PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Americans on Medicaid, SNAP Benefits and the Earned Income Tax Credit

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How much the federal government should spend on assistance programs for low-income households has been the subject of debate since their inception. This debate has included the health insurance program Medicaid, which makes up about ten percent of the federal budget, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps), and the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-wage workers, among others.

Our latest survey finds most Americans, including the majority of Republicans and Democrats, prefer spending on these programs be at least maintained, and in most cases expanded to offer more benefits and cover more people.

Federal Poverty Line

Respondents were provided information about poverty in the U.S., including the income levels that define the federal poverty line (e.g. up to about $32,150 for a family of four), and that currently about 37 million people, or 11% of the population, is at or under the poverty line. They were also shown a chart showing the change in the poverty rate since 1960.

Asked whether they think the federal poverty line should be raised or lowered (so more or fewer people are defined as living in poverty), or kept the same, a majority of 52% said it should be raised, including 50% of Republicans and 56% of Democrats. One in four said it should be kept the same (26%), and just one in five said lower (22%).

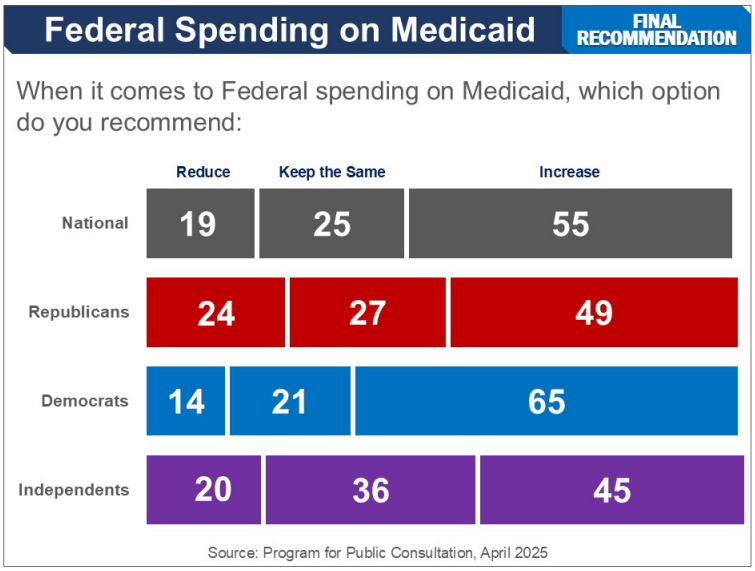
Medicaid

Respondents were informed that Medicaid is the government health insurance program that covers low-income households: about 71 million people, or around one-fifth of the US population, including about four in ten children. They were informed what the income cutoffs are for most households, which is about 138% of the Federal poverty line (higher for children, people over 65 and people with disabilities). They were informed that the Federal government covers about two-thirds of the cost - $608 billion last year or about ten percent of the federal budget – and state governments cover the other third.

Federal Spending on Medicaid

Given the option to increase, keep the same, or decrease federal spending on Medicaid along a seven-point scale, a very large bipartisan majority of 81% did not support decreasing spending, including 75% of Republicans and 86% of Democrats.

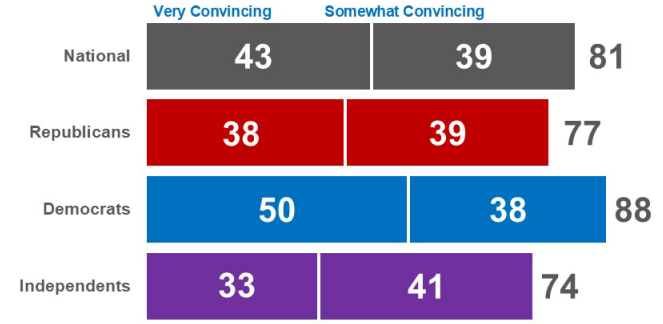
A majority (55%) favored increasing spending on Medicaid, which respondents were informed would allow Medicaid to enroll more people and cover more services. This included a majority of Democrats (65%) and about half of Republicans (49%). Just 19% favored reducing spending on Medicaid, including 24% of Republicans and 14% of Democrats.



