

# Online Information Sources: Government Expenditures

Compiled by Daniel Agostino  
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## Introduction

This paper serves two purposes: 1) It provides and briefly analyzes data on federal, state and local government spending, making comparisons among sources. 2) It offers a guide to online sources of information about expenditures by federal, state and local governments. It is preliminary; it does not cover all possible sources.

The research discussed herein was undertaken as a task which is part of a larger GDAE project on the public economy. The initial task is to identify "all" reported government expenditures in order to compare that amount with "government output" as reported in GDP. We found that government as a *percentage* of GDP varies widely among data sources.

There are numerous sources of data and information about government spending, and they provide sometimes conflicting information. Below is a list of descriptions and differences among those sources.

The average citizen or researcher who has a desire to learn about American government spending will likely turn to Google or another search engine on the internet to find answers and to collect data. We set out to see what they would find and to examine those sources that appear first in the search results, as well as some journalistic analysis with high visibility. The most readily accessible and shared information sources can be expected to receive the most hits and to have the most impact.

It is important to note that these sources of information are among the likely thousands of sources of information about government spending, both online and in print. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive but rather a glimpse at the most visible ones.

### Sources Included:

#### Government Sources

- [Bureau of Economic Analysis](#)
- [U.S. Census](#)
- [Office of Management and Budget](#)
- [USAspending.gov](#)
- [Congressional Budget Office](#)
- [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis](#)

#### Private or Personal Analyses

- National Priorities Project
- Real-World Economics
- The New York Times | Nate Silver
- The Washington Post | Ezra Klein
- John J. DiIulio | National Affairs and *Bring Back the Bureaucrats*
- USGovernmentSpending.com | Christopher Chantrell
- Heritage Foundation

# Part 1: Comparison of Sources

## A. What's Included in "Economic Insurance" Programs

As noted in the Introduction to this paper, the initial task was to identify total government spending. But beyond merely obtaining the numbers, our online research has raised some questions and possible issues. One issue is the inconsistency of category names for what are sometimes called "social insurance" programs (e.g., Medicare, Social Security, Unemployment Insurance and many others) across sources. Among the labels used are, "entitlements," "welfare," "social benefits," "human resources," "insurance" and "social insurance." It isn't always clear which programs are included within the broad category labels and whether the sources are consistent in which programs they are including when making calculations or offering analysis. Among the various sources, it appears these categories can differ considerably.

We suggest that they might be called "Economic Insurance" programs because they ensure income to individuals and ensure demand in the economy.

Below is a list of each source described in this document and their naming conventions along with an estimate of which programs are included. Because there is a grey area concerning which programs are included and which ones are not included, more in-depth research is required for a comparison of the categories and programs included.

### Analyses

**National Priorities Project:** Social Insurance: Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment Insurance

**Real-World Economics:** Social Insurance/Human Resources: Social Security, Medicare, Healthcare, Retirement/Disability

**Nate Silver - NYT:** Entitlement Programs: "under which I classify government expenditures on health care programs; pensions and retirement programs like Social Security; and welfare or social insurance programs like food stamps and unemployment compensation."

**Ezra Klein - WA Post:** Insurance: Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security

**John J. DiIulio:** Does not categorize

**USgovernmentspending.com:** Entitlement Spending: government pensions, healthcare and welfare.

**Heritage Foundation:** Entitlements; Welfare Spending: Health Care, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid

## Official Government Sources

**Bureau of Economic Analysis: Government Social Benefits:** Social Security, Medicare, unemployment, pensions, SNAP, veteran's benefits. There are 43 categories and subcategories in total, which are displayed in NIPA table 3.12

**U.S. Census:** Does not categorize

**Office of Management and Budget: Human Resources (table 3.1):** Education, training, employment, social services, health, Medicare, income security, Social Security, and veteran's benefits.

**USAspending.gov:** Does not categorize

**Congressional Budget Office:** Does not categorize

**Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis: Government Social Benefits:** Social Security, Medicare, unemployment, pensions, SNAP, veteran's benefits.

Naming Conventions used in "Official" Government Sites			
BEA NIPA and St. Louis Fed*	OMB	CBO	Census
<b>Government Social Benefits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Security</li> <li>• Medicare</li> <li>• Unemployment</li> <li>• Pensions</li> <li>• SNAP</li> <li>• Veteran's Benefits</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul> <p>* There are 43 total categories (NIPA table 3.12)</p>	<b>Human Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health Insurance</li> <li>• Medicare</li> <li>• Income security</li> <li>• Social security</li> <li>• Veteran's benefits</li> <li>• Education, Training, Employment, and Social Services</li> </ul>	<b>Does not categorize</b>	<b>Does not categorize</b>

## **B. Comparison of the Numbers**

The data in the various sites are remarkably inconsistent as to levels of government expenditures. Part of the problem is that there is overlap in certain categories, because sources discuss government spending in different ways. Also, the various sites and analysts create idiosyncratic categories, making comparison difficult.

### **Some of the Evident Differences**

- **Total Government Spending:** Usgovernmentspending.com consistently estimates total government spending (Federal, State, Local) to be about 500 billion dollars higher per year than the BEA NIPA's estimate of total government spending. It is unclear how Christopher Chantrill at Usgovernmentspending.com arrives at his numbers, and determining the reasons for the differences would require further research. It might be that the discrepancy

has something to do with intergovernmental transfers, although both sources claim to adjust for them in their calculations of total government spending.

- **Government as % of GDP:** Although the presentations of total U.S. GDP in terms of dollar amounts are fairly consistent across all sources, the presentation of Federal, State & Local (FSL) government as a *percentage* of GDP varies widely. For 2015, the BEA NIPAs states 17.7%, OMB reports 31.8% and IMF reports 35.7%. Usgovernmentspending.com – not a government source, but one of the more accessible sites and one that is cited and used by analysts – says it is 35%.

