

Gasoline Taxes and Consumer Behavior*

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Abstract

Gasoline taxes can correct externalities associated with automobile use, reduce dependency on foreign oil, and raise government revenue. Our understanding of the optimal gasoline tax and the efficacy of existing taxes is largely based on empirical analysis of consumer responses to gasoline *price* changes. In this paper, we directly examine how gasoline taxes affect consumer behavior as distinct from tax-exclusive gasoline prices. Our analysis shows that a 5 cent tax increase reduces gasoline consumption by 1.3 percent in the short-run. The response is six times as large as that from a 5 cent tax-exclusive gasoline price increase, which suggests that traditional analysis could significantly underestimate policy impacts of tax changes. We further investigate the differential effects from gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive gasoline prices on the intensive and extensive margins of gasoline consumption. We discuss implications of our findings for the estimation of the implicit discount rate for vehicle purchases and for the fiscal benefits of raising taxes.

Keywords: Automobile, Consumer Response, Gasoline Tax

JEL Classifications: Q4, Q5, H3

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1 Introduction

The gasoline tax is an important policy tool to control externalities associated with automobile use, to reduce dependency on oil imports, and to raise government revenue. Understanding how gasoline tax changes affect automobile use and gasoline consumption is crucial in effectively leveraging this instrument to achieve these policy goals.

Automobile usage produces a variety of externalities including local air pollutions, carbon dioxide emissions, traffic accidents, and traffic congestion (Parry, Walls, and Harrington (2007)). Although in theory the gasoline tax is not the optimal tax for these externalities except for carbon dioxide, a single tax avoids the need for multiple instruments (e.g., distance-based tax and real time congestion pricing) and offers an administratively simple way to control these externalities at the same time.

Besides correcting environmental externalities, the gasoline tax can reduce gasoline consumption and associated concerns about the sensitivity of the U.S. economy to oil price volatility, constraints on foreign policy, and military and geopolitical costs. While many industrialized countries levy high gasoline taxes to curb gasoline consumption, the United States relies on Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, which were enacted in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. A long literature has examined CAFE standards and broadly concluded that the gasoline tax is more cost-effective in achieving targeted fuel reductions.¹

Moreover, gasoline taxes at the federal and state levels are major funding sources for building and maintaining transportation infrastructure. The federal gasoline tax provides the majority of revenue for the Highway Trust Fund, which is used to finance highway and transit programs. Past increases in federal gasoline taxes have also been used to generate revenue for such programs, but the federal gasoline tax has stayed constant since 1993. With the increased need for improving transportation infrastructure and declined revenue due to the recent economic downturn, the Highway Trust Fund has been insolvent since 2008; Congress had had to provide funding from general taxation.²

Growing concerns of climate change, air pollution, energy security, the national budget deficit, and insolvency of the Highway Trust Fund have all brought renewed interests in increasing the gasoline tax. An underlying assumption used in policy analysis on the effectiveness of higher gasoline taxes and the optimal gasoline tax is that consumers react to gasoline tax changes the same as to gasoline price changes. The recent economics literature finds that consumers respond little to rising gasoline prices at least in the short run.³ Together with the maintained assumption,

¹See, for example, Goldberg (1998), Congressional Budget Office (2003), Austin and Dinan (2005), Fischer, Harrington, and Parry (2007), Jacobsen (2010), and Anderson and Saltee (2011).

²In federal fiscal year 2010, \$51 billion of spending was committed from the Highway Trust Fund while the total revenue into the fund was just \$35 billion.

³A partial list includes Small and Van Dender (2007), Hughes, Knittel, and Sperling (2008), Li, Timmins, and von Haefen (2009), Klier and Linn (2010). These studies often use variations in gasoline prices driven primarily by supply and demand shocks.

these estimates suggest that a large increase in the gasoline tax would be required to significantly reduce fuel consumption. This may exacerbate the political cost of high gasoline taxes and lead policymakers to favor CAFE standards because the costs are less obvious to consumers.

The purpose of our paper is to test the maintained assumption that consumers respond to gasoline tax and tax-exclusive price changes in the same way. In contrast to the literature, our analysis directly estimates consumer responses to gasoline taxes by decomposing retail gasoline prices into tax and tax-exclusive components. We use three outcomes to examine consumer behavior over short time horizons: gasoline consumption, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and vehicle fuel economy (miles per gallon, MPG). Gasoline consumption and VMT represent the intensive margin and MPG represents the extensive margin. Two separate data sets are employed in our analysis: aggregate state-level data that allow us examine gasoline consumption, and household-level data that allow us to examine VMT and MPG. We find that rising gasoline taxes are associated with much larger reductions in gasoline consumption than comparable increases in gasoline prices. The results from the baseline specification suggest that a 5-cent increase in the gasoline tax reduces gasoline consumption by 1.3 percent in the short-run while an equivalent change in the tax-exclusive price reduces gasoline consumption by 0.16 percent. Dissecting the intensive and extensive margins, we find a significant differential effect in household MPG, especially among newer vehicles. Although we focus on short-term responses, the large effect of taxes on MPG suggests that the long run response to taxes may also be greater than the long run response to tax-exclusive gasoline prices. Our analysis also shows that the gasoline tax has a stronger effect for VMT than the tax-exclusive price, but the difference is not precisely estimated.

There are at least two possible (and not mutually exclusive) explanations for the larger response to gasoline taxes than to tax-exclusive prices. First, legislation and proposals to change gasoline taxes are often subject to intensive public debate and attract a large amount of media coverage. Therefore, changes in gasoline taxes may be more salient than an *equal-sized* changes in tax-exclusive prices (e.g., due to oil price shocks). As a result, consumers may respond more to a tax increase than a commensurate increase in the tax-exclusive price. Recent empirical studies have shown that consumers are more responsive to salient price or tax changes (Busse, Silva-Risso, and Zettelmeyer (2006), Chetty, Looney, and Kroft (2009), and Finkelstein (2009)).⁴ Second, the durable goods nature of automobiles implies that a change in fuel prices depends on consumer expectations of future fuel costs. If consumers consider tax changes to be more persistent than gasoline price changes due to other factors, a larger response to gasoline taxes than prices could arise through vehicle choice in both the short and long run. Although the short-run response of VMT to gasoline price changes is unlikely to depend on the persistence of price changes, as our analysis suggests, the long-run response to persistent changes could be greater than to less

⁴In addition, Finkelstein (2009) finds that the salience of a tax system has a negative impact on equilibrium tax rates in the context of highway tolls. This leads to the argument that the salient nature of gasoline taxes may contribute to the low taxes rates in the United States.

persistent changes because of transaction costs involved in travel mode and intensity decisions (such as setting up carpooling or changing where to live and work).

Our findings have several implications. First, they suggest that the gasoline tax would be more effective than suggested by the empirical literature on gasoline prices at addressing climate change, air pollution, and energy security. Several recent proposals have called for higher gasoline taxes for either fiscal motives (see e.g., the proposal of the Deficit Reduction Committee), to maintain the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund, or to internalize greenhouse gas emissions. By focusing on the effects of gas taxes, our paper speaks directly to the effectiveness of these proposals.

Second, separating gasoline taxes from tax-exclusive prices offers a strategy to address a challenging identification problem in environmental and energy economics. Energy efficiency-related policies such as CAFE are often advocated because consumers are widely believed to use a high implicit discount rate to value future energy savings. Beginning with Hausman (1979) and Dubin and McFadden (1984), a long literature estimates the implicit discount rate. The identification problem arises because the econometrician does not observe a consumer's expectation of future energy costs. Consequently, it is impossible to estimate implicit discount rates without making assumptions on consumers' expectations of future energy prices. In some cases, assumptions of future expectations are innocuous (e.g., for regulated retail electricity markets) but in others such as gasoline prices, which are subject to influences from numerous domestic and international factors, modeling consumer expectations is not straightforward. Nevertheless, as illustrated in Section 5.1, under assumptions regarding consumer perceptions on state and federal taxes, the implicit discount rate could be identified without making assumptions regarding consumer expectations of gasoline prices.

Finally, the results have implications for the literature on the optimal gasoline tax (e.g., Parry and Small (2005)). The literature estimates the optimal tax based partly on empirical estimates of the elasticity of gasoline consumption to gasoline prices, under assumptions that the gasoline tax and gasoline price elasticities of demand are the same. Although our analysis focuses on short-term responses to gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive prices, the large effect of taxes on MPG suggests that the long run responses to taxes may also be greater than to tax-exclusive prices. The implications for the magnitude of the optimal gasoline tax are beyond the scope of this paper, however.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 2, we present some background on U.S. gasoline prices and taxes. We present our analysis of the aggregate state-level data in section 3 and present our analysis of the consumer data in section 4. In section 5, we discuss the implications of our results for the estimation of implicit discount rates, and the elasticity of fiscal revenue. Section 6 concludes.

2 Background on U.S. Gasoline Prices and Taxes

Our empirical analysis employs changes in state gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive prices to investigate the effects of taxes on gasoline consumption, vehicles miles traveled, and vehicle choices. In this section, we discuss variation of U.S. gasoline prices and taxes.

Taxes make up a substantial portion of U.S. retail gasoline prices. As an illustration, we decompose gasoline prices into oil prices and excise taxes. We regress the tax-inclusive price on crude oil prices, federal and state excise taxes, state fixed effects, and state-specific linear time trends:

$$RetailPrice_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta OilPrice_t + \gamma \tau_{it} + \delta_i t + \epsilon_{it}, \quad (1)$$

where i is state index and t is year index. $RetailPrice_{it}$ is the retail price, $OilPrice_t$ is the crude oil price, and τ is the sum of federal and state excise taxes. The state fixed effects, α_i , capture time-invariant differences in gasoline prices that arise from differences in transportation costs. The linear time trends allow the retail prices in each location to adjust at a different linear rate over time. The coefficient on taxes is 1.03 and is statistically indistinguishable from 1, suggesting that gasoline taxes are heavily borne by consumers. This is consistent with the result in Marion and Muehlegger (2011), which finds that, under typical supply and demand conditions, state and federal gasoline taxes are fully passed on to consumers and are incorporated fully into the tax-inclusive price in the month of the tax change.

Figure 1 decomposes the average U.S. retail gasoline price (dashed line) into an oil component, a tax component, and the state fixed effects and time trends. Although much of the intertemporal variation in national gasoline prices is correlated with changes in oil prices, taxes constitute a significant portion of the tax-inclusive gasoline prices for much of the period. Table 1 reports the average nominal gasoline price, state gasoline tax, and federal gasoline tax, in cents per gallon for five-year intervals beginning in 1966 and ending in 2008. In addition, for each period the table reports the percentage of gasoline price changes explained by changes in gasoline taxes. The percentage varies substantially over time, rising with the federal gasoline tax (from 4 to 9 cpg in 1983, to 14.1 cpg in 1991, and then to 18.4 cpg in 1994) and state taxes, and falling during periods of volatile oil prices.

National averages obscure substantial cross-state variation in excise tax rates. Figure 2 displays snapshots of state gasoline tax rates in 1966 and 2006. Figure 3 maps changes in state gas taxes from 1966 to 1987 and 1987 to 2008. Figure 4 presents the mean, maximum and minimum state tax rates as well as the federal tax rate over the period. Although the mean state tax rate rises slowly over time, state tax rates rise more quickly in some locations than in others. In 1966, the difference between the states with the highest and lowest tax rates was 2.5 cpg. In 2008, the difference was 30 cpg; Georgia's excise tax was 7.5 cpg while Washington's excise tax was 37.5

cpg.

States vary substantially in the frequency and magnitude with which they increase gasoline excise taxes. From 1966 to 2008, annual state tax rates changed in approximately 26 percent of the state-years.⁵ Tax rates rose in 488 state-years and fell in 44 state-years, out of 2,064 total observations. Nebraska, North Carolina, and Wisconsin changed taxes most often, in 29, 24, and 24 years, respectively.⁶ Georgia only changed the gasoline excise tax twice.

Figure 5 graphs the proportion of the tax-inclusive retail price made up by excise taxes. At the median, taxes make up approximately 26 percent of the after-tax price. This varies substantially over time and across states; the proportion is greatest during the late 1960s and late 1990s when oil prices were relatively low and taxes were relatively high. The proportion is lowest during the early 1980s and after 2005, when oil prices rose substantially. At the peak in 1999, the proportion varies from a low of 25 to 30 percent (at the 5th percentile) to a high of over 40 percent (at the 95th percentile).