Increasing Federal Spending on Medicaid

ARGUMENT IN FAVOR

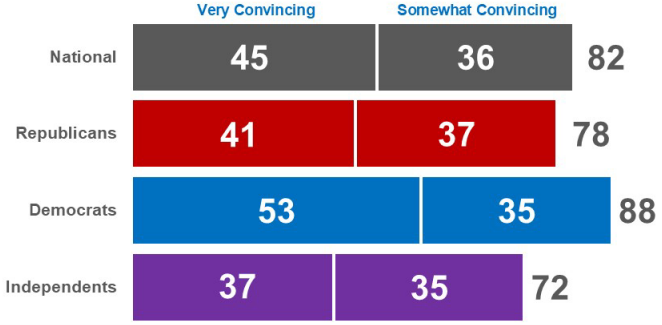
Giving more people access to healthcare is a good investment. It increases people's health and productivity, and reduces suffering from illness. Many households currently can not get Medicaid because they make just a little more than the limit, yet they are still too poor to afford healthcare. So they forego rent or food, or go into bankruptcy – causing them to stay poor for longer. An investment in Medicaid benefits everyone.



Reducing Federal Spending on Medicaid

ARGUMENT AGAINST

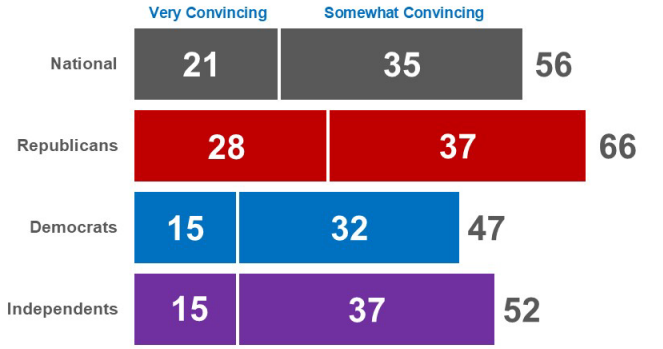
Cutting Medicaid will throw millions of families off health insurance, including millions of children, elderly and disabled people. Without healthcare many will get sicker and even die. It will also lead to healthcare workers being laid off and hospitals shutting down, especially in poor and rural areas.



Reducing Federal Spending on Medicaid

ARGUMENT IN FAVOR

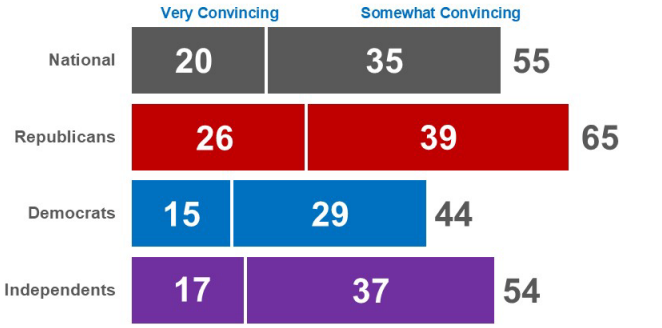
The government has allowed the national debt to grow massively. Cuts need to be made somewhere. Programs like Medicaid are a major contributor to the deficit. Medicaid makes too many people–a quarter of the population–reliant on the government.



Increasing Federal Spending on Medicaid

ARGUMENT AGAINST

The Federal government already spends an enormous amount on Medicaid - it is one of the largest government programs, taking up 10% of the budget. The Federal government should be encouraging more people to take care of themselves, not rely on the government. Furthermore, if states want to cover more people they can do so. The Federal government doesn't have to be responsible for everything.



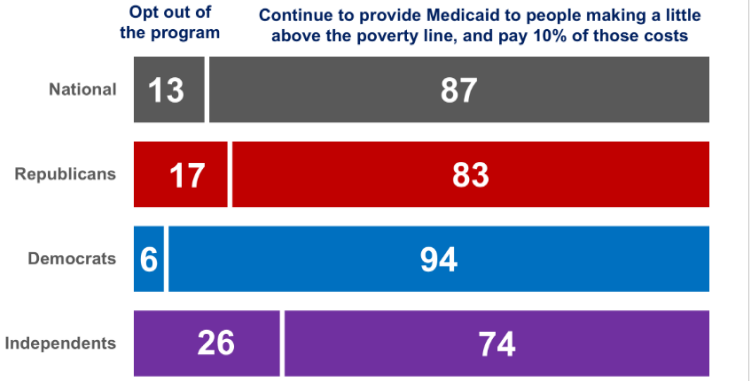
Medicaid Expansion in States

Respondents were informed that the federal government has a program to help states pay for expanding Medicaid to more people – those earning a little above the federal poverty line – but only if states opt in and cover ten percent of the costs. They were informed that 40 states have opted into the expansion program, costing them an additional few hundred thousand to a few million dollars a year, and resulting in an additional 20 million people getting Medicaid coverage.