For OMB, and usgovernmentspending.com the calculation is discernible: it is total government expenditures divided by total GDP. It is unclear how IMF arrives at 35.7%, since they do not report total government expenditures. For the BEA's NIPAs, which present government as a much smaller share than the others, the calculation is not based on government "expenditures" but rather on "Government Consumption Expenditures and Gross Investment," the composition of which is complex and beyond the scope of this report.

We know that NIPA does not include transfer payments (called "government social benefits" by NIPA) in "Government Consumption Expenditures and Gross Investment"). But what other reasons may account for the lower value the GDP calculation places on the government share of GDP? This is a topic for further research.

# Part 2: Online Information Sources

## A. Government Sources

### Bureau of Economic Analysis

**Summary:** The most often referenced and most comprehensive source for data on U.S. government financial statistics. The BEA creates and issues the National Income and Product Accounts (NIPAs), which are the source of the official GDP as well as the source for calculations on government revenue and expenditures. The government section (section 3), features over 40 historical tables on government, expenditures, receipts, investments, taxes and more. The website features interactive tables that allow for user customization of data. In addition to the tables, the website can display line charts and bar charts for selected data (by years or quarters).

### Interactive Data

Sign In Register

#### What is the Interactive Data Application?

BEA's interactive data application is the one stop shop for accessing BEA data on the fly. The interactive application makes it easier to access and use our statistics by providing a common look and feel for users accessing national, international, regional or industry statistics. The application makes the data easier to print, save and export. The charting features are robust and visually appealing. The application also allows for data sharing with others via a number of social tools.

BEA updates its data in near real time. During BEA news releases there might be a slight delay in accessing the most recent data but access to supplemental data files is always available.

The interactive data application organizes data by account and topic. The application uses a "tabbed" browser experience common to many e-commerce and other standard Web sites. Navigating between data sets and accessing and changing query parameters is easy, as they are similar across all datasets.

#### National Data

GDP & Personal Income Fixed Assets

#### Industry Data

GDP-by-Industry Input-Output

#### International Data

Int'l Transactions, Services, & IIP Direct Investment & MNEs

#### Regional Data

GDP & Personal Income

NIPA Tables Interactive Data +

Table 3.17. Selected Government Current and Capital Expenditures by Function  
[Billions of dollars]  
Last Revised on: November 04, 2015

Line	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Current expenditures <sup>1</sup></b>								
<b>Consumption expenditures:</b>								
<b>1 Government</b>	<b>2,209.7</b>	<b>2,368.6</b>	<b>2,442.1</b>	<b>2,522.2</b>	<b>2,530.9</b>	<b>2,544.2</b>	<b>2,522.0</b>	<b>2,556.3</b>
2 General public service	206.8	218.5	228.0	231.9	230.0	233.0	232.1	237.3
3 National defense	526.1	582.8	613.3	653.2	662.3	653.9	614.4	599.8
4 Public order and safety	300.4	321.3	328.5	331.5	336.0	342.6	343.9	353.4
5 Economic affairs	257.5	273.5	282.5	296.9	288.2	291.1	289.8	295.7
6 Housing and community services	9.9	10.9	10.6	10.6	10.8	11.0	11.0	11.2
7 Health	124.1	138.5	142.0	146.5	153.5	154.8	158.1	167.3
8 Recreation and culture	31.7	33.4	33.6	33.6	32.8	33.1	33.6	34.4
9 Education	667.2	701.7	713.3	727.0	729.2	735.6	746.7	762.2
10 Income security	85.9	88.1	90.2	91.1	88.0	89.1	92.1	94.9
<b>11 Federal</b>	<b>798.4</b>	<b>879.8</b>	<b>933.7</b>	<b>1,003.9</b>	<b>1,006.1</b>	<b>1,007.8</b>	<b>961.3</b>	<b>955.3</b>
12 General public service	43.9	48.6	53.4	57.3	57.7	59.4	56.1	55.5
13 National defense	526.1	582.8	613.3	653.2	662.3	653.9	614.4	599.8
14 Public order and safety	37.7	43.4	46.9	48.0	49.1	54.1	50.0	51.5
15 Economic affairs	100.9	106.7	113.9	129.4	116.6	116.1	111.6	112.9
16 Housing and community services	1.1	1.5	1.4	1.7	2.0	2.2	2.0	1.9
17 Health	64.8	73.2	79.5	86.4	92.5	94.2	97.7	103.7
18 Recreation and culture	3.8	4.0	4.3	4.6	4.4	4.8	4.7	4.7
19 Education	5.4	5.6	6.0	6.3	6.7	7.4	7.5	7.2
20 Income security	14.7	14.0	15.0	17.0	14.7	15.8	17.2	18.1
<b>21 State and local</b>	<b>1,411.4</b>	<b>1,488.7</b>	<b>1,508.4</b>	<b>1,518.3</b>	<b>1,524.8</b>	<b>1,536.3</b>	<b>1,560.7</b>	<b>1,601.0</b>

Legend/Footnotes

Above figures from [Bureau of Economic Analysis](https://www.bea.gov/)

## U.S. Census

**Summary:** This source includes the most recent census of governments from 2013, which shows spending data for state and local governments, broken down by category. Also available from 1992 onwards, are historical tables on government finance, tax statistics, government employment and payroll data, and federal spending data from 1983 to 2010.

