

# AMERICANS ON FEDERAL POVERTY PROGRAMS



**A Citizen Cabinet survey nationwide,  
and in California, Florida, Maryland, New York,  
North Carolina, Ohio, Texas and Virginia**

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## OVERVIEW

Since the War on Poverty in the 1960s, one of the most politically polarized issues in the American political discourse is the question of how much the Federal government should invest in efforts to mitigate poverty in the America population. Roughly a fifth of all federal spending goes to programs that seek to aid Americans at or near the poverty line. Currently, there are numerous proposals for modifying the Federal poverty programs, which have stimulated substantial debate.

A central goal of this study was to find out whether, when Americans deliberate on these proposals, such polarization persists or if there are areas in which consensus emerges.

To find out, Voice of the People had the Program for Public Consultation conduct an in-depth Citizen Cabinet survey in which a large representative sample of American voters went through a process called a ‘policymaking simulation.’ In a policymaking simulation, respondents are briefed on a policy issue, presented policy options, evaluate arguments for and against those options, and finally make their recommendations.

Substantial efforts were made to ensure that the briefing and presentation of the policy options are accurate and unbiased and that the arguments for and against each proposal are indeed the strongest ones being made by advocates and opponents. The content of the policymaking simulation was reviewed by key staffers from both parties, who deal with these issues from Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee. In addition, the following specialists were consulted: Stuart Butler, currently at the Brookings Institution, formerly at the Heritage Foundation; Douglas Besharov, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland and the American Enterprise Institute; Indivar Dutta-Gupta, Georgetown Center on Poverty and

Inequality. While great efforts were made to incorporate their feedback, their review does not signify an endorsement of the final version.

The largest area explored on the policymaking simulation included proposals for modifying current federal programs to mitigate the negative effects of poverty.

Numerous proposals have been put forward to modify the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as ‘food stamps.’ Respondents were presented arguments for and against increasing SNAP benefits (modelled after H.R. 1276 introduced by Rep. Alma Adams [D-NC-12]). They were then presented two cases with their SNAP benefit level and given the opportunity to increase or decrease benefit levels as they saw fit.

Another proposal that was evaluated raised the level of savings a household can have and still receive SNAP benefits.

Proposals for disallowing certain items from SNAP benefits such as sweetened sodas and candy were presented (consistent with H.R. 2383 introduced by Rep. Tom Rice [R-SC-L] and H.R. 4881 introduced by Rep. David Roe [R-TN-1]). Ultimately respondents evaluated whether specific food items should be allowed.

A proposal for providing discounts for fruits and vegetables was considered (similar to H.R. 1933 introduced by Rep. Marcia Fudge [D-OH-11], H.R. 5423 and H.R.4904 introduced by Rep. Matt Cartwright [D-PA-17], and H.R. 3072 introduced by Rep. Daniel Kildee [D-MI-5]).

In regard to Medicaid, respondents evaluated the option, part of the Affordable Care Act, to have their state receive Federal funds for expanding Medicare. The option of increasing Medicare benefits was also considered.



Finally, two options were explored in relation to child poverty: a proposal to expand early education (similar to past bills such as S.473 by Sen. Tom Udall [D-NM], H.R.2528 by Rep. Susan A. Davis [D-CA-53], and H.R.3604 by Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton [D-DC-At Large].) As well as a proposal to establish a commission to develop a plan for reducing child poverty (based on past bill H.R.2408 by Rep. Danny K. Davis [D-IL-7].

Options for helping the working poor were considered including: Raising the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation (similar to past bills H.R.2150 from Rep. Robert C. Scott [D-VA-3] and S.1150 by Sen. Patty Murray [D-WA]).

Expanding Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) to provide more coverage to low-wage workers without children (similar to past bills H.R.4946 by Rep. Mike Coffman [R-CO-6] and S.2327 by Sen. Robert P Casey Jr. [D-PA])

As well as a proposal to more effectively penalizing government contractors found guilty of nonpayment of wages (similar to proposal H. Amdt. 138 by Rep. Mark Pocan [D-WI-2]).

Two new possible large-scale options were considered: one more typically from the left and one more typically from the right.

The first was to have large-scale government job creation programs (similar to past bill H.R.1617 by Rep. Janice D. Schakowsky [D-IL-9], H.R.2495 by Rep. Maxine Waters [D-CA-43], S.1275 by Sen. Jeff Merkley [D-OR], and H.R.2296 introduced by Rep. Matt Cartwright [D-PA-17]. Current bills H.R.547 by Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro [D-CT-3] and H.R.272 by Rep. John Lewis [D-GA-5] are also similar).

The second is to institute an option for states to receive federal poverty program funding in the form of block grants. This was based on a proposal by House Speaker Paul Ryan in his “A Better Way” report from the Republican committee-led task force on Poverty, Opportunity & Upward Mobility. Proposals have also been put forward for both increasing and reducing the amount of their

income public housing tenants must pay for public housing

## METHODOLOGY

The policymaking simulation was fielded online as a survey with the Citizen Cabinet, a citizen advisory panel consisting of a probability-based representative sample of registered voters. 7,128 participants were provided by Nielsen Scarborough from Nielsen Scarborough’s sample of respondents, which was recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of households. Additional recruiting of 317 respondents in Maryland, Oklahoma, and Virginia was conducted by telephone and mail by Communications for Research, Inc. The total sample consisted of 7,445 respondents. The national sample of 7,128 had a margin of error +/- 1.2%

State	Sample Size	Margin of Error
Texas:	398	+/- 4.9%
North Carolina:	402	+/- 4.9%
Florida:	423	+/- 4.8%
Ohio:	509	+/- 4.3%
Virginia:	463	+/- 4.6%
California:	682	+/- 3.8%
Maryland:	486	+/- 4.4%
New York:	401	+/- 4.9%

## Field Dates:

Fielded by Nielsen-Scarborough: November 11, 2016 – December 10, 2016

Fielded by Communications for Research, Inc. (CFR): December 13, 2016 – January 18, 2017

**Weighting:** The sample was subsequently weighted by age, income, gender, education, race, and in the case of the national sample by geographic region. Benchmarks for weights were obtained from the Census’ 2014 Current Populations Survey of Registered Voters. Some state samples were also weighted by Party identification, where available, using the States’ political affiliation statistics from their department of elections for registered voters.

## Bipartisan Consensus Positions

Seventy-two percent favored making pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families and expanding the availability of Early Head Start programs to more children, age three and under, from low income families (Republicans 52%, Democrats 90%)

When told about current levels of benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—commonly known as ‘food stamps’—large bipartisan majorities favored increasing them:

- Told that recipients living alone, earning on average \$542 a month, get \$140 a month in benefits, 81% favored raising the benefit level (Republicans 66%, Democrats 93%)
- Told that a single mother with one child, earning on average \$760 a month, get \$253 a month in benefits, 78% favored raising the benefit level (Republicans 62%, Democrats 91%)

Overwhelming majorities favored not allowing SNAP benefits to be used for:

- the purchase of candy--76% (Republicans 85%, Democrats 68%)
- the purchase of sweetened sodas--73% (Republicans 82%, Democrats 67%)

Nine in ten favored providing discounts on fruit and vegetables bought with SNAP benefits (Republicans 81%, Democrats 93%)

Three in four favored raising the minimum hourly wage from \$7.25 to \$9.00 over a two-year period (Republicans 58%, Democrats 89%).

Six in ten approved of giving states the option of receiving Federal poverty program funds in the form of block grants for some programs, which the states would then administer with federal regulation (67% of Republicans, 54% of Democrats).

Overwhelming majorities (80-82%) favored four different options for Federal job creation programs to employ people who have been unemployed for a period (Republicans 58-73%, Democrats 85-91%). However, while Democrats generally favored instituting the programs under current conditions, Republicans were divided between instituting them now and having the programs ready to go if economic conditions worsen.

To deter nonpayment of wages, which tends to disproportionately hurt low-income workers, nine in ten overall and from both parties favored a proposal saying that if a company under a government contract is found guilty of not paying wages, the company will lose the right to bid on government contracts.



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

### ***Initial Views of Poverty and Response to Basic Presentation***

Large majorities express substantial levels of concern about poverty. When told about the income levels that fall under the official poverty line nearly seven in ten would raise the level to include more people and only one in ten would lower it.

### ***Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (aka Food Stamps)***

#### ***SNAP Benefit Levels***

When presented typical levels of SNAP benefits, eight in ten favored raising them, including two thirds of Republicans. Majorities made increases in benefits ranging from 19 to 43% depending on the case.

#### ***Restricting SNAP Eligible Items and Offering Discounts***

When respondents considered a proposal for limiting items eligible for use with SNAP benefits, there was substantial variation depending on the item. Large bipartisan majorities favored disallowing sweetened sodas and candy. A majority overall, but not a majority of Democrats, favored disallowing cookies, cakes and doughnuts. A majority opposed disallowing chips and snack crackers and ice cream. An overwhelming nine in ten, including eight in ten Republicans, favored providing discounts on fruit and vegetables bought with SNAP benefits.

#### ***Permitted Levels of Savings for SNAP Beneficiaries***

When told that the amount of savings a household can have and still receive SNAP benefits is \$2,250, a slight majority overall

favored keeping the requirement as it is, but a majority of Democrats favored raising the permitted level.

### ***Medicaid***

Two thirds favored their state accepting the ACA plan for expanding Medicaid in their state, however a modest majority of Republicans were opposed. Those living in states that have not accepted Medicaid expansion are only slightly less supportive.

### ***Early Childhood Education***

Eight in ten, including a slight majority of Republicans, support making pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families and expanding the availability of Early Head Start programs to more children three and under from low income families.

### ***Reducing Child Poverty***

A large bipartisan majority favors Congress setting up a commission to develop a plan to reduce child poverty by half in 10 years and as close to zero as possible in 20 years.

### ***The Minimum Wage***

Overall the majority supported a proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour over a three-year period, however among Republicans the majority limited the increase to \$9 over two years. More than six in ten favored indexing the minimum wage to inflation, though a slight majority of Republicans were opposed.

### ***Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC)***

Respondents explored the option of expanding EITC to provide more coverage to low wage workers without children, which are currently quite low (credits to workers with children are far higher). The argument in favor was found convincing by overwhelmingly majorities, and six in ten favored raising the income ceiling for eligibility. However, less than half favored





increasing the benefit or lowering the minimum age of eligibility.

### ***Federal Job Creation***

Four proposals were considered for the federal government to invest in creating jobs that would employ people who have been unemployed for a period. This would include many who live under or close to the poverty line. For all of the proposals, only small minorities simply opposed them. For two of these proposals a majority favored enacting them in current economic conditions, while an additional 21-25% wanted to have them ready in case economic conditions worsen.

### ***Optional Block Grants to States***

Six in ten, including a modest majority of Democrats approve of the idea of giving states the option of receiving Federal poverty program funds in the form of block grants for some programs which the states would then administer.

### ***Nonpayment of Wages***

Overwhelming bipartisan majorities favor a proposal saying that if a company under a government contract is found guilty of not paying wages, the company will lose the right to bid on government contracts.

### ***Public Housing***

There was not majority support for either raising or lowering the amount of income that public housing tenants pay for rent.



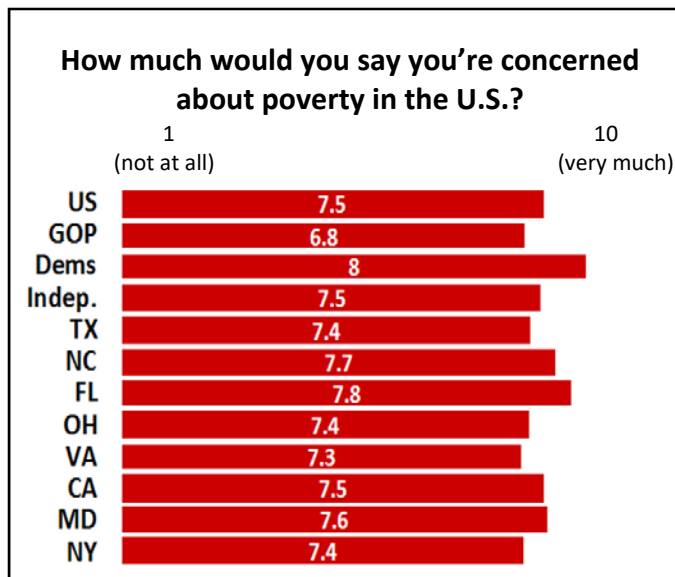


## FINDINGS

### *Initial Views of Poverty and Response to Basic Presentation*

**Large majorities express substantial levels of concern about poverty. When told about the income levels that fall under the official poverty line nearly seven in ten would raise the level to include more people and only one in ten would lower it.**

Asked to rate how concerned they are about poverty in the US on a 0-10 scale with 0 meaning not at all and 10 meaning very much, all populations expressed high levels of concern. For the nation as a whole, the mean response was 7.5, with 80% scoring above 5. Democrats were only slightly higher (8.0) than Republicans (6.8). All states were within a narrow range of 7.3 to 7.8, with redder states being no less concerned than bluer states.



