

# Corporation Income Tax Returns:1980

By James R. Hobbs\*

While for 1980 the corporate sector of the economy continued to grow in size (the number of income tax returns filed and the amount of total assets and total receipts increased), there was a dramatic decrease in the profits of these companies. Net income (less deficit) of \$239.0 billion represented a 16.2 percent drop from the 1979 amount. This decrease is largely a reflection of the deteriorated condition of the economy during the period covered by this report.

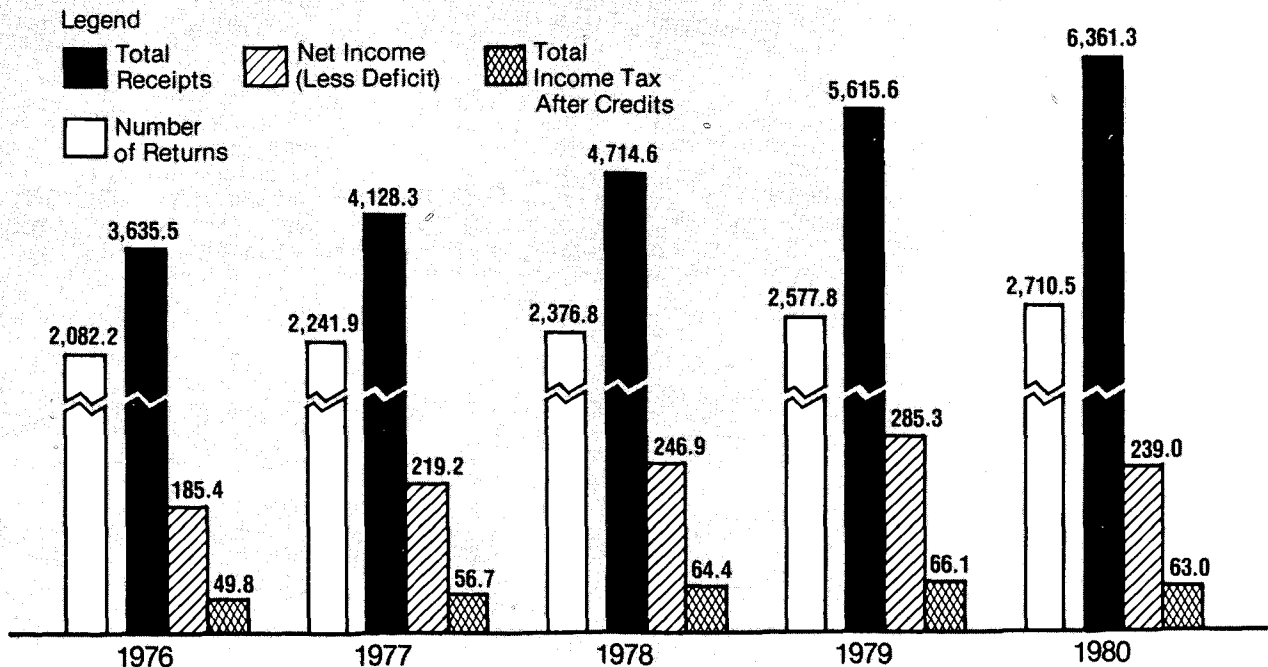
## NUMBER OF RETURNS

Over 96 percent of the corporations filing tax returns were actively engaged in business during 1980.

The 2,711,000 income tax returns of active corporations filed were 5.2 percent greater than the number filed for 1979. This increase when compared to increases of 7.7, 6.0, and 8.5 percent for 1977, 1978, and 1979, respectively, indicates a decline in the rate of growth of the corporate sector. (See Figure A for a brief historical presentation.)

The number of corporate returns filed in any given year actually understates the corporate population. This is because of consolidated returns, which contain the combined financial data of two or more corporations which have met certain affiliated group provisions of the Internal Revenue Code. For 1980, there

Figure A  
**Returns of Active Corporations: Number of Returns, Total Receipts, Net Income (Less Deficit), and Total Income Tax After Credits, 1976-1980**  
 (Number of Returns in Thousands — Amounts in Billions of Dollars)



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## Corporation Returns, 1980

were approximately 58,000 consolidated returns representing an estimated 221,000 corporations. Taking these figures into account, a reasonable estimate for the total number of corporations included in "active" returns would be about 2,874,000.