DESCRIPTION	United States						Alabama					
	STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT		STATE GOVERNMENT AMOUNT	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMOUNT		STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT		STATE GOVERNMENT AMOUNT	LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMOUNT			
	AMOUNT	CV		AMOUNT	CV	AMOUNT	CV		AMOUNT	CV		
Revenue	3,419,868,195	0.07	2,193,443,291	1,709,268,981	0.16	44,644,352	0.53	29,092,950	21,180,567	1.15		
General revenue	2,690,426,735	0.08	1,685,745,846	1,487,524,966	0.16	34,986,527	0.54	22,759,645	17,856,047	1.11		
Intergovernmental revenue	584,651,830	0.12	527,066,355	540,429,552	0.23	9,186,815	0.72	8,338,033	6,477,947	1.36		
From Federal	584,651,830	0.12	513,478,951	71,172,879	0.95	9,186,815	0.72	8,226,967	959,848	6.87		
From State	0	0.00	0	469,256,673	0.22	0	0.00	0	5,518,099	1.06		
From Local	0	0.00	13,587,404	0	0.00	0	0.00	111,066	0	0.00		
General revenue from own sources	2,105,774,905	0.10	1,158,679,491	947,095,414	0.22	25,799,712	0.69	14,421,612	11,378,100	1.57		
Taxes	1,455,498,630	0.12	847,434,611	608,064,019	0.27	14,724,783	1.03	9,267,567	5,457,216	2.77		
Property	455,441,810	0.32	13,053,517	442,388,293	0.32	2,645,349	3.20	322,300	2,323,049	3.65		
Sales and gross receipts	496,439,247	0.15	394,086,475	102,352,772	0.75	7,001,826	1.70	4,708,518	2,293,308	5.19		
General sales	327,065,751	0.21	254,154,294	72,911,457	0.95	4,358,304	2.70	2,331,676	2,026,628	5.81		
Selective sales	169,373,496	0.19	139,932,181	29,441,315	1.11	2,643,522	0.68	2,376,842	266,680	6.74		
Motor fuel	41,410,555	0.13	40,089,067	1,321,488	3.92	598,864	1.15	530,244	68,620	10.04		
Alcoholic beverage	6,618,673	0.28	6,058,633	560,040	3.27	206,751	1.35	174,395	32,356	8.60		
Tobacco products	18,255,711	0.02	17,858,789	396,922	1.03	145,627	1.06	120,110	25,517	6.03		
Public utilities	28,640,895	0.89	14,356,400	14,284,495	1.79	785,577	1.12	737,619	47,958	18.30		
Other selective sales	74,447,662	0.26	61,569,292	12,878,370	1.52	906,703	1.51	814,474	92,229	14.88		
Individual income	338,471,471	0.07	309,524,489	28,946,982	0.84	3,316,309	0.43	3,202,520	113,789	12.67		
Corporate income	53,039,469	0.11	45,015,768	8,023,701	0.70	382,202	0.00	382,202	0	0.00		
Motor vehicle license	25,080,048	0.13	23,213,282	1,866,766	1.81	222,414	1.86	204,960	17,454	23.70		
All other taxes	87,026,585	0.30	62,541,080	24,485,505	1.07	1,156,683	3.03	447,067	709,616	4.94		
Charges and miscellaneous general revenue	650,276,275	0.19	311,244,880	339,031,395	0.36	11,074,929	0.86	5,154,045	5,920,884	1.60		
Current charges	444,152,589	0.26	183,433,664	260,718,925	0.44	8,906,685	0.93	3,965,673	4,941,012	1.67		
Education	117,647,102	0.04	94,158,447	23,488,655	0.22	2,477,525	0.11	2,132,350	345,175	0.79		
Insitutions of higher education	101,945,211	0.04	92,847,950	9,097,261	0.46	2,102,965	0.00	2,102,965	0	0.00		
School lunch sales (gross)	6,009,592	0.28	31,675	5,977,917	0.28	116,826	0.00	0	116,826	0.00		

Above figure from [U.S. Census](#)

## Office of Management and Budget

**Summary:** Features the President's budgets, and historical data on spending at federal, state and local levels by category, from 1940 onwards. Available are summaries of receipts, outlays, surpluses and deficits. Outlays broken down by agency, programs, superfunction, function and subfunction are available. Much of the data is also presented as a percentage of the GDP. Accompanying the historical charts are [Analytical Perspectives](#), a 400-page publication that highlights and puts budget data in perspective.

Enter a name for a cell range, or select a named range from the list				RECEIPTS, OUTLAYS, AND SURPLUSES OR DEFICITS (-): 1789-2021 (in millions of dollars)						
4	Year	On-Budget			Off-Budget					
		Receipts	Outlays	Surplus or Deficit (-)	Receipts	Outlays	Surplus or Deficit (-)	Receipts	Outlays	Surplus or Deficit (-)
107	2000	2,025,191	1,788,950	236,241	1,544,607	1,458,185	86,422	480,584	330,765	149,819
108	2001	1,991,082	1,862,846	128,236	1,483,563	1,516,008	-32,445	507,519	346,838	160,681
109	2002	1,853,136	2,010,894	-157,758	1,337,815	1,655,232	-317,417	515,321	355,662	159,659
110	2003	1,782,314	2,159,899	-377,585	1,258,472	1,796,890	-538,418	523,842	363,009	160,833
111	2004	1,880,114	2,292,841	-412,727	1,345,369	1,913,330	-567,961	534,745	379,511	155,234
112	2005	2,153,611	2,471,957	-318,346	1,576,135	2,069,746	-493,611	577,476	402,211	175,265
113	2006	2,406,869	2,655,050	-248,181	1,798,487	2,232,981	-434,494	608,382	422,069	186,313
114	2007	2,567,985	2,728,686	-160,701	1,932,896	2,275,049	-342,153	635,089	453,637	181,452
115	2008	2,523,991	2,982,544	-458,553	1,865,945	2,507,793	-641,848	658,046	474,751	183,295
116	2009	2,104,989	3,517,677	-1,412,688	1,450,980	3,000,661	-1,549,681	654,009	517,016	136,993
117	2010	2,162,706	3,457,079	-1,294,373	1,531,019	2,902,397	-1,371,378	631,687	554,682	77,005
118	2011	2,303,466	3,603,056	-1,299,590	1,737,678	3,104,450	-1,366,772	565,788	498,606	67,182
119	2012	2,449,988	3,536,951	-1,086,963	1,880,487	3,029,363	-1,148,876	569,501	507,588	61,913
120	2013	2,775,103	3,454,647	-679,544	2,101,829	2,820,836	-719,007	673,274	633,811	39,463
121	2014	3,021,487	3,506,114	-484,627	2,285,922	2,800,061	-514,139	735,565	706,053	29,512
122	2015	3,249,886	3,688,292	-438,406	2,479,514	2,945,215	-465,701	770,372	743,077	27,295
123	2016 estimate	3,335,502	3,951,307	-615,805	2,537,845	3,161,649	-623,804	797,657	789,658	7,999
124	2017 estimate	3,643,742	4,147,224	-503,482	2,816,874	3,318,636	-501,762	826,868	828,588	-1,720
125	2018 estimate	3,898,625	4,352,222	-453,597	3,035,354	3,467,898	-432,544	863,271	884,324	-21,053
126	2019 estimate	4,095,054	4,644,309	-549,255	3,196,845	3,702,365	-505,520	898,209	941,944	-43,735
127	2020 estimate	4,345,701	4,879,818	-534,117	3,413,847	3,871,656	-457,809	931,854	1,008,162	-76,308
128	2021 estimate	4,571,990	5,124,248	-552,258	3,591,774	4,052,084	-460,310	980,216	1,072,164	-91,948
129	* \$500 thousand or less.									
130	Note: Budget figures prior to 1933 are based on the "Administrative Budget" concepts rather than the "Unified Budget" concepts.									