Respondents were introduced to the federal poverty line as follows:

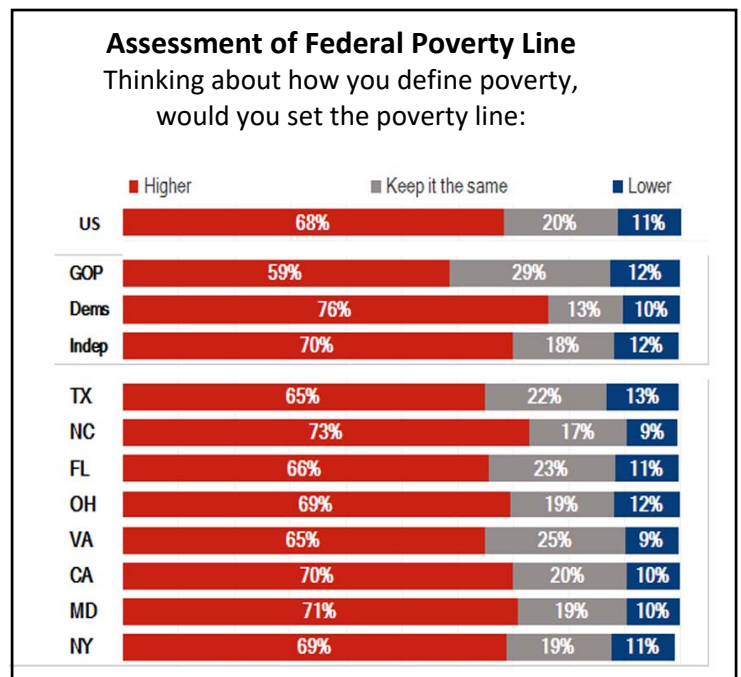
The federal government defines poverty as total cash income per year below a certain level, depending on household size, counting adults and children. This is called the “poverty line.” This

income does not include the value of government benefits, such as food stamps, that the household may receive. Here is the current poverty line for some types of households.

They were then presented three examples of the poverty line for different households as shown.

Size of household	Poverty line
One adult living alone	\$12,071 or less
Single mother with child	\$16,337 or less
A couple with two children	\$24,036 or less

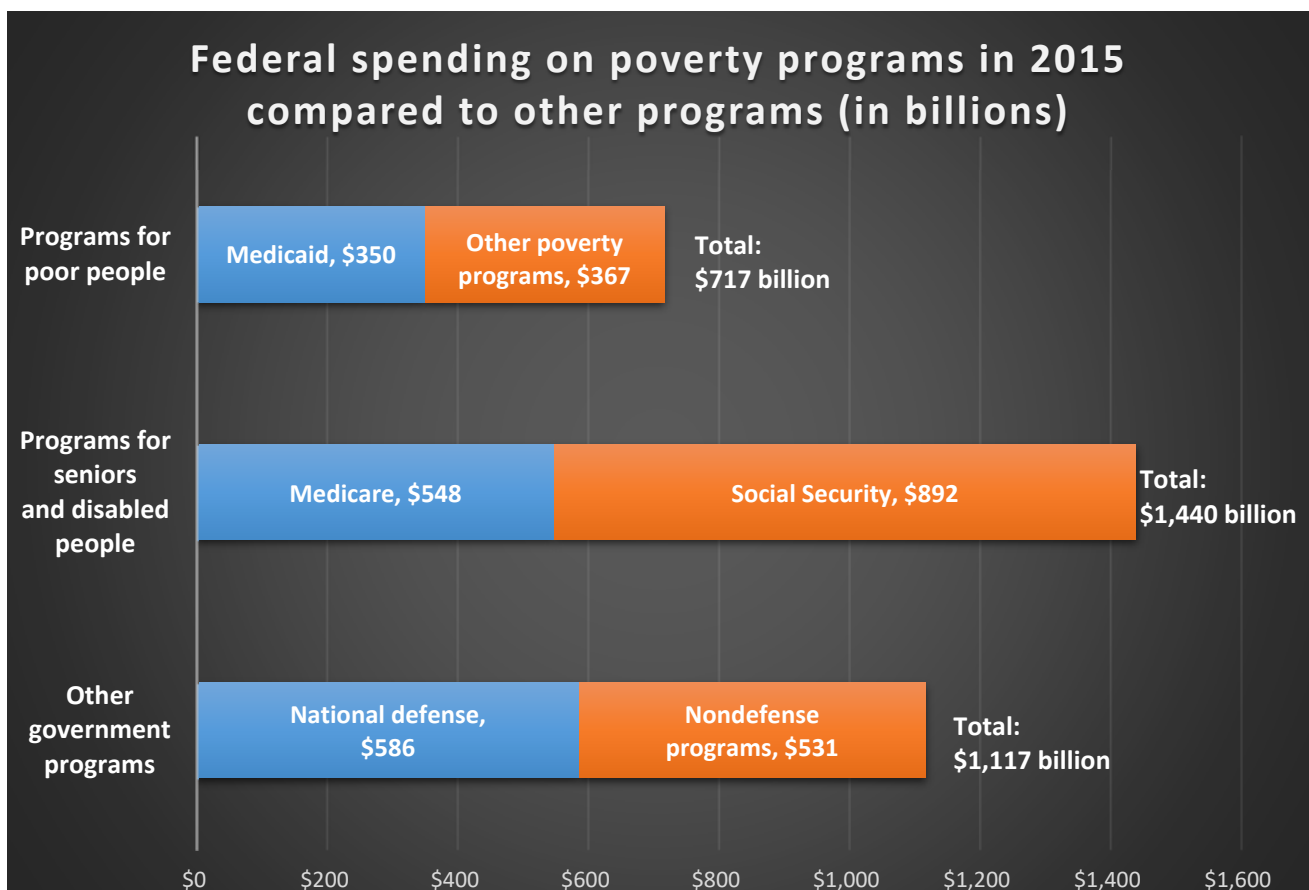
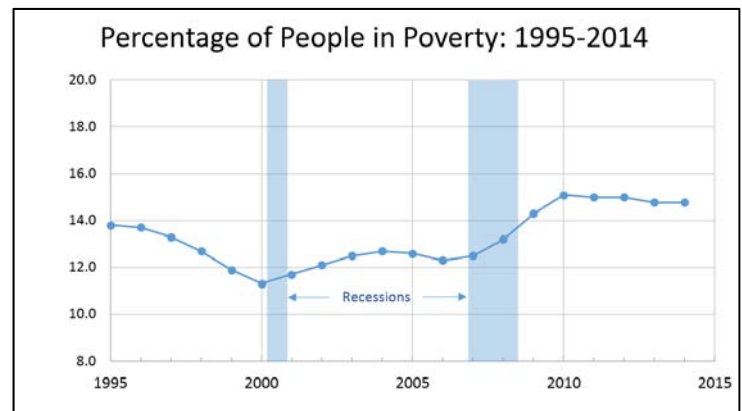
Respondents were asked, “Thinking about how you define poverty, would you set the poverty line” higher or lower. Large majorities overall, for Republicans and Democrats, and in every state would set the poverty line at least a little higher. Only about one in ten in all categories would set it lower.





Respondents told that according to the most recent census 14.8% of the population lived under the poverty line and shown a trendline for the percentage of people living under the poverty line from 1995 to 2014. The majority in all cases said the number was about what they expected. But more people thought that it was more than they expected than thought it was less.

Respondents were also presented the amount of spending on Federal poverty programs as compared to other federal programs with the following chart.







## EVALUATING FEDERAL PROGRAMS TO REDUCE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF POVERTY

### *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (aka Food Stamps)*

#### **SNAP Benefit Levels**

**When presented typical levels of SNAP benefits, eight in ten favored raising them, including two thirds of Republicans. Overall, majorities made increases in benefits ranging from 19 to 43% depending on the case.**

Respondents were given a background briefing on the SNAP program including information that “In 2015, the program cost \$74 billion, with 23 million households receiving benefits, including about 26 million adults and 20 million children.” They were told that the Federal guidelines for SNAP eligibility were:

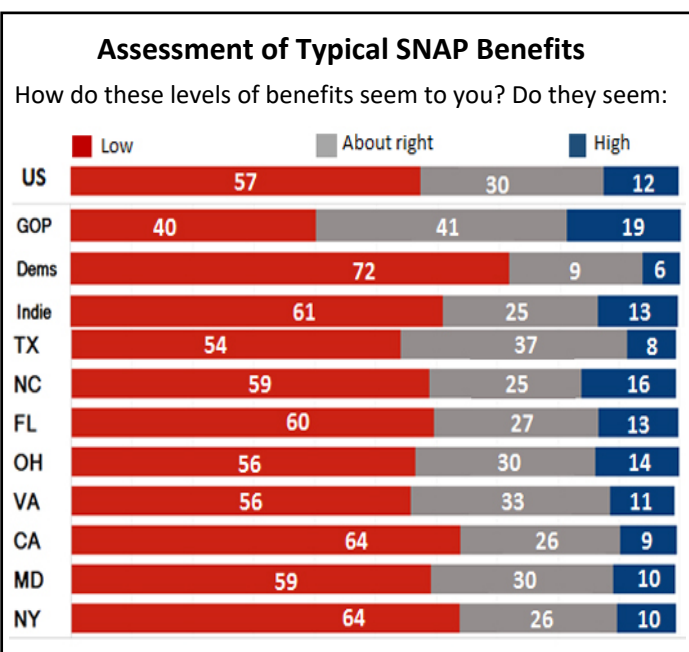
- Total household income: Must be no more than a bit above the federal poverty line.
- Total household savings: Must be less than \$2,250. In fact, the average recipient has \$400 in savings.
- Work requirements: Able-bodied adults must register with a state employment office, actively seek work and/or job training, and accept a job, if offered.

Respondents were told “Benefits vary on a sliding scale depending on household income. As income goes up, benefits go down, and then stop entirely when income is a bit above the poverty line.” They were then given two examples of average SNAP benefits as follows.

- About half of all SNAP recipients are living alone. Their average monthly income is \$542. Their SNAP benefit is, on average, about \$140 a month.

- Another major group of SNAP recipients are single mothers with one child. Their average income is approximately \$760 a month. Their SNAP benefit is, on average, \$253 a month.

They were then asked whether these levels seemed low, about right, or high. Majorities nationally (57%) and in all states said they found these benefit levels low, with states ranging from 54% in Texas to 64% in California. More than seven in ten Democrats found them low. Less than half of Republicans (41%) found them low, but only one in five found them high.

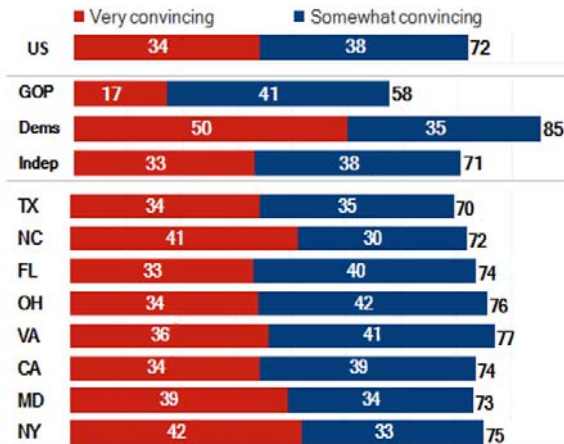


Respondents then evaluated arguments for and against raising benefits. The argument in favor of raising benefits did very well with more than seven in ten finding it convincing nationally and majorities in all states. Republicans were lower, but still nearly six in ten found the argument convincing.



### Argument in Favor: Raising SNAP Benefits

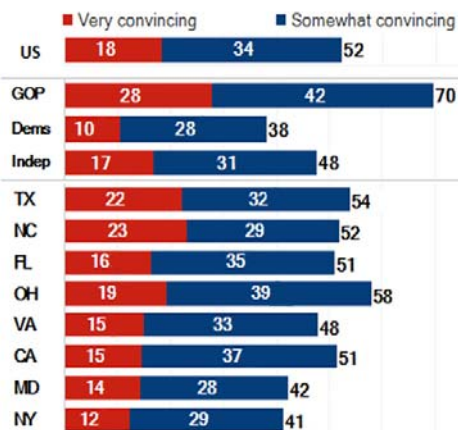
The average person who receives food stamps makes only \$542 a month. For them to get \$140 a month for food stamps is simply not enough—this is less than \$5 a day. Many want to earn more, but can't find a job or a better paying job. Food is a basic human need and it is simply wrong to keep people on the edge of hunger with benefits so low.



The argument against raising benefits was much less convincing. A bare majority found it convincing nationally and in most states. Among Republicans, seven in ten found it convincing.

### Argument Against: Raising SNAP Benefits

The amount we spend on SNAP is a lot of money--\$74 billion dollars. We should not increase it. The economy is better now and there are more jobs out there. We need to encourage people to get out there and try harder in this improving labor market. We shouldn't make it easier for them not to make the effort.



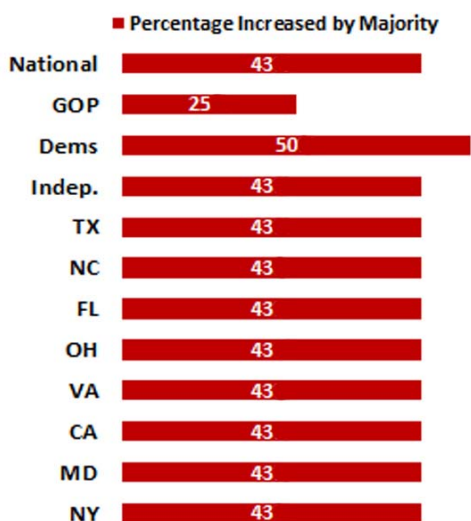
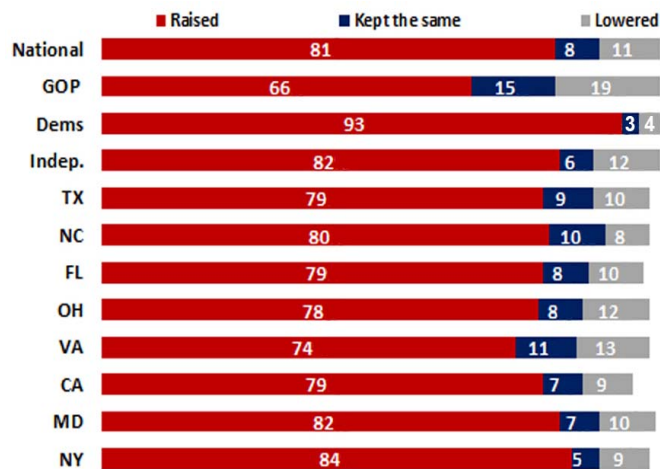


Coming back to the two specific cases of benefit levels, respondents were asked to be specific about what they thought the level should be and were able to give any number. For both cases, bipartisan majorities, nationally and in every state, substantially raised benefits from the current level.