The 6.0 percent, or approximately 160,000 increase for 1980 in the number of corporations included in "active" returns, is, of course, a netted figure. Both newly incorporated companies ("births") and companies dropping their incorporated status for various reasons ("deaths") are reflected in the 160,000 increase. This estimated net increase was smaller than that for 1979. While the birth rates for these years were similar [1], the lower increase was the result of the death rate rising by approximately 20 percent, again—a reflection—of—the weakened economy.

## BALANCE SHEET

Corporate assets increased by almost \$800 billion, from \$6.8 trillion for 1979 to \$7.6 trillion for 1980. This 11.3 percent increase outpaced the 9.0 percent inflation rate for 1980, as measured by the Implicit Price Deflator for Gross National Product [2]. Because balance sheet items tend to be "book valued" (as opposed to a "fair market value" which adjusts for inflation) from year to year, new assets accounted for the majority of the 2.3 percent real value increase.

The increase was spread among all asset items and ranged from only 4.9 percent for State and local Government obligations to a high of 25.5 percent for net depletable assets. Net depletable assets included the value of mineral property, oil and gas wells, other natural deposits, standing timber, intangible development and drilling costs capitalized, and leases and leaseholds, less the reduction for accumulated depletion. The largest dollar increase for net depletable assets (\$4.6 billion) was associated with the manufacture of petroleum and coal products. This industry included "integrated" companies which were involved in both extracting and refining oil.

Another asset item of interest is inventories. Inventory change, often an indicator of the direction of the economy, was only \$30.5 billion, or a net increase in inventories of 6.0 percent for 1980. Considering the inflation rate, this meant that there was an actual decrease in the constant-dollar or real value of inventories. The chart below shows that most of the change to ending inventories was due to companies involved in either manufacturing or trade.

Industry	1979 Inventories (billions)	1980 Inventories (billions)	Percent Change
Manufacturing	\$257.6	\$268.4	4.2
Wholesale and Retail Trade	177.0	188.8	6.7
All Industries	504.3	534.8	6.0

Most liability items, like assets, increased for 1980. The components of corporate debt were altered somewhat from 1979 due in part to rising interest rates (see below for a more detailed discussion of the effect of interest rates). While mortgages, notes, and bonds payable rose only 11.4 percent, loans from stockholders, a source of comparatively low-cost financing for corporations, rose by 26.9 percent.

The proportion of liabilities and stockholder's equity related to corporate assets remained constant at 75 and 25 percent, respectively, for 1980. It could be expected, however, that equity will assume a some-

what smaller proportion of assets for 1981 due to the decrease in profitability and the resulting decline in the rate of growth of retained earnings.

## INCOME STATEMENT

The decline in corporate profitability reversed a trend of increasing profits since the last economic downturn in 1975. The downturn in 1980 was much larger than that for 1975 in both rate of change and actual dollar amounts. Shown below is a historical summary of net income (less deficit), as computed under the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code.

Years Compared	Difference (billions)	Percent Change
1974-1975	\$- 3.4	- 2.3
1975-1976	42.8	30.0
1976-1977	33.8	18.2
1977-1978	27.6	12.6
1978-1979	38.4	15.6
1979-1980	-46.3	-16.2

The drop in corporate profits for 1980 was widespread. Very divergent business activities had declines, demonstrating that the economy did not just deteriorate in one area. The drop in profits for a selected group of business activities is shown below.

Industry	Net Income (Less Deficit)		Percent Change
	1979 (millions)	1980 (millions)	
General building contractors and operative builders	\$1,976.3	\$1,768.5	-10.5
Manufacturing:			
Primary metal industries	5,458.1	4,526.2	-17.1
Motor vehicles and equipment	8,418.3	-2,586.1	-130.7
Banking	7,350.4	4,576.8	-37.7
Real estate	3,096.7	1,616.6	-47.8

The poor showing of corporate profits for 1980 was the result of expenses increasing faster than receipts. While total receipts increased almost \$746 billion, or 13.3 percent, total expenses increased even more, by over \$793 billion, or 14.9 percent. Sales, the predominant component of total receipts, rose by 11.2 percent, a real value increase considering the 9.0 percent inflation rate. However, the even greater rise of 13.0 percent in cost of sales and operations was the primary cause of the reduced profits.