Medicaid Expansion: In States That Have Expanded Medicaid

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

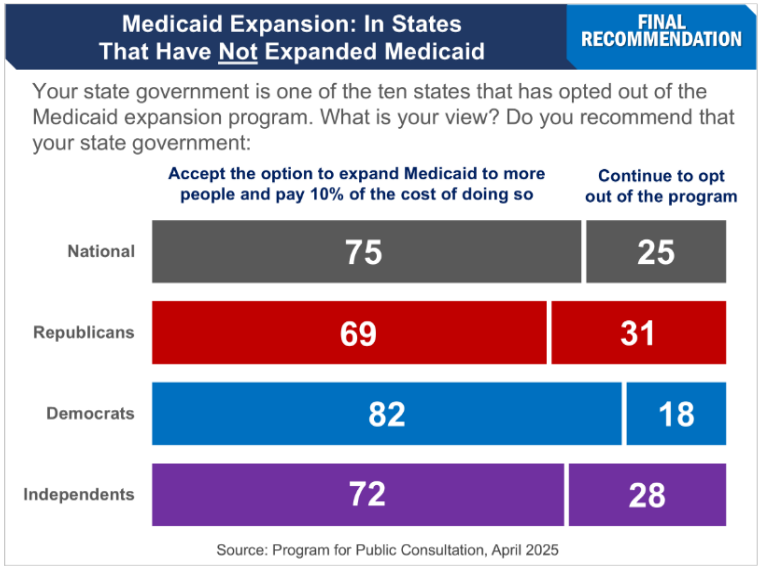
Your state government has accepted the option to expand Medicaid. What is your view? Do you recommend that your state government:



Source: Program for Public Consultation, April 2025

Among respondents in the ten states that have not opted into the Medicaid expansion program, a bipartisan majority of 75% favor their state opting in and paying the required ten percent of costs (Republicans 69%, Democrats 82%).

Among respondents in the 40 states and Washington, DC that have expanded Medicaid, a bipartisan majority of 87% favored their state continuing to be part of the program (Republicans 83%, Democrats 94%).



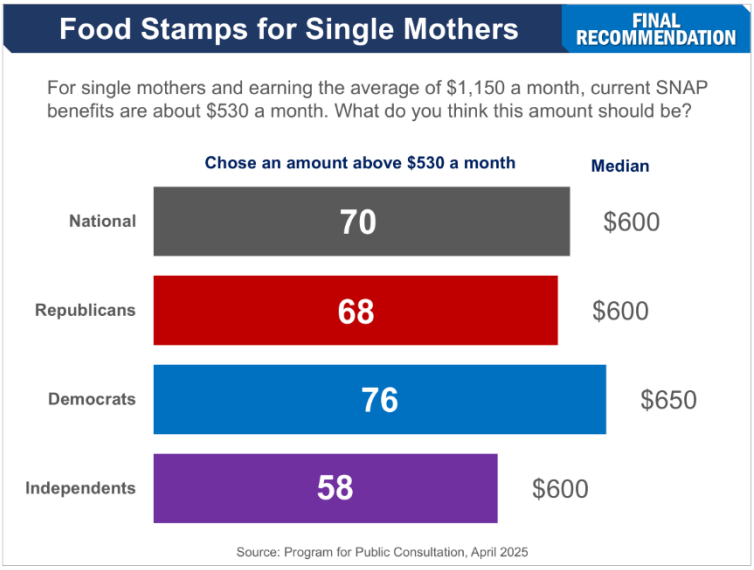
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps)

Respondents were informed that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides food stamps for low-income households (up to 130% of the poverty line), provided they meet certain eligibility requirements, including work requirements, income cutoffs, and savings limits. They were informed that this program covers about 23 million households, at a cost of about $94 billion a year.

Monthly SNAP Benefits

For Single Mothers

Told that single mothers receive about $530 in SNAP benefits a month, on average, and given the option to choose how much monthly food stamps should be, a bipartisan majority (70%) increased the benefits (Republicans 68%, Democrats 76%).

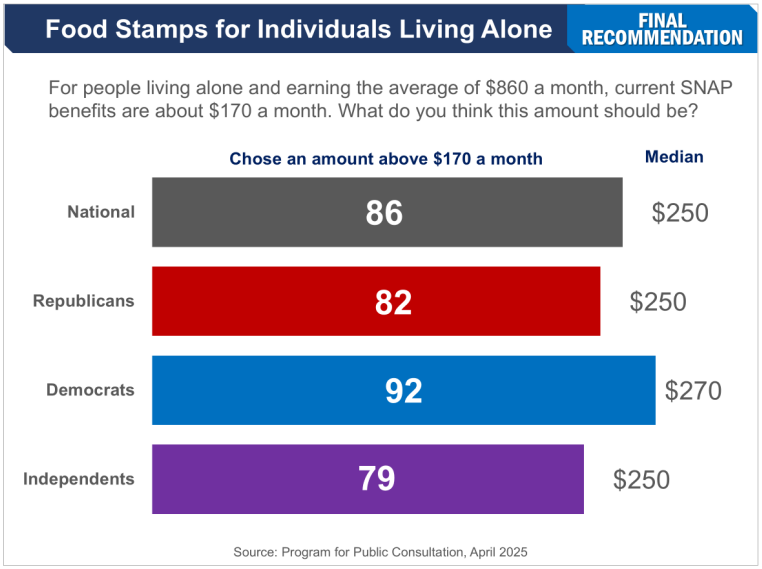


The median respondent increased the monthly food stamp benefits for single mothers from $530 to $600 (Republicans $600, Democrats $650).