For the case of “recipients living alone and earning on average \$542 a month” with current SNAP benefits of about \$140, eight in ten raised the benefits, with an overall majority raising the benefit 43% or more from \$140 to \$200 and up.

### Benefit Changes for SNAP:

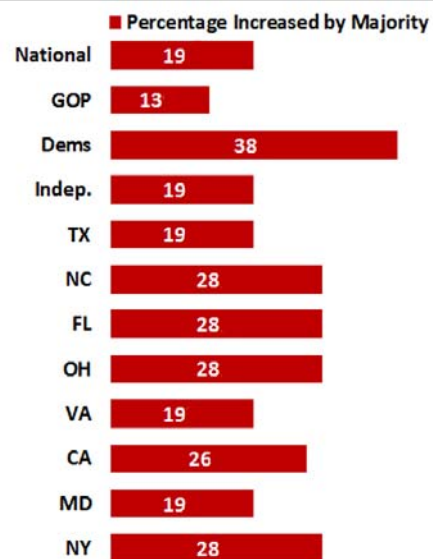
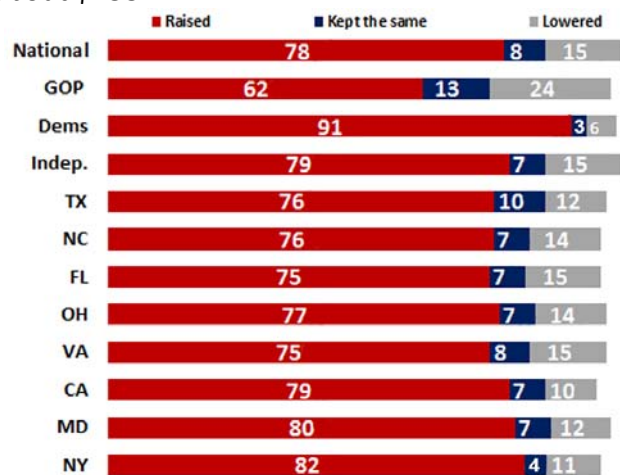
Recipients living alone and earning on average \$542 per month with current SNAP benefits of about \$140



For the case of “a single mother with one child and earning on average \$760 a month” with current SNAP benefits about \$253, once again approximately eight in ten increased benefits. In this case, though, the amount of the increase was less, with the overall majority increasing it 19% or more or from \$253 to \$300.

### Benefit Changes for SNAP:

Single mother with one child earning on average \$760 per month with current SNAP benefits of about \$253







### Restricting SNAP Eligible Food Items

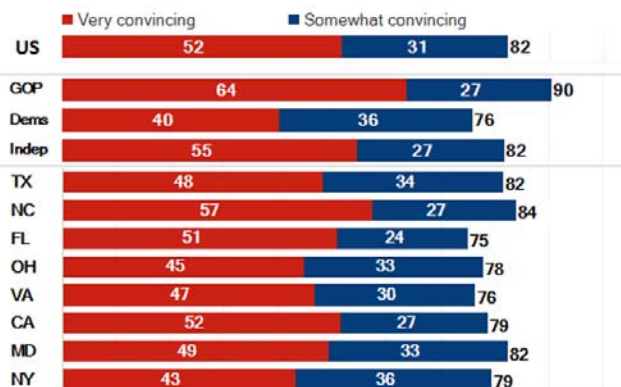
When respondents considered a proposal for limiting items eligible for use with SNAP benefits, there was substantial variation depending on the item. Large bipartisan majorities favored disallowing sweetened sodas and candy. A majority overall, but not a majority of Democrats, favored disallowing cookies, cakes and doughnuts. A majority opposed disallowing chips and snack crackers and ice cream.

Respondents were told that, “Recently, there has been a debate over whether some kinds of food people can buy with SNAP benefits should be restricted. Currently, SNAP cannot be used for alcoholic beverages, and usually not for hot ready-to-eat food. One proposal is to extend these limits to other food items with little nutritional value, such as sweetened sodas, candy, cookies, cakes, and ice cream.”

They were then presented an argument in favor of restricting SNAP eligible foods. It was found convincing by an overwhelming majority.

#### Argument in favor: Restricting SNAP eligible foods

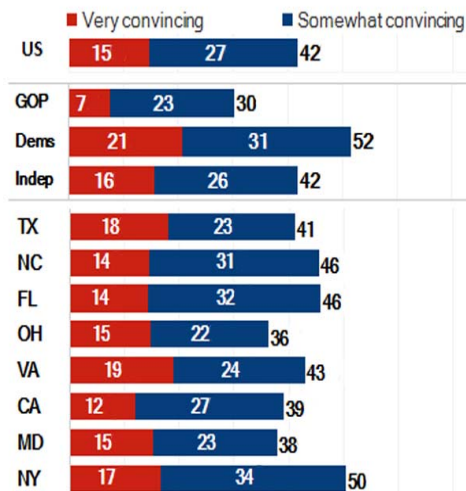
Helping needy people meet their nutritional needs is one thing, but taxpayer dollars should not go to purchase junk food with no nutritional value. We should not encourage people to waste money on food that can damage their health. The rise in obesity and diabetes from eating fatty and sugary foods is a serious strain on America’s healthcare system.



The argument against such restrictions did much more poorly.

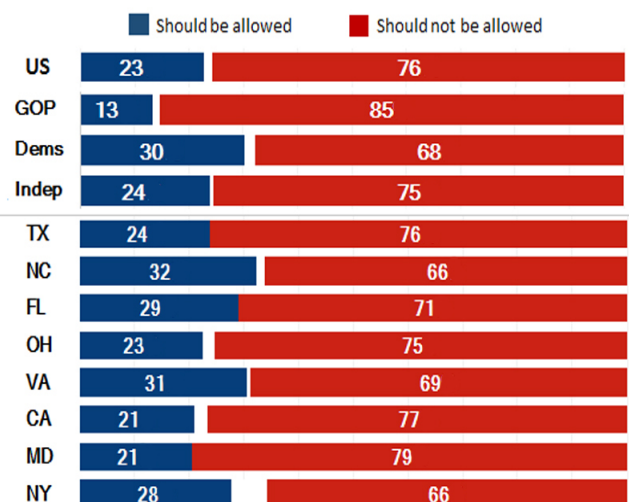
#### Argument against: Restricting SNAP eligible foods

Just because people are poor does not mean the federal government should tell them what to eat. Individuals can make their own decisions about nutrition. Furthermore, administering such rules could be expensive. And, Congress would have to fend off armies of food-industry lobbyists, trying to protect certain foods from being excluded.



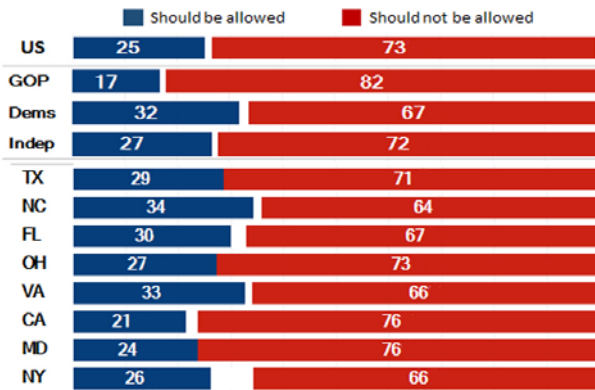
When asked to specify whether specific food items should be disallowed there was substantial variation depending on the item. The largest bipartisan majorities favored disallowing candy, followed closely by sweetened sodas.

#### Purchasing candy with SNAP benefits



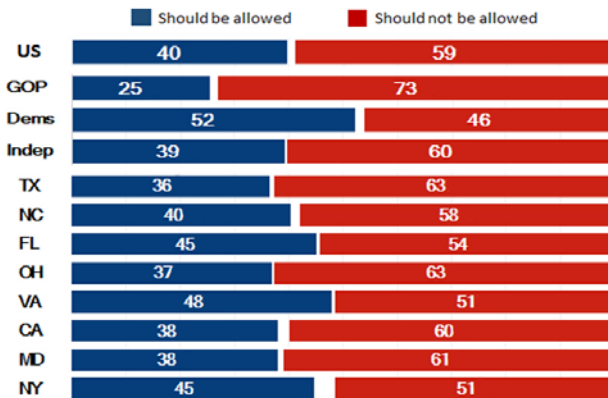


### Purchasing sweetened soda with SNAP benefits



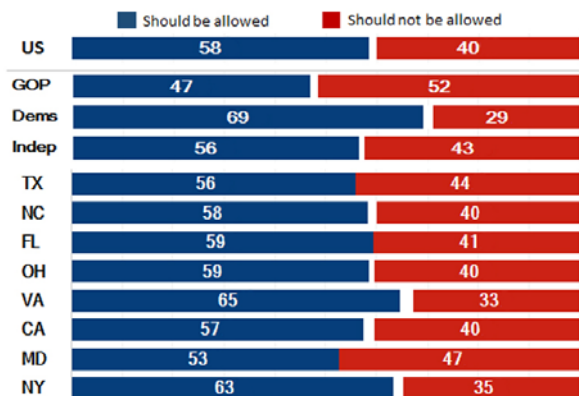
Purchasing cookies, cakes and doughnuts with SNAP benefits was disallowed by 6 in 10 overall, and by majorities in all states, though a slight majority of Democrats said it should be allowed.

### Purchasing cookies, cakes, and doughnuts with SNAP benefits

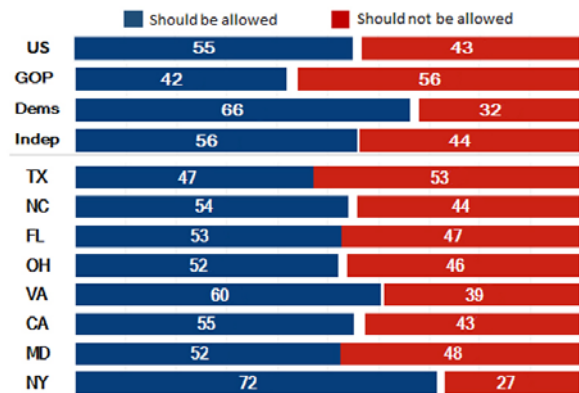


Majorities said that chips and snack crackers, and ice cream should be allowed, though a slight majority of GOP said it should not be allowed.

### Purchasing chips and snack crackers with SNAP benefits



### Purchasing ice cream with SNAP benefits



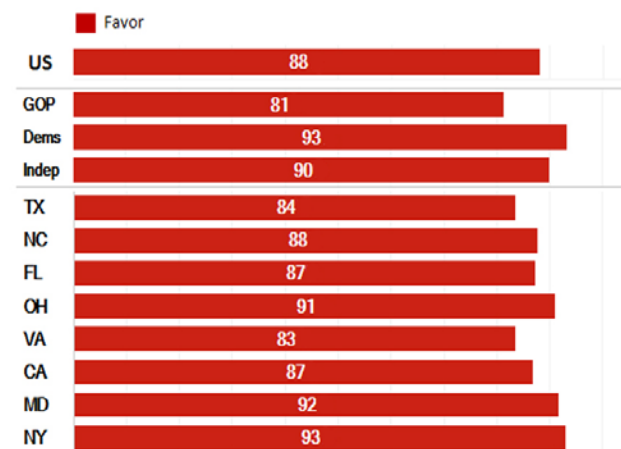
### Discounts for Fruit and Vegetables

An overwhelming nine in ten, including eight in ten Republicans, favored providing discounts on fruit and vegetables bought with SNAP benefits.

Consistent with proposed legislation, overwhelming majorities overall, and in both parties, favored providing discounts on fruit and vegetables bought with SNAP benefits.

### Offering discounts for fruits and vegetable bought with SNAP benefits

Do you favor or oppose offering discounts on fruit and vegetables bought using SNAP credits?







### Permitted Levels of Savings for SNAP Beneficiaries

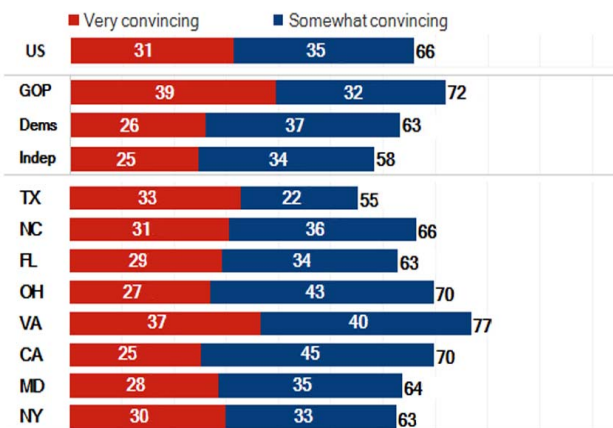
When told that the amount of savings a household can have and still receive SNAP benefits is \$2,250, a slight majority overall favored keeping the requirement as it is, but a majority of Democrats favored raising the permitted level.