Another ingredient in the decline of corporate profits was the increased cost of borrowed funds. Reflecting the rising interest rates (for instance, the average "prime rate" charged by banks on loans rose from 12.67 percent for 1979 to 15.27 percent for 1980 [3]), both the amount of interest received and the amount of interest paid grew significantly. Interest received on non-Governmental obligations rose by \$70 billion, or 26.9 percent, and interest paid rose by \$83 billion, or 31.8 percent. While much of this interest was intercorporate, i.e., from one corporation to another, substantial amounts were also the result of such corporate activities as loans which involved individuals and governmental bodies. This included demand and time deposits and mortgage and consumer loans made by banks and savings institutions and U.S. Small Business Administration loans.

The effects of the increased interest rates are further apparent when the rapid rise in interest income

and expenses are compared to the much slower growth in balance sheet items representing debt obligations. Thus, the asset item of mortgage and real estate loans increased only 6.3 percent, and the liability items of combined mortgages, notes, and bonds payable rose 11.4 percent.

**INCOME TAX**

Total income tax before credits for 1980 declined by 12.6 percent, from \$120.3 billion to only \$105.1 billion, the first actual decrease since 1970. (Even the 1975 economic downturn produced a slight increase in income tax.) Total income tax after credits (discussed below) also decreased, by 4.9 percent to \$62.7 billion for 1980. This \$3.2 billion decrease in U.S. tax liability is a reflection of the drop in corporate profits. Compared to an expected increase based on previous years, this decrease was a significant factor in the growing Federal budget deficit.

Since the tax rate structure for 1980 was essentially unchanged from 1979, it did not contribute to the decrease in corporate tax liability. Two basic methods of tax computation were available to corporations: a regular method based on five graduated steps of taxable income and an alternative method. The rates for the regular method are shown below:

<u>Taxable Income</u>	<u>Tax Rates (Percent of Taxable Income)</u>
\$25,000 or less	17
\$25,001 to \$50,000	20
\$50,001 to \$75,000	30
\$75,001 to \$100,000	40
Over \$100,000	46

The alternative method of computing tax using net long-term capital gains was also available as in prior years. Under this method, the special capital gains tax rate was 28 percent. The remainder of taxable income was taxed at the regular rates. Corporations were allowed to use this alternative method when the resulting tax liability was less than that computed under the regular method.

**TAX CREDITS**

The \$103.8 billion of corporate tax liability for 1980 resulting from the regular and alternative tax was reduced by nearly \$42 billion by the foreign tax, U.S. possessions tax, investment, work incentive (WIN), jobs, alcohol fuel, and nonconventional source fuel credits. (The taxes from recomputing prior-year investment and work incentive (WIN) credits and the additional tax for tax preferences could not be reduced by these credits.) Brief discussions on selected credits are provided below.

Foreign tax credit was a credit against U.S. income tax for taxes paid, accrued, or "deemed paid" to foreign countries. The foreign taxes could have been based on foreign income, war profits, or excess profits. This credit dropped 32.5 percent, from \$36.8 billion to \$24.9 billion. This reduction was completely accounted for by a \$17.0 billion decrease among companies whose principal business activity was the extraction of crude petroleum, natural gas, and natural gas liquids. This decline was the result of a decrease in tax liability before credits, which was related to the foreign nationalization of certain U.S. oil interests. (The total credit for all other industries actually rose for 1980.) A brief historical table is shown below.