Despite gasoline taxes constituting a large proportion of after-tax fuel prices, relatively little work examines political and economic factors that influence state and national fuel taxes. Goel and Nelson (1999) find that gasoline taxes are negatively correlated with tax-exclusive gasoline prices. Tax increases are more likely than decreases, which they interpret as evidence that states are less reluctant to increase taxes when prices are low. In addition, they find evidence that gasoline taxes were negatively correlated with road toll revenue between 1960 and 1981 and were positively correlated with non-compliance with environmental regulation. Decker and Wohar (2007) examine diesel taxes and find that state taxes are positively correlated with non-compliance with environmental regulation. The article also finds that diesel taxes are negatively correlated with trucking industry employment. Internationally, Hammar, Lofgren, and Sterner (2004) find that government debt as a percent of GDP is positively correlated with gasoline taxes. This is less likely to be relevant in the U.S., where states typically set aside gasoline taxes for infrastructure investment rather than for bridging fiscal deficits. Finally, Doyle and Samphantharak (2008) use gasoline tax moratoria that were granted in Illinois and Indiana in 2000 to estimate the incidence of gasoline taxes. Although in this case taxes were waived in direct response to high gasoline prices, gas tax moratoria are very rare and constitute a negligible fraction of the observed variation. Overall, the past literature identifies political and economic factors correlated with tax changes, but the variables considered explain only a small fraction of total variation.

⁵In the annual data, we only count years in which the average annual rate changed relative to the previous year. We do not count multiple changes over the course of a year as part of the total.

⁶In fact, Nebraska changes its gasoline tax even more often than the annual figures suggest. From 1983 to 2008, for which we have monthly data, Nebraska changed its gasoline tax 56 times.

3 Aggregate Data Analysis

In this paper, we examine two distinct data sources: (1) aggregate data including gasoline consumption, taxes, and prices at the state level; and (2) individual household data on vehicle ownership and driving decisions. We employ the aggregate data to estimate gasoline consumption responses to tax and price changes, while we use the household data to examine two separate margins through which gasoline consumptions are affected: the extensive margin (vehicle choice) and the intensive margin (vehicle miles traveled, VMT).⁷ In this section, we present our empirical strategy, data, and results using the aggregate data.

3.1 Empirical Methodology

To estimate the relative impact of tax and non-tax price changes on aggregate gasoline consumption and vehicle miles traveled, we employ a similar empirical approach to Marion and Muehlegger (2011) and Davis and Kilian (forthcoming). We estimate the following linear equation, which decomposes the tax-inclusive retail price into a tax-exclusive component and the tax rate:

$$\ln(q_{sy}) = \alpha \ln(p_{sy}) + \beta \ln\left(1 + \frac{\tau_{sy}}{p_{sy}}\right) + X_{sy}\Theta + \delta_s + \phi_y + e_{sy} \quad (2)$$

where q_{sy} is the dependent variable, gasoline consumption per adult, by state and year; p_{sy} is the tax-exclusive gasoline price; τ_{sy} is the total state and federal tax on gasoline; X_{sy} is a vector of state-level observables; and δ_s and ϕ_y are state and year fixed effects. Within-state deviations from the national trend identify the correlation among the dependent variables, tax-exclusive gasoline prices, and tax ratios.

Following the decomposition in Marion and Muehlegger (2011), we can derive the price and tax elasticities of demand from the coefficients in equation 2. Marion and Muehlegger (2011) find strong evidence that state taxes are fully (and rapidly) passed on to consumers. Under the assumption that consumers bear the entire tax, the tax-exclusive price is not affected by a change in the tax rate, $dp/d\tau = 0$. Under this assumption, we take the derivative of equation 2 with respect to the price and tax and rearrange terms to obtain price and tax elasticities of gasoline demand:

$$\epsilon_p = \alpha - \beta \frac{\tau}{p + \tau}; \quad \epsilon_\tau = \beta \frac{\tau}{p + \tau}. \quad (3)$$

Similarly, we can derive the semi-elasticities, which are defined as the percent change associated with a unit increase in either the tax-exclusive price or gasoline tax:

$$\frac{\partial \log(q)}{\partial p} = \frac{1}{p} \left(\alpha - \beta \frac{\tau}{p + \tau} \right); \quad \frac{\partial \log(q)}{\partial \tau} = \beta \frac{1}{p + \tau}. \quad (4)$$

⁷Although state-level VMT measures are available, we do not use them to examine the intensive margin because of their well-known measurement errors.

This approach provides a direct test of whether taxes are more strongly correlated with behavior than are tax-exclusive gasoline price changes. If consumers respond equally to changes in gasoline tax and tax-exclusive price (of the same size), α is equal to β . The two semi-elasticities derived above would be the same and equation 2 reduces to a regression of quantity on the tax-inclusive gasoline price. If, on the other hand, consumers respond more to a change in taxes than to a change in the tax-exclusive price, $\beta > \alpha$. Because we use state fixed effects and annual data, we interpret the results as short-run effects.

3.2 Sources

We use a panel of data on gasoline consumption by state and year from 1966 to 2008. Gasoline consumption and state and federal gasoline taxes are taken from annual issues of Highway Statistics Annual, published by the Federal Highway Administration. Tax-inclusive retail gasoline prices are from the Energy Information Administration State Energy Price Reports. The data contain demographic variables, including population and average family size from the Current Population Survey, Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and the Census; and per capita income, gross state product, and fraction of the population living in metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) from BEA. The fraction of the population located in metro areas with rail transit is calculated from the Statistical Abstract of the United States. There are several additional vehicle-related variables from the Highway Statistics reports: the number of licensed drivers, number of registered cars and trucks, and miles of public roads. Except for the federal gasoline tax, all variables vary by state and year.

3.3 State Level Gasoline Consumption Results

Table 2 presents the main coefficient estimates from equation 2. The dependent variable is gasoline consumption per adult. Each column reports a different specification. We estimate equation 2 using feasible generalized least squares (FGLS) in which we allow for a state-specific first order autocorrelation structure. The standard errors are robust to heteroskedasticity and correlation across states. Observations are weighted by the state's population, and the coefficients can be interpreted as the population-weighted effects of the gasoline price and gasoline tax. To summarize the state-level results, we find that in the short run gasoline consumption responds more to taxes than to the tax-exclusive price.

Column 1 reports estimates using the tax-inclusive gasoline price for comparison with the results when the gasoline price is decomposed into tax-exclusive and tax components. The estimated price elasticity of gasoline consumption is -0.05. This is close to Small and Van Dender (2007), who use the same data sources but a different specification and a slightly shorter sample. Column 2 shows the main specification of interest, which separates the gasoline price into the tax-exclusive and tax components. The coefficient estimate on the tax variable is much larger

than that on the tax ratio, and the hypothesis that the two coefficients are equal can be rejected at the 1 percent significance level.

To assess the magnitudes of the coefficient estimates, we calculate partial elasticities for the gasoline tax and tax-exclusive price. Table 3 reports the percent change in gasoline consumption for an increase in the tax or tax-exclusive price of \$0.05/gallon. The results show that a tax increase has a much larger effect on gasoline demand than does an equal-sized increase in the tax-exclusive price.

For comparison with the literature, Table 3 also reports the implied tax and price elasticities of demand. Similar to the results for the semi-elasticities, the tax elasticity is larger (-0.069) than the tax-exclusive price elasticity (-0.030). Because of the differences in the scale of the gasoline tax and the tax-exclusive price, and the fact that it is more natural to compare the effects of a given monetary change in taxes or tax-exclusive prices, the remainder of the paper focuses on semi-elasticities.

Columns 3-6 in Table 2 show that the results are robust to adding additional controls and estimating the same specifications without the regression weights. For comparison with the main results, we also report the estimates using ordinary least squares (OLS). The coefficient estimates are much larger with OLS than with FGLS. Table 3 reports the elasticity and semi-elasticity estimates for the corresponding specifications.

3.4 Identification and Additional Tests

We perform several additional analyses to rule out alternative explanations for the estimated difference in the coefficients on the tax-exclusive gasoline price and the tax rate. First, we use crude oil prices to instrument and correct for the endogeneity of the pre-tax price. We construct two instruments: (1) the interaction of the pre-tax price in 1966 with the average annual price of imported crude oil, and (2) one plus the gasoline tax divided by the annual average price of imported crude oil.⁸ We present the instrumental variables (IV) results in Table 4. The first two columns replicate the OLS and FGLS specifications in columns 6 and 2 of Table 2 using the slightly shorter sample for which our instruments are available (1968 to 2008). Columns 3 and 4 present the IV results for the same specifications. After instrumenting, the point estimate for the coefficient on the log of the tax-exclusive price falls slightly, while the point estimate for the coefficient on $\log(1 + \text{taxratio})$ rises. In all four specifications, the coefficient on $\log(1 + \text{taxratio})$ is significantly greater than the coefficient on the log of the tax-exclusive gasoline price.

In addition, we conduct three tests for omitted variables that may be correlated with both state tax rates and our variables of interest, and may consequently drive a spurious difference

⁸We use the average price of imported crude oil rather than the more commonly used WTI or Brent crude spot price because the imported price series begins in 1968. Between 1985 and 2008, during which we observe all three series, the correlation coefficient between the imported crude oil price and the WTI and Brent crude oil spot prices is 0.9988 and 0.9989, respectively.

between the tax rate and tax-exclusive gasoline prices. Of particular concern are unobserved trending variables—omitted demographic trends affecting vehicle ownership or driving intensity that are correlated with the state gasoline tax.

We first compare the demographics of high tax and low tax states. We classify states as high tax by comparing the state tax rate to the weighted average national tax rate in a given year.⁹ We present the mean and standard deviations of the demographic variables for the high tax and low tax states in Table 5. In addition, we calculate the difference between the mean of the demographic variables in the high and low tax states and report whether the means are statistically distinguishable. We do not find significant differences in per capita income, educational attainment, family size, vehicles per capita, and urban population share. In addition, we do not find that the pre-tax prices are statistically distinguishable, which is consistent with consumers bearing the majority of gasoline taxes. We do find that high tax states have slightly fewer drivers per capita and a slightly lower fraction of the population living in a metro area with a rail transit system, although even these differences are small in absolute value.

Second, we examine a shorter state-level panel with *monthly* gasoline taxes, prices, and consumption from 1983 to 2008. To test for omitted variables, we estimate a first-differenced version of (2) using the monthly data. First-differencing the higher frequency data makes it less likely the coefficients will be biased. An omitted variable must change in the same month as the state excise tax to bias the coefficients of the first-differenced monthly specification.

We present the results in Table 6. As a point of comparison, columns 1 and 2 re-create the earlier levels regressions from Table 2 using the shorter monthly panel.¹⁰ The estimated coefficients from the regressions in levels are similar to the earlier estimates using the longer, annual, panel. Columns 3 and 4 regress gasoline consumption on the pre-tax price and tax rate, after first-differencing. As in the levels regression, we find a significant difference between the coefficients on pre-tax price and the tax rate.

One drawback of using first-differenced monthly data arises if consumers shift consumption in response to anticipated changes in gasoline prices or taxes. In this case, first-differenced gasoline consumption may appear to be more responsive than in our levels regressions. As an additional check, we aggregate the data up to the season before first-differencing in columns 5 and 6. At the seasonal level, intertemporal substitution is unlikely to be a problem. Although the size of both coefficients declines, we continue to find a statistically significant difference between the coefficients on pre-tax price and the tax rate. This suggests that the results in columns 3 and 4

⁹Only five states are exclusively classified as above or below mean in all years. Gas taxes in Nebraska, Washington and West Virginia are above the national average in all years. Gas taxes for Missouri and Wyoming are below the national average in all years. Across all years, states in the 25th percentile report tax rates above the national average in nine or fewer years and states in the 75th percentile report gas taxes above the national average in 32 of the 43 years.

¹⁰When regressing in levels, we include state fixed effects and time fixed effects. In the first-differenced specification, we only include time fixed effects.

are not being driven entirely by the strategic timing of gasoline purchases around tax changes.

Finally, the specifications in Table 2 assume a log-linear relationship between the dependent variables and the tax and tax-exclusive price. In the following, we examine potential asymmetric responses to price changes. There is some evidence in the literature that consumers respond more to gasoline price increases than to decreases. Because there are so few examples of tax decreases in the data (about one per state on average), it is not possible to assess statistically whether there is a differential tax response. It is possible to investigate asymmetric responses to tax-exclusive prices, however, by adding to the main specification the interaction of the tax-exclusive price with a dummy equal to one if the price increased between the previous and current years. If consumers respond more to a price increase than to a decrease, the coefficient would be negative, but in fact the coefficient is positive and statistically significant. The coefficient is quite small, however, and we do not find an economically meaningful difference in the response to tax-exclusive price increases.

Figure 6 presents changes in gasoline consumption over time following a change in the gasoline tax. The figure shows that gasoline consumption falls steadily after a tax increase. There is no evidence of a pre-existing trend, which provides further evidence against omitted variables bias. Gasoline consumption decreases after a tax decrease, but as noted above, there are very few tax increases in the data.