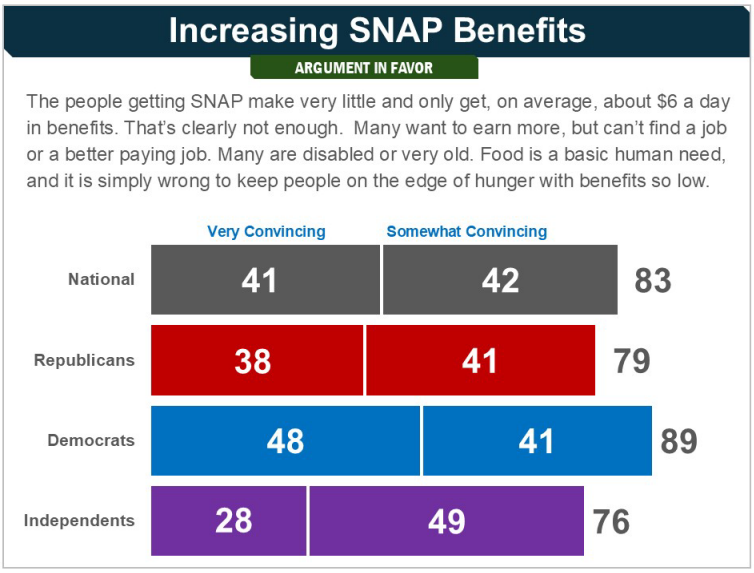
For Individuals Living Alone

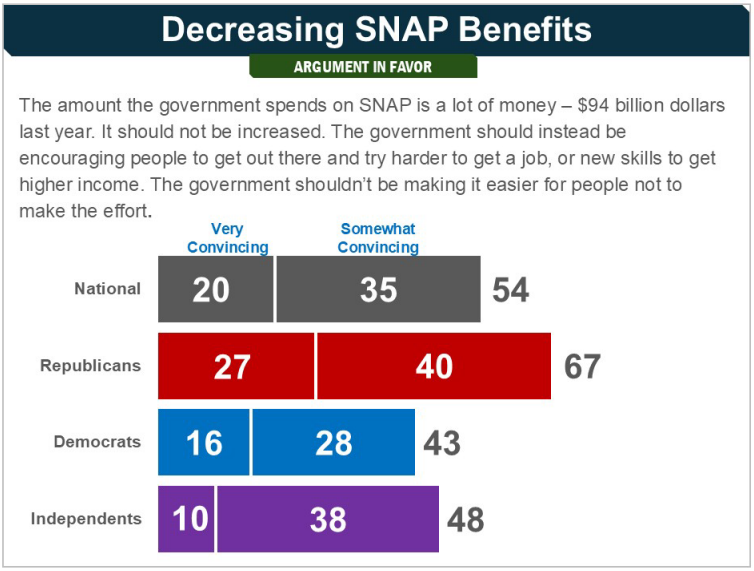
Told that individuals living alone receive about $170 a month in SNAP benefits a month, on average, and given the option to choose how much monthly food stamps should be, a bipartisan majority (86%) chose to increase benefits. (Republicans 82%, Democrats 92%).

The median respondent increased the monthly food stamp benefits for individuals without children from $170 to $250 (Republicans $250, Democrats $270).



