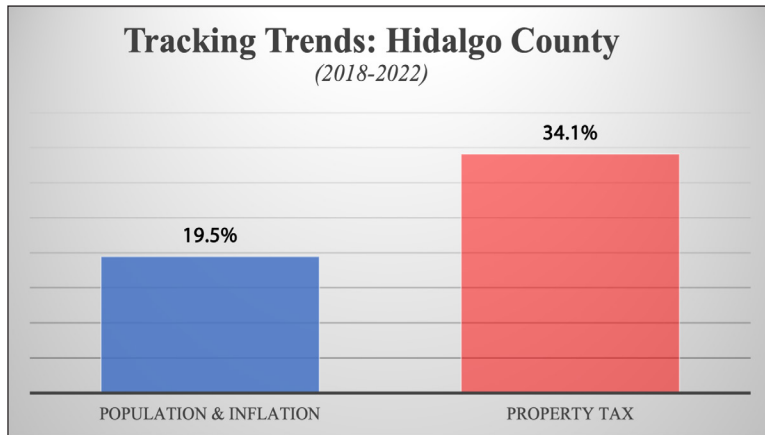
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Hidalgo County’s property tax levy increased from \$206.6 million to \$277.2 million, representing a growth of 34.1%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county’s population grew from 862,298 to 888,367, equating to a 3% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 19.5%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Hidalgo County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.



### El Paso County

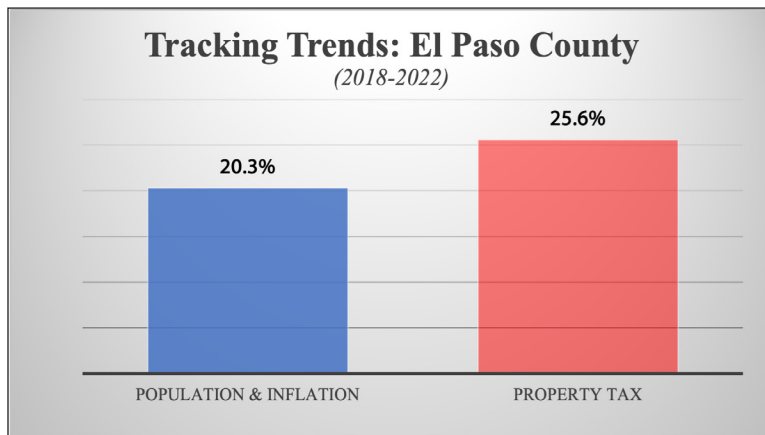
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, El Paso County’s property tax levy increased from \$189.7 million to \$238.2 million, representing a growth of 25.6%.

**Population:** From 2018 to 2022, the county’s population grew from 836,825 to 868,763, equating to a 3.8% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Population & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, P&I increased by a combined 20.3%.

Hence, property taxes levied by El Paso County rose *faster than* P&I from 2018 to 2022.





## Most Populous School Districts

A fair amount of variation was observed in the growth rate of school district property tax levies.

Some school districts, like Fort Worth ISD (+26.9%) and Austin ISD (+17%), experienced a heightened level of growth as compared to enrollment and population (E&I). Other districts, like Katy (-13%), Frisco (-7.9%), and Conroe (-3.5%) ISDs grew at less than the E&I measure. Still others, like Northside (+5.7%), Houston (+1.8%), and Cypress-Fairbanks (+2.2%) ISDs, held property tax levy growth to within roughly 5% of E&I. In all, 7 of the top 10 largest school districts increased their property taxes at a faster rate than E&I.

As shown in **Table 1**, property taxes levied by *all* independent school districts comprised 55.3% of the total tax levy in 2022.

**Table 4**  
*ISD Levy Growth Versus E&I*

Tracking Trends: Large ISDs, 2018 – 2022			
	Property Tax	Enrollment & Inflation (E&I)	Diff.
Houston ISD	8.9%	7%	1.9%
Dallas ISD	18.1%	7.5%	10.6%
Cypress-Fairbanks ISD	18.9%	17.8%	1.1%
Northside ISD	17.5%	13%	4.5%
Katy ISD	19.5%	32.5%	-13%
Fort Bend ISD	27.5%	17.2%	-1.2%
Austin ISD	25.2%	8.2%	17%
Fort Worth ISD	27.8%	2.6%	25.2%
Conroe ISD	25.7%	29.1%	-3.5%
Frisco ISD	19.8%	27.7%	-7.9%

Figures may not add due to rounding.