The final approach to investigating lagged responses is to include lags of the tax-exclusive price and the tax. Table 7 shows that adding three lags of both variables reduces the point estimates on the current tax and tax-exclusive variables by almost half. Nevertheless, the differential effect from gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive prices still exist. In an alternative specification, we add two-year lags and the parameters estimates are comparable in magnitude to the current variables. Thus, we find that even if we allow for lagged responses to taxes and tax-exclusive prices, we find a larger response to taxes than tax exclusive prices.

3.5 Interpretation

As discussed in the introduction, there are at least two explanations for the larger effect of gasoline taxes. First, gasoline tax changes at both the federal and state levels are often subject to public debates and attract a great deal of attention from the media. This could contribute to the salience of gasoline tax changes: a 5-cents increase in gasoline taxes could very well receive more attention from the media and consumers than a gasoline price increase of the same size.¹¹ Several recent empirical studies find that salience is an important factor in consumer responses to prices and taxes. Using experimental data, Chetty, Looney, and Kroft (2009) find that including sales tax

¹¹These public debates may even lead to the misperception that gasoline taxes are higher and changed more frequently than they actually are. A telephone survey of 800 adults conducted on behalf of Building American's Future in 2009 showed that 60 percent of respondents believe that the federal gasoline tax goes up every year while in reality, it has not been changed since 1993.

in the price tag (hence increasing its salience) reduces demand by nearly the same amount as an equivalent price increase. In addition, using observational data they show that consumers are more responsive to excise tax (which are included in the posted price) than sales tax in alcohol purchases. Finkelstein (2009) finds that driving become less elastic under electric toll collection (ETC) because tolls are less salient than manual toll collection. As a result, toll-setting behavior becomes less sensitive to local election cycles and toll rates increases after adoption of ETC system.

Second, consumers may perceive changes in gasoline taxes to be more long-lasting than gasoline price changes caused by other factors such as temporary demand and supply shocks. Given that automobiles are durable goods, the expectation of future gasoline prices affects vehicle purchase decisions. Therefore, vehicle purchasers may respond more to a gasoline tax change than to a price change caused by other factors.

Both of these explanations could work in concert with each other and we do not attempt to disentangle the two. In the following, we provide several pieces of suggestive evidence for their validity. First, to examine the persistence of gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive prices, we conduct AR(1) regressions with these two variables using the state-level panel data and controlling for state and year fixed effects. Using the dynamic panel data approach in Blundell and Bond (1998), we obtain an AR(1) coefficient of 0.925 with a robust standard error of 0.018 for gasoline taxes and 0.775 with a robust standard error of 0.018 for tax-exclusive prices. This suggests that gasoline tax changes are more persistent; of course, consumer perceptions of persistence could be different from these estimates.

Second, if either or both of the explanations are true, consumers should respond more to tax changes in states that change their taxes infrequently. We use several alternatives to equation 2 to investigate this implication and we find supporting evidence.

We calculate the number of times the state changes its tax from 1966-2008. Column 1 of Table 8 adds to the main specification the interaction of the tax variable with the number of times the state changes its tax. The coefficient on the tax variable is -0.38 (instead of -0.32 in the baseline). The coefficient on the interaction term is positive and statistically significant. This suggests that the tax elasticity is smaller (in magnitude) for states that change their taxes more frequently and vice versa. For a state that changes its tax one standard deviation less frequently than the average (five tax changes in 43 years instead of 10 tax changes), the coefficient is -0.40. In column 2, states are assigned quintiles based on the number of tax changes. Defining higher quintiles as states that change taxes more often, we expect smaller coefficients (in magnitude) for higher quintiles. The pattern holds, but most of the variation is for states that change their taxes very infrequently (the lowest quintile includes states that change taxes six times or fewer).

The first two columns in Table 8 use the total number of tax changes over the entire sample. For some states there are periods in which taxes change frequently and other periods when taxes change infrequently. Consequently, the total number of changes may not accurately reflect consumer perceptions about the persistence of taxes throughout the sample. To address this

possibility, columns 3-5 add the interactions of the tax variable with the number of tax changes during the past 15, 10 and 5 years. Column 6 uses the number of years since the last change. Because these variables are calculated using recent tax changes, they may better capture consumer perceptions than the variables in columns 1 and 2, which are calculated over the entire sample. The results are similar for these specifications, which show that the effect of taxes on gasoline consumption is larger for states that change their taxes less frequently.

4 Household Data Analysis

Vehicle purchase and driving constitute the extensive and intensive margins through which the gasoline price affects gasoline demand.¹² The purpose of this section is to further examine how gasoline tax and tax-exclusive gasoline prices affect the two margins. We conduct analysis on household vehicle purchase and travel using the 1995, 2001, and 2009 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS). The NHTS, conducted by agencies of the Department of Transportation through random sampling, provides detailed household-level data on vehicle stocks, travel behavior, and household demographics at the time of survey.

4.1 Empirical Methodology

We employ a similar empirical strategy to the one used to examine the aggregate data, but exploit the richer set of demographics and geographic characteristics present in the household data. For the analysis on vehicle fuel economy, we focus on households who purchased at least one vehicle (new or used) during the past 12 months. In the survey, the purchase time (year and month) is available for the recently purchased vehicles. For these households, it is possible to match the vehicle MPG and the gasoline price in the purchase month and the preceding months. We estimate the following equation to examine how gasoline prices affect vehicle purchases:

$$\ln(MPG_i) = \alpha_m \ln(p_i) + \beta_m \ln\left(1 + \frac{\tau_i}{p_i}\right) + X_i \Theta_m + \epsilon_i, \quad (5)$$

where i denotes a household. MPG_i is the average MPG of all the vehicles purchased during the past 12 months by household i . The key explanatory variables include the tax-exclusive gasoline price and the tax ratio. Importantly, the tax and price correspond to the household's state and the quarter of purchase. We include a large set of household demographics. We use quadratic functions for the non-categorical variables: household size, the age of the reference person, the number of adults, the number of workers and the number of drivers in each household. We include full sets of fixed effects for the categorical variables: household income, education of the reference person, MSA size, worker density by census tract, population density by census tract,

¹²Vehicle scrappage is part of the extensive margin but is not examined in this paper due to data limitations.

rail availability, and urban and rural indicator variables. We also include fixed effects for year, month, and location (census division or state).

To examine the effect of the tax-exclusive gasoline price and the gasoline tax on household travel behavior, we estimate the following equation:

$$\ln(VMT_i) = \alpha_v \ln(p_i) + \beta_v \ln\left(1 + \frac{\tau_i}{p_i}\right) + \Theta_v X_i + \epsilon_i, \quad (6)$$

where VMT_i is the daily total VMT across all vehicles belonging to household i . The VMT equation includes the same set of variables as the MPG equation with the exception of month dummies, which are constructed to match the travel period.

4.2 Sources

Household data from the NHTS provide detailed demographic characteristics about each household. Each household is categorized into one of eighteen income bins and eight education bins. The data include the number and age of adults, and the numbers of workers and drivers in the household. In addition, the data provide detailed information about neighborhood (census tract) demographics such as rural and urban indicators, population, working population, housing density, and the availability of rail. Consequently, the NHTS data provide a detailed set of controls for characteristics that may vary with both a state’s tax rate and the household’s driving or purchase decisions.

For the MPG analysis, we use the 1995, 2001, and 2009 NHTS. The data include the make and model of the household’s vehicles, which we match to the EPA fuel economy database to obtain MPG for each vehicle. Gasoline prices at the time of purchase are based on the gasoline prices used in the aggregate analysis. Because purchases of newer vehicle may respond more to price changes than purchases of older vehicles, our analysis is conducted on two separate samples. The first sample, with 52,128 observations includes households who purchased at least one vehicle during the 12 months prior to the survey. The second sample focuses on newer vehicles. It has 30,363 households who purchased at least one vehicle during the past 12 months and all the vehicles purchased are less than four years old. Table 9 provides summary statistics for the two samples. The average MPG of vehicles in the two samples are almost the same and other variables are quite close as well. The households in sample 2 (those who purchased newer vehicles) have slightly smaller household size, higher income and more education.

We use a subset of the NHTS data to examine VMT. During the 1995 and 2001 installments, participants received an initial survey followed by a second survey several months later. In both, participants were asked to report odometer readings of all of their vehicles. We calculate daily VMT per vehicle across vehicles owned by a household by comparing the two odometer readings for each vehicle. We also construct the average gasoline price during the odometer reading period

based on the date of the odometer readings and weekly state gasoline prices. Unfortunately, not all survey participants report the second odometer reading and there are many missing values for the first odometer reading. We drop approximately two-thirds of the households in the 1995 and 2001 survey waves with missing data for either of the two odometer readings or reading dates for any of the vehicles owned by the household. The final VMT data set contains 28,303 observations. Table 10 reports summary statistics under sample 1.

To our knowledge, whereas the previous literature has used self-reported annual VMT, this is the first use of VMT data based on two odometer readings from NHTS. We compare the results using odometer-based VMT with the results using self-reported annual VMT. The data set with self-reported annual VMT is larger and contains 61,795 observations. Table 10 reports summary statistics for the self-reported sample under sample 2.

To compare daily VMT based on the two types of VMT estimates, we use 24,528 households with both values. The (weighted) average daily VMT based on odometer readings is 49.9 with a standard deviation of 35.3, while the average self-reported daily VMT is 50.1 with a standard deviation of 45.4. The top graph in Figure 7 plots Kernel densities of the two VMT measures: the distributions of the two variables are quite similar. Nevertheless, the comparison of the two distributions mask the differences that exist for a given observation. We find that although the mean of the two variables are quite close, the difference between the two measures (for a given household) can be quite large: the mean difference is 0.2 but the standard deviation is 38.5. Given that two odometer readings could happen any time (2-6 months apart in general) during the year, part of the differences could be caused by seasonality in driving.

To further understand the difference, we compare the two VMT measures for two subsamples that are defined according to whether odometer-based VMT is above the sample mean of 49.9 (which we refer to as high and low VMT households). The average daily odometer-based VMT for the two subsamples is 83.0 and 26.0, while the average self-reported daily VMT is 74.7 and 32.3 for the two subsamples. The middle graph in Figure 7 plots the kernel densities of the difference between the odometer-based and self-reported VMT for the high and low VMT subsamples separately, with vertical lines indicating the sample averages. Households who travel more tend to under-report their travel intensity, and those who travel less tend to over-report. To check if this is driven by seasonality, we compare the two measures month by month and find that the pattern still holds in each of the 12 months as shown in the bottom graph in Figure 7. To the extent that gasoline prices are negatively correlated with travel, this finding implies that using self-reported VMT in regression analysis could attenuate the effect of gasoline prices on travel demand.

Because the observations used for our VMT analysis only constitute about one-third of the full sample, it is important to know how representative the estimation sample is. Table 11 compares the characteristics of the subsample of participants who report two odometer readings with the characteristics of the full 1995 and 2001 samples. We find that the mean tax-exclusive price and

gasoline taxes for the VMT subsample and full sample compare quite closely. Households in the estimation sample are slightly older (mean age 50.66 vs. 49.59) and less likely to live in an MSA with a subway system (14 percent vs. 16 percent). Overall, however, the mean and the 10th and 90th percentiles of the variables are quite similar for the full sample and the estimation sample. Figures 8 and 9 show the distributions of the categorical variables for both samples. Similarly to the other variables, the distributions for these variables are very similar for the full NHTS and the estimation samples. These comparisons suggest that the estimation sample may be representative of the full NHTS sample, but we treat the estimation results with caution.

The empirical strategy for gasoline consumption and VMT uses cross-state and time-series variation in the tax-exclusive prices and gasoline taxes. An important concern is that the tax-exclusive prices, taxes, and the dependent variables may be correlated with omitted variables. To investigate this possibility, we examine whether gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive prices are correlated with the independent variables. In particular, we separate states according to whether they have high gasoline taxes or tax-exclusive prices. Across the samples, we compare the means and the 10th and 90th percentiles of the independent variables. In general, we find that the distributions are quite similar, which is consistent with the assumed exogeneity of tax-exclusive prices and taxes (results are not reported but are available upon request).

4.3 Results

Table 12 reports key parameter estimates and elasticities for 12 regressions, examining how gasoline prices and taxes affect the fuel economy of recently purchased vehicles. Panel A shows six regressions of the effect of the tax-inclusive gasoline price on average MPG of recently purchased vehicles. Columns 1 to 3 use sample 1 (all households), and columns 4 to 6 use sample 2 (households purchasing newer vehicles).