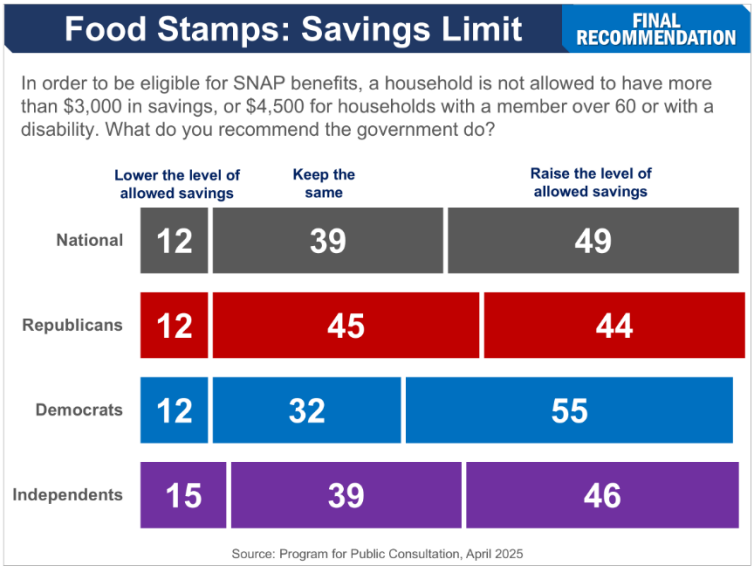
Arguments





Savings Limit to be Eligible for SNAP

Respondents were informed that SNAP recipients can not have more than $3,000 in savings, or $4,500 if their household has a member over 60 years old or with a disability. About half chose to raise the level of allowed savings (49%, Republicans 44%, Democrats 55%), and four in ten kept it the same (39%, Republicans 45%, Democrats 32%). Just 12% favored lowering it.

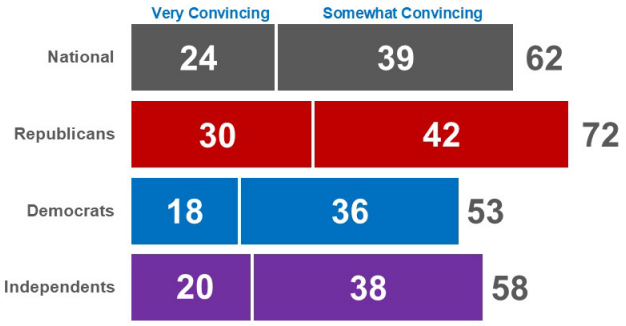


Arguments

Asset Limits for SNAP Eligibility

ARGUMENT IN FAVOR

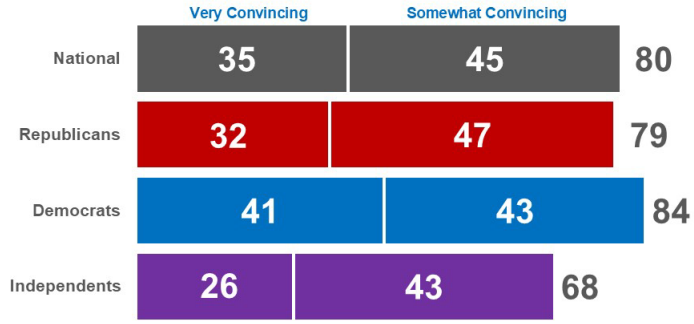
We should ensure that people receiving government assistance are truly in need. Taxpayer dollars should only help people who have exhausted all other means. If someone loses their job but has substantial money in the bank, they should not qualify for SNAP. It is not the government's responsibility to ensure that people can maintain their bank accounts.



Asset Limits for SNAP Eligibility

ARGUMENT AGAINST

Kicking people off of food stamps when they save up some money does the opposite of what the government should be encouraging people to do. It makes it nearly impossible for people to save up enough to pay for education or skills that would get them a better job with more pay, and get off welfare. It discourages them from saving money to face an unexpected cost, so they don't end up in debt or homeless.



Whether to Restrict Food Stamps for Sodas, Snacks and Desserts

Proposals have been put forward to restrict the use of food stamps to buy sodas, chips, ice cream, cake, or candy.

For each food category, respondents were asked whether it should or should not be allowed to be bought using SNAP benefits. Majorities recommended continuing to allow each (53-72%), including majorities of Democrats in all cases (59-79%), and majorities of Republicans in most cases (54-66%) with the exception of candy (48% allowed vs 52% not allowed).

Just 28-47% preferred restricting them, which is down significantly among both Democrats and Republicans since 2017, when PPC found bipartisan support for prohibiting sodas and candy from being bought with food stamps, and a majority of Republicans in favor of prohibiting chips and ice cream.