Above figure from [Office of Management and Budget](#)



## [USAspending.gov](http://USAspending.gov)

**Summary:** This website was created as a part of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006. The site collects and reports data by year and by state, on grants, loans, insurance, assistance and contracts. It shows the awarding agency name, addresses of the recipient, amount of the award, number of transactions, award date, award number, congressional district, etc. Data can be viewed on a national, state or local level. Reviews of the website by the Congressional Research Service, the Project on Government Oversight and others indicate that the data is incomplete.

### SPENDING MAP

Input your Zip Code and select GO. Or choose two or more filters, such as, a state and county or state and congressional district and select GO to see the places of performance for prime recipient transactions. Click on a dot or the Award ID for more details. See How to Use the Map below.

Fiscal Year	FY-2016	Recipient Name		Award Type	
State	Massachusetts	Zip Code	Zip Code	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contracts	
County	View All	Cong. District	View All	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grants	
Agency	View All			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Loans	
				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other Financial Assistance	
				Funding Amount	View All

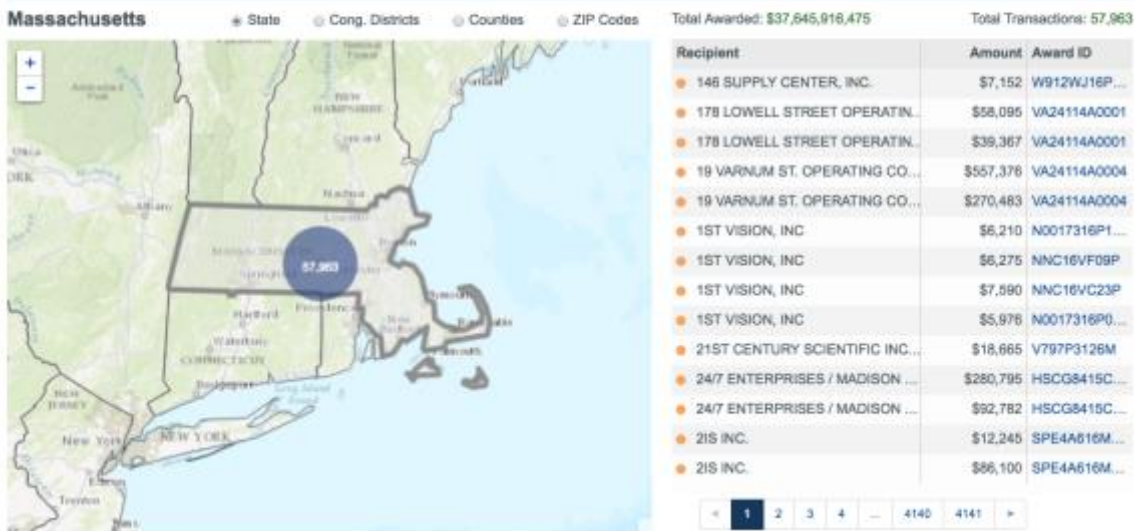


Figure from [USAspending.gov](http://USAspending.gov)

## Congressional Budget Office

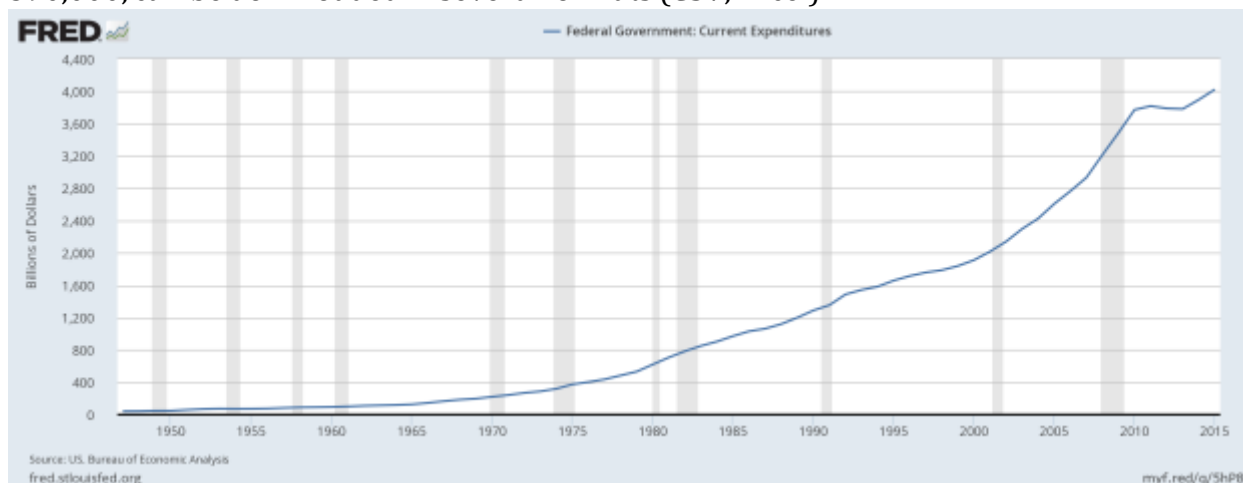
**Summary:** This office creates analysis of budgetary and economic [issues](#) for the U.S. Congress. According to their website, “the agency’s economists and budget analysts produce dozens of reports and hundreds of cost estimates for proposed legislation. CBO is strictly nonpartisan; conducts objective, impartial analysis.” They create a number of [products](#) including historical budget data, analytic reports, current budgets, 10-year budget projections and other information.