Columns 1 to 3 differ according to whether census division dummies or state dummies are included. The parameter estimates are very similar and are statistically significant. The elasticity of MPG with respect to the tax-inclusive gasoline price is 0.065 in the preferred specification, which includes state dummies. The elasticity estimates from sample 2 (presented in columns 4 to 6) are similar across the three specifications, and they are only slightly larger than their counterparts from sample 1. The elasticity estimates are close to those in several recent studies: Small and Van Dender (2007) estimate a short-run elasticity of 0.044; Gillingham (2010) finds a medium-run (2-year) fuel economy elasticity of 0.09; Klier and Linn (2010) estimate an elasticity of about 0.12 using monthly data.

Panel B shows regressions that separate the gasoline tax from the tax-exclusive gasoline price; columns are analogous to those in Panel A. Columns 1 to 3 shows that the gasoline tax has a larger effect than the tax-exclusive gasoline price. The difference is 0.68 percent and statistically significant in column 3 when state dummies are included. The differential effect is stronger for

newer vehicles: it is 2 percent in column 6. This comparison is intuitive: if the differential effect is driven by the durable good nature of automobiles, we would expect a stronger effect among newer vehicles that have a longer remaining lifetime. Supporting this hypothesis, Busse, Knittel, and Zettelmeyer (2009) find that the adjustment in the new vehicle market to gasoline price changes is primarily in market shares, while it is primarily in vehicle prices in the used vehicle market.

The gasoline prices are matched to the month of vehicle purchase in the specifications presented above. We also estimate the same regressions using the 3-month or 12-month averages of the gasoline price and tax (including the purchase month and months prior to purchase). The results (not reported) are very similar to those in Table 12, but the parameter estimates are less precise. This may reflect the fact that the average gasoline price is a noisier predictor of the expected future gasoline prices.

Table 13 presents key parameter estimates for the VMT analysis, VMT elasticities, and semi-elasticities. The six regressions in Panel A include total gasoline prices on the right side, while those in Panel B separate tax-exclusive prices from gasoline taxes. The dependent variable in columns 1 to 3 is the log of household daily odometer-based VMT (in logarithm), and that in columns 4 to 6 is the self-reported VMT (sample 2).

The VMT elasticity with respect to gasoline prices from sample 1 ranges from -0.33 to -0.50 in the three specifications. The preferred specification in column 3 with state dummies provides an estimate of -0.39. When separating gasoline taxes from tax-exclusive gasoline prices in Panel B, the VMT elasticity with respect to gasoline taxes are not statistically significantly different in the second and third specifications. This could reflect more limited variations in gasoline taxes changes than the MPG analysis in the previous section: here we are using only 1995 and 2001 NHTS for this analysis due to the discontinuation of the second odometer readings in the 2009 survey. In all specifications, the percent changes in VMT from a 5-cents increase in gas tax are larger than those from changes in tax-exclusive gasoline prices of the same magnitude. However, none of the differences are statistically significant.

We conduct the same analysis in columns 4 to 6 based on self-reported VMT. We use average gasoline prices over the same period as VMT reporting. The VMT elasticity from gasoline prices is -0.27 from column 4, while it is smaller in magnitude and statistically insignificant in columns 5 and 6. The regressions in the second panel separate the gasoline tax from the tax-exclusive gasoline price. There are no statistically significant differential effects on VMT from the tax-exclusive gasoline price and gasoline tax. Nevertheless, when state dummies are included, the difference in the VMT effect is quite large in magnitude with equally large standard errors. We conduct additional regressions using self-reported VMT data based on a larger sample that also includes data from the 2009 NHTS. The findings, not reported here, are qualitatively the same.

Although we find that vehicle purchase decisions (as reflected in average MPG) respond more strongly to gasoline tax changes than commensurate tax-exclusive price changes, there is no statistically significant evidence of a differential effect for VMT. This contrast could be viewed

from two rather different angles. First, it could be driven by the limited variations in gasoline taxes in the VMT analysis as we discussed above. That is, we fail to precisely estimate the differential effect in VMT decisions because of the data limitation. Second, the findings could reflect different natures of MPG and VMT decisions. As discussed above, if consumers view gasoline tax changes as more persistent than changes in other components of gasoline prices, their vehicle purchase decisions could react more strongly to gasoline tax changes due to the durable good nature of automobiles. Regarding VMT, although gasoline prices could affect consumers’ day-to-day travel decisions, the underlying cause of price changes (e.g., whether they are from gasoline tax changes or oil price shocks) should not matter for their travel decisions (e.g., how to go to work) in the short run.¹³

5 Implications

Our central and robust finding of differential responses to gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive prices has important implications for the effectiveness of using gasoline taxes to address climate change, air pollution, and energy security. In particular, gasoline taxes would be more effective than suggested by empirical estimates of the effect of gasoline prices on gasoline consumption. The results also have implications for the implicit discount rate and the tax revenue from gasoline taxes, which we discuss in this section.

5.1 Implicit Discount Rate

Our analysis points to an empirical strategy to deal with a challenging identification problem in estimating implicit discount rates in consumer decisions. To understand this, consider consumers’ vehicle purchase decisions when facing an array of choices that have different upfront costs (i.e., purchase price), future operating costs (e.g., fuel costs), and other vehicle characteristics. Due to the durable good nature of automobiles, a rational consumer makes the decision based on total (discounted) expected costs and total (discounted) utility to be derived from the vehicle. To examine how consumers trade upfront purchase costs with future operating costs, researchers often estimate the implicit discount rate in a vehicle demand or hedonic framework.

A high discount rate is interpreted as evidence that consumers fail to properly consider future costs. The undervaluation of future fuel cost savings is a manifestation of the so-called “energy paradox”. If present, it could hinder the effectiveness of gasoline taxes and hence lend support for CAFE standards. Whether, and to what extent, the energy paradox holds in the automobile sector is still a contentious empirical issue.¹⁴ This is partly due to the identification challenge

¹³In the long run, because of adjustment costs tax changes could have a larger effect than changes in tax-exclusive prices on consumer location decisions (and, hence, travel distance and possibly travel mode). The long-run response remains an open question.

¹⁴Allcott and Wozny (2010) and Saltee, West and Fan (2010) are among recent studies using very rich data sets

researchers face in the empirical analysis because neither consumers' discount rates nor their expectation of future gasoline prices are observed. Consequently, it is not possible to estimate implicit discount rates without making assumptions on consumer expectations of future gasoline prices.

In the following, we use a canonical vehicle demand model to illustrate how separating gasoline taxes from tax-exclusive gasoline prices can aid the identification of the implicit discount rate. The vehicle demand model is a linear model that can be estimated using market-level sales data. This model can be derived from a multinomial logit model at the consumer level.

$$\log(s_j/s_0) = \alpha c_j + X_j\beta + \epsilon_j, \quad (7)$$

where j is the index for a model (e.g., a 1999 Toyota Camry) and 0 indexes the choice of not purchasing a new vehicle (denoted as the outside good). s_j is the market share of model j . c is the total expected cost during the vehicle's lifetime. X is a vector of vehicle attributes that capture consumer utility from the vehicle. The present value of the total expected cost of owning vehicle j is equal to:

$$c_j = vp_j + \sum_{t=1}^T \frac{1}{(1+r)^t} \frac{p_t^e VMT_t}{MPG_j} = vp_j + \sum_{t=1}^T \frac{1}{(1+r)^t} \frac{(\tau_t^e + ep_t^e) VMT_t}{MPG_j}, \quad (8)$$

where vp is the vehicle price. T is the vehicle's lifetime and r is the discount rate. p_t^e is the expected gasoline price at year t , which is the sum of the expected gasoline tax (τ) and tax-exclusive gasoline price (ep). In order to estimate parameters in equation (7), one needs to make assumptions on the discount rate r and expected future gasoline prices. If consumers view the gasoline tax as being (more) permanent in nature, the identification of the implicit discount rate is possible by assuming $\tau_t^e = \tau$, without making an assumption on future tax-exclusive gasoline prices ep_t^e .

Decomposing c_j into tax and tax-exclusive components, equation (7) can be written as the following:

$$\begin{aligned} \log(s_j/s_0) &= \alpha \left[vp_j + \frac{\tau}{MPG_j} \sum_{t=1}^T \frac{VMT_t}{(1+r)^t} + \frac{ep}{MPG_j} \sum_{t=1}^T \frac{VMT_t}{(1+r)^t} \frac{ep_t^e}{ep} \right] + X_j\beta + \epsilon_j \\ &= \alpha vp_j + \gamma_1 \frac{\tau}{MPG_j} + \gamma_2 \frac{ep}{MPG_j} + X_j\beta + \epsilon_j, \end{aligned} \quad (9)$$

where γ_1 is equal to $\alpha \sum_{t=1}^T \frac{VMT_t}{(1+r)^t}$ assuming that the VMT profile is the same across vehicles. $\frac{\tau}{MPG_j}$ is tax dollars per mile for vehicle j and $\frac{ep}{MPG_j}$ is the tax-exclusive dollars per mile, both of which can be easily constructed from available data. Equation (9) can be estimated in a linear

to investigate this issue, while Helfand and Wolverson (2010) offers a recent review.

framework. With estimates for α and γ_1 , we can recover the implicit discount rate r with a given VMT profile over vehicle lifetime. Relaxing the assumption of vehicle-invariant VMT profile is straightforward and would entail nonlinear estimation to recover the implicit discount rate r simultaneously with other model parameters.

We estimate the above model using sales data at the vehicle model level in 22 MSAs from 1999 to 2006 (Li, Timmins, and von Haefen 2009). To save space, we do not report the full results and they are available upon request. In the estimation, we control for vehicle price endogeneity using product characteristics of other vehicles models produced by the same firm and other firms, which are standard instruments in the vehicle demand literature (Berry, Levinsohn and Pakes 1995). To control for possible endogeneity of gasoline prices, we use similar instruments as in the state-level analysis: the crude oil price interacted with gasoline prices prior to the sample period.

When using overall gasoline prices to identify the discount rate by assuming a random walk process, the estimates suggest a large implied discount rate (0.42), implying significant under-valuation of future fuel costs. When estimating the model by separating gasoline taxes from tax-exclusive prices, we find that vehicle choices are more responsive to gasoline taxes, consistent with our findings in the household analysis. The parameter estimates imply a much smaller discount rates (0.11), which is more in line with market interest rates (e.g., for auto financing). A more flexible demand model (e.g., taking into account consumer heterogeneity) would be desired for a full evaluation of the implicit discount rate and is left for future work. Our purpose here is to illustrate the point that consumers' differential responses to gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive prices can be explored to identify the implicit discount rate.

5.2 Tax Elasticity of Tax Revenues

Finally, our approach may have implications for fiscal policy related to gasoline taxes. As an illustration, we calculate the change in tax revenues associated with a 5 cent-per-gallon increase in federal gasoline taxes based on (1) a naive estimate using the tax-inclusive price elasticity in column 1 of Table 3; and (2) the corresponding tax elasticity estimate from column 2 of Table 3. The naive estimate (based on a tax-inclusive price elasticity of -0.052, an average tax-inclusive gasoline price of \$1.10, and average combined state and federal taxes of \$0.25) would imply that a 5 cent-per-gallon increase in state gasoline prices would increase tax revenues approximately 19.8 percent over the sample. This corresponds to tax revenue of about \$6.5 billion, which is about one-third of the deficit for the Highway Trust Fund forecasted by the Congressional Budget Office. Using the separately estimated tax and price coefficients, a 5 cent-per-gallon tax increase would raise tax revenue by 18.9 percent. Interestingly, the naive prediction does not substantially overestimate the implied increase in tax revenues associated with a gas tax increase. Gasoline demand is sufficiently inelastic and gasoline taxes are sufficiently far from the revenue maximizing level so as to make the distinction between techniques less relevant for fiscal policy.

6 Conclusion

Despite multiple policy goals that the gasoline tax can help to achieve, the United States taxes gasoline at the lowest rate among industrialized countries. In 2009, average state and federal gasoline taxes were 46 cents per gallon, compared to \$3.4 per gallon in the UK. Heightened environmental and energy concerns, a record national budget deficit, and an insolvent Highway Trust Fund have brought about renewed interest in raising the gasoline tax in the US. Policy analyses on potential impacts of higher gasoline taxes often take gasoline demand elasticity with respect to *gasoline prices* as an input, with an implicit assumption that consumers respond to a change in gasoline taxes in the same way as they respond to a commensurate change in tax-exclusive gasoline prices.

Our paper investigates this underlying assumption by separately estimating consumer responses to gasoline taxes and tax-exclusive gasoline price. We examine the impacts on gasoline consumption, vehicle miles traveled, and vehicle choices using both state-level and house-level data. We find strong and robust evidence that gasoline tax changes are associated with larger changes in gasoline consumption and vehicle choices than are commensurate changes in the tax-exclusive gasoline price. However, we do not find a statistically significant differential effect in vehicle miles traveled.