Currently, there is a controversy over what level of savings low-income individuals may have and still qualify for SNAP benefits. Respondents were told that “Currently for people to be eligible for SNAP, their household savings should be under \$2,250.” There is debate about whether this limit should remain \$2,250, be raised to a higher level, or eliminated.

Arguments both for preserving and raising the asset limit were found convincing by about two thirds, with Republicans more likely to be persuaded by the argument in favor of preserving the limit and Democrats more likely to be persuaded by the argument to raise the limit.

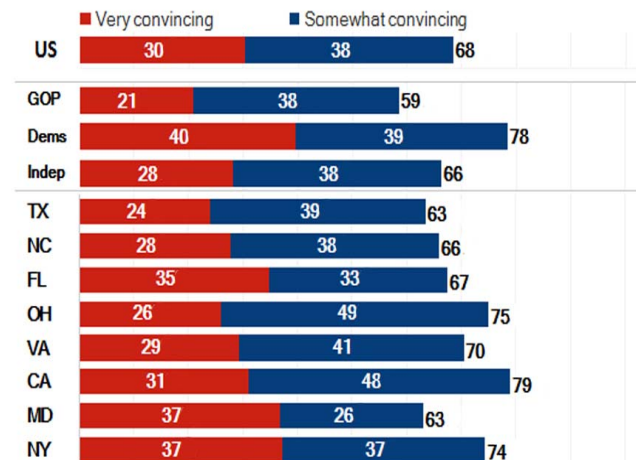
#### Argument in favor: Preserving the current asset limit for SNAP beneficiaries

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. They should be expected to use those savings until they are below \$2,250. It is not the government’s responsibility to ensure that people can maintain their bank accounts. Many working people don’t have \$2,250 in the bank.



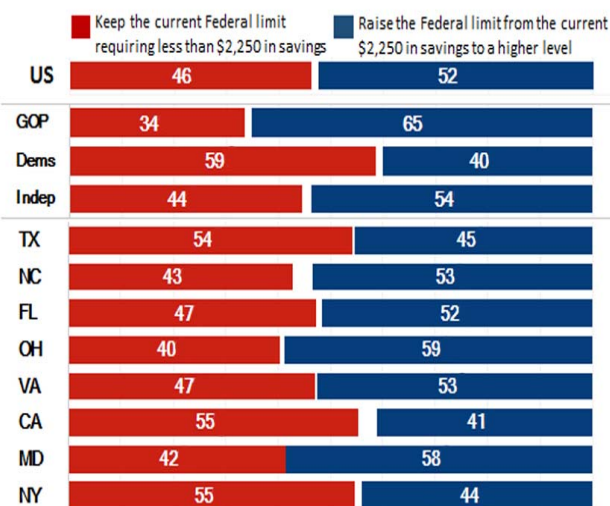
#### Argument in favor: Raising the current asset limit for SNAP beneficiaries

There should be a limit on how much savings a SNAP recipient can have, but it should be above \$2,250. To say a parent with children who has a little more than \$2,250 must spend down these savings before getting food stamps is really unfair. If they face an unexpected cost, they could end up broke and maybe homeless. Even poor people deserve to have a month or two’s security.



Asked for their final recommendation, a slight national majority favored keeping the current limit, but views differed sharply between Republicans and Democrats. The states varied sharply as well, but did not cluster along partisan lines.

#### What do you think the government should do about the amount of savings a household can have and still receive SNAP benefits?





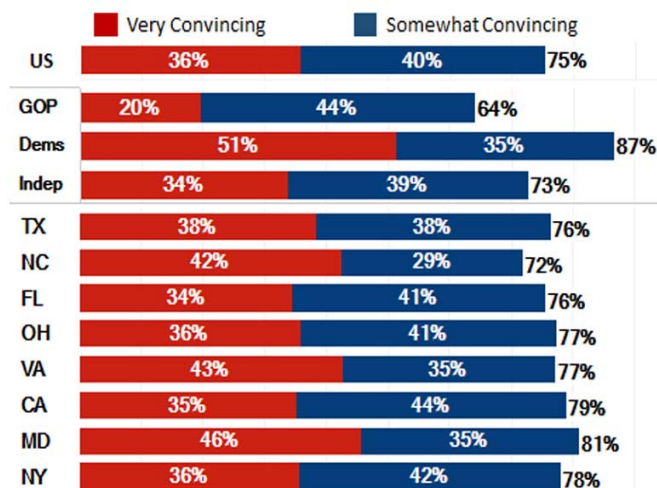
### Medicaid

**Two thirds favored their state accepting the ACA plan for expanding Medicaid in their state, however a modest majority of Republicans were opposed. Those living in states that have not accepted Medicaid expansion were only slightly less supportive. Half found acceptable and another quarter found just tolerable the idea of increasing Medicaid benefits.**

Respondents were introduced to the idea Affordable Care Act plan that gives states the option of expanding Medicaid with Federal help. They were presented arguments in favor and against the idea of their state accepting this plan. The argument in favor was found convincing by three quarter, including two thirds Republicans. The argument against was found convincing by a modest majority, seven in ten Republicans, and less than half of Democrats.

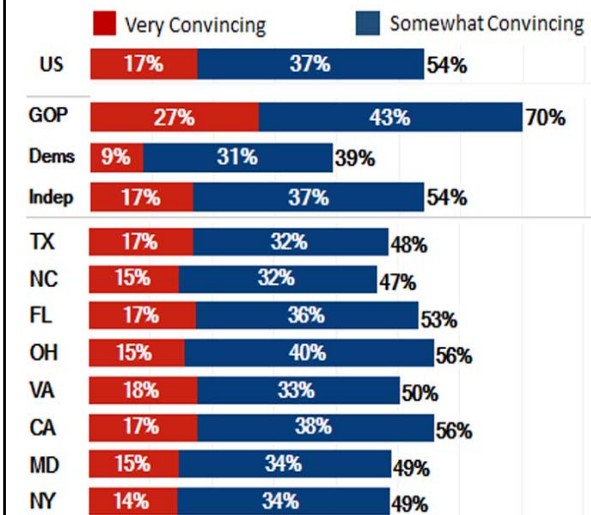
#### Argument in favor: Your state accepting this plan for expanding Medicaid

Many very low-income people are in genuine need and can't afford medical insurance for themselves and their children. They do not get healthcare when they need it and often end up more sick as a result. This is also bad for the state: when they get sick, poor people end up going to emergency rooms because they cannot be denied treatment there. This is very inefficient. The costs are passed on to others in the state. If the federal government is willing to cover nearly all the costs of providing Medicaid to these low-income people, our state should definitely do it. It not only helps those people, but saves us money as well.



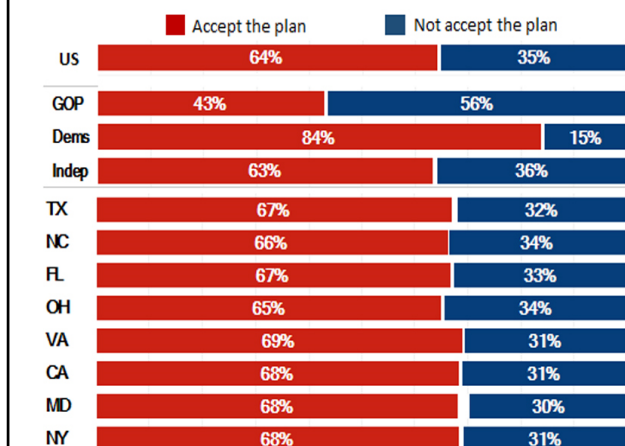
#### Argument against: Your state accepting this plan for expanding Medicaid

Our state should not be enticed into taking on this new responsibility. While the federal government covers the cost at first, our state will have a whole new ongoing obligation after 2016. We cannot be certain that the federal government will not cut back later and leave us holding the bag. In a bad economic year, the state's amount would go way up. This would either drive up taxes or crowd out spending for other state priorities-- education, transportation, and other social services.



In their final recommendation, nearly two thirds favored accepting the plan, though a majority of Republicans were opposed. The states were strikingly uniform, with majorities in favor ranging from 63-68%. These included four states where the state has not accepted the Medicaid plan: Texas, North Carolina, Florida, and Virginia.

#### Conclusion: Medicaid





The total sample was also divided in terms of whether the respondents' state had or had not accepted the Medicaid plan. Support was only a bit lower in states that had not accepted the plan (62%) than in states that had (65%).

#### Support for State Accepting Medicaid Expansion

In states that have accepted

65%

In states that have not accepted

62%

The possibility of increasing Medicaid benefits was also explored in a more limited way. Respondents were told that, "In 2013, for people to receive Medicaid, they had to be well below the poverty line--on average, no more than 61%. For example, for a single parent with two children, their income could be no more than \$11,316," and asked how they felt about raising this limit using a 0-10 scale with 0 being not at acceptable, 5 being just tolerable, and 10 being very acceptable. The mean response was 5.7, with 50% giving a score of acceptable (6-10) and another 23% giving it a score of 5. Thus 73% said it would be at least tolerable. Republicans were a bit lower with a mean score of 5.0, 39% rating it acceptable and 29% tolerable, with a total of 58% saying at least tolerable.



#### Early Childhood Education

**Eight in ten, including a slight majority of Republicans, support making pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families and expanding the availability of Early Head Start programs to more children three and under from low income families.**

Respondents were presented the following:

Another major proposal for helping families in poverty is to expand access to early childhood education. This has two benefits for families in poverty:

- It provides education to poor children.
- It provides childcare for working parents.

Currently, only a small number of 4-year-old children in low-income families attend **pre-kindergarten programs**. The federal government could provide funds to help states build or expand programs, so that more 4-year-old children from low-income families have access to such programs.

Currently, only a small number of children age 3 and under in low-income families have access to the **Early Head Start program**, which helps some states provide care and early education to infants and toddlers from low-income households.

The proposal for the federal government to help states build, or expand and upgrade, their early childhood education programs would:

**Make pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families.** To qualify, for example, a family of three (a single parent and two children) would make less than \$37,540 per year.

- Expand the availability of **Early Head Start** programs to more children aged three and





under from low-income families. To qualify, for example, a family of three (a single parent and two children) would make less than \$18,770 per year.

This proposal would cost the federal government about \$8 billion per year.

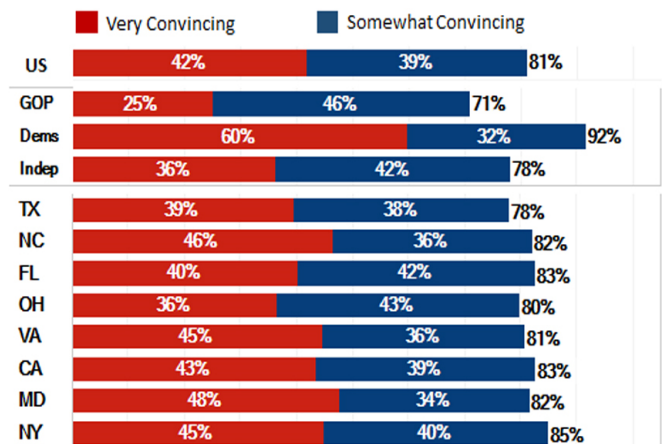
Surrounding this proposal is a controversy about the long-term effectiveness of such pre-school programs for poor children. Research indicates that poor children who go through such programs do better when they enter school, but this advantage fades after the first one to two years. However, there is also some evidence, though not as strong, that in high school some of these advantages reappear. Also, proponents of the proposal emphasize that with more research improvements can be made to increase long-term effectiveness.

Presented argument for and against expanding access to early childhood education the argument in favor did substantially better.



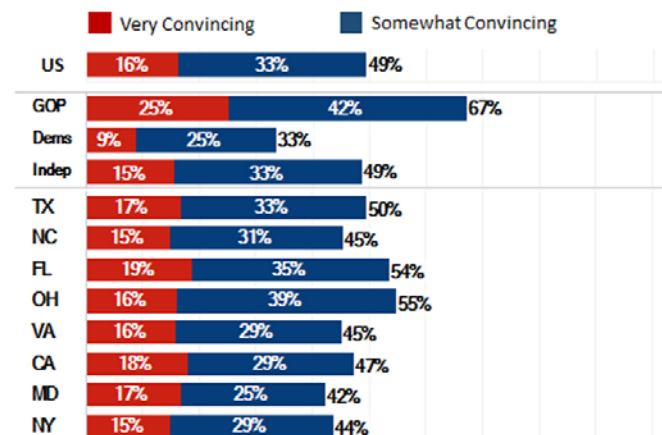
### Argument in favor: Expanding access to early childhood education

Research shows that poor children get less mental stimulation than other children, and this contributes to deficits in their cognitive development and ultimately poor performance in school. Thus, to help children out of poverty, it is essential to help them get preschool education. While the benefits may not always stick, this is only more reason to improve quality, not a reason to give up. Furthermore, pre-school education allows low-income parents to work and help pull the family out of poverty.



### Argument against: Expanding access to early childhood education

We all agree that education is an important American value. But, we have to face what the research shows: these quite expensive programs don't work. Two years into elementary school, the advantages for children who went through the programs disappear. We need proven programs before we can authorize this kind of major investment. As for childcare, people are already finding ways to take care of their children, like having family members cover for them or pooling responsibilities with friends and neighbors.