5. Mandatory Outlays Since 1966										
	Social Security	Medicare <sup>a</sup>	Medicaid	Income Security <sup>b</sup>	Other Retirement and Disability	Other Programs	Offsetting Receipts	Total	Memorandum: Major Health Care Programs (Net) <sup>c</sup>	
49	2006	543.9	376.8	180.6	200.0	113.1	141.6	-144.3	1,411.8	511.0
50	2007	581.4	436.1	190.6	203.1	122.4	94.2	-177.9	1,450.0	567.4
51	2008	612.1	456.0	201.4	280.7	126.9	121.3	-185.4	1,594.9	594.1
52	2009	677.7	499.9	250.9	350.2	137.7	371.4	-194.6	2,093.2	683.6
53	2010	700.8	520.5	272.8	437.3	138.4	40.5	-196.5	1,913.7	727.1
54	2011	724.9	559.6	275.0	404.1	144.2	127.2	-209.0	2,026.0	763.5
55	2012	767.7	551.2	250.5	353.6	143.5	192.2	-228.3	2,030.5	725.8
56	2013	807.8	585.2	265.4	339.5	152.5	185.9	-304.8	2,031.6	767.6
57	2014	844.9	599.8	301.5	310.9	157.5	161.2	-277.3	2,098.5	831.0
58	2015	881.9	634.1	349.8	300.4	161.5	227.2	-257.5	2,297.2	936.5
As a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product										
61	1966	2.6	0	0.1	0.7	1.1	1.1	-1.1	4.5	0.1
62	1967	2.5	0.4	0.1	0.6	1.1	1.3	-1.2	4.9	0.4
63	1968	2.6	0.6	0.2	0.7	1.1	1.5	-1.2	5.5	0.7
64	1969	2.7	0.6	0.2	0.7	1.1	1.2	-1.1	5.5	0.8
65	1970	2.8	0.6	0.3	0.8	1.2	1.2	-1.1	5.8	0.8
66	1971	3.1	0.7	0.3	1.2	1.3	1.2	-1.3	6.5	0.9
67	1972	3.2	0.7	0.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	-1.2	7.1	1.0
68	1973	3.6	0.7	0.3	1.1	1.4	1.6	-1.3	7.2	0.9
69	1974	3.7	0.7	0.4	1.2	1.4	1.4	-1.4	7.4	1.0
70	1975	3.9	0.9	0.4	1.8	1.6	1.8	-1.1	9.4	1.2
71	1976	4.1	0.9	0.5	2.1	1.5	1.4	-1.1	9.5	1.3
72	1977	4.1	1.0	0.5	1.7	1.5	1.2	-1.1	9.0	1.4
73	1978	4.1	1.1	0.5	1.4	1.5	1.5	-1.0	9.0	1.4
74	1979	4.0	1.1	0.5	1.3	1.5	1.3	-1.0	8.6	1.5
75	1980	4.2	1.2	0.5	1.6	1.6	1.3	-1.0	9.4	1.6
76	1981	4.4	1.3	0.5	1.6	1.6	1.4	-1.2	9.6	1.7
77	1982	4.6	1.5	0.5	1.6	1.7	1.3	-1.1	10.1	1.9

Above figure from [Congressional Budget Office](#)

## Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

**Summary:** Contains extensive collection of online interactive charts and financial data, some of it published by the St. Louis Fed, but much of it sourced from other government agencies, such as the BEA, U.S. Census, OECD, BLS, World Bank, IMF and many other sources including public research universities. The online interactive graphs make it a good source for quick and easy interaction with complex data from a wide range of sources, all in one place. Each dataset, of which there are over 390,000, can be downloaded in several formats (CSV, Excel).



Above figure from [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis](#)