Our finding that not all variations in gasoline prices are created equal has important policy implications. First and foremost, our work suggests that fuel taxes may be a more effective measure of reducing gasoline consumption or inducing consumers to adopt more fuel efficient vehicles than previously thought. Second, our work suggests that previous estimates of the implicit discount rate for fuel economy based on changes in tax-inclusive prices may substantially overstate true implicit discount rates. Finally, our work suggests that traditional estimates may underestimate consumer responses and slightly overestimate the fiscal benefits of a gasoline tax.

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Figure 1: Gasoline Price Decomposition

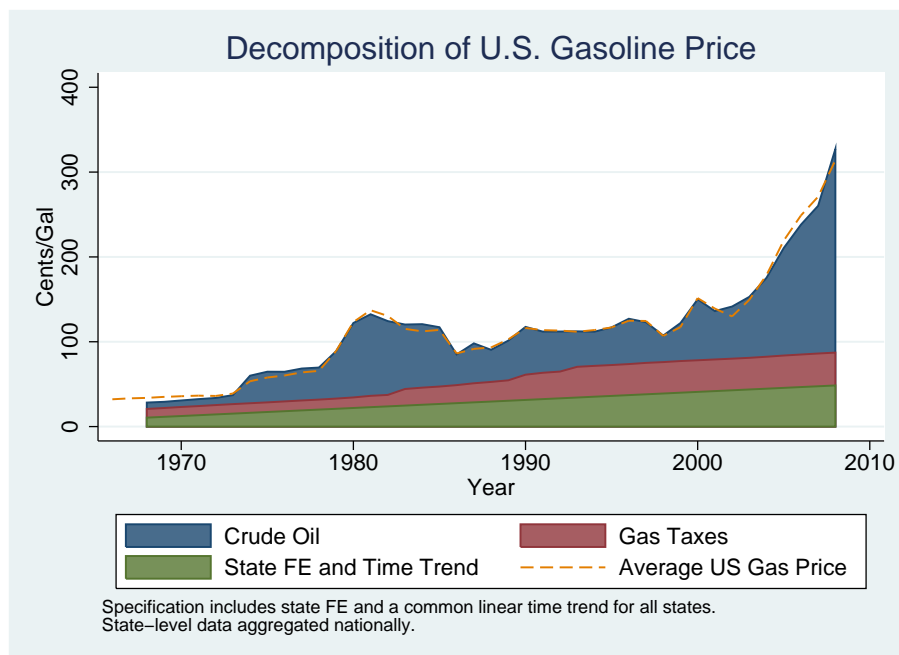
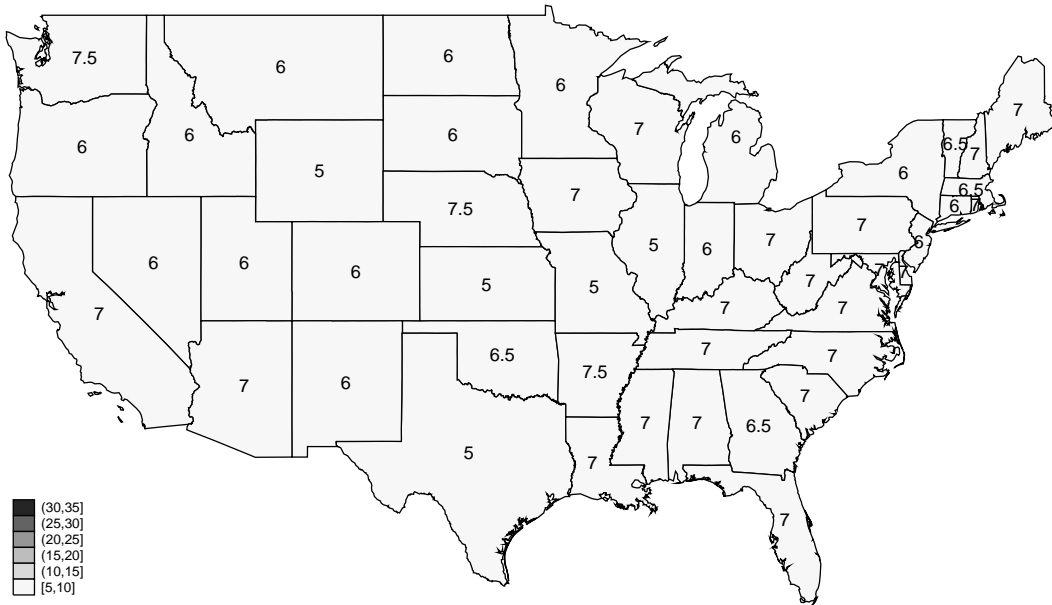