Food Stamps: Restrictions on Buying Sodas, Snacks and Desserts

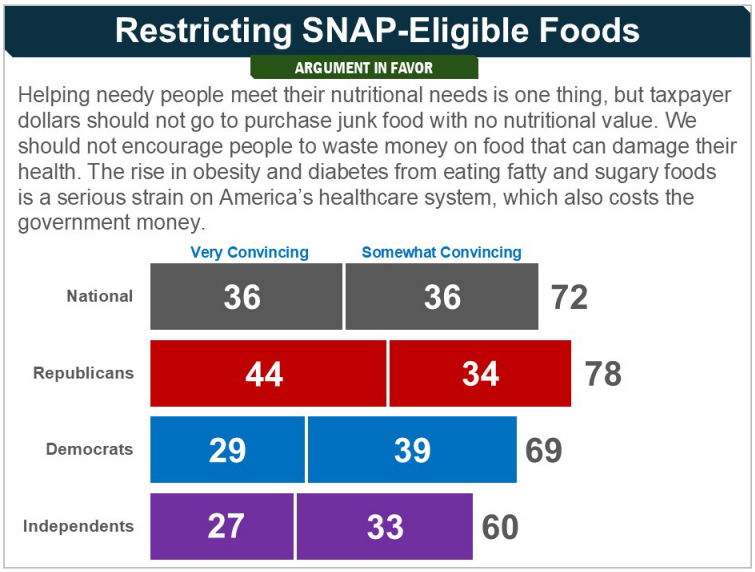
FINAL RECOMMENDATION

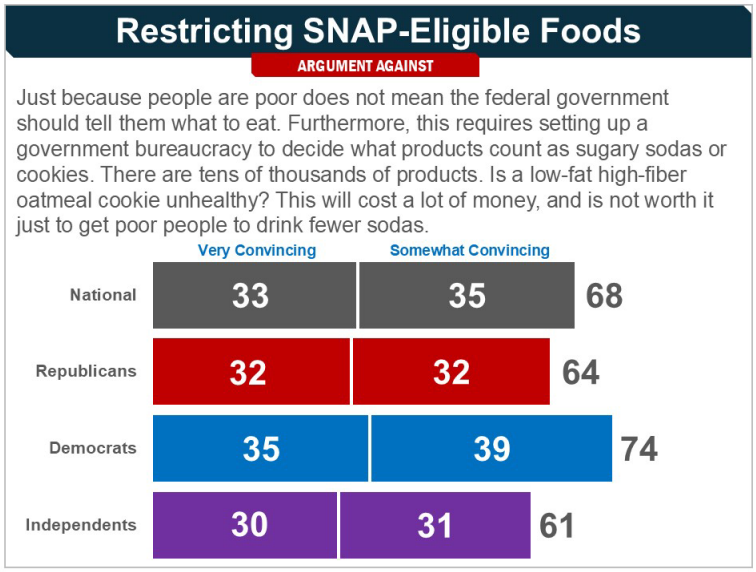
Do you think SNAP credits (food stamps) should be allowed or not allowed for buying the following items?

	% SHOULD BE ALLOWED			
	National	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Sweetened sodas	57	54	62	52
Candy	53	48	59	48
Cookies, cakes and doughnuts	68	63	74	64
Ice cream	71	66	79	67
Chips	72	65	79	69