**Extraction of Crude Petroleum, Natural Gas, and Natural Gas Liquids**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Income Tax Before Credits (billions)</u>	<u>Foreign Tax Credit (billions)</u>	<u>Percent of Total Income Tax Reduced by Foreign Tax Credit</u>
1976	13.3	12.9	97.0
1977	14.1	13.6	96.5
1978	12.7	12.3	96.9
1979	19.0	18.5	97.4
1980	2.1	1.5	71.4

Investment credit was allowed corporations for investment in certain depreciable (and amortizable) property with a useful life of 3 years or more. While the amount of this credit did increase by \$425 million, the rate of increase slowed considerably. The 2.9 percent increase for 1980 was substantially less than the 13.8, 16.8, and 20.6 percent increases for 1979, 1978, and 1977, respectively. The small increase for 1980 was in part due to the drop in tax against which the credit could have been applied. Additionally, the expenditures on depreciable and amortizable property (i.e., capital investment) related to the credit actually decreased by \$2.0 billion, amounting to \$225.7 billion for 1980.

**DATA SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS**

A general description of sampling procedures and data limitations applicable to the Statistics of Income tabulations is contained in the Appendix of this publication. Specific information related to 1980 corporate data is shown below.

Sample Selection

The statistics for the 1980 Income Year were estimated from a stratified probability sample of about 85,000 corporation income tax returns selected after revenue processing but before audit. The returns for 1980, as well as for 1979, were generally stratified using net income or deficit, total assets, and business activity. (However, for years prior to 1979, samples were stratified using only total assets and net income or deficit.) The corporation population from which the sample was drawn contained the following types of returns: Form 1120--U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return; Form 1120L--U.S. Life Insurance Company Income Tax Return; Form 1120M-- U.S. Mutual Insurance Company Income Tax Return; Form 1120S--U.S. Small Business Corporation Income Tax Return; Form 1120F--Return of a Foreign Corporation; and Form 1120-DISC--Domestic International Sales Corporation Return.

The sample rates for return Forms 1120 and 1120S ranged from 0.25 percent to 100 percent and were based on size of total assets and net income (or deficit), and the presence or absence of principal business activity codes. Return Forms 1120L and 1120M were sampled at either a 50 or 100 percent rate, depending on the size of total assets. Return Form 1120F was sampled at rates ranging from 25 percent to 100 percent. For return Form 1120-DISC, sample rates ranged from 19 to 100 percent.

Limitations

Because the data presented in this article are estimates based upon a sample, they are subject to sampling error. To use the data properly, the magnitude of the sampling error should be known. Coefficients of variation (CV's) are used to measure that magnitude.

## Corporation Returns, 1980

The table below presents approximated CV's for frequency estimates. The approximate CV's shown here are intended only as a general indication of the reliability of the data. For numbers of corporations other than those shown below, the corresponding CV's can be estimated by interpolation.

Estimated Number of Returns	Approximated Coefficient of Variation (Percent)
1,000,000	2
160,000	5
40,000	10
10,000	20
4,500	30
3,300	35
1,600	50

The reliability of estimates based on samples and the use of CV's for evaluating the precision of sample estimates are discussed in the Appendix.

Time Period Covered

The 1980 estimates are based on data from returns with accounting periods that coincided with Calendar Year 1980 (these returns accounted for the bulk of the financial data) as well as returns with accounting periods that were for fiscal years ending any time from July 1980 through June 1981. In addition to returns filed for 12-month accounting periods, the statistics also include data from so-called part-year returns. These returns, which were filed for less than a 12-month period, were for corporations that changed accounting periods, and for new, merging, and liquidating corporations.

Definitions and Changes in Law

Definitions of terms, changes in law, a comprehensive description of data limitations, and additional detailed statistics will be available in the publication, Statistics of Income--1980, Corporation Income Tax Returns. Definitions for most of the terms used here are now available in Statistics of Income--1978-1979, Corporation Income Tax Returns.

Derivation of Estimates

For this article estimates for both 1979 and 1980 were prepared by weighting the sample to population totals by size of total assets, net income or deficit, and business activity.

Data for 1979 shown in this article are slightly different from 1979 data contained in the publication, Statistics of Income -- 1978-1979, Corporation Income Tax Returns. While the same sample was used for 1979, the estimates in the previous publication were obtained by weighting to population totals only by size of total assets and net income or deficit.