Figure 2: State Gasoline Tax Rates

State Gasoline Taxes (cpg), 1966



State Gasoline Taxes (cpg), 2006

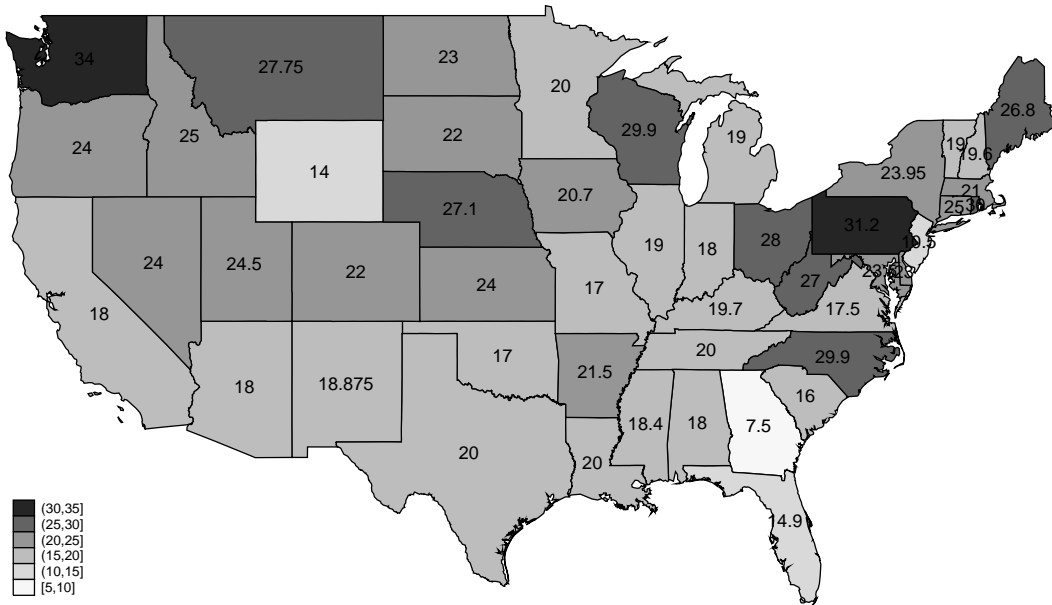


Figure 3: State Gasoline Tax Rates

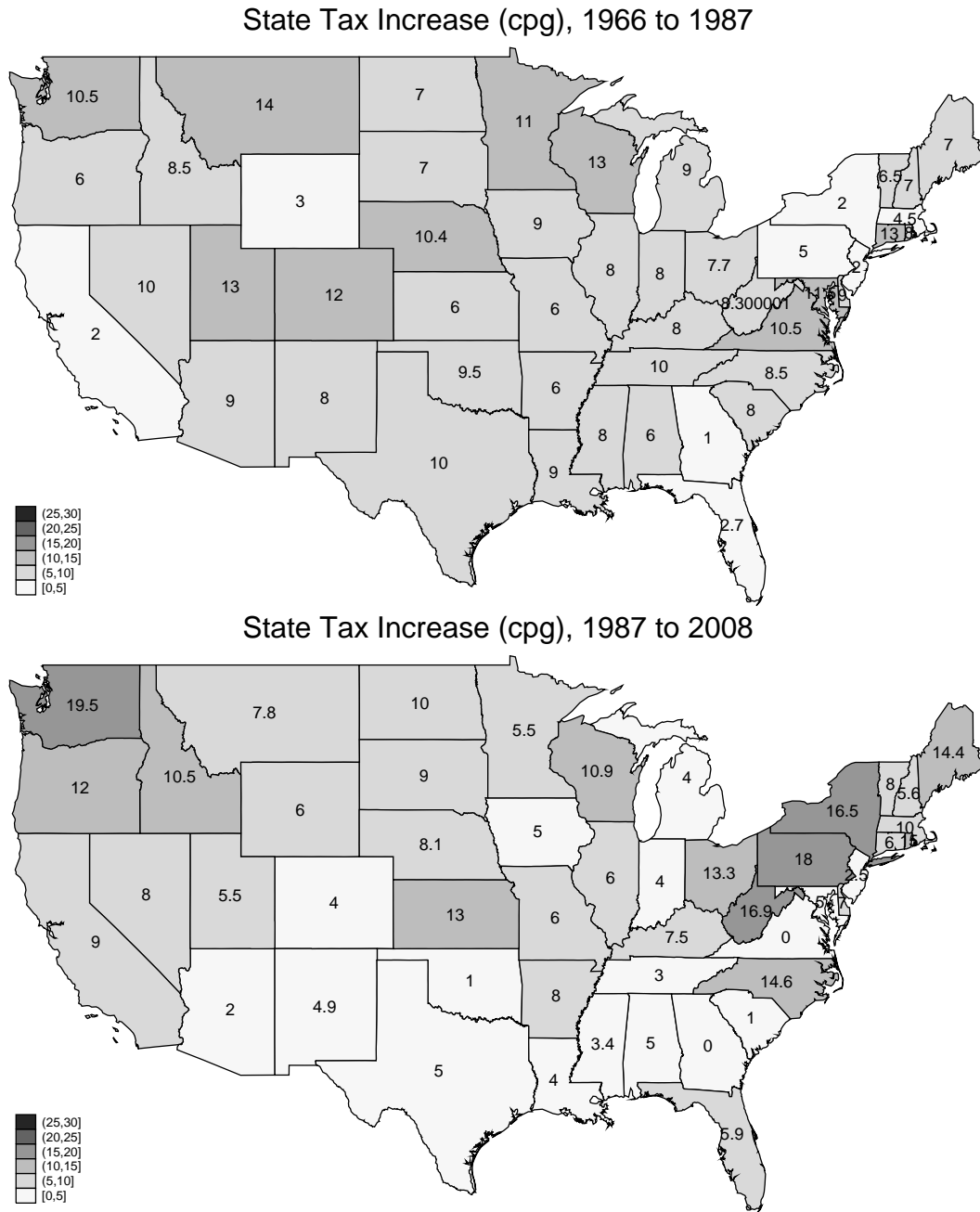


Figure 4: Distribution of Gasoline Taxes, by year

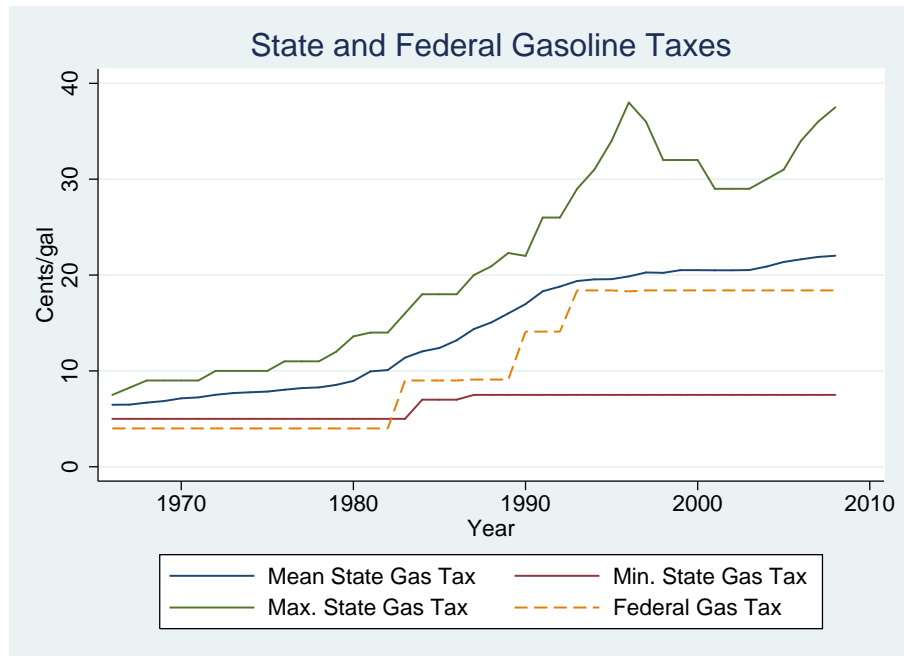


Figure 5: Tax Fraction of Retail Price, by year

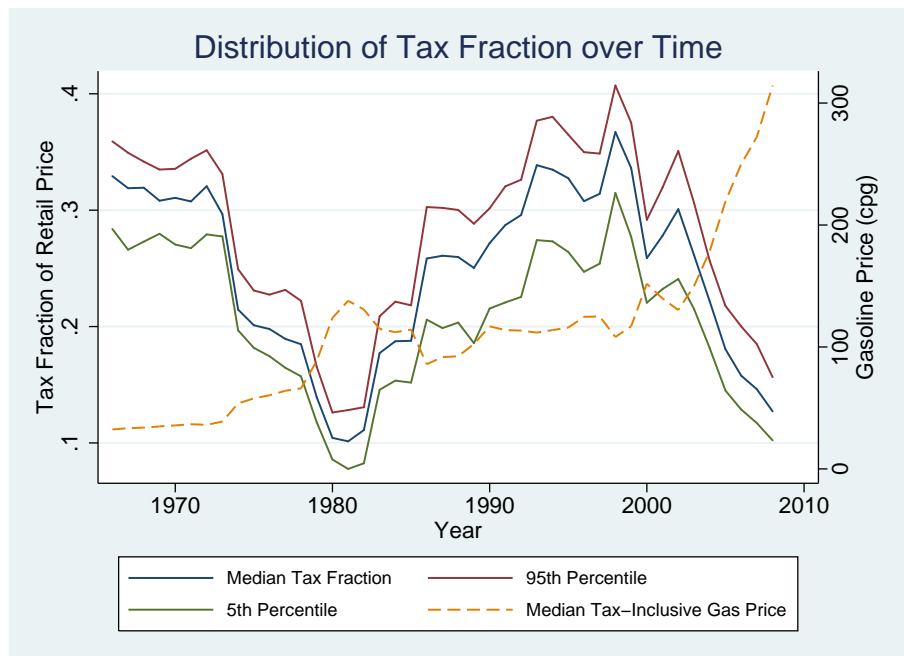


Figure 6: Change in Gas Consumption, pre- and post-tax change

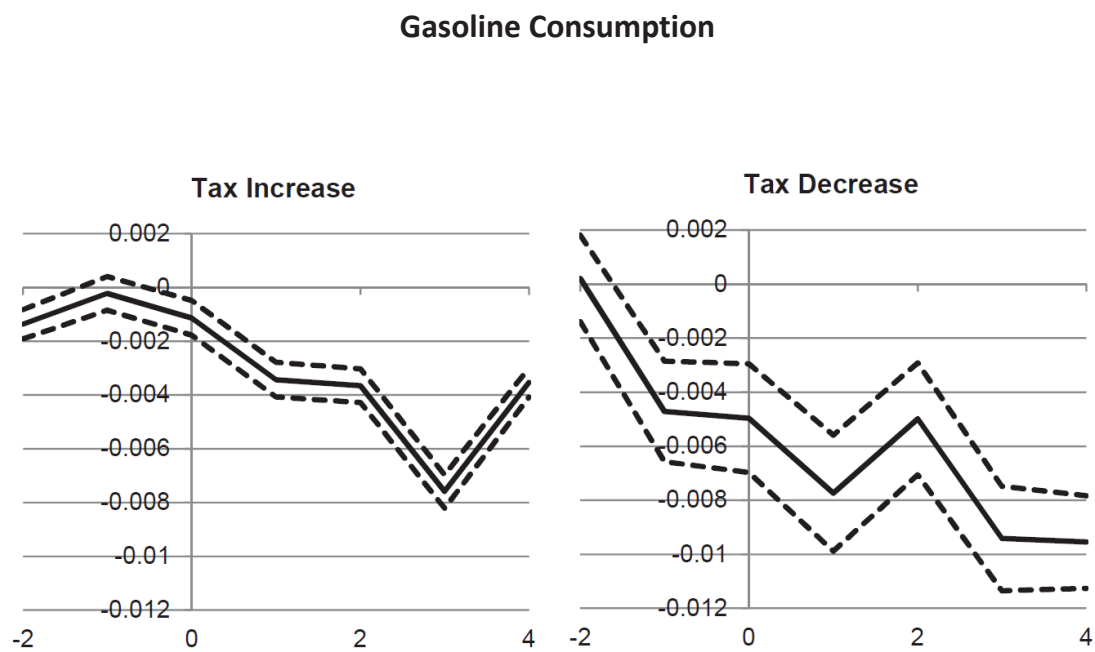


Figure 7: Densities of Daily VMT from Odometer Readings and Self-reported Annual VMT

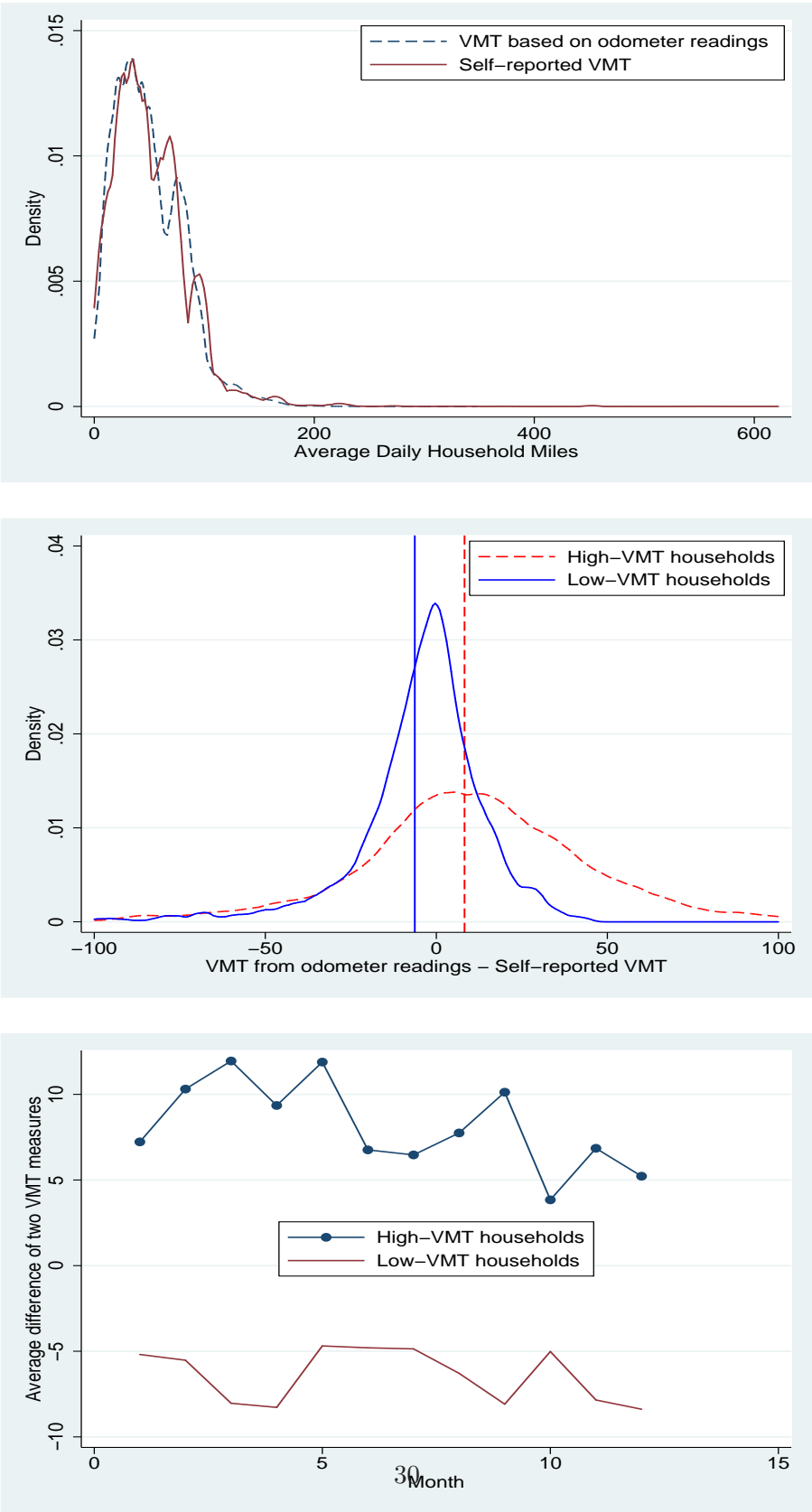


Figure 8: Summary Statistics for NHTS Categorical Variables



Figure 9: Summary Statistics for NHTS Categorical Variables (Cont.)

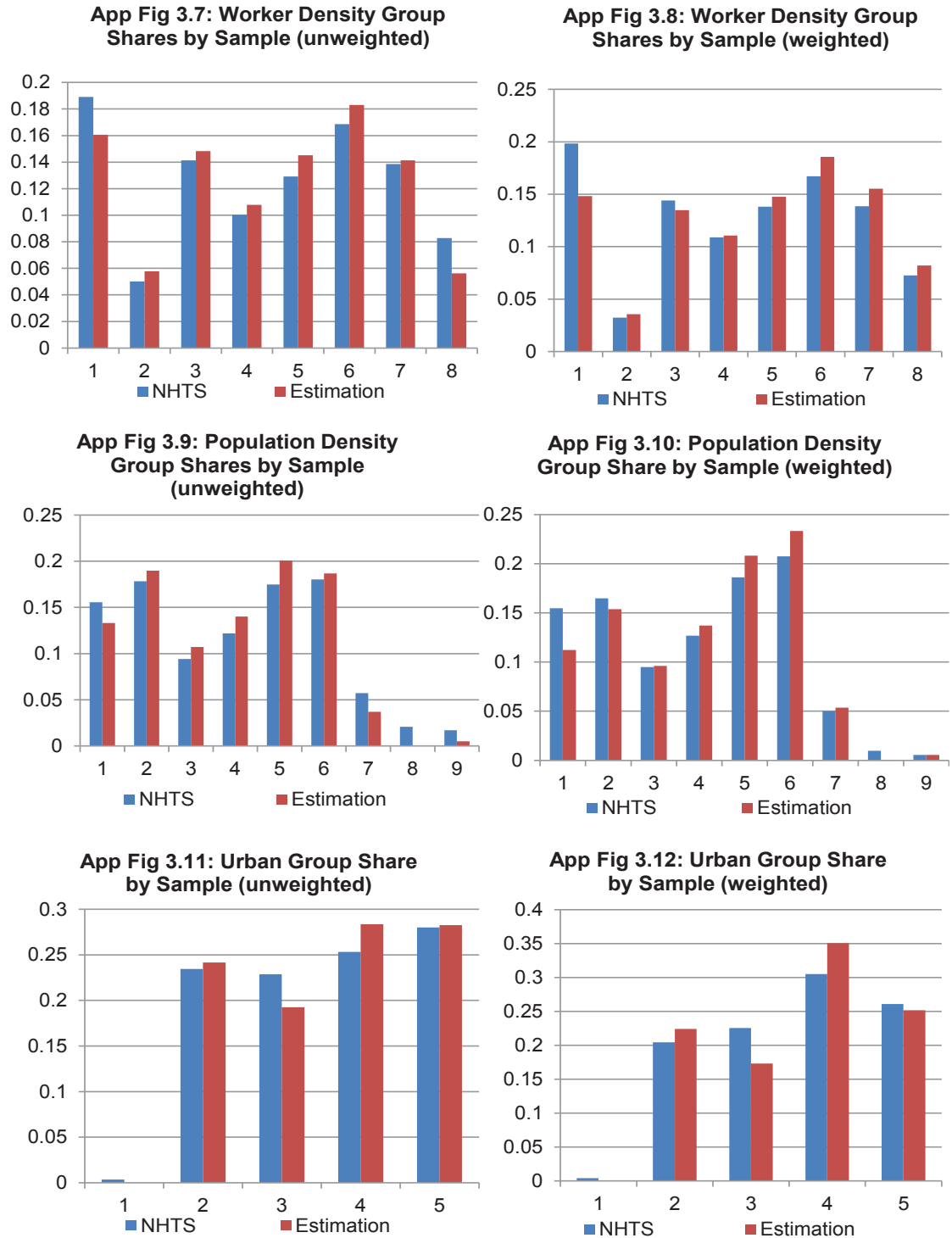


Table 1: Nominal Prices and Taxes (cpg), over time

| Period | Average Tax-Inclusive Retail Price | Average State Tax | Average Federal Tax | Tax Fraction of Retail Gasoline Price | Percent of Retail Gas Variation Explained by Tax Changes |
|-------------|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| 1966 - 1970 | 34.0 | 6.7 | 4.0 | 31.5% | 48.3% |
| 1971 - 1975 | 44.6 | 7.6 | 4.0 | 26.0% | 2.3% |
| 1976 - 1980 | 80.4 | 8.4 | 4.0 | 15.4% | 2.1% |
| 1981 - 1985 | 121.8 | 11.2 | 7.0 | 14.9% | 19.3% |
| 1986 - 1990 | 98.0 | 15.1 | 10.1 | 25.7% | 11.4% |
| 1991 - 1995 | 113.9 | 19.1 | 16.7 | 31.4% | 25.5% |
| 1996 - 2000 | 125.0 | 20.3 | 18.4 | 30.9% | 2.2% |
| 2001 - 2005 | 163.3 | 20.8 | 18.4 | 24.0% | 2.0% |
| 2006 - 2008 | 278.0 | 21.8 | 18.4 | 14.5% | 0.6% |