Source: Program for Public Consultation, April 2025

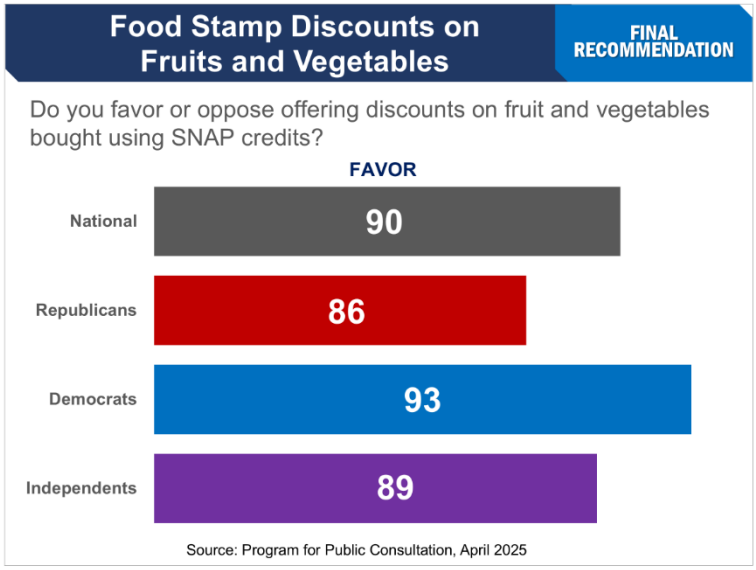
Arguments





Discount on Fruits and Vegetables

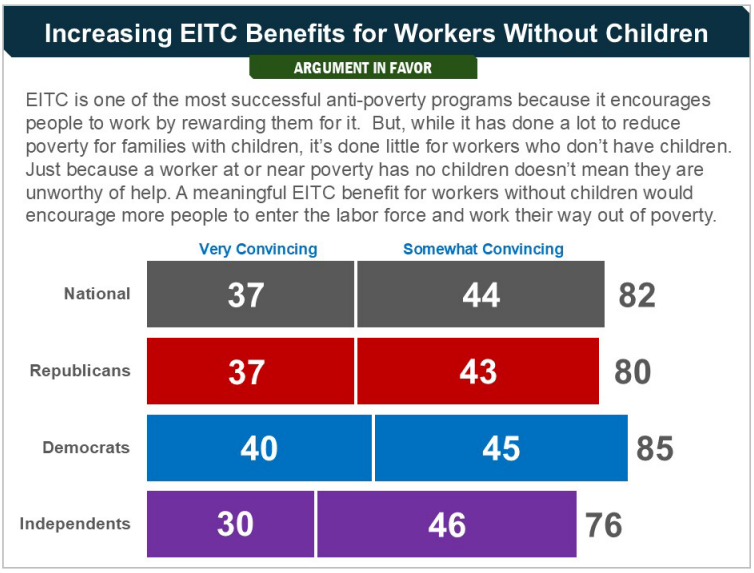
A bipartisan majority of 90% favored giving food stamp recipients a discount on fruits and vegetables, which respondents were informed would increase the cost of the program, but produce long-term government savings as result of the increased health of recipients. This included 86% of Republicans and 93% of Democrats.

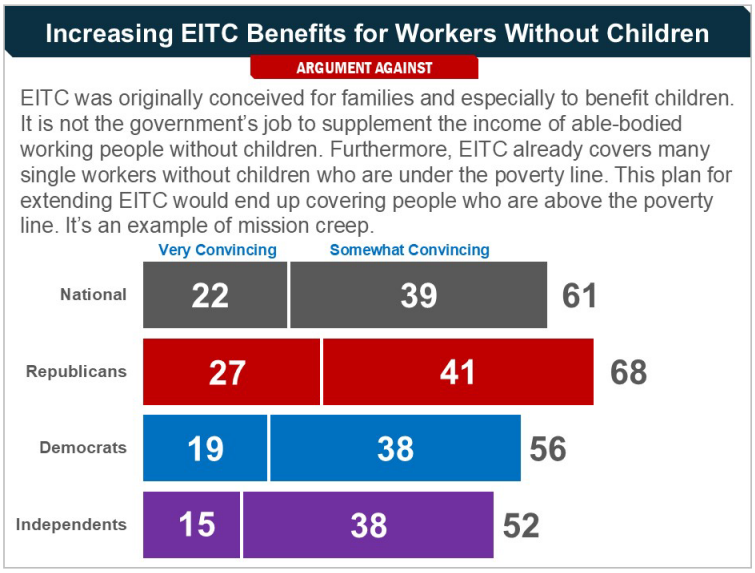


Earned Income Tax Credit for Workers Without Children

Respondents were informed that the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a refundable tax credit that supplements the income of low-wage workers. They were told that most of these credits go to workers with children, who can have incomes up to $63,000 for those with two children, for example, and can receive a maximum credit of $7,000 a year. In comparison, they were told, workers without children can not have incomes above $18,500 (or $25,500 for married couples), receive a maximum credit of $630, and must be 25 years or older.

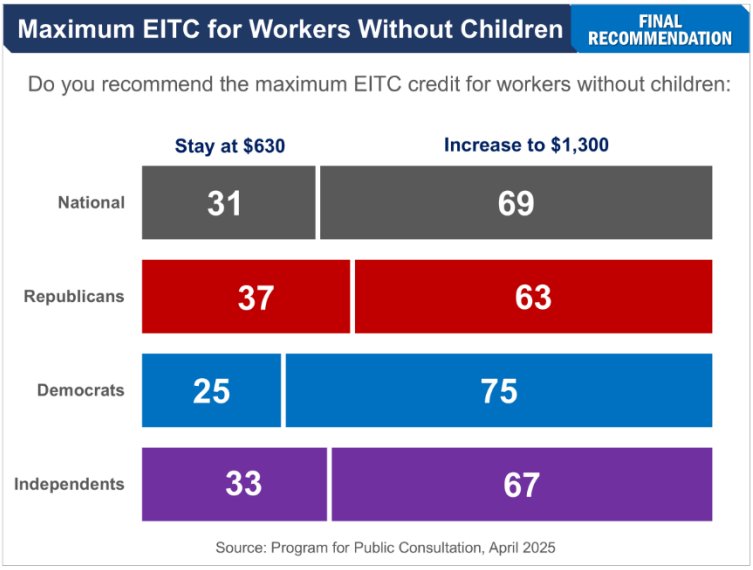
General Arguments: Raising EITC for Workers Without Children