It should be noted that even though the new procedure for weighting the corporate sample (described in [4]) did assign somewhat different weights, the resulting aggregates were not significantly different in most cases.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] Economic Report of the President, p. 338, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982. The source for these data was, in turn, Dun and Bradstreet, Inc.
- [2] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Survey of Current Business, November 1981, Vol. 61, No. 11, p. 12.
- [3] Economic Report of the President, p. 310, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982.
- [4] Harte, James M., "Post-Stratification Approaches in the Corporate Statistics of Income Program," 1982 Proceedings, American Statistical Association, Section on Survey Research Methods (forthcoming).

**Table 1.—Returns of Active Corporations: Balance Sheet, Income Statement, Tax, and Credit Items, 1979 and 1980**

[All figures are estimates based on samples—money amounts are in thousands of dollars]

Item	1979	1980	Percent change 1979 to 1980	Item	1979	1980	Percent change 1979 to 1980
	(1)	(2)	(3)		(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>Number of returns</b> . . . . .	<b>2,577,801</b>	<b>2,710,538</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>Total deductions</b> . . . . .	<b>5,331,970,825</b>	<b>6,125,365,155</b>	<b>14.9</b>
<b>Total assets</b> . . . . .	<b>6,844,891,231</b>	<b>7,617,238,403</b>	<b>11.3</b>	Cost of sales and operations . . . . .	3,721,782,971	4,204,905,905	13.0
Cash . . . . .	462,537,777	528,914,747	14.4	Compensation of officers . . . . .	97,723,102	108,973,751	11.5
Notes and accounts receivable . . . . .	1,817,469,863	1,984,601,790	9.2	Repairs . . . . .	38,774,776	42,407,967	9.4
Less: Allowance for bad debts . . . . .	42,859,301	50,057,307	16.8	Bad debts . . . . .	17,486,107	18,769,771	7.3
Inventories . . . . .	504,315,590	534,806,547	6.0	Rent paid on business property . . . . .	63,606,356	71,990,832	13.2
Investments in Government obligations:				Taxes paid . . . . .	128,172,063	163,003,622	27.2
United States . . . . .	224,656,370	265,542,521	18.2	Interest paid . . . . .	261,530,850	344,612,542	31.8
State and local . . . . .	196,785,368	206,517,216	4.9	Contributions or gifts . . . . .	2,294,755	2,358,554	2.8
Other current assets . . . . .	260,221,427	310,177,160	19.2	Amortization . . . . .	1,418,749	1,374,658	-3.1
Loans to stockholders . . . . .	25,478,428	29,873,250	17.2	Depreciation . . . . .	138,490,396	157,345,828	13.6
Mortgage and real estate loans . . . . .	841,303,175	894,323,489	6.3	Depletion . . . . .	7,828,973	8,871,993	13.3
Other investments . . . . .	1,028,946,423	1,213,986,210	18.0	Advertising . . . . .	46,480,265	52,266,004	12.4
Depreciable assets . . . . .	1,900,626,462	2,107,027,914	10.9	Pension, profit-sharing, stock bonus, and annuity plans . . . . .	46,583,431	51,529,310	10.6
Less: Accumulated depreciation . . . . .	699,741,553	767,841,763	9.7	Employee benefit programs . . . . .	33,719,869	40,179,104	19.2
Depletable assets . . . . .	57,702,755	71,901,490	24.6	Net loss, noncapital assets . . . . .	4,074,858	5,903,104	44.9
Less: Accumulated depletion . . . . .	16,016,891	19,569,556	22.2	Other deductions . . . . .	722,003,304	850,872,216	17.8
Land . . . . .	84,792,835	92,931,935	9.6	<b>Total receipts less total deductions</b> . . . . .	<b>283,654,693</b>	<b>235,918,858</b>	<b>-16.8</b>
Intangible assets (amortizable) . . . . .	37,465,838	45,480,694	21.4	Constructive taxable income from related foreign corporations . . . . .	12,524,853	15,708,560	25.4