Table 2: Coefficient Estimates Gasoline Demand Regressions

| Variables | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| Dependent Variable: Log Gasoline Consumption per Adult | | | | | | |
| Log(gas price) | -0.052 (0.017) | | | | | |
| Log(tax-excl. gas price) | | -0.099 (0.019) | -0.112 (0.017) | -0.087 (0.017) | -0.100 (0.019) | -0.207 (0.061) |
| Log(1 + tax ratio) | | -0.287 (0.042) | -0.282 (0.040) | -0.240 (0.038) | -0.300 (0.042) | -0.765 (0.176) |
| Specification | Tax- inclusive gas price | Separate tax from tax- exclusive price | Add controls to (2) | Add quadratic state trends to (2) | Un- weighted | OLS |

Notes: All regressions include 2,064 observations. The dependent variable is the log gallons of gasoline consumed per adult, by state and year. The bottom of the table shows the specification used in each column. Columns 1-5 are estimated by feasible generalized least squares, allowing for first order, state-specific autocorrelation. Standard errors allow for heteroskedastic and correlated errors. Column 6 is estimated by ordinary least squares and standard errors are clustered by state. Columns 1-4 and 6 report weighted regressions, using the state's share in national population for the corresponding year as the weight. Column 5 is unweighted. All columns include state and year dummies. Column 3 adds to column 2 the family size, log road miles per adult, log gross state product per capita, log number of registered cars and log number of registered trucks, log number of licensed drivers, log real income per capita, fraction of the population living in metro areas, and fraction of population living in metro areas with rail transport. Column 4 adds to column 2 the interactions of a set of state dummies with linear and quadratic time trends.

Table 3: Elasticities and Effects of Price Changes on Gasoline Demand

| Variables | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Panel A: Gasoline Consumption Elasticity | | | | | | |
| Gas price | -0.052 (0.017) | | | | | |
| Tax-excl. gas price | | -0.030 (0.013) | -0.044 (0.013) | -0.043 (0.000) | -0.026 (0.013) | -0.023 (0.051) |
| Gas tax | | -0.069 (0.010) | -0.068 (0.010) | -0.059 (0.000) | -0.074 (0.010) | -0.189 (0.043) |
| Panel B: Percent Change in Gasoline Consumption from \$0.05/gallon Increase | | | | | | |
| Gas price | -0.0022 (0.0007) | | | | | |
| Tax-excl. gas price | | -0.0016 (0.0007) | -0.0024 (0.0007) | -0.0023 (0.0000) | -0.0016 (0.0008) | -0.0012 (0.0028) |
| Gas tax | | -0.0131 (0.0019) | -0.0129 (0.0018) | -0.0112 (0.0001) | -0.0147 (0.0021) | -0.0349 (0.0080) |
| Specification | Tax- inclusive gas price | Separate tax from tax- exclusive price | Add controls to (2) | Add quadratic state trends to (2) | Un- weighted | OLS |

Notes: Table reports estimated elasticities and estimated percent changes in gasoline consumption from a \$0.05/gallon increase, with standard errors in parentheses. Each cell uses coefficient estimates from the corresponding specification in the previous table. See Appendix for equations used to estimate the elasticities and percent changes. To calculate elasticities, columns 1-4 and 6 use the weighted average of the gas tax and tax-exclusive gas price and the weighted average of the ratio, weighting by adult population. Column 5 uses the simple average of these variables.

Table 4: IV Estimates of Gasoline Demand

| Variables | Uninstrumented, 1968-2008 | | Instrumented, 1968-2008 | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Log(tax-excl. gas price) | -0.236 (0.0506) | -0.125 (0.0295) | -0.0848 (0.0171) | -0.0703 (0.00509) |
| Log(1 + tax ratio) | -0.570 (0.169) | -0.321 (0.0726) | -0.623 (0.170) | -0.339 (0.0758) |
| Observations | 1968 | 1968 | 1968 | 1968 |
| R-squared | 0.950 | 0.991 | 0.948 | 0.991 |
| Error Structure | OLS | FGLS | OLS | FGLS |

Notes: The dependent variable is the log of gasoline consumption per adult. The standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by state, but uncorrected for autocorrelation. All specifications include year and state fixed effects.

The log of the oil price interacted with the pre-tax gasoline price in 1966 and 1 + gasoline tax / oil price instrument for the tax-exclusive gasoline price and 1 + tax ratio.

Table 5: Nominal Prices and Taxes (cpg), over time

| Variables | Below Mean Tax | Above Mean Tax | Difference |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------|
| State gas Tax | 12.00 5.18 | 16.46 7.26 | 4.46*** |
| Tax-exclusive price | 86.17 56.56 | 84.05 52.60 | -2.12 |
| GSP per capita | 19,854 12,622 | 19,678 13,586 | -176 |
| Fraction of adults graduating HS | 70.862 11.691 | 70.700 14.124 | -0.163 |
| Fraction of adults with BA | 18.202 5.920 | 18.350 6.731 | 0.148 |
| Mean family size | 3.461 0.391 | 3.440 0.393 | -0.021 |
| Autos per capita | 0.691 0.093 | 0.684 0.103 | -0.007 |
| Drivers per capita | 0.922 0.077 | 0.905 0.074 | -0.017*** |
| Urban population share | 0.708 0.198 | 0.719 0.189 | 0.010 |
| Pop. share in MSA with rail | 0.092 0.182 | 0.074 0.191 | -0.018** |

Notes: States are grouped above or below mean tax relative to the weighted average state gasoline tax in each year. *, **, and *** denote that the difference in means is statistically significant at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels.

Table 6: Gasoline Taxes, Pre-tax Prices, and Consumption, monthly

| Variable | <u>Levels</u> | | <u>First-differenced</u> | | <u>First-differenced Seasonal Data</u> | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--|----------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Log(gas price) | -0.196*** (0.030) | | -0.248*** (0.030) | | -0.109* (0.057) | |
| Log(tax-excl. gas price) | | -0.217*** (0.028) | | -0.365*** (0.047) | | -0.172*** (0.061) |
| Log(1 + tax ratio) | | -0.414*** (0.046) | | -0.769*** (0.157) | | -0.394*** (0.140) |
| Observations | 14,898 | 14,898 | 14,763 | 14,763 | 4,893 | 4,893 |
| R-squared | 0.987 | 0.987 | 0.446 | 0.446 | 0.466 | 0.467 |

Notes: The dependent variable is the log of gasoline consumption per adult. All specifications include time fixed effects. Levels regressions also include state fixed effects. Robust standard errors are clustered by state. *, **, and *** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels.

Table 7: Coefficient Estimates: Lagged Prices and Taxes

| Variable | Dep. Var.: Log(gas cons. per adult) | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | (1) | (2) |
| Log(gas price) | -0.062 (0.018) | |
| 1-year lag gas price | -0.046 (0.018) | |
| 2-year lag gas price | -0.055 (0.017) | |
| 3-year lag gas price | -0.029 (0.017) | |
| Log(tax-excl. gas price) | | -0.061 (0.020) |
| 1-year lag tax-excl. gas price | | -0.034 (0.020) |
| 2-year lag tax-excl. gas price | | -0.060 (0.020) |
| 3-year lag tax-excl. gas price | | -0.023 (0.019) |
| Log(1 + tax ratio) | | -0.168 (0.046) |
| 1-year lag Log(1 + tax ratio) | | -0.132 (0.047) |
| 2-year lag Log(1 + tax ratio) | | -0.200 (0.046) |
| 3-year lag Log(1 + tax ratio) | | -0.106 (0.045) |
| Specification | Total gas price | Separate tax from tax-excl. price |

Notes: The dependent variable is the log of gasoline consumption per adult. Specifications are the same as in columns 1 and 2 of Table 2, except that 1-, 2-, and 3-year lag of the gas price and tax variables are added.

Table 8: Effect on Gas Consumption of Frequency of Tax Changes

| Variables | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Log(tax-excl. gas price) | -0.104 (0.019) | -0.105 (0.019) | -0.106 (0.021) | -0.098 (0.021) | -0.102 (0.020) | -0.098 (0.021) |
| Log(1 + tax ratio) | -0.340 (0.047) | | -0.285 (0.052) | -0.315 (0.049) | -0.294 (0.046) | -0.280 (0.055) |
| Total tax changes * tax variable | 0.0036 (0.0014) | | | | | |
| First quintile * tax variable | | -0.343 (0.047) | | | | |
| Second quintile * tax variable | | -0.314 (0.047) | | | | |
| Third quintile * tax variable | | -0.236 (0.051) | | | | |
| Fourth quintile * tax variable | | -0.301 (0.044) | | | | |
| Fifth quintile * tax variable | | -0.268 (0.045) | | | | |
| Tax changes past 15 yrs * tax variable | | | 0.0057 (0.0034) | | | |
| Tax changes past 10 yrs * tax variable | | | | 0.0068 (0.0040) | | |
| Tax changes past 5 yrs * tax variable | | | | | 0.0032 (0.0059) | |
| Yrs since last change * tax variable | | | | | | -0.0029 (0.0018) |
| Observations | 2,064 | 2,064 | 1,344 | 1,584 | 1,824 | 2,064 |

Notes: The dependent variable is the log of gas consumption per adult. Specifications are the same as for column 2 of Table 2, except that additional control variables are added. The number of times the state changes its tax during the sample is calculated. Column 1 includes the interaction of the log tax ratio with the number of times the state changes its tax. States are separated into quintiles depending on the number of tax changes, where higher quintiles indicate more tax changes. Column 2 includes interactions of a set of dummy variables equal to one if the state is in the corresponding quintile with the tax ratio variable. Columns 3-5 use the number of tax changes in the past 15, 10, or 5 years instead of the number of changes during the entire sample; column 6 uses the number of years since the last tax change. Columns 3-6 also include the corresponding variables for the number of tax changes or number of years since the last change, which are not reported.

Table 9: Summary Statistics: MPG of Recently Purchased Vehicles

| Variable | Sample 1: All Purchases | | | | Sample 2: Newer Vehicles | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------------------------|-------|-------|--------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. |
| Average MPG | 21.42 | 5.13 | 10.00 | 49.80 | 21.40 | 5.30 | 10.12 | 49.25 |
| Tax-excl. gas price | 1.59 | 0.74 | 0.70 | 3.94 | 1.60 | 0.75 | 0.70 | 3.94 |
| Gas tax | 0.42 | 0.07 | 0.24 | 0.69 | 0.42 | 0.07 | 0.24 | 0.69 |
| Household size | 2.97 | 1.43 | 1 | 14 | 2.82 | 1.35 | 1 | 14 |
| Number of drivers | 2.10 | 0.83 | 0 | 10 | 2.06 | 0.76 | 0 | 10 |
| Number of adults | 2.11 | 0.79 | 1 | 10 | 2.07 | 0.73 | 1 | 10 |
| Number of workers | 1.60 | 0.94 | 0 | 10 | 1.55 | 0.90 | 0 | 10 |
| Age of reference person | 45.20 | 14.53 | 17 | 92 | 46.99 | 14.64 | 17 | 92 |
| Household income | 10.66 | 5.21 | 1 | 18 | 12.10 | 4.93 | 1 | 18 |
| Education of ref. person | 3.02 | 1.13 | 1 | 5 | 3.23 | 1.11 | 1 | 5 |
| MSA size | 4.12 | 1.45 | 1 | 6 | 4.16 | 1.39 | 1 | 6 |
| Worker density | 1,201 | 1,446 | 25 | 5,000 | 1,227 | 1,436 | 25 | 5,000 |
| Population density | 3,610 | 4,903 | 50 | 30,000 | 3,636 | 4,747 | 50 | 30,000 |
| With rail | 0.21 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 | 0.24 | 0.43 | 0 | 1 |
| Without rail | 0.79 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 | 0.76 | 0.43 | 0 | 1 |
| Second city | 0.19 | 0.39 | 0 | 1 | 0.18 | 0.38 | 0 | 1 |
| Suburban | 0.27 | 0.45 | 0 | 1 | 0.31 | 0.46 | 0 | 1 |
| Town and country | 0.41 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 | 0.39 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Urban | 0.12 | 0.33 | 0 | 1 | 0.12 | 0.33 | 0 | 1 |

Notes: Sample 1, with 52,128 observations, includes households who purchased at least one vehicle within the past year, from the 1995, 2001, and 2009 NHTS. Sample 2, with 30,363 observations, includes households who purchased at least one vehicle during the past year such that all the vehicles purchased are less than four years old. Tax-exclusive gasoline price and gasoline tax correspond to the purchase month (and are averaged in case of multiple vehicle purchases). Household income, education of reference person, MSA size, worker density, and population density at the Census tract level are all categorical variables.