## DID YOU KNOW?

School districts can raise property taxes through a variety of different mechanisms. Of course, the most common is through the direct imposition of a maintenance and operations (M&O) tax rate, which generally pays for administrative salaries and benefits, teacher pay, and other day-to-day expenses. In addition to these M&O taxes, ISDs may also seek voter permission to levy an interest and sinking (I&S) tax rate, which is typically used to service voter-approved debt. A third approach is to hold a voter-approval tax rate election (VATRE), which, if successful, allows ISDs to collect more property taxes than otherwise allowed by the state-mandated revenue limitation. For the most part, both bond elections and VATREs have relatively high passage rates, although questions persist about whether voters fully understand the tax implications of these elections.

### Houston ISD

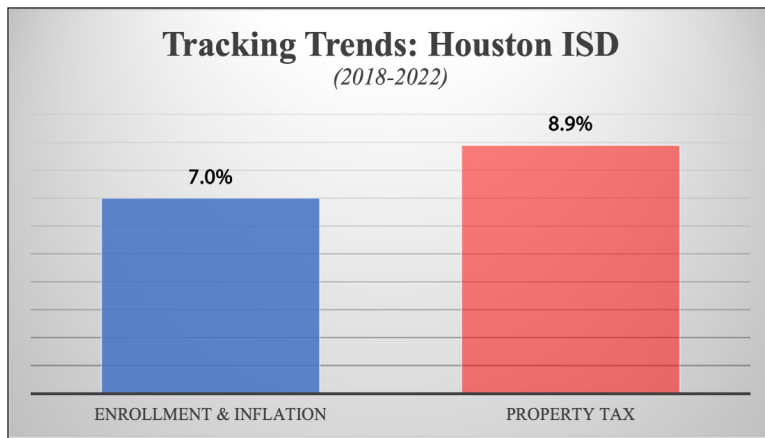
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Houston ISD’s property tax levy rose from \$2.06 billion to \$2.24 billion, representing a 8.9% increase ([Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, n.d.](#)).

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district’s student enrollment shrank from 209,772 to 189,934, equating to a 9.5% decrease ([Texas Education Agency, n.d.-b.](#)).

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation, as determined by the Consumer Price Index (U.S. city average, All items), climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase ([Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.](#)).

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 7%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Houston ISD rose *faster than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Dallas ISD

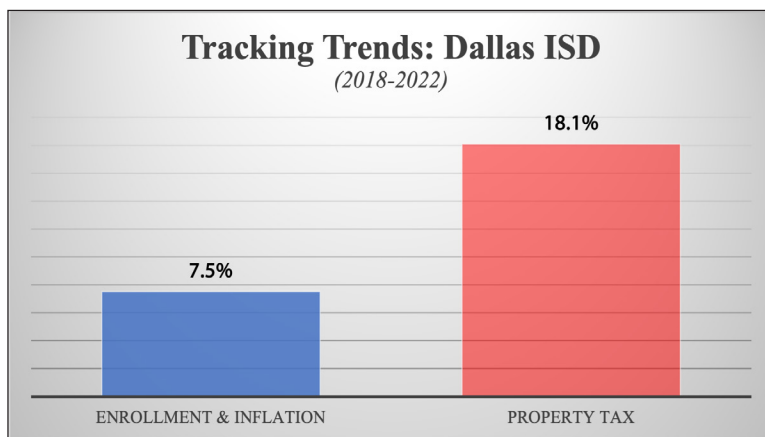
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Dallas ISD’s property tax levy rose from \$1.64 billion to \$1.93 billion, representing an 18.1% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district’s student enrollment shrank from 155,119 to 141,169, equating to a 9% decrease.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 7.5%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Dallas ISD rose *faster than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Cypress-Fairbanks ISD

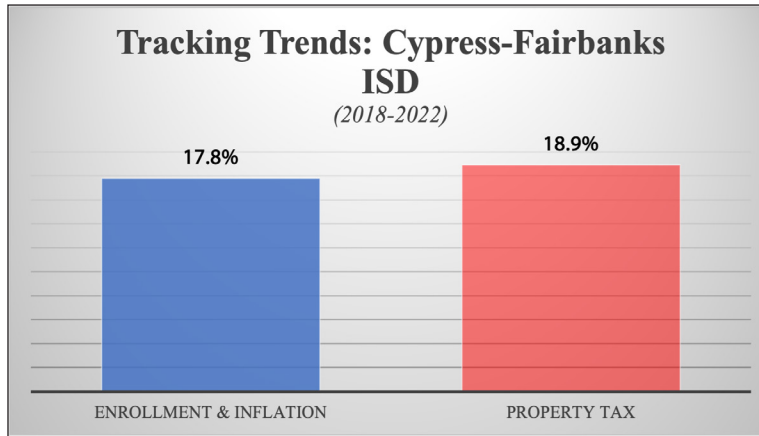
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD's property tax levy rose from \$732.1 million to \$870.7 million, representing an 18.9% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district's student enrollment grew from 116,512 to 118,010, equating to a 1.3% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 17.8%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Cypress-Fairbanks ISD rose *faster than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Northside ISD