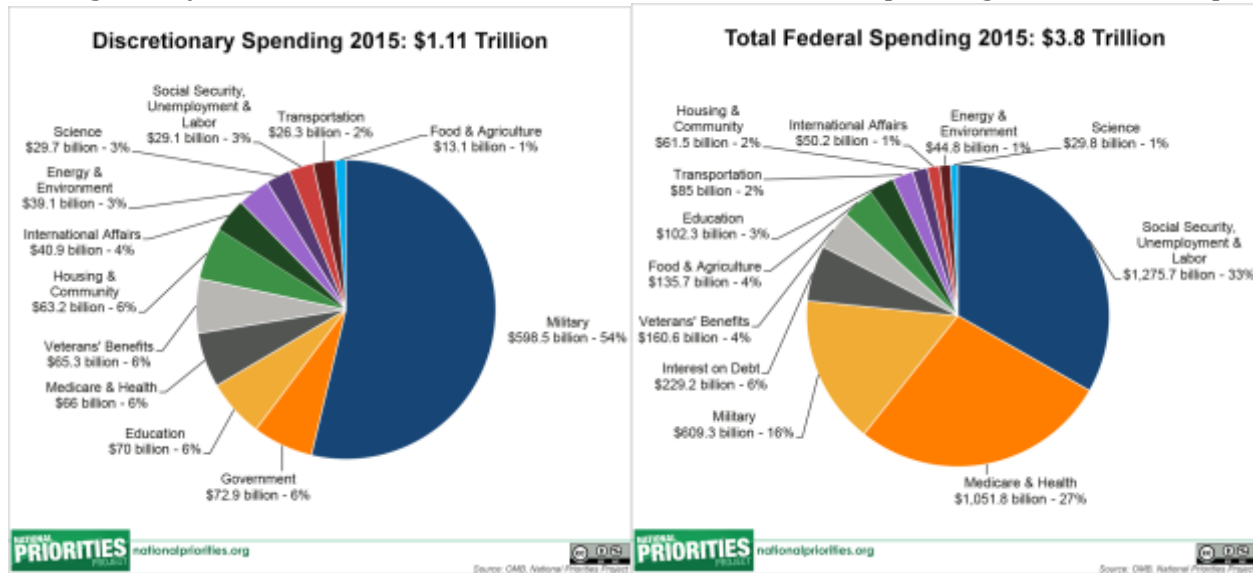
## B. Private or Personal Analyses

These sources of information include analyses from journalists, authors and private organizations, available on privately maintained websites.

### National Priorities Project

#### Federal Spending: Where Does the Money Go

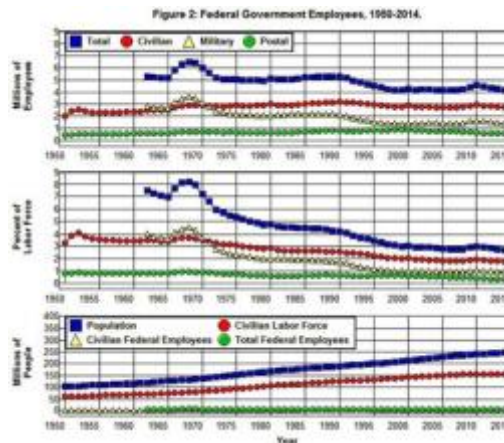
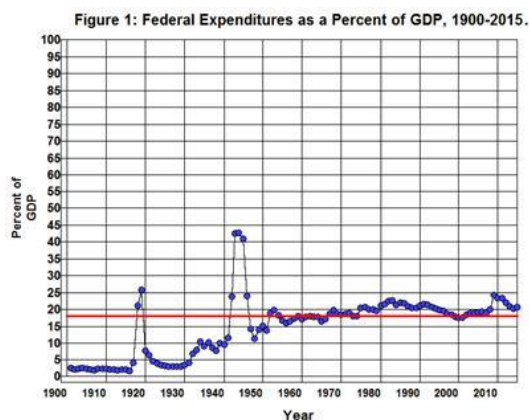
**Summary:** NPP is a non-partisan, non-profit research organization whose mission is to make the federal budget accessible to the public. Their website prominently features charts with a breakdown of total government spending, as well as breakdowns of mandatory and discretionary spending. The website has a section called “Federal Budget 101,” which describes the federal budget process, where the money comes from, where the money goes, borrowing and federal debt, and a glossary of terms. There is also a section for data on local spending and tax dollar spending.



Figures from [National Priorities](http://nationalpriorities.org)

### Real-World Economics

**Summary:** This site, compiled by an independent economist, provides data – displayed in visually accessible graphs – to show that popular “beliefs about the federal budget that are demonstrably inconsistent with” actual data. The site provides data showing that “the size of the federal budget as a fraction of our economy—that is, as a percent of gross domestic product (GDP)—in the 2000s was about where it was in the 1970s and was actually slightly smaller in 2000 and 2001 (17.6%) than it was in 1961 through 1964 (17.8%-18.2%)... [T]here were more federal government employees in 1967 (2.85 million civilians plus 3.45 million military) than there were in 2013 (2.77 million civilians plus 1.53 million military)... [F]ederal employees as a fraction of the civilian labor force has fallen by more than 50% since the 1960s.”



Figures from [Real-World Economics](http://Real-World Economics)

## Nate Silver | New York Times

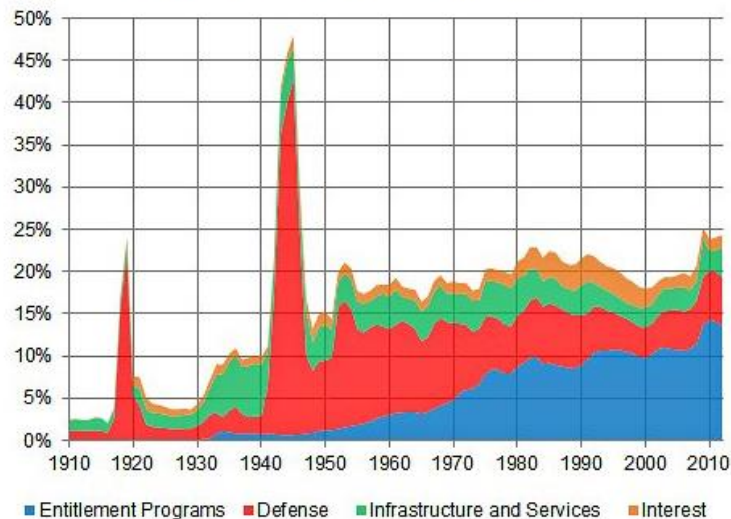
### What is Driving Growth in Government Spending?

**Summary:** This analysis of “government growth” concludes that growth is largely attributable to increases in health care through Medicare and Medicaid and to social insurance and entitlement programs. Silver analyzes data from USgovernmentspending.com to draw his conclusions (he received some online criticism for using this private site rather than official government sources). Our main interest in this analysis was in how he chose to categorize government spending.