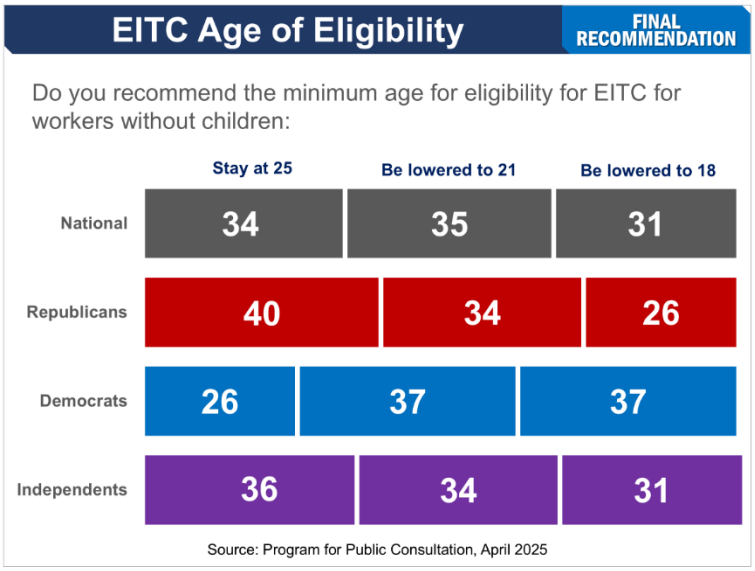
Maximum Credit

A bipartisan majority of 69% favored increasing the maximum EITC for workers without children from $630 to $1,300 a year (Republicans 63%, Democrats 75%).



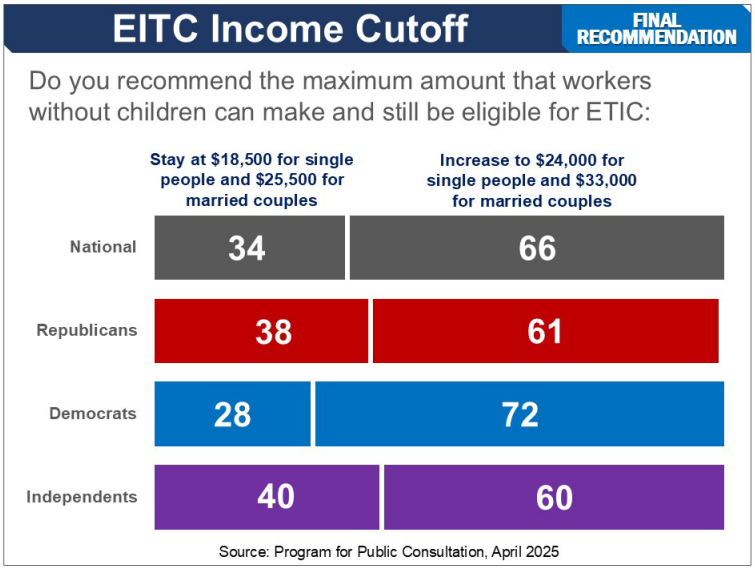
Age of Eligibility

Given the option to lower the age of eligibility for EITC for workers without children from 25 to 21 or 18, a bipartisan majority of 66% favored lowering the age of eligibility from 25 to at least 21 (Republicans 59%, Democrats 73%). Three in ten (31%) favored going further and lowering it to 18.



Income Cutoff

A bipartisan majority of 66% favored increasing the income cutoff for EITC for workers without children from about $18,500 for individuals and $25,500 for married couples, to about $24,000 and $33,000, respectively (Republicans 61%, Democrats 72%)



MORE INFORMATION

- Online Report
- Questionnaire with Toplines, Crosstabs and Methodology
- Try the Low-Income Programs Policymaking Simulation

About the Survey

The survey was a "public consultation survey" in which respondents are provided briefings and evaluate arguments for and against each proposal. Content was written using the assistance of LLMs, and reviewed to ensure that the briefings are accurate and balanced and that the arguments presented are the strongest ones being made.

The survey was fielded April 4-9, 2025 with 1,195 adults nationally. Sample was obtained from multiple online opt-in panels, including Cint, Dynata and Prodege. Sample collection and quality control was managed by QuantifyAI under the direction of the Program for Public Consultation. The sample was pre-stratified and weighted by age, race, gender, education, income, region, marital status, and home ownership to match the general adult population. The sample was also weighted by partisanship to align with the most recent national distribution The survey was offered in both English and Spanish. The confidence interval is +/- 3.1% and the response rate for the sample is 7.5%.

About the Program for Public Consultation

The Program for Public Consultation (PPC) at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy develops and conducts public consultation surveys, seeking to improve democratic governance by consulting representative samples of citizens on key public policy issues. It shares its findings with officials in government, the media, other academics, and the general public.