

Exploring the psychology of welfare politics

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Recent political history has shown that United States conservative leaders tend to vote against the expansion of federal welfare, or social safety net, programs. But are conservative-leaning citizens less likely than their liberal-leaning peers to enroll in said programs and accept aid

for themselves?

That's the question that Virginia Tech's Shreyans Goenka answered with his recently published research, "Are Conservatives Less Likely Than Liberals to Accept Welfare? The Psychology of Welfare Politics."

"This research shows that conservatives are less likely than liberals to enroll in federal welfare programs only when the welfare program does not have a work requirement policy," said Goenka.

Shreyans Goenka is an assistant professor of marketing in the Pamplin College of Business. His research investigates consumer morality. He examines how moral beliefs shape consumption preferences and economic patterns. In doing so, his research produces implications for understanding how morality can help inform [policy decisions](#), marketing positioning strategies, and prosocial campaigns.

The researchers analyzed how participation rates in the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as [food stamps](#), was influenced by a change in the work requirement policy. When SNAP had a work requirement from 2005-08, the Republican-leaning states and Democratic-leaning states recorded similar levels of welfare participation. However, when the work requirement was waived from 2009-13, the Republican-leaning states recorded lower levels of welfare participation than the Democratic-leaning states.

Follow-up controlled experiments show that conservatives believe it is morally wrong to accept welfare if they are not contributing back to society in some manner.

"Conservatives tend to believe that accepting welfare without reciprocal work can make them a 'burden' on society," explained Goenka.

"Therefore, conservatives are less likely than liberals to enroll in welfare programs without work requirements."

Importantly, the research also shows how [policymakers](#) can utilize marketing messaging strategies to boost conservatives' welfare participation.

"When welfare brochures highlight how welfare programs can serve the interest of society as whole, conservatives' welfare enrollment increases," added Goenka. "Policymakers can utilize this research to redesign welfare marketing materials and boost participation in welfare programs."

The [research](#) was published in the *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*.

More information: Shreyans Goenka et al, Are Conservatives Less Likely Than Liberals to Accept Welfare? The Psychology of Welfare Politics, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1086/719586](#)

Provided by Virginia Tech

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