Less: Accumulated amortization . . . . .	15,164,289	18,393,037	21.3	<b>Net income (less deficit), total</b> . . . . .	<b>285,300,630</b>	<b>239,006,542</b>	<b>-16.2</b>
Other assets . . . . .	176,370,956	187,015,106	6.0	Net income . . . . .	322,517,550	296,787,201	-8.0
<b>Total liabilities</b> . . . . .	<b>6,844,891,231</b>	<b>7,617,238,403</b>	<b>11.3</b>	Deficit . . . . .	37,216,920	57,780,659	55.3
Accounts payable . . . . .	482,558,295	542,172,368	12.4	<b>Statutory special deductions, total</b> . . . . .	<b>18,352,884</b>	<b>18,717,621</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Mortgages, notes, and bonds payable in less than one year . . . . .	452,958,194	504,802,288	11.4	Net operating loss deduction . . . . .	9,492,960	9,382,540	-1.2
Other current liabilities . . . . .	2,585,491,652	2,706,796,360	4.7	Dividends received deduction . . . . .	8,694,549	9,296,730	6.9
Loans from stockholders . . . . .	67,546,719	85,718,510	26.9	Other . . . . .	165,374	38,351	-76.8
Mortgages, notes, and bonds payable in one year or more . . . . .	885,515,693	986,663,932	11.4	<b>Income subject to tax, total</b> . . . . .	<b>280,155,155</b>	<b>246,598,486</b>	<b>-12.0</b>
Other liabilities . . . . .	651,266,486	846,696,691	30.0	Net long-term capital gain taxed at alternative rates . . . . .	13,613,082	13,217,222	-2.9
Capital stock . . . . .	353,450,846	417,153,783	18.0	<b>Income tax (before credits), total</b> . . . . .	<b>120,349,946</b>	<b>105,142,436</b>	<b>-12.6</b>
Paid-in or capital surplus . . . . .	448,365,805	532,039,407	18.7	Regular and alternative tax . . . . .	119,157,964	103,831,172	-12.9
Retained earnings, appropriated . . . . .	48,803,035	41,461,644	-15.0	Tax from recomputing prior-year investment credit . . . . .	749,051	867,571	15.8
Retained earnings, unappropriated . . . . .	912,992,287	1,027,902,049	12.6	Tax from recomputing prior-year work incentive (WIN) credit . . . . .	9,282	4,835	-47.9
Less: Cost of treasury stock . . . . .	44,057,783	74,168,627	68.3	Additional tax for tax preferences . . . . .	433,649	438,820	1.2
<b>Total receipts</b> . . . . .	<b>5,615,625,519</b>	<b>6,361,284,012</b>	<b>13.3</b>	Selected credits:			
Business receipts . . . . .	5,152,613,019	5,731,616,337	11.2	Foreign tax credit . . . . .	36,828,057	24,861,315	-32.5
Interest on Government obligations:				U.S. possessions tax credit . . . . .	1,376,124	1,565,681	13.8
United States . . . . .	19,541,449	25,440,716	30.2	Investment credit . . . . .	14,678,306	15,102,812	2.9
State and local . . . . .	10,878,916	12,620,876	16.0	Work incentive (WIN) credit . . . . .	27,942	36,483	30.6
Other interest . . . . .	259,146,298	328,802,958	26.9	Jobs credit . . . . .	1,318,837	601,444	-54.4
Rents . . . . .	31,863,195	41,371,141	29.8	Travel, entertainment, and gift expense . . . . .	20,458,192	23,157,359	13.2
Royalties . . . . .	8,440,476	12,450,250	47.5	Distributions to stockholders:			
Net short-term capital gain reduced by net long-term capital loss . . . . .	1,209,842	2,013,510	66.4	Cash and property except in own stock . . . . .	86,833,911	97,378,617	12.1
Net long-term capital gain reduced by net short-term capital loss . . . . .	20,005,538	24,910,957	24.5	Corporation's own stock . . . . .	3,135,129	3,525,549	12.5
Net gain, noncapital assets . . . . .	15,397,176	20,117,615	30.7				
Dividends received from domestic corporations . . . . .	16,863,766	18,654,800	10.6				
Dividends received from foreign corporations . . . . .	12,715,084	14,563,353	14.5				
Other receipts . . . . .	66,950,760	128,721,498	92.3				

NOTE: Detail may not add to total because of rounding.