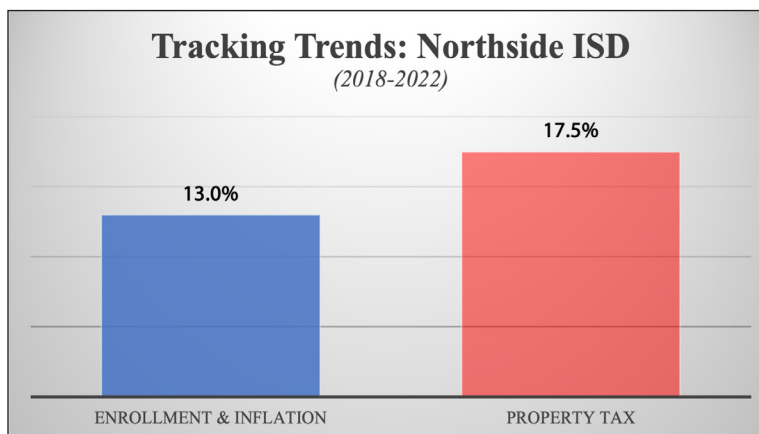
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Northside ISD's property tax levy rose from \$751.6 million to \$883 million, representing a 17.5% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district's student enrollment shrank from 106,723 to 102,962, equating to a 3.5% decrease.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 13%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Northside ISD rose *faster than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Katy ISD

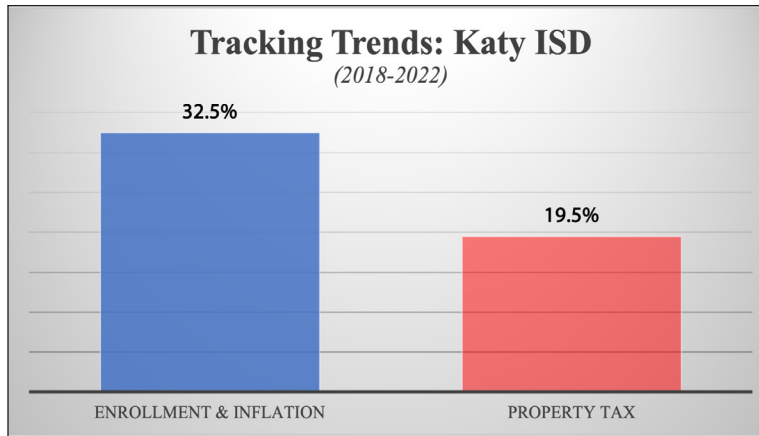
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Katy ISD's property tax levy rose from \$590.6 million to \$705.7 million, representing a 19.5% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district's student enrollment grew from 79,913 to 92,667, equating to a 16% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 32.5%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Katy ISD rose *more slowly than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Fort Bend ISD

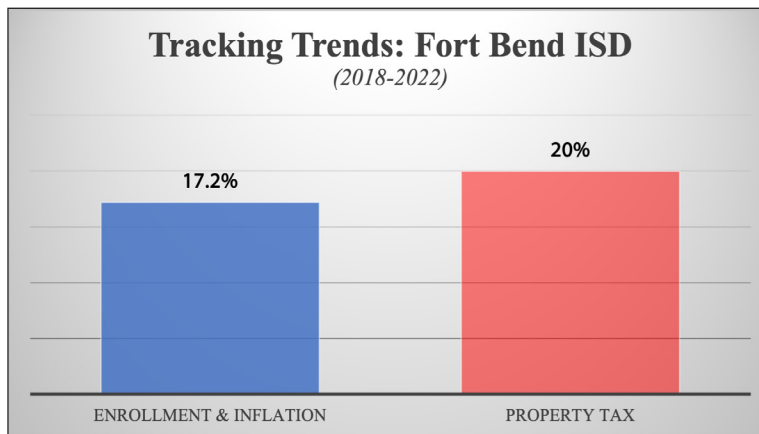
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Fort Bend ISD's property tax levy rose from \$512.3 million to \$614.7 million, representing a 20% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district's student enrollment grew from 76,122 to 76,660, equating to a 0.7% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 17.2%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Fort Bend ISD rose *faster than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Austin ISD