Table 10: Summary Statistics: Household VMT

| Variable | Sample 1: Odometer Readings | | | | Sample 2: Self-reported VMT | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|------|--------|-----------------------------|-------|------|--------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. | Mean | S.D. | Min. | Max. |
| Average daily VMT | 50.82 | 35.71 | 0.01 | 347.96 | 58.94 | 50.03 | 0.00 | 499.09 |
| Tax-excl. gas price | 1.07 | 0.12 | 0.74 | 1.69 | 1.13 | 0.13 | 0.87 | 1.68 |
| Gas tax | 0.46 | 0.06 | 0.29 | 0.71 | 0.45 | 0.06 | 0.29 | 0.68 |
| Household size | 2.33 | 1.32 | 1 | 12 | 2.51 | 1.38 | 1 | 14 |
| Number of drivers | 1.69 | 0.67 | 0 | 6 | 1.79 | 0.73 | -8 | 10 |
| Number of adults | 1.74 | 0.66 | 1 | 8 | 1.83 | 0.71 | 1 | 9 |
| Number of workers | 1.16 | 0.88 | 0 | 6 | 1.32 | 0.91 | -8 | 10 |
| Age of reference person | 50.98 | 16.42 | 17 | 88 | 47.85 | 16.12 | 17 | 88 |
| Household income | 9.33 | 4.96 | 1 | 18 | 9.48 | 4.96 | 1 | 18 |
| Education of reference person | 3.09 | 1.18 | 1 | 5 | 3.02 | 1.15 | 1 | 5 |
| MSA size | 4.06 | 1.40 | 1 | 6 | 4.10 | 1.42 | 1 | 6 |
| Worker density at census tract | 1,397 | 1,507 | 25 | 5,000 | 1,396 | 1,531 | 25 | 5,000 |
| Population density at census tract | 4,000 | 4,907 | 50 | 30,000 | 3,890 | 4,856 | 50 | 30,000 |
| With rail | 0.22 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 | 0.21 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 |
| Without rail | 0.78 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 | 0.79 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 |
| Second city | 0.21 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 | 0.21 | 0.41 | 0 | 1 |
| Suburban | 0.32 | 0.47 | 0 | 1 | 0.29 | 0.45 | 0 | 1 |
| Town and country | 0.34 | 0.47 | 0 | 1 | 0.37 | 0.48 | 0 | 1 |
| Urban | 0.13 | 0.34 | 0 | 1 | 0.13 | 0.34 | 0 | 1 |

Notes: Sample 1, with 28,303 observations, is from the 1995 and 2001 NHTS and includes households who reported two odometer readings for each of the vehicles owned. Sample 2, with 61,795 observations, includes households with self-reported annual VMT for each vehicle owned. In sample 1, the tax-exclusive gasoline price and gasoline tax are averaged during the period of the two odometer readings. Household income, education of reference person, MSA size, worker density, and population density at the Census tract level are all categorical variables.

Table 11: Comparison of NHTS and Estimation Subsample

| Panel A: Unweighted | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Full NHTS Sample | | | | | Estimation Subsample | | | | |
| | N | Mean | SD | 10th | 90th | N | Mean | SD | 10th | 90th |
| Pre-tax price | 45,459 | 0.89 | 0.12 | 0.75 | 1.04 | 34,234 | 0.89 | 0.12 | 0.76 | 1.05 |
| Tax | 41,389 | 0.40 | 0.04 | 0.35 | 0.45 | 34,234 | 0.40 | 0.04 | 0.35 | 0.45 |
| Household size | 106,831 | 2.60 | 1.34 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 34,234 | 2.56 | 1.29 | 1.00 | 4.00 |
| Number of drivers | 106,831 | 1.85 | 0.77 | 1.00 | 3.00 | 34,234 | 1.88 | 0.70 | 1.00 | 3.00 |
| Number of adults | 111,850 | 1.89 | 0.82 | 1.00 | 3.00 | 34,234 | 1.91 | 0.65 | 1.00 | 3.00 |
| Number of workers | 106,831 | 1.36 | 0.96 | 0.00 | 2.00 | 34,234 | 1.35 | 0.94 | 0.00 | 2.00 |
| Age | 111,850 | 49.59 | 18.79 | 29.00 | 74.00 | 34,234 | 50.66 | 15.67 | 31.00 | 73.00 |
| MSA has subway | 111,850 | 0.16 | 0.37 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 34,234 | 0.14 | 0.34 | 0.00 | 1.00 |
| Panel B: Weighted | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Full NHTS Sample | | | | | Estimation Subsample | | | | |
| | N | Mean | SD | 10th | 90th | N | Mean | SD | 10th | 90th |
| Pre-tax price | 45,459 | 0.87 | 0.12 | 0.74 | 1.04 | 34,234 | 0.89 | 0.12 | 0.75 | 1.05 |
| Tax | 41,389 | 0.37 | 0.04 | 0.32 | 0.44 | 34,234 | 0.37 | 0.04 | 0.32 | 0.42 |
| Household size | 106,831 | 2.54 | 1.34 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 34,234 | 2.53 | 1.35 | 1.00 | 4.00 |
| Number of drivers | 106,831 | 1.85 | 0.73 | 1.00 | 3.00 | 34,234 | 1.84 | 0.73 | 1.00 | 3.00 |
| Number of adults | 111,850 | 1.89 | 0.70 | 1.00 | 3.00 | 34,234 | 1.88 | 0.70 | 1.00 | 3.00 |
| Number of workers | 106,831 | 1.30 | 0.94 | 0.00 | 2.00 | 34,234 | 1.31 | 0.93 | 0.00 | 2.00 |
| Age | 111,850 | 50.25 | 16.15 | 30.00 | 73.00 | 34,234 | 49.76 | 15.97 | 30.00 | 73.00 |
| MSA has subway | 111,850 | 0.20 | 0.40 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 34,234 | 0.22 | 0.41 | 0.00 | 1.00 |

Table 12: Gasoline Taxes, Tax-Exclusive Prices, and Vehicle MPG

| | Sample 1: All Purchases | | | Sample 2: Newer Purchases | | |
|--|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) |
| Panel A: Effect from Total Gas Price | | | | | | |
| Log(gas price) | 0.076 (0.017) | 0.069 (0.018) | 0.065 (0.019) | 0.084 (0.026) | 0.082 (0.027) | 0.076 (0.028) |
| R-squared | 0.054 | 0.056 | 0.059 | 0.082 | 0.084 | 0.091 |
| % Δ in MPG: 5c \uparrow gas price | 0.236 (0.052) | 0.214 (0.056) | 0.200 (0.058) | 0.258 (0.079) | 0.253 (0.084) | 0.233 (0.0086) |
| Panel B: Separating Gas Tax and Tax-exclusive Price | | | | | | |
| Log (tax-excl. gas price) | 0.087 (0.020) | 0.085 (0.019) | 0.105 (0.029) | 0.099 (0.024) | 0.111 (0.027) | 0.134 (0.037) |
| Log(1 + tax ratio) | 0.151 (0.082) | 0.174 (0.073) | 0.288 (0.126) | 0.201 (0.067) | 0.274 (0.077) | 0.405 (0.148) |
| R-squared | 0.053 | 0.055 | 0.059 | 0.082 | 0.085 | 0.091 |
| Elasticity w.r.t. tax-excl. gas price | 0.051 (0.015) | 0.044 (0.017) | 0.038 (0.016) | 0.052 (0.023) | 0.047 (0.023) | 0.040 (0.023) |
| Elasticity w.r.t. gas tax | 0.035 (0.019) | 0.041 (0.017) | 0.067 (0.029) | 0.047 (0.016) | 0.064 (0.018) | 0.094 (0.034) |
| % Δ in MPG: 5c \uparrow tax-excl. price | 0.158 (0.047) | 0.137 (0.050) | 0.117 (0.050) | 0.162 (0.070) | 0.143 (0.071) | 0.123 (0.072) |
| % Δ in MPG: 5c \uparrow gas tax | 0.418 (0.277) | 0.482 (0.202) | 0.798 (0.348) | 0.552 (0.187) | 0.759 (0.213) | 1.124 (0.410) |
| Difference in % changes | 0.260 (0.245) | 0.345 (0.224) | 0.682 (0.361) | 0.396 (0.218) | 0.616 (0.236) | 1.001 (0.433) |
| Census division dummies | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| State dummies | No | No | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Observations | 52,128 | 52,128 | 52,128 | 30,363 | 30,363 | 30,363 |

Notes: The dependent variable is the log of average household MPG. Columns 1 to 3 are based on all households who purchased at least one vehicle during past 12 months prior to the survey. The dependent variable is the log of the average MPG across all vehicles purchased during the past 12 months. Columns 4 to 6 focus on households who purchased at least one vehicle during the past 12 months, and all the vehicles purchased are less than four years old. All regressions include the variables listed in Table 9. We use dummy variables for the categorical variables. Sampling weights are used in all regressions. Clustered standard errors at the state level are reported in parentheses.

Table 13: Gasoline Taxes, Tax-exclusive Prices, and Household VMT

| | (1) | Sample 1 (2) | (3) | (4) | Sample 2 (5) | (6) |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Panel A: Effect from Total Gas Price | | | | | | |
| Log(gas price) | -0.497 (0.11) | -0.329 (0.113) | -0.391 (0.133) | -0.274 (0.156) | -0.122 (0.123) | 0.108 (0.284) |
| R-squared | 0.447 | 0.448 | 0.45 | 0.361 | 0.362 | 0.363 |
| % Δ in VMT: 5c \uparrow gas price | -1.563 (0.344) | -1.035 (0.351) | -1.230 (0.417) | -1.214 (0.694) | -0.543 (0.504) | 0.481 (1.260) |
| Panel B: Separating Gas Tax from Tax-exclusive Price | | | | | | |
| Log(tax-excl. gas price) | -0.373 (0.084) | -0.329 (0.113) | -0.469 (0.256) | -0.253 (0.182) | -0.066 (0.145) | -0.246 (0.42) |
| Log(1 + tax ratio) | -0.124 (0.072) | -0.339 (0.21) | -0.604 (0.815) | -0.387 (0.334) | -0.273 (0.147) | -1.423 (1.3) |
| R-squared | 0.447 | 0.448 | 0.45 | 0.361 | 0.362 | 0.364 |
| Elas. w.r.t. tax-excl. gas price | -0.362 (0.092) | -0.249 (0.089) | -0.296 (0.101) | -0.142 (0.219) | 0.013 (0.139) | 0.161 (0.18) |
| Elas. w.r.t. gas tax | -0.149 (0.088) | -0.097 (-0.080) | -0.173 (0.233) | -0.111 (0.096) | -0.078 (0.042) | -0.407 (0.372) |
| % Δ in VMT: 5c \uparrow tax-excl. price | -1.171 (0.265) | -0.782 (0.281) | -1.312 (0.448) | -0.631 (0.972) | 0.056 (0.617) | 0.716 (0.798) |
| % Δ in VMT: 5c \uparrow gas tax | -1.454 (0.850) | -0.945 (0.584) | -1.924 (2.595) | -1.231 (1.064) | -0.870 (0.468) | -4.532 (4.142) |
| Difference in % changes | -0.288 (0.905) | -0.163 (0.582) | -0.611 (2.634) | -0.510 (1.806) | -0.926 (0.783) | -5.248 (4.185) |
| Census division dummies | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No |
| State dummies | No | No | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Observations | 28,303 | 28,303 | 28,303 | 61,795 | 61,795 | 61,795 |

Notes: The dependent variable in all specifications is the log of daily household VMT for all vehicles owned. Columns 1 to 3 are based on households who reported two odometer readings for each of the vehicles owned from the 1995 and 2001 NHTS. Columns 4 to 6 are based on self-reported annual VMT. All regressions include the control variables listed in Table 10. We use dummy variables for the categorical variables. Sampling weights are used in all regressions. Clustered standard errors at the state level are reported in parentheses.