Respondents were then asked whether they would favor or oppose a proposal that would:

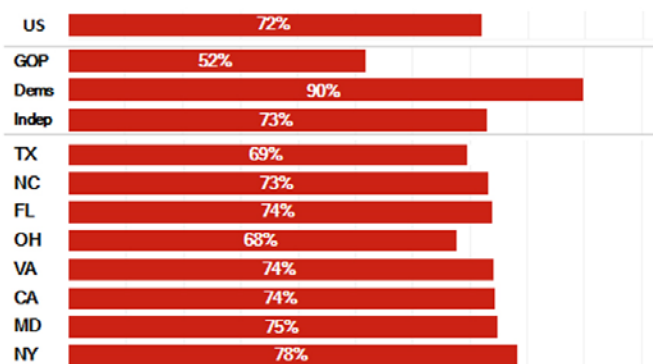
- Make pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families; and
- Expand the availability of Early Head Start programs, which provide care and early education from birth until the age of 3 for infants and toddlers from low income households.

**Seven in ten or more nationally and in all states favored the proposal. Only a slight majority of Republican were in favor.**

#### Expanding Early Childhood Education

- Make pre-kindergarten available to all 4-year-olds in low-income families; and
- Expand the availability of Early Head Start programs, which provide care and early education from birth until the age of 3 for infants and toddlers from low income households.

■ Favor



#### Reducing Child Poverty

**A large bipartisan majority favors Congress setting up a commission to develop a plan to reduce child poverty by half in 10 years and as close to zero as possible in 20 years.**

Respondents were told:

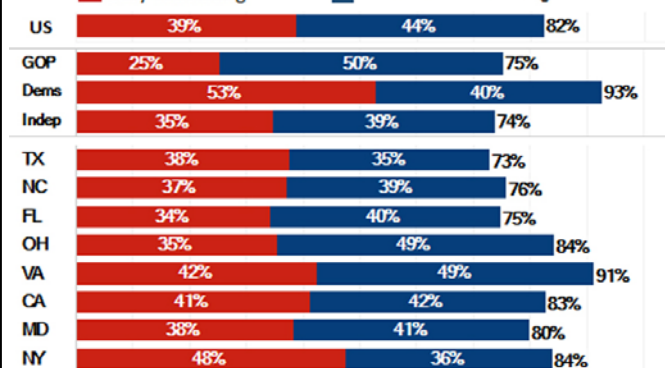
Some lawmakers have called for specifically targeting **child** poverty. One proposal before Congress would set the goal of reducing child poverty by half and ultimately eliminating it. A commission that would develop a national plan, working with the National Academy of Sciences to reduce **within 10 years** the number of children living in poverty **by half**. Over the following 10 years the number would be reduced as close to **zero** as possible. Congress would still have to pass legislation enacting the plan, and the president would still need to sign the legislation into law.

When asked to evaluate arguments pro and con, the argument in favor did substantially better.

#### Argument in favor: Setting goal of eliminating child poverty

One in five American children are raised in poverty—much higher than in any other industrialized country. Poverty creates serious difficulties for physical and behavioral development. People raised in poverty are more likely to need social services, end up in the criminal justice system, and be less economically productive. The costs to society are estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars a year. While of course it's important to help the family as a whole, if parents are unresponsive or overwhelmed, we should make sure the children get adequate nutrition and healthcare at these critical stages of their development.

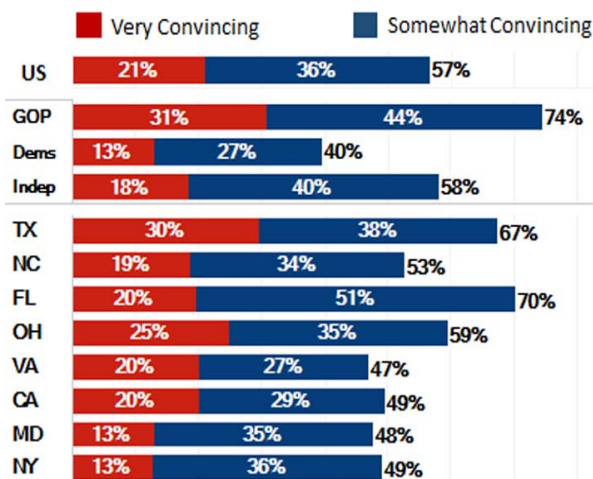
■ Very Convincing ■ Somewhat Convincing





### Argument against: Setting goal of eliminating child poverty

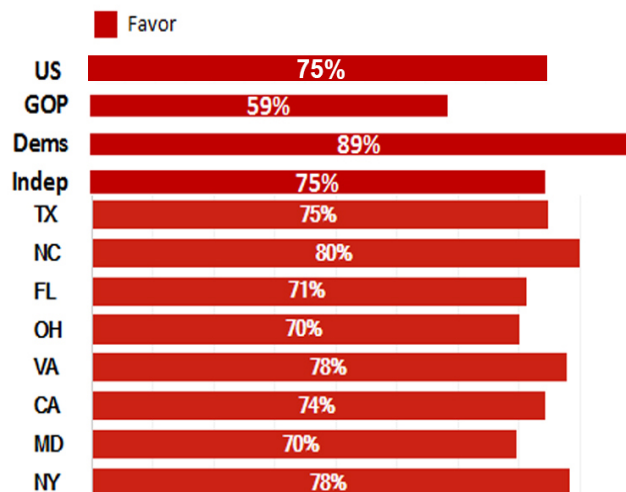
The idea of focusing on children is emotionally appealing, because they seem so vulnerable. But going around the parents to get to the children is another example of the state overreaching and undermines the centrality of the family. What is really needed to help children is to strengthen their family, especially by promoting marriage. Children with two parents in one household—even if those parents have little education—are much less likely to spend time in poverty, both as children and as adults later.



Overwhelming majorities favored setting up a commission to develop a plan to reduce and ultimately eliminate child poverty.

### Plan for Cutting Child Poverty

Congress setting up a commission to develop a plan to reduce child poverty by half in 10 years and as close to zero as possible in 20 years.



### The Minimum Wage

Overall the majority supported a proposal to raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour over a three-year period, however among Republicans the majority limited the increase to \$9 over two years. More than six in ten favored indexing the minimum wage to inflation, though a slight majority of Republicans were opposed.

Respondents were presented the following information about the federal minimum wage.

- Currently, the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour. Here is how much a full-time worker earns at that rate **before** taxes:

	Per week	Per month	Per year
Full-time minimum wage earnings	\$290	\$1,208	\$14,500

- A single person earning minimum wage and working full-time is a bit above the poverty line. However, someone earning minimum wage with one or more children, or a spouse who does not work, is under the poverty line. Thus, raising the minimum wage would lift a significant number of people above the poverty line.
- Raising the minimum wage would not create costs for the federal government, although it would increase costs to employers.
- Raising the minimum wage is controversial among economists. Some economists argue that increasing it could lead some employers to not create new jobs and even lay off employees. Other economists say this is not the case, pointing to cases when the minimum wage was increased in one

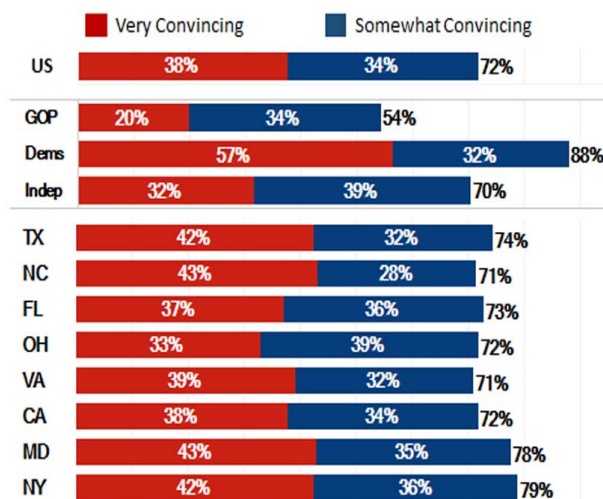


state but not in another neighboring state, and employment rates were no different between the states.

They were then presented arguments in favor and against raising the minimum wage. The argument in favor did much better, except among Republicans.

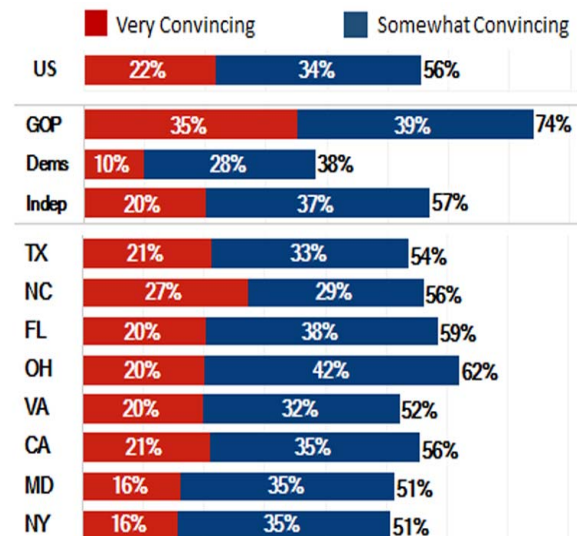
### Argument in favor: Raising the minimum wage

People who work should not live in poverty. Increasing the minimum wage would raise many workers and their children above the poverty line. This would also save the government money. The current minimum wage lets companies get away with paying very low wages, because the government has to fill the gap with poverty programs like food stamps. Raising the minimum wage will lessen the need for these programs and save the government money.



### Argument against: Raising the minimum wage

If we raise the minimum wage, some employers will have to lay off workers because they cannot pay the higher wages and make a profit. Some may also find automation more cost-efficient. This will especially hurt workers with few skills, no high school diploma, and little savings; they are not likely to be rehired and may be thrown deep into poverty. It will also hurt younger workers who accept low wages to get work experience that can lead to better-paying jobs.



They were then presented two proposals for raising the minimum wage that have been analyzed by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). The first was presented as follows:

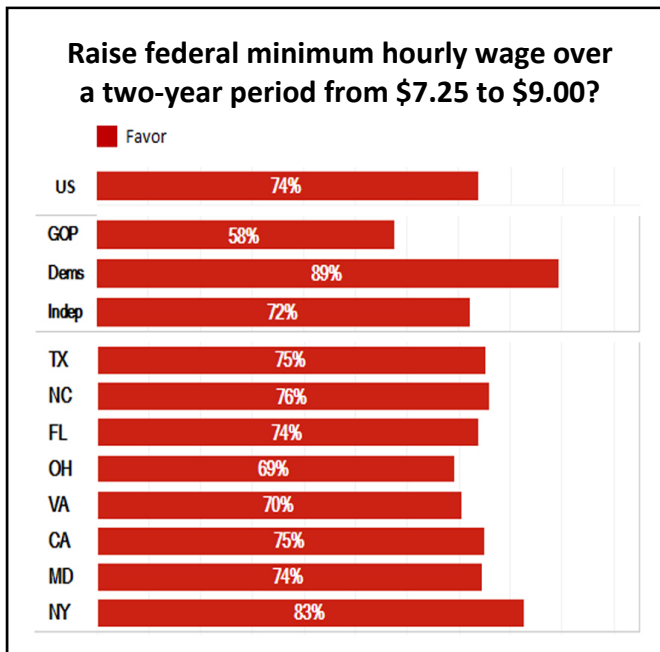
The **first proposal** would raise the minimum wage over a two-year period from \$7.25 to \$9.00.

CBO estimates that with this option the most likely outcomes would be:

- About 7.6 million people would have an increase in their weekly earnings.
- About 300,000 people would have their household income rise above the poverty line.
- The number of jobs in the economy would decline by about 100,000, or 0.07%.



Nationally three quarters favored this proposal including nearly six in ten Republicans.



The second proposal was presented as follows:

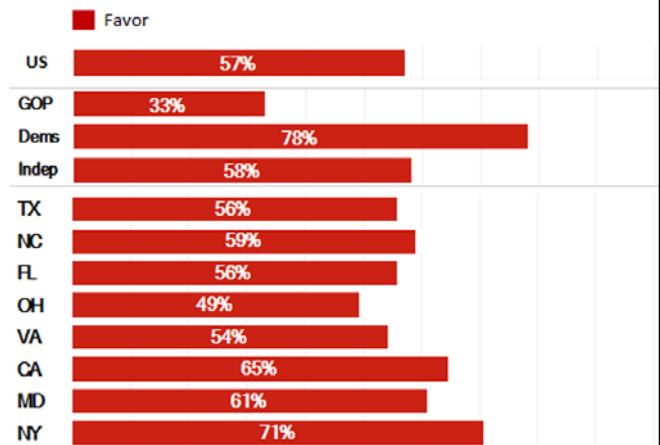
The **second proposal** that the CBO analyzed goes further. It would raise the current minimum wage over a three-year period from \$7.25 to \$10.10.

CBO estimates that with this option the most likely outcomes would be:

- About 16.5 million people would have an increase in their weekly earnings.
- About 900,000 people would have their household income rise above the poverty line.
- The number of jobs in the economy would decline by about 500,000 or 0.35%.

This proposal was endorsed by 57% overall, but only one in three Republicans.

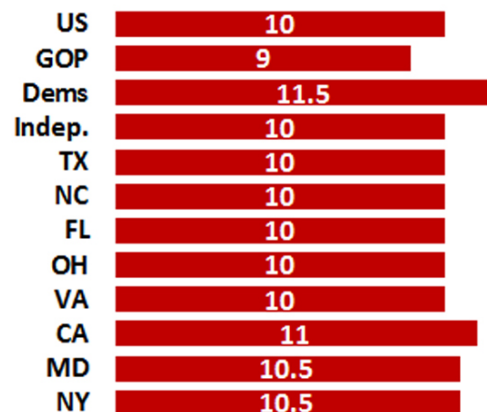
### Raise the minimum hourly wage over a three-year period from \$7.25 to \$10.10?