### Categories of Spending identified by Silver:

- Entitlement Programs:
  - Health care programs
  - Pensions
  - Retirement (social security)
  - Welfare and social insurance programs (food stamps, unemployment)
- Military Spending
- Interest on the national debt
- Infrastructure and Services (His name for discretionary spending)
  - Education
  - Fire services
  - Police and criminal justice system
  - Physical infrastructure including transportation
  - Science, Technology, R&D
  - General government which is the cost of maintaining the political system
    - Includes salaries for public officials

**Federal Government Spending as Share of GDP**



Above figure from [The New York Times](#)

**Ezra Klein | The Washington Post**

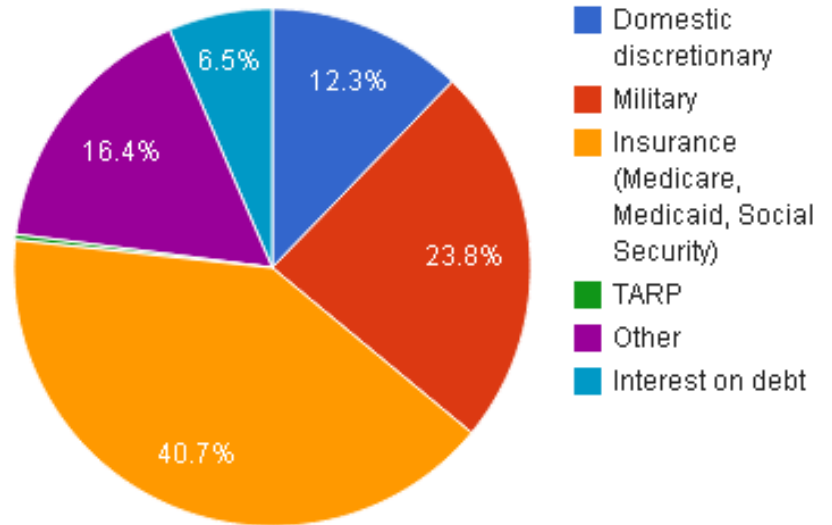
**The U.S. Government: An insurance conglomerate protected by a large, standing army**

**Summary:** An analysis of government expenditures using the President’s 2012 budget. Klein characterizes American government as an insurance company, given that the plurality of the budget is used for social insurance programs.

**Categories of Spending Identified by Klein**

- Domestic Discretionary
- Military
- Insurance
- Medicare
- Medicaid
- Social Security
- Tarp
- Other
- Interest on Debt

**The business of the American government is insurance**



Above figure from [The Washington Post](#)

**John J. DiIulio | Bring Back the Bureaucrats & Facing Up to Big Government in National Affairs**

**Summary:** John J. DiIulio Jr., a political scientist and former government employee, writes about “big government.” But, contrary to most others, he makes the case that government costs would be reduced if more of its work was done by government employees rather than contractors.

*GOVERNMENT SPENDING: 1960-2010  
(AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP)*

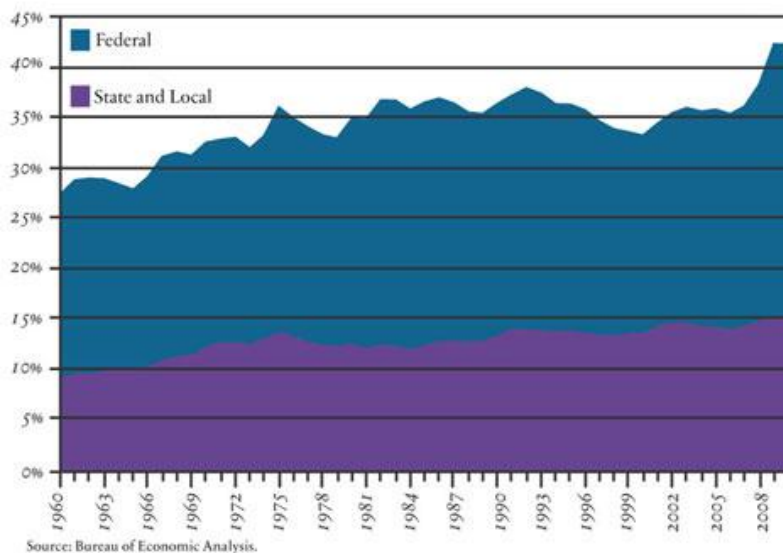


Figure from [National Affairs](#)

[USGovernmentSpending.com](http://USGovernmentSpending.com)

**Summary:** This website is run by Christopher Chantrill, a self-described conservative. It is the top result when doing a Google search for “US government spending”, and dominates in other searches related to government spending, in effect having preference over official government data sources. The site presents easy-to-grasp charts and graphs accompanied by brief narratives. While it claims to use data from government sources, its data summaries and categorizations are sometimes different from official government websites, and in Chantrill’s own words, some numbers are even “guesstimated”. It includes data on federal, state and local government spending. The primary sources of information identified are: CBO (Federal), U.S. Census (State and Local) and BEA/NIPA (GDP).

This website consistently shows total government spending as higher than that shown by OMB or BEA/NIPA. For example, for 2015 this site shows total government spending at 6.36 trillion, whereas the OMB shows 5.65 trillion and BEA/NIPA shows 5.95 trillion. The categorization of expenditures is idiosyncratic, as in the choice to create a category called “welfare,” a term not used on official government sites.

There are three levels of governments in the US: federal, state, and local. The following table shows Total spending. Total spending includes federal, state, and local spending.