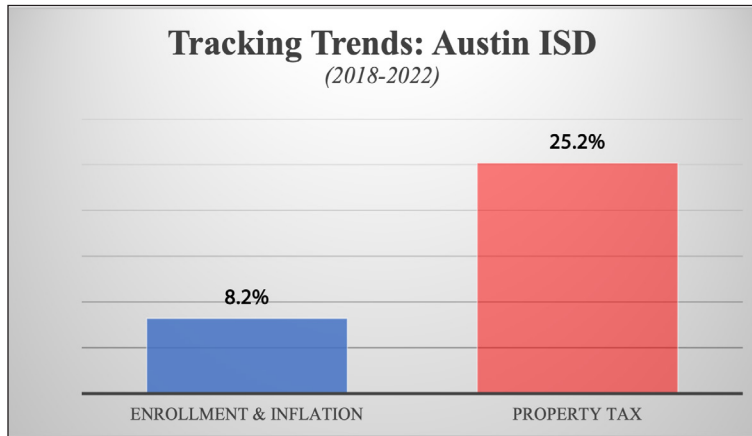
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Austin ISD's property tax levy rose from \$1.45 billion to \$1.81 billion, representing a 25.2% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district's student enrollment shrank from 80,032 to 73,384, equating to an 8.3% decrease.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 8.2%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Austin ISD rose *faster than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Fort Worth ISD

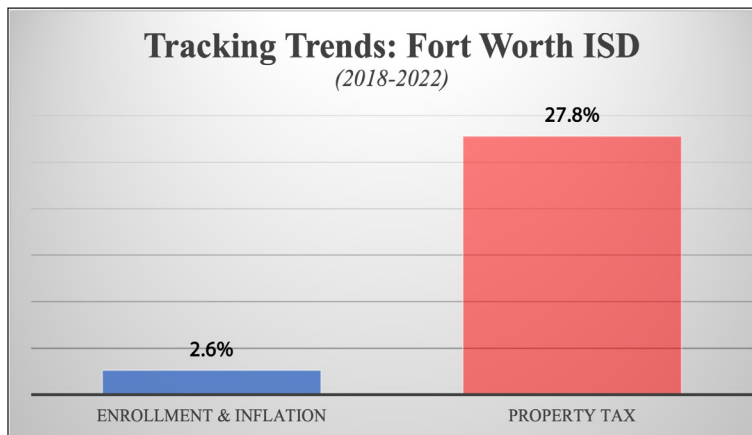
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Fort Worth ISD's property tax levy rose from \$497.9 million to \$636.3 million, representing a 27.8% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district's student enrollment shrank from 84,510 to 72,783, equating to a 13.9% decrease.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 2.6%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Fort Worth ISD rose *faster than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Conroe ISD

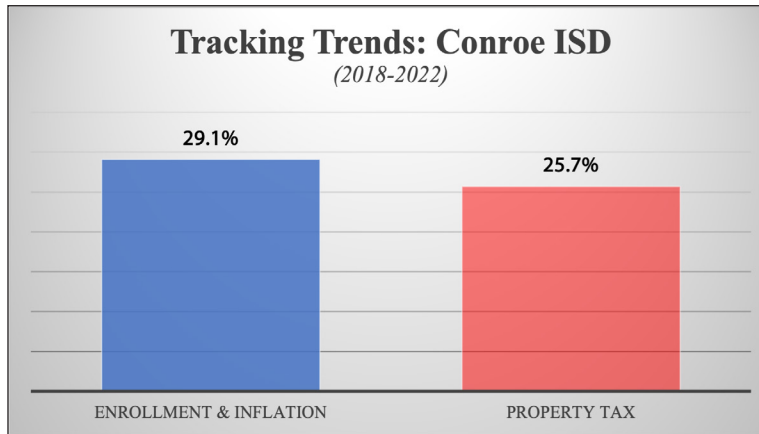
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Conroe ISD’s property tax levy rose from \$454.1 million to \$570.8 million, representing a 25.7% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district’s student enrollment grew from 62,837 to 70,783, equating to a 12.6% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 29.1%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Conroe ISD rose *more slowly than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