Respondents were also given the opportunity to specify exactly what they thought the minimum wage should be three years from now. Nationally the majority said it should be \$10.

### What the minimum hourly wage should be three years from now

*Majority specified the following amounts or higher*



### Indexing the Minimum Wage to Inflation

Respondents were told:

Another controversial issue is whether the minimum wage should be adjusted for inflation. Presently, it is not adjusted, and it never has been. It is increased by an act of Congress. Thus, with inflation, the purchasing power of the



minimum wage goes down until Congress acts to raise it.

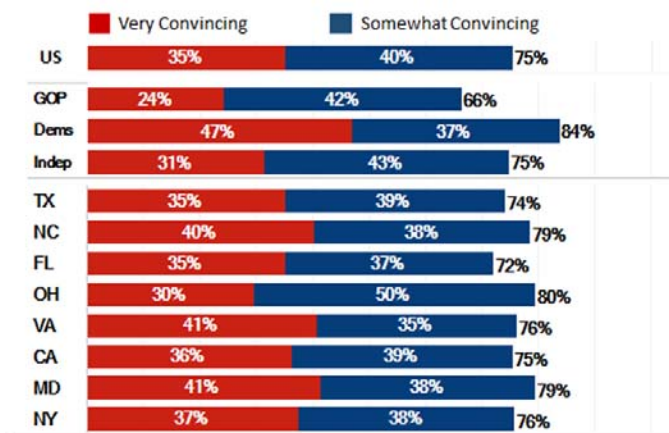
They were then shown a graph with minimum wage over time adjusted for inflation.



When they evaluated argument for and against adjusting the minimum wage to inflation the argument in favor did substantially better, except with Republicans.

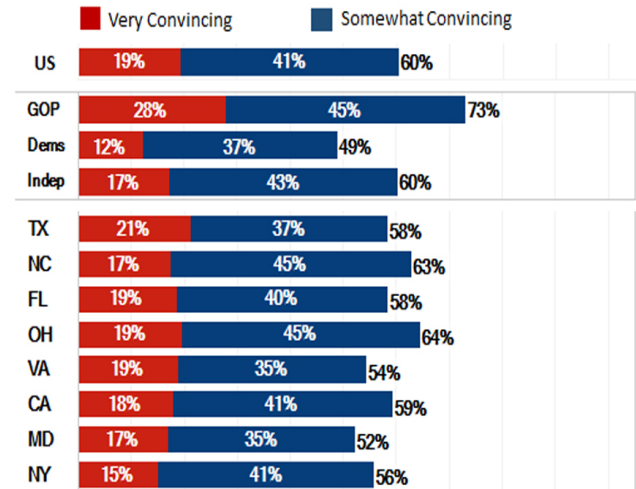
### Argument in favor: Adjusting the minimum wage to inflation

It makes no sense to have the purchasing power of the minimum wage on a constant downward slide, followed by a periodic catch-up. It is not fair to minimum-wage workers and it creates lots of uncertainty not only for workers, but also for employers who need to make long-term plans. Finally, the minimum wage should not be subject to the special interest lobbying that Congress gets caught in.



### Argument against: Adjusting the minimum wage to inflation

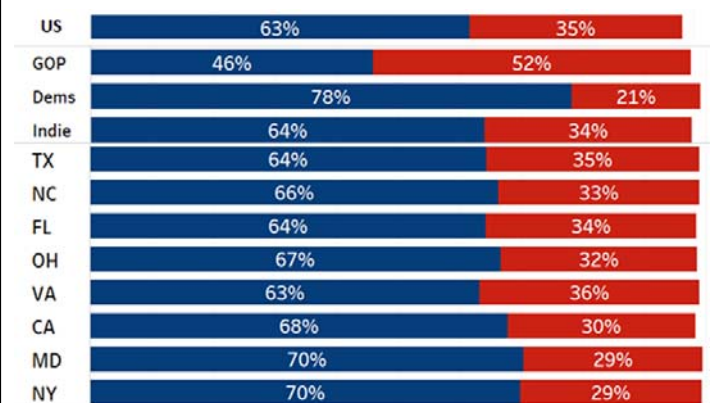
The minimum wage should not be on auto-pilot. Congress should be able to assess current economic conditions and decide whether it is best to raise the minimum wage or not. For example, when unemployment is high, raising the minimum wage can be a bad idea because it could lead employers to lay off workers. Furthermore, the states can and do raise the minimum wage if they think it is needed.



In making their final recommendation, 63% nationally and equally high or higher numbers in all states favored indexing. However, a slight majority of Republicans (52%) said that the minimum wage should only be adjusted by an act of Congress.

### Minimum wage should:

- Option 1: Be adjusted each year according to the rate of inflation.
- Option 2: Only be adjusted by an act of Congress.







### Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC)

Respondents explored the option of expanding EITC to provide more coverage to low wage workers without children, which are currently quite low (credits to workers with children are far higher). The argument in favor was found convincing by overwhelmingly majorities, and six in ten favored raising the income ceiling for eligibility. However, less than half favored increasing the benefit or lowering the minimum age of eligibility.

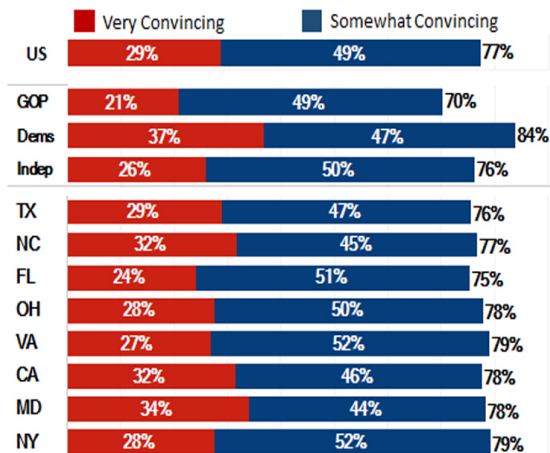
Respondents were told that Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) supplements the income of low-wage workers, and that nearly all of EITC goes to workers **with** children, with credits up to \$6,242 a year. Low wage workers without children get much less—the maximum is \$503 a year. They were then told that they would assess the proposal to raise benefits for workers without children.

The argument in favor of such an increase was found convincing by a very high 77%, while the argument against was found convincing by just 58%.



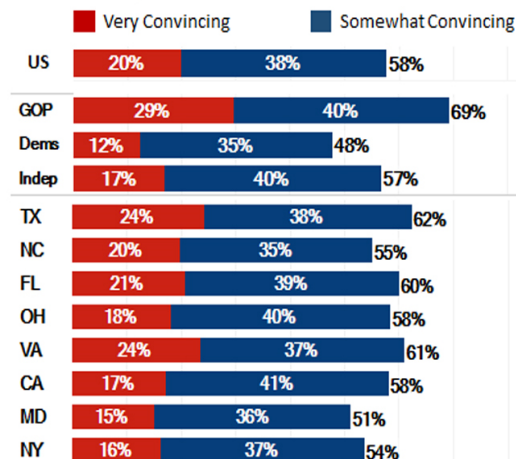
### Argument in favor: Increasing EITC for low-wage workers without children

EITC is one of the most successful antipoverty programs because it encourages people to work by rewarding them for it. But, while it has done a lot to reduce poverty for families with children, it's done little for workers who don't have children. Just because a worker at or near poverty has no children doesn't mean they are unworthy of help. A meaningful EITC benefit for workers without children would encourage more people to enter the labor force and work their way out of poverty.



### Argument against: Increasing EITC for low-wage workers without children

EITC was originally conceived for families and especially to benefit children. It is not the government's job to supplement the income of able-bodied working people without children. Furthermore, EITC already covers many single workers without children who are under the poverty line. This plan for extending EITC would end up covering people who are above the poverty line. It's an example of mission creep.

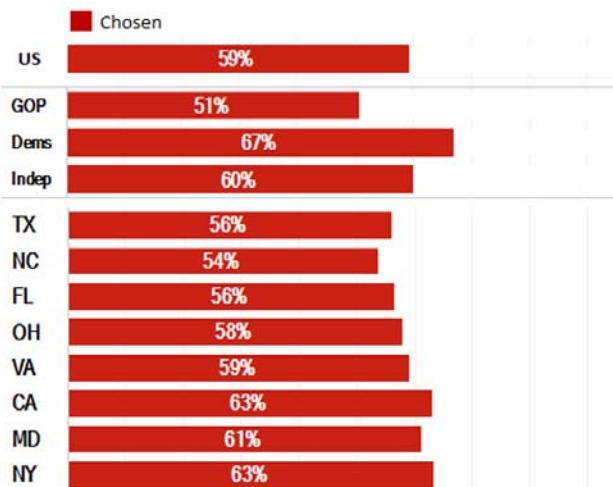






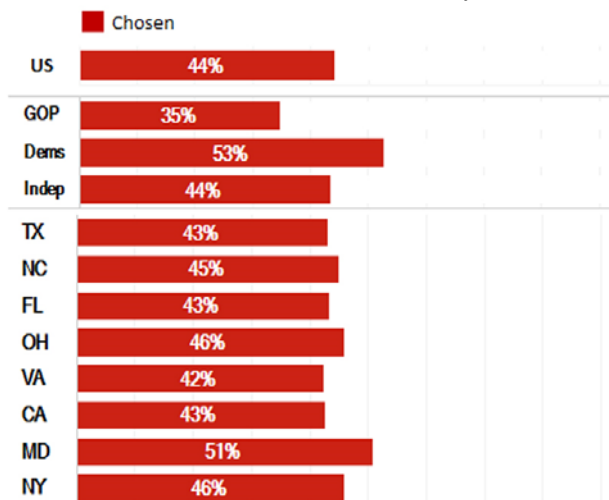
However, when asked for their recommendations, only one of the three proposals for increasing benefits to workers without children was recommended by a majority. Six in ten recommended increasing the maximum amount a worker can make and still receive benefits from \$14,820 to \$18,000.

**Raise the maximum amount that they can make and still be eligible for EITC from \$14,820 to \$18,000**

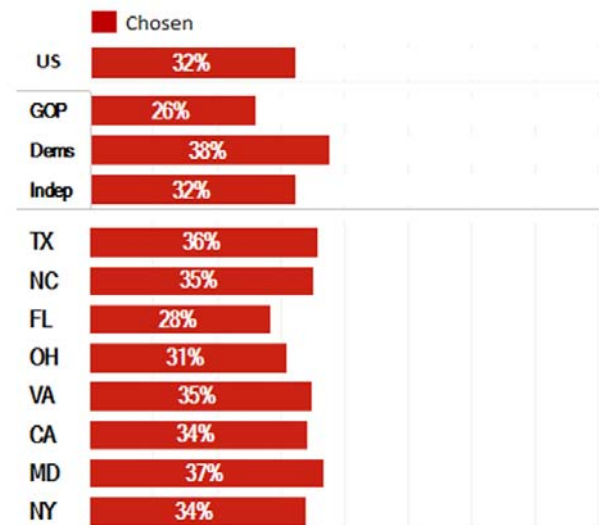


Less than half favored increasing the maximum monthly benefit from \$503 to \$1,000 and only one in three favored lowering the age of eligibility from 25 to 21.

**Increase monthly EITC benefit for worker without children from \$503 to \$1,000**



**Reduce minimum age for EITC eligibility for workers without children from 25 to 21**



**Federal Job Creation**

Four proposals were considered for the federal government to invest in creating jobs that would employ people who have been unemployed for a period. This would include many who live under or close to the poverty line. For all of the proposals only small minorities simply opposed them. For two of these proposals a majority favored enacting them in current economic conditions, while an additional 21-25% wanted to have them ready in case economic conditions worsen.

Respondents were presented the following:

According to the Census Bureau, about 4 million adults are living under the poverty line, are unemployed or underemployed, and are actively seeking work.

One possibility is for the federal government to invest funds to create jobs that would employ people who have been unemployed for a period. This would include many who live under or close to the poverty line.

Such jobs can be created by directing extra funds to a federal, state, or local program so that it can

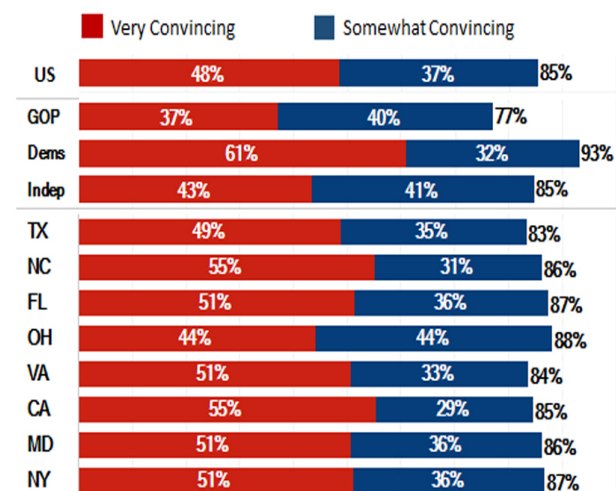


hire additional employees. Four examples of possible job creation programs were discussed.

Respondents then evaluated arguments for and against the government investing in creating jobs. The argument in favor did far better than the argument against.