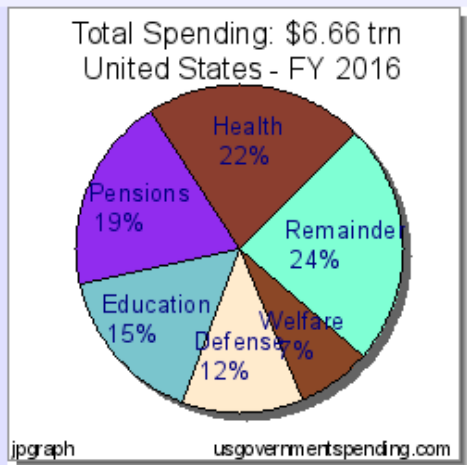
Total [Federal](#) [State](#) [State & Local](#) [Local](#)

\$ trillion nom 2016 full screen

### Total 2016 Spending by Function

Function	-yr 2016 +yr
<b>Total Spending</b>	<b>\$6.7 trillion</b>
<b>Pensions</b>	<b>\$1.3 trillion</b>
<b>Health Care</b>	<b>\$1.4 trillion</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>\$1.0 trillion</b>
<b>Defense</b>	<b>\$0.8 trillion</b>
<b>Welfare</b>	<b>\$0.5 trillion</b>

Spending: *guesstimated*<sup>2</sup>



Click chart for table of Spending or click: [2014](#) [2015](#) [2016](#) [2017](#) [2018](#)

**Note:**

1. Federal spending after 2015 is budgeted.
2. State spending after 2014 and local spending after 2013 are “guesstimated” by projecting the latest change in reported spending forward to future years

**Data Sources:**

GDP, GO: [GDP, GO Sources](#)  
 Federal: [Fed. Budget: Hist. Tables 3.2, 5.1, 7.1](#)  
 State and Local: [State and Local Gov. Finances](#)  
 ‘Guesstimated’ by projecting the latest change in reported spending forward to future years

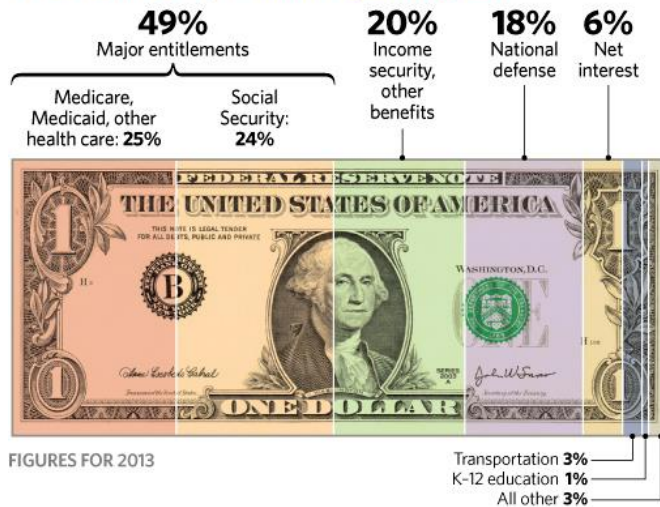
Above figure from [www.usgovernmentspending.com](http://www.usgovernmentspending.com)

## The Heritage Foundation

### Federal Spending by the Numbers, 2014

**Summary:** The Heritage Foundation is a think tank whose mission is, “to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.” Their special report, “Federal Spending by the Numbers, 2014,” seeks to show how government “wastes” money and increases national debt. The report encourages privatization, leaving more spending to state and local government, and the elimination of “waste, duplication and inappropriate spending”. The report includes concrete numbers and includes many attractive charts and infographics on spending, entitlements, debt and other issues related to government spending.

#### Where Did Every Dollar in Spending Go?

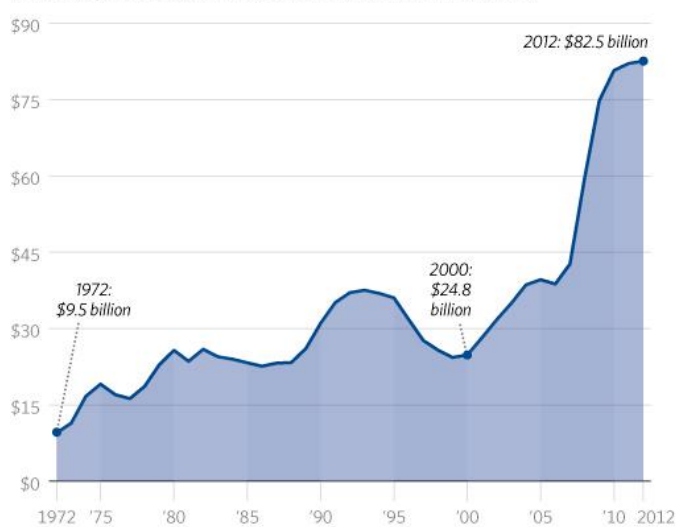


**Notes:** Income security includes federal employee retirement and disability, unemployment compensation, food and housing assistance, and other federal income security programs. Figures have been rounded. National defense includes overseas contingency operations.  
**Source:** U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2015: Historical Tables*, 2014, pp. 156-157, Table 8.4, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals/> (accessed September 17, 2014).

Federal Spending by the Numbers 2014 heritage.org

#### Food Stamps Is One of the Largest Welfare Programs

SPENDING, IN BILLIONS OF 2013 INFLATION-ADJUSTED DOLLARS



**Source:** U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2015: Historical Tables*, 2014, pp. 231-257, Table 11.3, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals/> (accessed September 17, 2014).

Federal Spending by the Numbers 2014 heritage.org

Above figures from [The Heritage Foundation](#)

## C. Sources Cited

The organizations and individuals analyzing government spending cited the following data sources:

[National Priorities Project](#): OMB (federal), USASpending.gov (local)

[Real-World Economics](#): OMB, BLS, OPM, Cambridge University Press

[Nate Silver | The New York Times](#): USGovernmentspending.com

[Ezra Klein | The Washington Post](#): OMB

[John DiIulio | National Affairs and Bring Back the Bureaucrats](#): U.S. Government Accountability Office

[USgovernmentspending.com](#): OMB (federal), U.S. Census (S&L), CBO and BEA/NIPA

[Heritage Foundation](#): Congressional Budget Office (CBO), Office of Management & Budget (OMB)