### Frisco ISD

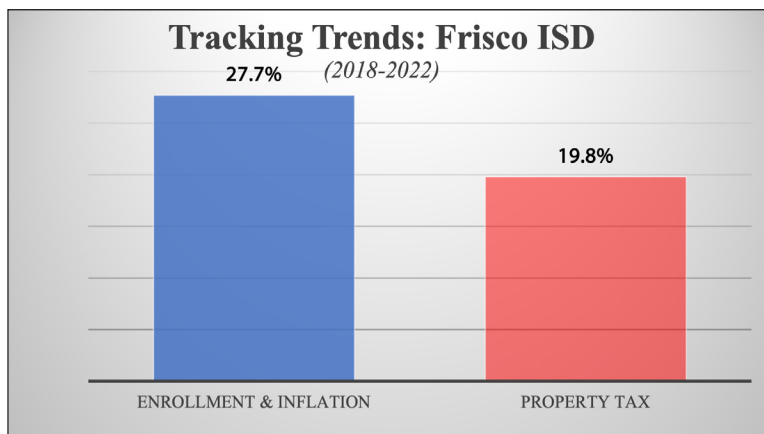
**Tax Levy:** From 2018 to 2022, Frisco ISD’s property tax levy rose from \$571.7 million to \$685.1 million, representing a 19.8% increase.

**Enrollment:** From 2018-19 to 2022-23, the district’s student enrollment grew from 60,182 to 66,916, equating to an 11.2% increase.

**Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, inflation climbed from 251.107 to 292.655, amounting to a 16.5% increase.

**Enrollment & Inflation:** From 2018 to 2022, E&I increased by a combined 27.7%.

Hence, property taxes levied by Frisco ISD rose *more slowly than* E&I from 2018 to 2022.



## Recommendations

The data make clear that property taxes grew well beyond a reasonable level, that is, population (enrollment) growth and inflation, from 2018 to 2022. In some cases, the burden of government greatly outstripped those bounds in spite of contravening factors, like population stagnation or enrollment decline. As a result of the over-taxation, homeowners, renters, businesses, and property owners of all types were forced to pay much higher taxes than they should.

Moving forward, it would be prudent for the Texas Legislature to consider policy changes that would slow the divergence of *actual* property tax levy growth and the *preferred* rate of growth, as measured by population and inflation, so as to realign the system in a more reasonable way. To that end, there are a host of proposals to consider.

First, local governments have played word games to take advantage of a trusting public and wind up saddling them with more debt. For example, in 2022 the *Tyler Morning Telegraph* quoted a Tyler ISD official saying that an \$89 million bond package would not increase the district's tax rate ([McHam, 2022](#)). While this was a factually correct statement, it was misleading. The Foundation explained that a steady tax rate, "in tandem with rising valuations, will cause tax bills to rise" ([Quintero 2022, para. 10](#)). Cases like this were the catalyst that led to HB3 (2019) which made it mandatory to place a disclaimer on school district debt elections that read "THIS IS A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE." In the spirit of expanding transparency, supporting policy like this would help families who are not versed in the intricacies of property tax law by providing plain language for Texans.

Second, shining a light on hiring practices will also help curb government spending. Lobbying in and of itself is a perfectly acceptable way for citizens to address their government; however, it is wholly inappropriate for a government to do so. Data from the Texas Ethics Commission show that local governments have spent \$75 million in 2021 to hire lobbyists ([Texas Ethics Commission, n.d.](#)). Policy like SB175 (2023) would prevent any political subdivision from using public funds to hire lobbyists. This would not only decrease local spending by the amount they pay lobbyists but also save money on government expansion that would have occurred as a result of lobbying.

Third, on top of creating legislation that restricts how governments tax and spend, there is room to benefit the people directly. That is to say, if a taxing entity has enough money to run its operation and a healthy savings account, then it should be required to return any money beyond a reasonable threshold (say, anything above 90 days of operating expense) back to taxpayers.

Fourth, local governments should be made to adhere to a spending limit. Just like someone that has grown physically unhealthy must diet and exercise, so too should we address local government largesse through strict fiscal discipline. One of the reasons why Texas state government has been able to enjoy a historic budget surplus is that it is subject to numerous constitutional and statutory tax and expenditure limits ([Legislative Budget Board, 2022b, p. 2](#)). Cities, counties, and school districts should be required to follow a similar requirement, with the most preferable fiscal rule being one that centers on limiting spending growth to population and inflation ([Texas Public Policy Foundation, 2022](#)). Such a change would bring accountability and sustainability to local public finance. ★

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Quintero received an M.P.A. from Texas State University and a B.A. from the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently seeking a Ph.D. in public policy from Liberty University. In 2022, he was appointed to serve a three-year term on the Commission for Lawyer Discipline.

Quintero and his wife, Tricia, are blessed with five beautiful children, a Great Dane, a Boston Terrier, and an exceptionally large grocery bill.



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Prior to joining TPPF John served in the University system as a Graduate Assistant until he was given the opportunity to teach Principles of American Government. John holds a Master of Arts in Political Science from Texas State University and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Sam Houston State University.

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