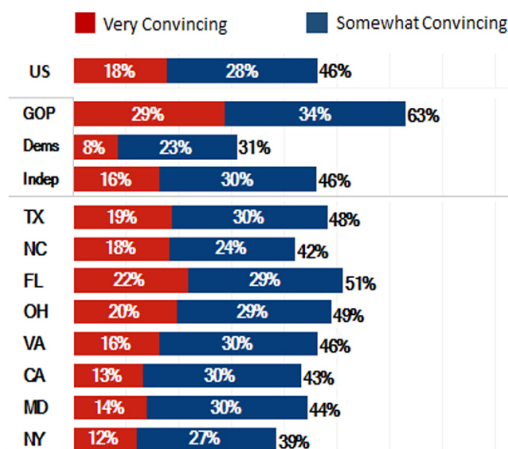
### Argument in favor: Federal government investing in creating jobs

As long as there are unemployed people who are able and willing to work, the government should invest in creating jobs. A job is always the best poverty program. The work they do contributes to society and it reduces the need for the government to provide benefits. It keeps people in the habit of working, maintains and improves their skills, and sustains their sense of self-worth. Furthermore, if the government is going to have work requirements for its poverty programs, then it has to make sure jobs are available.



### Argument against: Federal government investing in creating jobs

The government should not be in the business of trying to create jobs. This should be left to the private market, which is much more efficient at creating jobs--ones that provide goods and services that are really needed. When the government tries to create jobs, interest groups form that want to keep the jobs going even if they are not really needed anymore. This drains resources and makes people dependent on the government.

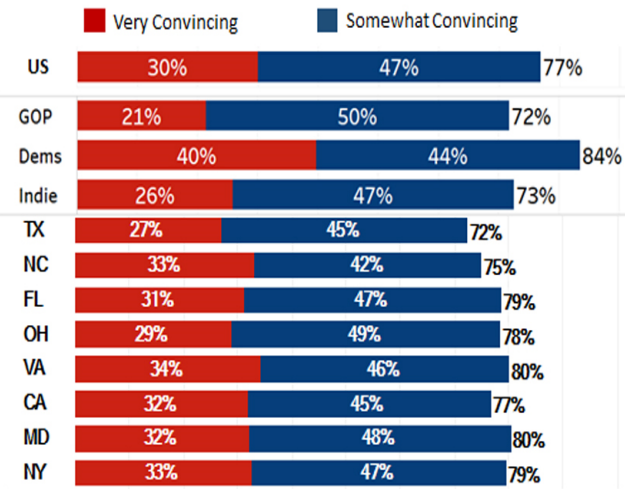


Respondents were then presented an argument in favor of the idea that the government should not generally seek to create jobs but should do so in difficult times and an argument that the government should not be involved in such efforts.



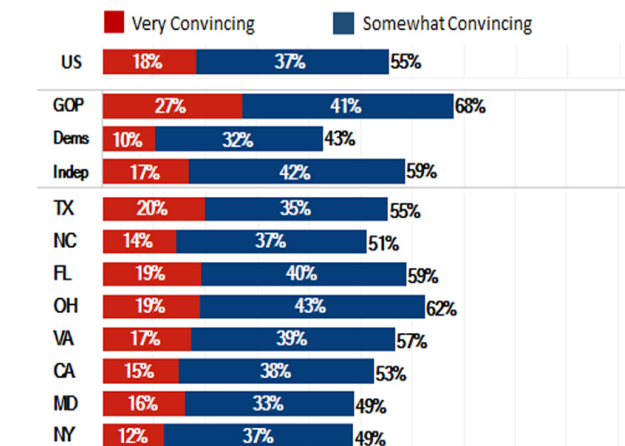
### Argument in favor: Government creating jobs in difficult times

In general, job creation should be left to the private market. But, we can't rely on the market to take care of all our needs. There are also times when the market breaks down and there is a surge in unemployment, with many people falling into poverty. When the government needs to step in with programs especially at the state and local level--to hire people who have been unemployed for a while. This not only helps them, but also allows them to buy goods and services, which creates jobs in the private sector.



### Argument against: Government creating jobs in difficult times

The idea of the government trying to create jobs in difficult times is well-intentioned, but in practice, it doesn't really work out. The government is slow to authorize money for these programs. The locations where the projects take place are often not where the need is greatest. By the time they start, the economy is already turning around. And after the programs are established, it is hard to end them. All this creates distortions in the natural processes of the economy.



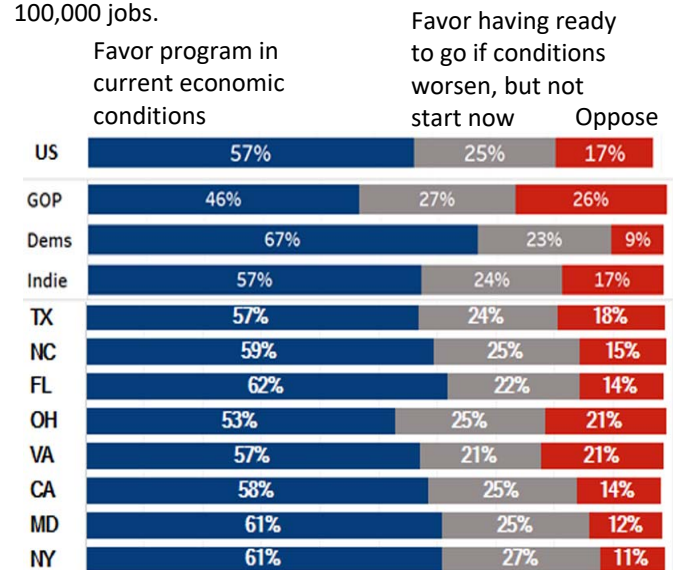
Respondents were then presented four proposals for job creation with costs and the number of jobs they would likely produce. They were told that "For all these proposals, people who have been unemployed for a period--and are qualified to do the work--would be first to be hired."

None of the proposals were rejected by more than one in four. The primary variation was on whether the proposal should be put into full effect under current economic conditions or if the government should have the program ready to if economic conditions get worse.

Two of the proposals had majorities favoring instituting it now. The most popular proposal involved having the US Forest Service hire young people to help preserve public lands. The second most popular was to hire child care workers and early education teachers to expand Headstart and similar programs.

### Federal Jobs Program #1

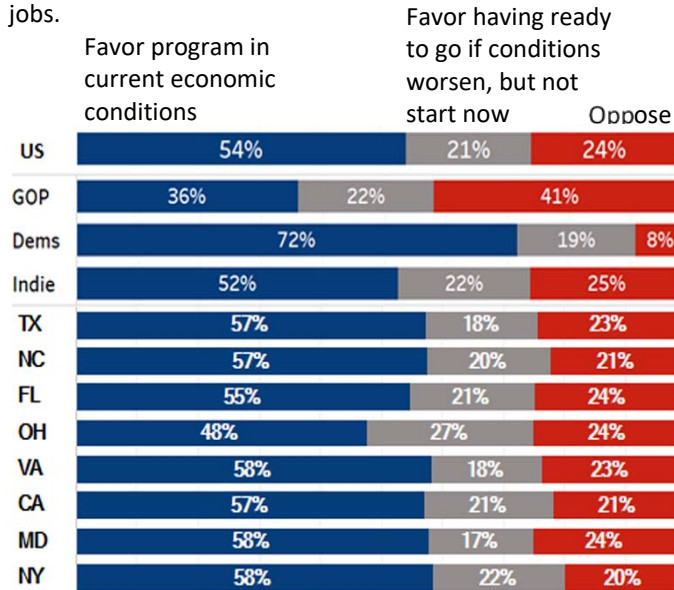
Having U.S. Forest Service employ young people age 16 to 25 for conservation projects to help preserve public lands, which would require \$250 million a year and create about 100,000 jobs.





### Federal Jobs Program #2

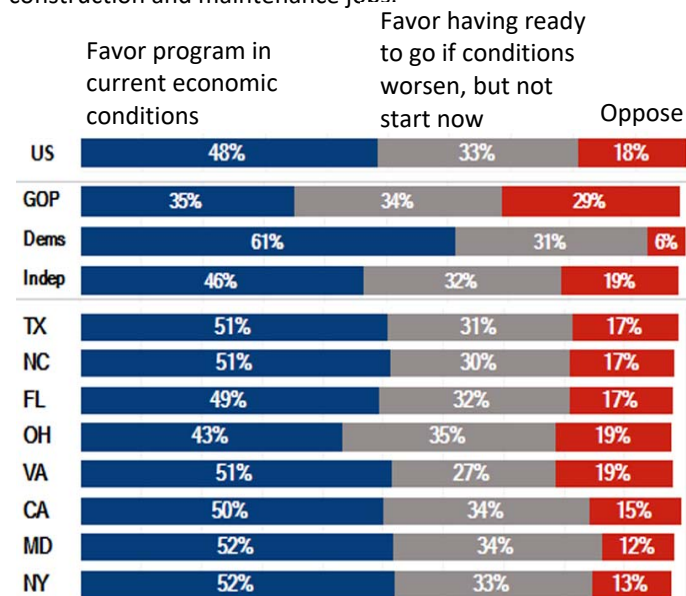
Hire more child-care workers and early education teachers to expand Head Start and similar state-run programs, which would require \$3 billion a year and create about 100,000 jobs.



Two other proposals just under half supporting immediate enactment, with substantial numbers favoring having the program ready to go in the event of an economic downturn and no more than one in five opposing the plan. These plans were much more costly and ambitious.

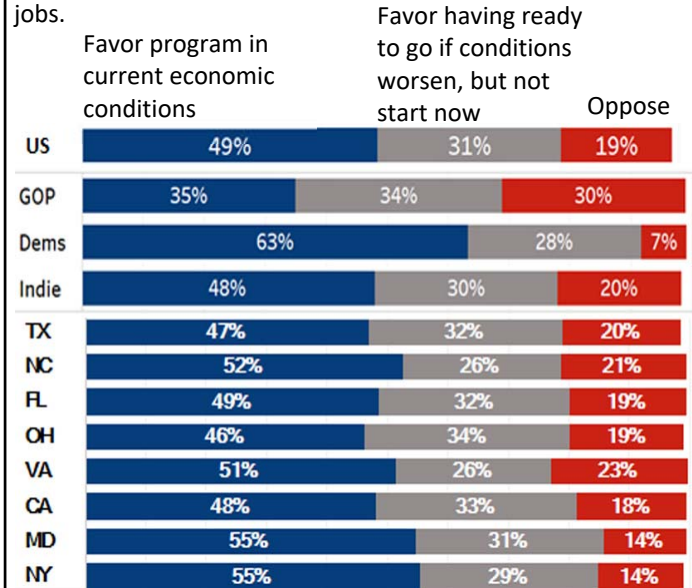
### Federal Jobs Program #3

The federal government would offer federal grants to states for repairing and renovating elementary and high school buildings, requiring \$50 billion a year and creating 650,000 construction and maintenance jobs.



### Federal Jobs Program #4

The federal government would offer grants to states and local governments for community projects such as reclaiming land affected by pollution, improving energy efficiency in a neighborhood, or renovating older public buildings, requiring \$30 billion a year for two years and creating 750,000 new jobs.



### Optional Block Grants to States

Six in ten, including a modest majority of Democrats approve of the idea of giving states the option of receiving Federal poverty program funds in the form of block grants for some programs which the states would then administer.

Respondents were presented the following:

Another debate about poverty programs is how much they should be administered by the federal government and how much by the states.

Advocates for having the states administer poverty programs call for the federal government to transfer program funds to the states as "block grants."

Here is how a block grant works. For states that want it, the federal government provides them





with a specified amount of money to address some broad purpose. The federal government sets the basic rules, but states get more flexibility in using the funds.

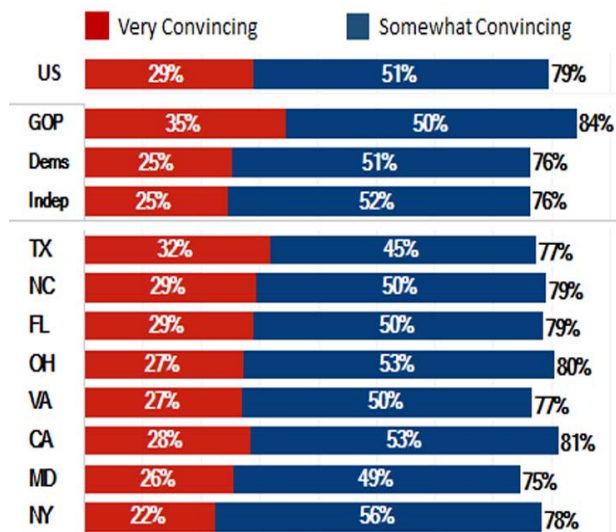
Funding for various federal poverty programs could be combined into a single block grant. Funding for food stamps, housing vouchers, public housing, assistance to the poor for energy bills and weatherizing homes, and services that help unemployed workers find work could all be combined into a block grant for states.

The argument in favor of the idea was found convincing by a larger margin, but the argument against was found convincing by more than six in ten.

#### Argument in favor:

##### States having option for block grants

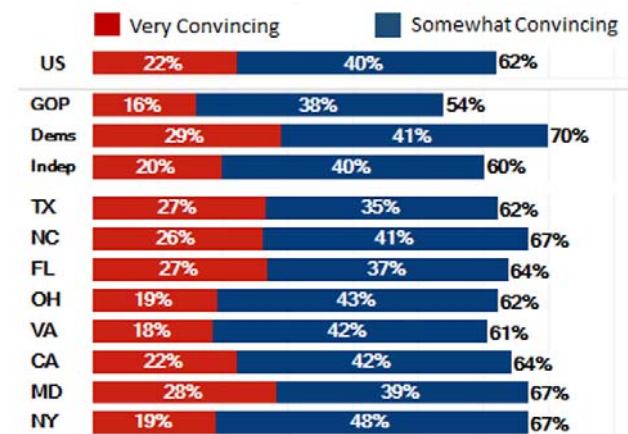
Currently, the federal government layers on program after program to handle different needs—food, housing, and so on—in a fragmented way. It's better to have states control those programs, because states are closer to the people who need to be served, and can run them in a more integrated way. States could use charitable organizations with local experience, and could experiment with new methods for helping people find their way out of poverty. The federal government would stay involved by measuring whether states' efforts are effective.



#### Argument against:

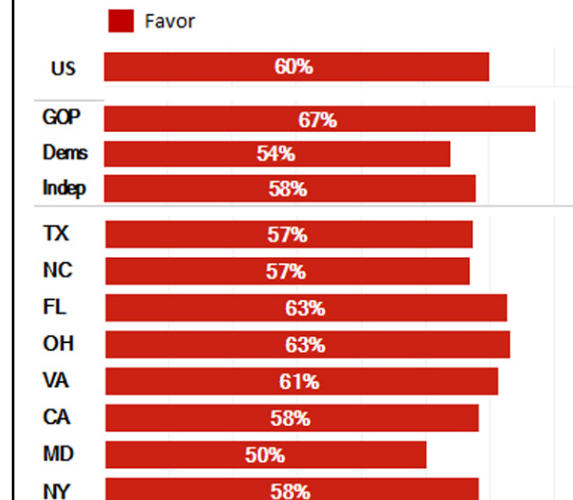
##### States having option for block grants

With block grants, the federal government will no longer ensure that established minimum needs are actually met. Congress simply decides each year how large a block grant to make and leaves the states responsible. In recessions more people become poor, but since tax revenues are also down, Congress is unlikely to increase the block grants. More importantly, when states get big chunks of money like this it's easy for state politicians to use the money for other things, not the needs of poor people. The federal government has to take direct responsibility for ensuring that minimum needs are being met.



Six in ten overall, including 54% of Democrats, approved of the idea of states having the option of receiving Federal poverty program funds in the form of block grants for some programs, which the states would then administer.

#### Support for states having option of block grants for poverty programs







## Nonpayment of Wages

**Overwhelming bipartisan majorities favor a proposal saying that if a company under a government contract is found guilty of not paying wages, the company will lose the right to bid on government contracts.**

The issue of nonpayment of wages was introduced as follows:

Another problem for the working poor is that they are not always fully paid for the hours they have worked. Research shows that in some industries—especially farming, construction, and restaurants--this is a problem that significantly reduces the pay of low-income workers.

When a worker is not paid, there is a system in place to deal with it. He or she can make a complaint to the local office of the Labor Department. However, this system is not entirely effective, as there are still many cases of unpaid wages, largely because:

- The process for getting unpaid wages is slow and cumbersome.
- Many workers do not even use it, often out of fear that if they do they will get fired.

A proposal in Congress would put greater pressure on companies to pay wages in full, by making it more costly if they are found responsible for unpaid wages while under a government contract.

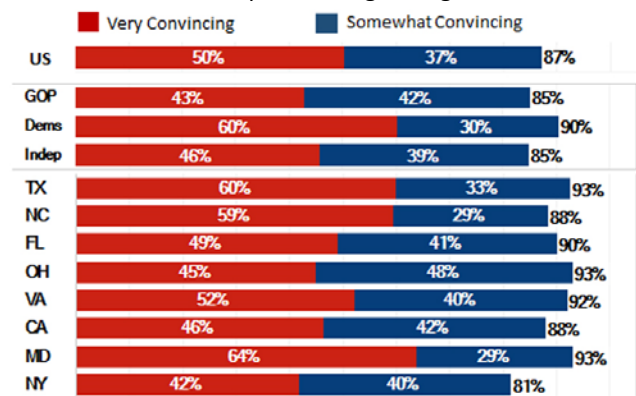
Currently, if an employer is found guilty of not paying wages under a government contract, the company has to pay those wages plus some interest, but can still make bids to get future government contracts.

The proposal is that if such a company is found guilty, they will also lose the right to make bids to get future government contracts.

The argument in favor of this proposal was found convincing by overwhelming majorities while the argument against did quite poorly.

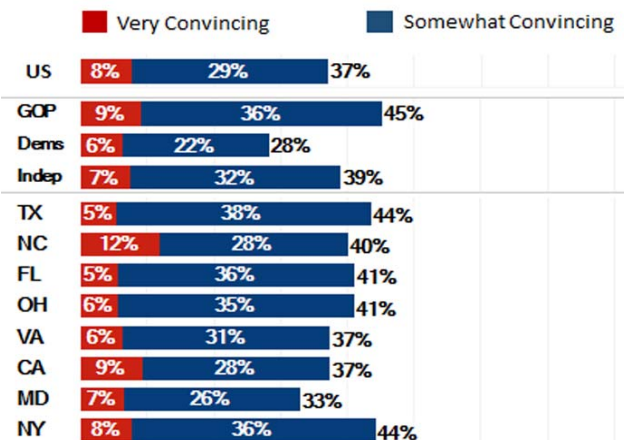
### Argument in favor: Penalizing government contractors guilty of nonpayment of wages

When companies do not pay wages earned—what is called “wage theft”—it most often hurts people who are already living on the edge and are not in a position to fight back. The employer who cheats their workers is also not paying their fair share of taxes. Right now, if they get caught all they have to do is pay those wages plus some interest, so they may think they might as well try to get away with it. We need to raise the costs higher to counter this problem, which has been shown to be widespread and growing.



### Argument against: Penalizing government contractors guilty of nonpayment of wages

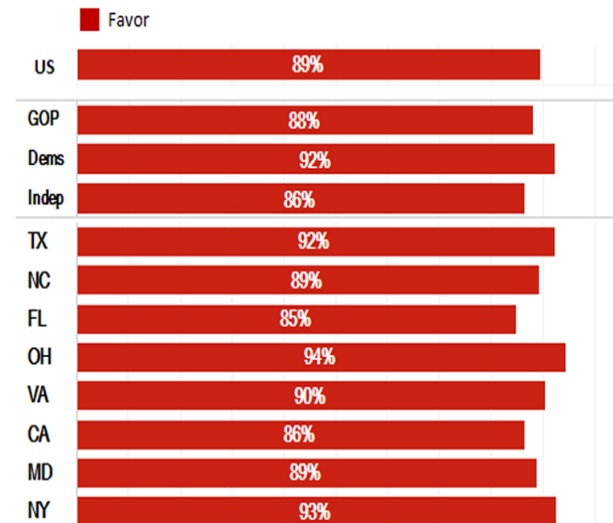
There is already in place an orderly means for people who don't get paid to file a complaint, get a hearing, and if they are right, to get paid with interest. If workers fail to file complaints, that's not the company's fault. If the company's management thinks they are in the right, they should be able to make their case without fear of losing their ability to bid on government contracts. This proposal puts pressure on companies to give in to the workers' demands when the company might in fact be right.





In making their final recommendation overwhelming majorities nationally, in all states, and in both parties endorsed the proposal.

**Do you favor or oppose a proposal that if a company under a government contract is found guilty of not paying wages, the company will lose the right to bid on government contracts?**



### Public Housing

**There was not majority support for either raising or lowering the amount of income that public housing tenants pay for rent.**

Respondents were told:

The federal government provides some housing assistance to poor and very low-income people. Federal housing programs generally require low-income tenants to contribute 30% of their monthly income toward the cost of housing. No matter how little income they have, there is always a minimum payment they must cover. There is a debate over whether this 30% contribution should be set higher or lower.

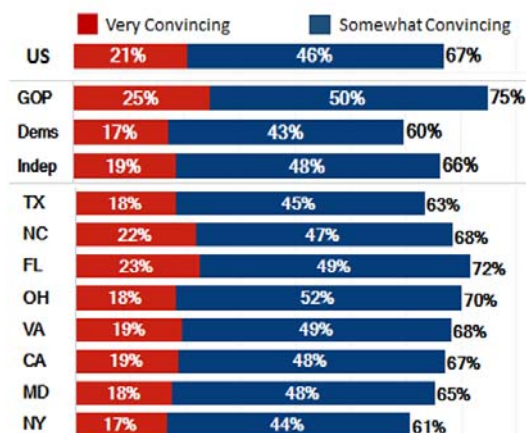
They were then presented arguments on each side of this debate. Both arguments were found convincing by majorities, though the argument in favor of increasing did a bit better. Republicans were more persuaded by the argument in favor of

increasing and Democrats by the arguments for decreasing.

### Argument in favor:

#### Increasing public housing tenant payments

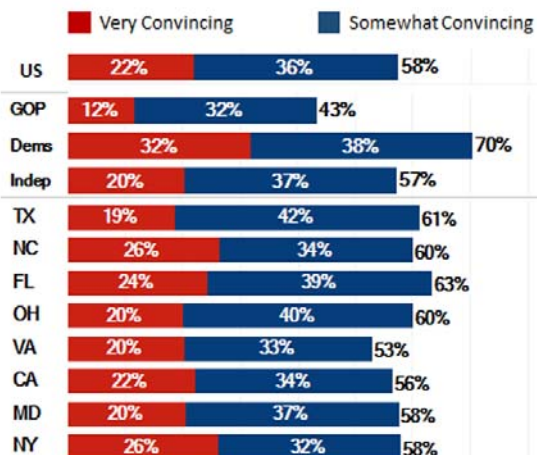
Asking public housing tenants to contribute only 30% of their income is not enough. On average, renters with similar incomes but no public housing benefits contribute nearly 40% of their monthly income to rent. If tenants were gradually to move up to 35%, that would still be an excellent deal. Residents in public housing will still have the peace of mind of knowing they will always pay a fixed percentage of their income toward rent.



### Argument in favor:

#### Decreasing public housing tenant payments

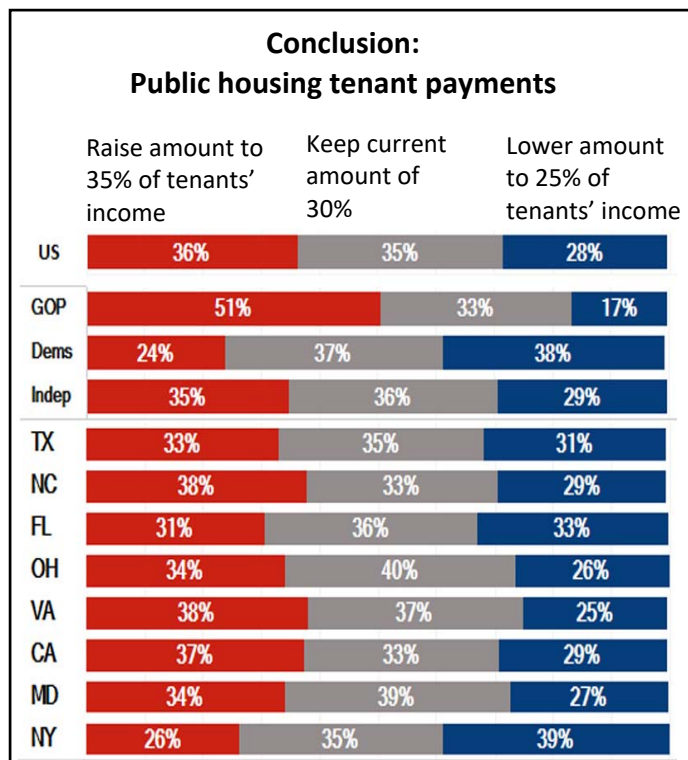
People in public housing live there because they are poor. They set aside a fixed portion of their income to pay for housing, then struggle to handle their other necessities. An increase in their rent contribution would require them to cut back on food, child care, or medical care. This would make them even more vulnerable and may increase the likelihood that other government programs will have to step in, especially for children and the elderly. Instead, let's lower their 30% share to 25% and give them a bit of stability.





Finally, respondents were asked to make their recommendation among three options—increasing tenant payments to 35% of their income, reducing them to 25%, or keeping them at the current 30%.

They were told that increasing the rent paid to 35% of income would save the government \$2-3 billion while reducing it to 25% would cost the government the same amount. None of the three options received majority support nationally or in any of the states, though the option of increasing tended to a bit better than the option reducing. A bare majority of Republicans, nationally, favored the increase, while Democrats were more likely to favor lowering the cost than raising it.





**Voice Of the People** is a non-partisan organization that seeks to re-anchor our democracy in its founding principles by giving ‘We the People’ a greater role in government. VOP furthers the use of innovative methods and technology to give the American people a more effective voice in the policymaking process.

VOP is working to urge Congress to take these new methods to scale so that Members of Congress have a large, scientifically-selected, representative sample of their constituents—called a Citizen Cabinet—to be consulted on current issues and providing a voice that accurately reflects the values and priorities of their district or state.



## PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

The **Program for Public Consultation** seeks to improve democratic governance by consulting the citizenry on key public policy issues governments face. It has developed innovative survey methods that simulate the process that policymakers go through—getting a briefing, hearing arguments, dealing with tradeoffs—before coming to their conclusion. It also uses surveys to help find common ground between conflicting parties. The Program for Public Consultation is part of the School of Public Policy at the University of Maryland.

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Allison Stettler managed the design and production of the report with assistance from Francesca Martens.